

**A PROPOSED STRATEGY FOR TRAINING INDIGENOUS YOUTH  
MINISTERS IN BAPTIST CHURCHES IN SINGAPORE**

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**A Dissertation  
Presented to  
The Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary**

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**In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy**

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**by  
David Parks  
March 2004**

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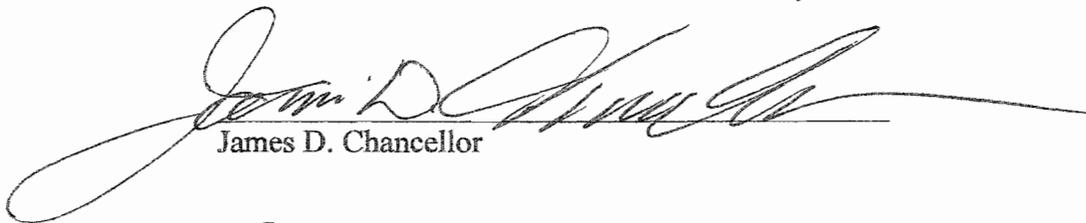
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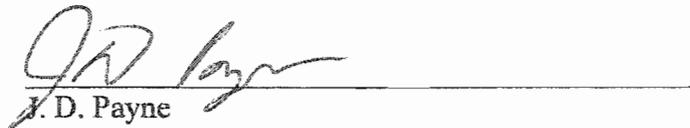
**A PROPOSED STRATEGY TO TRAIN INDIGENOUS YOUTH MINISTERS  
IN BAPTIST CHURCHES IN SINGAPORE**

David Alan Parks

Read and Approved by:

  
John Mark Terry (Chairperson)

  
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Date April 7, 2004

To Jenn,

whose constant encouragement, love,  
patience, and support made this possible.

I love you.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

YMI	Youth Ministry International
IMB	International Mission Board
GYI	Global Youth Initiative
YFC	Youth For Christ
SYFC	Singapore Youth For Christ
NUS	National University of Singapore
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association
IYLT	International Youth Leader Trainer
UMNO	United Malay National Organisation
SAF	Singapore Armed Forces
PAP	People's Action Party
PMT	Partnership Ministry Team
BTS Singapore	Baptist Theological Seminary Singapore

## PREFACE

I still remember where I was in my car as I was driving through Birmingham in the Autumn of 1999. I had been thinking and praying about God's direction concerning a degree in missions. Having resigned as youth minister of Crossroad Baptist Church, I committed to leaving youth ministry to pursue a call to international missions. During that drive, however, God revealed to me that I was not to abandon ministry to students, but rather that He was going to use my experience with youth on the mission field. I knew then that I would be writing a missions dissertation focused on youth.

Many people have made this endeavor possible and I would like to thank them. I am always mindful of my parents, who have continually supported me through all the different phases of my life. I am grateful to God for giving me such loving parents. I am also thankful for having grandparents who are still actively involved in my life – including a grandfather who has greatly emphasized higher education. I am appreciative for the support from my family in spite of the fact that I am away from home. I know my mom misses Corrie – her only granddaughter.

Several professors have either aided or influenced me in a significant way. Bill O' Brien encouraged my interest in missions during my days at Beeson Divinity School. He spent time with me, got to know me, and discussed possible ways that God could use me in missions. It was his idea for me to pursue this degree. I am thankful for John Mark Terry's encouragement and support for a dissertation focused on international youth missions. Though I knew the general direction of this work ahead of time, it was my introduction to Randy Smith and Dave Adams that gave hands and feet to my vision. I appreciate their intense desire and selfless efforts to reach youth for Christ on a global

scale.

I would also like to thank the generous involvement and cooperation of the Singapore Baptist Convention and the local Baptist churches of Singapore. I received much feedback from youth workers and pastors that helped me gain important insights into Singaporean youth ministry. Leonard Heng, in particular, helped me a great deal as we exchanged many e-mails over a long period of time.

With the exception of the Lord Himself, no one deserves more gratitude for this work than my incredible wife. Jenn is the most consistently loving, patient, and kind person I know. She has endured over four years of erratic schedules, long hours of work, and various financial crunches. God has used this time to build our faith and grow us together spiritually. We are both extremely grateful for the grace that the Lord Jesus Christ has given us to both know Him and enjoy a life of serving Him as a team.

David A. Parks

Louisville, Kentucky

May 2004

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The impressive growth of the church in Singapore during the last three decades is due in part to success in reaching the young. In the last decade, however, the trend among youth has been more toward materialism and unbelief than converting to Christianity. The Baptist churches, which have struggled more than the average denomination regarding growth in general, have also had less success reaching youth than other churches. Moreover, they are now struggling to retain their own youth. While youth ministry is now perceived as a great need among Baptist church leaders, there are only a few youth ministers. The rest of the churches have untrained adult volunteers with little spare time who serve as leaders of existing youth programs. Therefore, local associational leaders, as well as the Baptist Theological Seminary (BTS) in Singapore, believe that training national youth ministers is a necessity.

#### Thesis

This dissertation proposes a strategy to train indigenous youth workers in Singapore. I explore the Singaporean context regarding history and culture, youth culture, youth evangelism, and the Baptist churches. After establishing the need for youth ministry in Baptist churches, I propose specific methodologies designed to establish a system of training sustainable by the national church. The plan to train youth workers is a strategy that will allow the Singaporean Baptist churches to be independent from the present felt need to bring in youth workers from the West. I present strategies for both formal training at BTS Singapore and informal youth ministry training within the Baptist Association of Singapore.

## Background of the Study

As a youth minister called to international missions, it was only natural that God would direct my attention to the global situation of youth worldwide. My research on youth in different places around the world led me to write “Global Youth Strategies.”<sup>1</sup> This paper argued that the demographics revealing the great percentage of youth in many countries and their distinctive culture required intentional training and resourcing for youth evangelism. Consequently, I became convinced that God wanted me to be involved in training youth ministers in an international context. Through several different contacts (a professor, an IMB strategy coordinator, two leaders of Youth Ministry International (YMI), and the interim president of BTS Singapore), I became aware of the desire for youth ministry training among the Baptist churches in Singapore. On January 16, 2003, I sat in a meeting at the Singapore Baptist Convention building with youth leaders, an IMB missionary, a YMI representative, a BTS Singapore representative, and the Local Missions Coordinator of the Singapore Baptist Convention. There was unanimous agreement and a sense of desperation regarding the need for youth ministry training. I am now in the process of applying with the IMB in order to go and implement the strategy I will be presenting in this dissertation.<sup>2</sup>

While there have been recent writings on the subject of youth culture in Singapore, it is still a fairly new area of study. Singapore's National Youth Council has a research arm named “Youth Research Network,” which makes information available and periodically conducts surveys. There are two professors of Sociology at the National University of Singapore (NUS) who have youth culture listed as a specialty of study.

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<sup>1</sup>David Parks. “Global Youth Strategies” (Paper for Ph.D. Seminar, *World Evangelization Strategies*, taught by John Mark Terry, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary), 2001.

<sup>2</sup>After my prospectus was approved, the IMB moved my job assignment to a country adjacent to Singapore. While I will not be in Singapore establishing this strategy in full, I will be following this strategy elsewhere. Regardless, I will most likely be doing some form of itinerant training on the island.

One of these professors, Laurence Wai-Teong Leong, wrote in an email to me over a year ago that almost nothing of interest has been written on youth in Singapore. Although I have found information regarding Singaporean youth, most of it is in the form of articles and demographics. There are a few books focused on values, lifestyles, and relevant statistics regarding young Singaporeans. The most recent work, *Youth.sg: The State of the Youth in Singapore* (2003), has advanced the study of youth culture and has become a reference book for youth workers.

Information regarding youth ministry in Singapore is mostly piecemeal. Youth for Christ has published articles that are very specific to their ministry. There are no professors of youth ministry in Singapore, including Singapore Bible College. Therefore, there are few scholars to perform lengthy research. A recent dissertation by Janet Yen on the topic of youth ministry deals primarily with youth culture and which programs are most effective and relevant to young people. The topic of training youth ministers in Singapore is academically unexplored.

### **Research Methodology**

Chapter 2 explores Singaporean demographics history, and culture. Here I primarily use books, articles, and research from the Internet to provide the basic information on these subjects. This initial research provides a foundation of understanding of the broader Singaporean culture in which their youth live. I also examine secular academic works on the global context of youth and other Christian sources on this subject for chapter 3. This approach provides a perspective on the global forces at work within Singaporean youth culture. I researched the Baptist churches with help from contacts within the churches and the Baptist Convention. Chapter 5 examines the history of youth ministry in Singapore. The latter part of the chapter specifically explores the history of Baptist youth ministry and its current situation. Before proposing specific strategies, I relate principles gleaned from the field of missiology that are

relevant to the training of youth ministers cross-culturally. I also examine the specific informal training strategies of Sonlife and YMI in chapter 7 in order to learn from two of the handful of organizations actively training youth ministers cross-culturally as their primary strategy.

In an effort to assess accurately the Baptist churches of Singapore, I worked with the Local Missions Coordinator of the Baptist Convention on surveys of the youth in their churches, the youth leaders, and their pastors as well. I also relied on personal conversations I had while I was in the country as well as direct e-mail from contacts within the local churches. I have the name, address, and email address of every Baptist youth leader and pastor in the thirty-five churches in Singapore. Any information needed outside of the surveys were obtained through personal inquiries. The Baptist Convention encouraged participation in my research and has already handed out a paper I have written about youth ministry in Singapore to every youth leader at the last convention meeting.

The survey taken by the youth leaders requested information regarding experience, qualifications, time and resources currently available to do the work of youth ministry. The survey given to the pastors granted an understanding of their perceived need for youth ministry, possible support of time and resources for youth ministry training, and the likelihood that they would hire a paid youth worker should they have a trained and qualified candidate. These surveys together helped me to understand the culture and background of those to be reached, the appropriate training for youth workers, and the support as well as obstacles that lie in the path of denominational efforts to grant resources toward this ministry. The research helps to legitimize the goals of youth ministry training as well as grant insight into the unique situation of Singapore.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

This dissertation uses the research to inform strategies for training youth

ministers. The initial chapters analyzing Singapore's history, culture, and values were used along with the chapter on youth culture to strengthen this objective. Therefore, the historical research is a means to an end, and not the ultimate purpose itself. Also, I did not provide a theological or philosophical justification for the specialization of youth ministry as it has emerged in the West. Furthermore, there are those who would agree with the practice of youth ministry in the United States, but disagree with it in foreign contexts. Considering the great emphasis on church planting strategy emphasized by the IMB, it would be worthwhile to explore how and if the training of indigenous youth ministers complements this philosophy. While I gave a short defense of the need to teach Singaporean adults to think cross-culturally in order to reach their own youth, this study does not contain a detailed defense of the practice of youth ministry in general.

Another worthwhile research project would be an elaboration on my discussion on the emerging urban worldwide youth culture. The existence of a universal youth culture would carry great missiological implications. A thorough research project within the missiological community could have a significant impact on the decisions of missions strategists. This study, in fact, does contain a chapter on the general characteristics of an emerging global youth culture, but stops short of any thorough attempt to prove that they can be thought of as one people group. I speak of global youth culture for the purpose of referring to macrolevel changes in the way adolescents are transitioning to adulthood today and how those global influences affect Singaporean youth.

### **Outline of the Study**

Chapter 1 begins with the statement of the problem. Here I discuss the issues facing youth and Baptist churches in Singapore. I also state that a great impact could be made through training indigenous youth ministers.

Chapter 2 provides the historical and cultural background of Singapore in an effort to gain an understanding of the nation in general. I will explore various

demographics regarding age, religion, and ethnicity. In addition, I examine topics such as Singapore's economic success, authoritarian government, and emphasis on education. The characteristics of the church in general, as well as the Baptist church specifically, are explored.

Chapter 3 analyzes the major global changes that are currently directing the shape of youth cultures worldwide. In the same way that Singaporean youth are greatly influenced by the practices and lifestyles of the adults in the city where they live, they are also inheritors of global forces that are finding their way to their own nation. The possible emergence of an identifiable people group composed of youth in urban affluent nations will also be briefly discussed.

Chapter 4 is entirely focused upon youth culture in the Singaporean context. Much of the chapter will be written with the purpose of comparing and contrasting Singaporean youth with global youth culture. It also contains the same comparing and contrasting of youth with the indigenous adult culture and determine whether or not the adults have been successful in transferring their values to the young. I will discuss western influence, the educational atmosphere with its accompanying stress and materialism, and the pluralistic context of Singapore.

In chapter 5 I explore the history of youth ministry in Singapore. In particular, I will investigate the history of the YMCA, Youth for Christ, and youth ministry among Baptist churches. The historical importance of Christian schools in Singapore will also be taken into consideration. Furthermore, I discuss missed opportunities in the past for Baptist churches to reach out to youth and their current desire to take whatever steps necessary for student evangelism.

Chapter 6 presents the missiological principles necessary for the justification of a cross-cultural youth ministry training program. Some subjects discussed are the use of buildings, the strategy of multiplication, the problems of dependence upon foreign leadership, and the importance of implementing a cross-cultural approach to reach youth.

Chapter 7 proposes specific strategies to train indigenous youth ministers in Singapore on an informal basis. After an initial overview, I explore the cross-cultural strategies used by Youth Ministry International and Sonlife in order to see what can be learned from their particular methods. I then discuss proposed methods of informal training through the Singapore Baptist Convention.

In chapter 8 I present a formal youth ministry training model that could possibly be established at BTS Singapore. I begin by establishing the need for such a program and answering possible objections. I then propose a list of classes necessary to make up an undergraduate youth major. Chapter 9 contains my conclusion.

## CHAPTER 2

### SINGAPOREAN HISTORY AND CULTURE

Singapore is one of the most fascinating places in the world today. Widely renowned as the greenest and cleanest city in the world, it is a mix of successful modernization, a strong national identity, and yet includes an emphasis on the traditions of the various ethnic and religious groups. In this chapter, I have examined the history and culture of both the nation of Singapore and the Singaporean church.

#### **Demographics**

Singapore is an island city-state encompassing a total area of 622.6 square kilometers. Its greatest width is twenty-three kilometers, and its length it is forty-two kilometers. These measurements, however, are no indicators of the influence Singapore has in the region. For example, David Tan writes, "In spite of its size, Singapore has the busiest seaport and airport in the world."<sup>1</sup> The total population, according to the 2000 Census taken by the Singapore Department of Statistics, was recorded at 4,017,700.<sup>2</sup> The population is very pluralistic in ethnic and religious construction. Chinese make up 76.8 percent of the population, 13.9 percent are Malay, 7.9 percent are Indian, and 1.4 percent are made up of a wide range of immigrants and nationalities.<sup>3</sup>

The religious distribution of the population reflects even more diversity. Buddhists constitute 42.5 percent of the population; 8.5 percent practice a mixture of

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<sup>1</sup>David Tan, "More Good Years," *Urban Mission* 6 (1990): 18.

<sup>2</sup>Singapore Department of Statistics, "Singapore Population" (May 2001) [online]; accessed 2 May, 2002; available from <http://www.singstat.gov.sg/Keystats/c2000/handbook.pdf>; 2; Internet.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.

Taoism and Chinese Traditional Beliefs; 14.9 percent are Muslims; 14.6 percent are Christians; four percent are Hindus; less than one percent practice other religions; and 14.8 percent have no religion at all.<sup>4</sup> There have been two religious shifts over the past twenty years. Buddhism has experienced the largest growth because of the large number of conversions from Taoism and other traditional Chinese religions.<sup>5</sup> They grew from twenty-seven percent in 1980 to forty-two percent in 2000. Christianity experienced the second largest growth. “The shift towards Christianity continued but the increase in proportion of Christians was very gradual – from 10 percent in 1980 to 13 percent in 2000. This shift was associated mainly with the increase in the better-educated Chinese who were more inclined towards Christianity.”<sup>6</sup>

The original inhabitants of Singapore were primarily Malay. After its founding as a city and seaport in the early nineteenth century, the population demographics quickly changed. Bobby Sng writes,

Singapore’s population rose from a mere 10,683 in 1821 to over 226,000 by the turn of the century. Much of this growth was the direct result of immigration. The Europeans formed only a small minority of the population. Those of Malay stock came from Malacca, Sumatra, the Riau islands and Java. Their numbers increased from 6,431 in 1821 to over 40,000 in 1901. The majority of these immigrants came from India, Ceylon and China.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>5</sup>This is not a fact that seems to be widely recognized by Christian writers. For example David Tan wrote in 1989, “Over the last twenty years, only the Christians have had significant growth.” Tan, “More Good Years,” 21.

<sup>6</sup>Singapore Department of Statistics, “Singapore Census of Population, 2000: Advance Data Release No. 2” (November 2000) [on-line]; accessed 2 May 2002; available from <http://www.singstat.gov.sg/papers/c2000/adr.religion.pdf>; 1; Internet. I have found several discrepancies with Christian authors regarding the percentage of Christians and, therefore, I am granting authority to the Singapore Department of Statistics. Examples of discrepancies include the following: David Tan estimates the Christian population in 1988 to be at 15 percent. Tan, “More Good Years,” 20. In 1989, Harvie Conn pointed to a government-sponsored random sample survey that estimated the Christian population at 18.7 percent in 1988. Harvie Conn, “Never Say ‘Never’ in the City,” *Urban Mission* 7 (1990): 3.

<sup>7</sup>Bobby E. K. Sng, *In His Good Time: The Story of the Church in Singapore*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Singapore: Graduates’ Christian Fellowship, 1993), 95.

The Chinese, of course, became the majority of today's four million inhabitants. They were well established as a majority by the twentieth century. Sng records, "The Chinese came to Singapore by the tens of thousands. Beginning with a population of only 3,317 in 1824, their numbers shot up to 164,681 in 1901, or about 73 percent of the total population."<sup>8</sup>

### History

The early history of Singapore is difficult to trace. The word *Singapura*, which literally means "Lion City," began to be used for the island near the end of the fourteenth century.<sup>9</sup> The historical obscurity ends when one studies its founding as an English colony. Tan writes, "Singapore was founded on January 29, 1819 by Sir Stamford Raffles. The British, who were looking for an alternative trading post on the west coast of Sumatra, landed on Singapore. They proceeded to establish trading in Singapore's deep harbors, her only natural resource, and it rapidly grew to be a successful and strategic post."<sup>10</sup>

### Stamford Raffles

Sir Raffles, honored on the island to this day, was the son of a captain of the West India trade working out of London. Raffles began early in his career with the East India Company, first as a clerk at the age of fourteen and was soon sent of as Assistant Secretary to the island of Penang.<sup>11</sup> Before the founding of Singapore, his career

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 96.

<sup>9</sup>Charles Cowan Carroll, "Towards a Culturally Relevant Strategy of Evangelism and Church Planting for Baptists among English-Speaking Chinese in Urban Singapore" (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989), 20.

<sup>10</sup>Tan, "More Good Years," 20.

<sup>11</sup>Charles Burton Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore* (Singapore: Fraser and Neave, 1902), 2.

included a period of governorship on the island of Java. This prestigious position afforded him the attention of none other than Napoleon Buonaparte, who willingly accepted his visit while on the island of St. Helena. Charles Buckley records, "The ex-Emperor refused to see any visitors, but on being told it was Raffles, late Governor of Java, he immediately consented to receive him. . . . Buonaparte asked a number of questions about Java and its trade, with which he seemed to be well acquainted. Raffles reached England in October, 1816, and was knighted in the following Summer."<sup>12</sup>

Raffles' stature and influence allowed him the ability to enter the British government's base in Bengal and offer the suggestion of an alternative trading post. Raffles' idea was affirmed. "The result of his interviews with Lord Hastings, then Governor-General, was that Sir Stamford was appointed Agent to the Governor-General to occupy some central station within the Archipelago, to the southward of Malacca, so as to secure free trade with the Archipelago and China through the Straits of Malacca, and to concede to the Dutch their pretensions in Sumatra."<sup>13</sup> Eventually Raffles identified the island of Singapore as the desired port and began the process of obtaining permission from the local viceroy. Having accomplished this, "Sir Stamford concluded a treaty, which was signed by Sir Stamford alone with both the Native Chiefs who were then present at Singapore. The treaty was signed on the 6<sup>th</sup> February, and the British flag was formally hoisted, and the island taken possession of, and Sir Stamford sailed the very next day on his return to Penang."<sup>14</sup>

### **Establishment of a Port City**

It did not take long for the endeavor to succeed. The area proved to be very

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 5.

strategic and lucrative. Song Siang records that “the news that there was a profitable business to be done in Singapore spread like wildfire among the inhabitants of Malacca.”<sup>15</sup> Siang records a letter written from Raffles to the Duchess of Somerset reading, “My new colony thrives most rapidly. We have not been established four months, and it has received accession of population exceeding 5,000 – principally Chinese, and their number is daily increasing.”<sup>16</sup> In reference to a few years later, Sng reports,

Within twenty years of its founding, Singapore had grown from an obscure fishing village to a major trading station situated right in the middle of the Malay archipelago. Vessels of all sizes and designs lined the southern shoreline of the island – Malay sampans, Bugis prahus, Chinese five-masted Pechili junks and British clippers. The mouth of the Singapore River – that vital artery of trade – throbbled ceaselessly with the movements of goods and people.<sup>17</sup>

At the same time, a downtown area was being created as a center of business operations in the area today known as Raffles Place. India and other nearby countries provided a cheap source of labor for their endeavors.<sup>18</sup> The use of the port to redistribute a massive amount of western goods led to its rise to prominence in the nineteenth century. Sng asserts, “Such was the growth of Singapore’s trade that by 1903 she could rightly claim to be the seventh busiest port in the world.”<sup>19</sup>

### The World Wars

The tumultuous times surrounding World War I did not affect Singapore quite like the rest the globe. Aside from the “internment of German personnel on the island

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<sup>15</sup>Song Ong Siang, *One Hundred Years’ History of the Chinese in Singapore* (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, W., 1923), 6-7.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>17</sup>Sng, *In His Good Time*, 46.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 148.

and the confiscation of their properties,” they were relatively unharmed.<sup>20</sup> The period between the wars was generally benign to the Singaporeans also. Even during the immediate years before World War II, the island did not have the feel of a people about to enter a major conflict. Even the war between Japan and China did not usher in immediate concern. Sng writes,

In Singapore, apart from an outbreak of strong anti-Japanese feelings following the Sino-Japanese War, when Japanese goods and services were boycotted, there was a general atmosphere of complacency among the populace. They never had it so good for the war in distant lands had brought an economic boom. In 1939, Malaya exported 40 percent of the world’s rubber and 60 percent of its tin. There was no need for any rationing and people went about their usual activities.<sup>21</sup>

Noel Barber captures the mindset of those involved in the exporting of the newly popular products when he writes, “To the rubber planters and the tin miners, one thing only mattered – the desperate race to fill the holds of vessels impatiently lining the quays of Keppel Harbour.”<sup>22</sup>

Adding to the feeling of general security was the presence of the British Navy. In the period between the wars, they built a naval base on the island. Noting the power of the naval base itself coupled with new airfields and heavy gun batteries throughout the island, Sng writes, “There were good reasons, therefore, for the people to feel confident. They could hide behind the British military umbrella; who would dare to challenge the world’s mightiest industrial and naval power?”<sup>23</sup>

Winston Churchill himself believed that the base gave them an impenetrable presence of power in the region. When it became clear that the Japanese would conquer Singapore, the reality was difficult to grasp. Barber comments,

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 195.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Noel Barber, *Sinister Twilight: The Fall of Singapore*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Cassell Military Paperbacks, 2002), 17.

<sup>23</sup>Sng, *In His Good Time*, 196.

Not until this moment – as the battle for Johore moved inexorably towards disaster in the last days of January – does it appear to have dawned on Churchill that Singapore was indefensible – and, even more terrible, that Britain would have to make what he described as an ‘ugly decision’ and abandon the island and fortress, diverting reinforcements to Burma. For it was not until January 19 (1941) that the myth of Singapore was exploded for Churchill himself – the one man above all else who had been taken in by the grand illusion of the fortress that never was.<sup>24</sup>

There were many enduring consequences to Japan’s brutal conquest of Singapore – two of which are relevant to the present study. The first, and most obvious, is the effect on the psyche of the Singaporeans who lived under their oppression. Carroll explains,

Life under the Japanese occupation was difficult for the people of *Syonan* (meaning “Light of the South”), as Singapore was renamed by her conquerors. The economy had collapsed and there were food lines, hunger, and poverty. Worst of all was the oppressive rule of terror by the Japanese, who set race against race and community against community by sowing seeds of mistrust.<sup>25</sup>

There were various ways in which the Japanese used ethnic differences to divide. Jon S. Quah documents the most damaging of them with the following:

During the Japanese Occupation of Malaya and Singapore (1942-45), the Japanese used the Malay police against the Chinese and Indians. . . . When the Japanese surrendered in 1945 racial riots between the Malays and Chinese and then between the Malays and Indians broke out in both Malaya and Singapore before returning British were able to control the tense situation.<sup>26</sup>

The second observation is a much less obvious effect of the events of World War II. Regardless of the immediate results, the defeat of the British was a victory for an Asian country and a rebuttal of the strongly held belief of white superiority in the region. Barber concludes his history of the fall of Singapore with these comments:

It is the trite observation that out of all evil some good can come; that the Asians, whose country Singapore now is, have ironically to thank the Japanese in some measure, for it was the Japanese victories in battle that destroyed forever the legend of the white man’s supremacy, and so set in motion a train of events

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<sup>24</sup>Barber, *Sinister Twilight*, 95.

<sup>25</sup>Carroll, “Towards a Relevant Strategy,” 22-23.

<sup>26</sup>Jon S. T. Quah, *In Search of Singapore’s National Values* (Singapore: The Institute of Policy Studies, 1990), 12.

throughout Asia which led to eventual independence. And though it is true that the Allies returned to liberate the countries, it was never quite the same again. The awe, the mystique . . . had gone forever, and in Singapore it was only a question of time before the frenetic, humid, opulent port that is unlike any other in the world ceased to be known as Europe's gateway to the east, but rather as Asia's gateway to the West.<sup>27</sup>

### Union and Separation with Malaysia

Britain was still in ultimate control immediately following the war, but the process of granting independence had begun. The first democratic elections would prove to have far-reaching consequences for Singapore. Lee Kuan Yew was appointed the first Prime Minister in 1959 – a position he held until 1990. The British soon acquiesced to Singapore's independence and subsequently the decision was made to join Malaya as the Federation of Malaysia in 1963.

Before becoming Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew and his colleagues had formed the Peoples Action Party (PAP) in 1954. Their ideals called for a democratic nation, the removal of British rule, and free trade. Therefore, it was perceived as a threat when Singaporean and Malayan Chinese began to develop a sense of pride concerning the success of communism in China. With this background in mind, the merger should be seen partially as a means to guard against the rising communist party in Malaya. In his book chronicling the recent history of Singapore, Yew writes about this brief period:

Once plunged in, we were sucked ever deeper into the struggle. We had to fight the communists sooner than we expected, contending against their open-front labor, student, and cultural organizations, all backed by their armed underground. We solved that problem by merger with Malaya in 1963 to form Malaysia, only to discover that the Ultras in the UMNO (United Malay National Organisation) leadership wanted a Malay-dominated society.<sup>28</sup>

The suspicion of Singapore's Chinese majority that the Malays were trying to dominate the new society had fatal consequences for the nation. The new union did not last. Sng summarizes,

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<sup>27</sup>Barber, *Sinister Twilight*, 283.

<sup>28</sup>Lee Kuan Yew, *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story: 1965-2000* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2000), 686.

After only one year and eleven months, the experiment in the political union of two neighbouring states that had developed alongside each other for the preceding 146 years, failed. The reason for the failure was compelling: far from promoting greater political harmony and economic cooperation, the merger had only bred communal tension and bitterness. Impetuous leaders on both sides of the Causeway accused each other of capitalizing on volatile communal issues. In 1964, rioting broke out between the two major racial groups in Singapore – Malays and Chinese – killing 22 persons and injuring hundreds of others. Rather than see the whole Federation degenerate into a cauldron of violence and destruction the Federal Government decided that it would be better for Singapore to leave.<sup>29</sup>

### Early Challenges

For the leaders of the new government, the initial period of Singaporean independence perhaps carried more anxiety than hope. The obstacles to their prosperity and survival as a new nation were numerous. Two of the greatest concerns revolved around security and the economy.

**Security issues.** Lee Kuan Yew's new government had to face both internal and external threats to their existence. Regarding external threats, those on the island were intensely worried about the impending pullout of the British Navy from their base in Singapore. Yew writes, "Indeed the question uppermost in my mind was how long the British would or could keep their bases in Singapore."<sup>30</sup> The next option for stability and a formidable ally in the region was the United States. However, they were "deeply mired in a guerrilla war in Vietnam which was extremely unpopular with their European allies and with African and Asian governments."<sup>31</sup> Yew elaborates on the situation with the following:

We had no army. Our two battalions were under the command of a Malaysian brigadier. How were we to build up some defense forces quickly, however rudimentary? We had to deter and, if need be, prevent any wild move by the Malay Ultras (extremists) in Kuala Lumpur (KL) to instigate a coup by the Malaysian

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<sup>29</sup>Sng, "In His Good Time," 263.

<sup>30</sup>Yew, *From Third World to First*, 4.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

forces in Singapore and reverse the independence we had acquired. Many Malay leaders in KL believed that Singapore should never have been allowed to leave Malaysia, but should have been clobbered into submission. . . . It was a time of great uncertainty.<sup>32</sup>

Another factor regarding Malaysia was the fear that they would cut off the water supply to Singapore. When directly confronted by the Prime Minister of Malaysia as to why Singapore was developing the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF), Yew responded candidly. He recalls, "I replied equally directly that we feared that at some time or other there could be a random act of madness like cutting off our water supplies, which they had publicly threatened whenever there were differences between us."<sup>33</sup>

Lee Kuan Yew and the PAP were successful in the creation of the effective SAF. They employed armed servicemen from Israel to train them. They did so covertly to avoid inflaming Malay Muslims.<sup>34</sup> The government hoped that the methods of the Israelis, another small nation surrounded by enemies, would give their armed forces credibility. Yew writes, "This was an ambitious plan based on the Israeli practice of mobilizing the maximum number possible in the shortest time possible. We thought it important for people in and outside Singapore to know that despite our small population, we could mobilize a large fighting force at short notice."<sup>35</sup> The plan did work and the recognition was granted.

Next on the security agenda was internal law and order. The government's greatest concern was the great number of Malays who were both sympathetic to Malaysian causes and on the Singaporean police force. Yew recalls, "Our policemen were mostly Malays from the kampongs of Malaya and their loyalty would be strained if

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 243.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 15. Yew recounts that "to disguise their presence, we called them 'Mexicans.' They looked swarthy enough."

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 17.

they had to take action against Malay rioters who wanted to rejoin Malaysia.”<sup>36</sup> The Ministry of Interior and Defense was developed to meet these challenges.

**Economy.** Economic concerns were perhaps equal to the concerns regarding security. The only natural resource Singapore could claim, besides her own people, had been its deep natural harbors. Previously, Singapore had functioned as a major port through the direction and control of the British – the dominant power in the region. For example, at one time early in the twentieth century, more than half of the world’s rubber supply was coming from the Malayan archipelago.<sup>37</sup> Sng explains, “Naturally, Singapore stood to benefit by all the increased commercial activities. Her ideal geographic position made her a natural outlet through which the primary products of the Malay archipelago could flow to the world markets. Furthermore, European commercial houses found in her a convenient centre for the redistribution of Western manufactured goods to the rest of the region.”<sup>38</sup>

This situation had now drastically changed. Yew recalls, “The Malaysians wanted to bypass Singapore and deal directly with all their trading partners, importers, and exporters, and only through their own ports. How was an independent Singapore to survive when it was no longer the center of the wider area that the British once governed as one unit?”<sup>39</sup> Sng describes the situation with the following: “Singapore was now all alone. Her abrupt departure from Malaysia failed to mask the harsh reality of her dependence upon the latter for much of her food supplies and entrepot trade. Many wondered how the island could ever survive as an independent state.”<sup>40</sup> Singapore did

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>37</sup>Sng, *In His Good Time*, 147.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 147-48.

<sup>39</sup>Yew, *From Third World to First*, 7.

<sup>40</sup>Sng. *In His Good Time*, 263.

survive and, in fact, thrived.

### **Building a Nation**

Despite the obstacles, the government and the people of Singapore forged ahead and created new opportunities and new lives. John Clammer, a sociologist who taught in Singapore for twelve years, describes the wonder of their accomplishments:

At first sight, Singapore appears to be a theoretically impossible object: a nation state twenty-six miles long by fifteen broad (at its widest points) with absolutely no natural resources. It is inhabited by . . . people of four major and numerous minor ethnic groups, each one of which is further subdivided into innumerable sub-ethnic, religious, caste, class, occupational, and other categories, with four official languages and a huge range of non-official ones, and a population almost entirely of immigrant stock not indigenous to the immediate geographical hinterland. Yet remarkably, it works: Singapore has achieved the second highest per capita income in Asia and the highest in Southeast Asia.<sup>41</sup>

Perhaps the single greatest unifying factor in the nation of Singapore is the desire for all to live prosperous lives regardless of race and religion. This is the result of the common suffering endured by all races and religions during the Japanese occupation and the need to work together necessitated by independence. Therefore, it is logical for this section on nation-building to be centered on the emergence and creation of the economy after the loss of the hinterland that was Malaya. In the following, I will discuss various aspects of Singapore's economic achievements.

**World trade and advanced technology.** The latter half of the twentieth century was a fortuitous time for Singapore to endure their particular situation. The lack of immediate and regular connections for trade was a serious problem, but advanced technology and communications provided the answer. While trade with their nearby neighbors was proving more difficult, improvements in communications made

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<sup>41</sup>John Clammer, "Singapore: Urbanism, Culture, and the Church," *Urban Mission* 7 (1990): 8.

international trading and alliances easier as the world continued to shrink. Yew writes, “with each technological advance, Singapore advanced – containers, air travel and air freight, satellite communications, intercontinental fiberoptic cables.”<sup>42</sup> There is no doubt that these new capabilities allowed Yew to comment, “We took advantage of the expansion in world trade and investments to move from Third World to First World standards in one generation.”<sup>43</sup> Yew summarizes his reflections on this subject below:

The story of Singapore’s progress is a reflection of the advances of the industrial countries – their inventions, technology, enterprise, and drive. It is part of the story of man’s search for new fields to increase his wealth and well-being. Stamford Raffles of the East India Company found an island of 120 fishermen in 1819 and turned it into an emporium on the sea route from India to China.<sup>44</sup>

**Alliance with the United States and the West.** Concerning the industrial countries Yew references in the previous quote, none proved to be a more strategic alignment than the United States. In reference to previous attempts to establish trade, Yew summarizes the importance of America with the following:

After several years of disheartening trial and error, we concluded that Singapore’s best hope lay with the American multinational corporations (MNCs). When the Taiwanese and Hong Kong entrepreneurs came in the 1960, they brought low technology such as textile and toy manufacturing, labor-intensive but not large-scale. American MNCs brought higher technology in large-scale operations, creating many jobs. They had weight and confidence. They believed that their government was going to stay in Southeast Asia and their businesses were safe from confiscation or war loss.<sup>45</sup>

It is noteworthy to point out the lack of resentment toward the military presence of the United States in the region. After Yew expresses his distaste of America’s dogmatic approach toward other countries concerning democracy, he concedes, “Even so, the United States is still the most benign of all the great powers,

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<sup>42</sup>Yew, *From Third World to First*, 689.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 121.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 689.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 57.

certainly less heavy-handed than any emerging great power. Hence, whatever the differences, all noncommunist countries in East Asia prefer America to be the dominant weight in the power balance of the region.”<sup>46</sup> Therefore, the United States has not only been a welcome trading partner, but a desired protector against the instabilities of Southeast Asia as well.

It would be easy to look back on the decision to align with western powers as the obvious choice for Singapore and lack an appreciation for the uncertainty involved. Yew recounts, “I did not know when I started my political life in the 1950s that we would be on the side of the winners of the Cold War and that Singapore would enjoy economic and social progress that flowed from stability, enterprise, and links with the West. We were living through a period of immense political, social, and economic change.”<sup>47</sup> The collapse of communism assured the strength of the West and the health of Singapore’s alliances.

**Use of foreign talent.** From the very beginning of its founding, Singapore has made great use of foreign talent. As they are by nature a multicultural immigrant community, this is not surprising. Singaporeans were already used to the idea of following the lead of British colonials in many different areas. Referring to American aid to Taiwan in 1949, Yew remarked, “I did not understand the importance of talent, especially entrepreneurial talent, and that trained talent is the yeast that transforms a society and makes it rise.”<sup>48</sup> He gives credit to the performance of the government to the quality of ministers whom he had put in charge. Yew began to operate in the mode of always looking and searching for new talent from Singapore and anywhere else. He

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 498.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 691.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 544.

writes, “To see how wide the net must be cast for talent, I had only to remember that the best ministers in my early cabinets were not born in Singapore. Three-quarters of them had come from outside Singapore.”<sup>49</sup>

**English as a trade language.** The four official languages of Singapore when it was part of Malaysia – Malaya, Chinese (Mandarin), Tamil, and English – were left unchanged. Because the Chinese in Singapore spoke a mixture of seven different dialects, a campaign was undertaken to convince them to learn Mandarin. This was done in order to improve communication with each other and the Chinese motherland while conducting business.<sup>50</sup> The majority of Singaporean parents, however, were making English a higher priority for their children in order to secure opportunities for the future. The tilt toward English did not necessitate a campaign, as it rapidly became the common trade language of all races.

Yew asserts that it had a great benefit because “English as our working language has prevented conflicts arising between our different races and given us a competitive advantage because it is the international language of business and diplomacy, of science and technology. Without it, we would not have many of the world’s multinationals and over 200 of the world’s top banks in Singapore. Nor would our people have taken so readily to the Internet.”<sup>51</sup> Popularly known as “Singlish,” their use of the English language is extremely common. Also common are the debates concerning whether or not children should all be taught their mother tongue in order to preserve their respective cultural heritage.

**Greening.** The Singaporean government has become well known for its

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 665.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 147-55.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 155-56.

ability to initiate a new policy or practice through national campaigns. One such campaign was directed toward the need to improve the landscape and general health of the community. Aside from the direct goal of upgrading health issues, this was desired in order to increase national pride, and, of course, to attract international business. Yew writes, “After independence, I searched for some dramatic way to distinguish ourselves from other Third World countries. I settled for a clean and green Singapore. One arm of my strategy was to make Singapore an oasis in Southeast Asia, for if we had First World standards then business people and tourists would make us a base for their business and tours of the region.”<sup>52</sup>

The new strategy was a challenge. The government was now trying to persuade peoples from many different backgrounds who had brought their long-held standards of cleanliness with them to live a different lifestyle. Yew describes the situation as follows: “Thousands would sell cooked food on the pavements and streets in total disregard of traffic, health, or other considerations. The resulting litter and dirty, the stench of rotting food, and the clutter and obstructions turned many parts of the city into slums.”<sup>53</sup> He comments further,

I knew when a country and its administrators were demoralized form the way the buildings had been neglected – washbasins cracked, taps leaking, water closets not functioning properly, a general dilapidation, and, inevitably, unkempt gardens. VIPs would judge Singapore the same way. We planted millions of trees, palms, and shrubs. Greening raised the morale of people and gave them a pride in their surroundings.<sup>54</sup>

Yew had requested the expertise of soil and plant experts from New Zealand and Australia to find out how to actually make their grass greener. After initial tests were successful on lawns, they “had all school and other sports fields and stadiums similarly

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 174.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 175.

treated. The bare patches around the goal posts with sparse, tired-looking yellow grass were soon carpeted green. Gradually, the whole city greened up.”<sup>55</sup>

Even the most casual of visits to Singapore today cannot help but leave one impressed by the cleanliness and immaculate nature of the city. It is truly one of the greenest and cleanest cities in the world. There is, in fact, a pride that Singaporeans feel regarding the way their city looks. In addition, the beauty of the city immediately attracts the attention of international visitors – especially foreign investors.

**Tourism.** Business investments were not the only advantage of a beautiful island city. In response to the need for employment opportunities, the government and local businessmen soon became heavily involved in establishing tourism as a national industry. Yew recalls,

One of our soft drink manufacturers suggested to me that we promote tourism; it was labor-intensive, needing cooks, maids, waiters, laundrymen, drycleaners, tour guides, drivers, and makers of souvenir handicraft. Best of all, it required little capital. We formed the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board and appointed our film magnate, Runme Shaw of Shaw Brothers, as chairman. He was the right man for the job. He was in the film and entertainment industry and knew all about the packaging and selling of sights and sounds, and how to keep visitors amused while in a strange country. He had a logo designed, the ‘merlion,’ a lion with a mermaid’s tail. I launched the logo erected in concrete at the mouth of the Singapore River. . . . To my relief it did create many jobs and put coins into many empty pockets.”<sup>56</sup>

By the 1980s Singapore was attracting around three million tourists a year – a number larger than its own population at that time.<sup>57</sup> It is an industry that is still flourishing and will mostly likely continue to prosper in the future.

**Lack of corruption.** One of the primary reasons Lee Kuan Yew has been so highly respected and revered in Singapore is because of his lack of tolerance for

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 176.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 50-51.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 609.

governmental corruption. Carroll comments,

Lee has always been a strong leader. His government will not tolerate corruption at any level. He constantly pushes the people of Singapore to higher levels of productivity and achievement. . . . Indeed, Lee is widely viewed as the “father” of the country, who has steered Singapore through the turbulent early years of nationhood.<sup>58</sup>

This is not an issue about which I have read or heard anything to the contrary. Therefore, I can allow the former Prime Minister to speak for himself concerning his goals regarding corruption:

When the PAP government took office in 1959, we set out to have a clean administration. We were sickened by the greed, corruption, and decadence of many Asian leaders. Fighters for freedom for their oppressed peoples had become plunderers of their wealth. Their societies slid backward. We were swept up by the wave of revolution in Asia, determined to get rid of colonial rule, but angry at and ashamed of the Asian nationalist leaders whose failure to live up to their ideals had disillusioned us.<sup>59</sup>

Although all indications are that he did live up to his own ideals, Yew has had to confront accusations of misuse of power during election times. He explains, “One imperative is to confront directly those who accuse me of corruption or misusing the power of my office. I have always met head-on all such allegations.”<sup>60</sup>

There are tangible effects of this reputation for being corruption-free. One of which is the confidence earned by foreign investors. Yew asserts that “If I have to choose one word to explain why Singapore succeeded, it is *confidence*. This was what made foreign investors site their factories and refineries here.” It is the confidence that investors had in Singapore’s honesty that helped them survive the financial crisis in East Asia in 1997. While the banks in many countries were withholding information concerning their assets, Singapore’s government encouraged their banks to practice full disclosure of financial information. Therefore, international investors remained

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<sup>58</sup>Carroll, “Towards a Relevant Strategy,” 27.

<sup>59</sup>Yew, *From Third World to First*, 157.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, 128.

committed to them and “no bank in Singapore faltered.”<sup>61</sup>

**Housing.** The final challenge to accomplishing a First World environment in Singapore was the provision of adequate housing. Considering the large and growing population and its inability to grow beyond the natural island borders, this was a difficult task. In reference to the early twentieth century, Sng writes, “Singapore’s growth as a port, unfortunately, was not matched by improvements in her living conditions. The town area was small and congested. Twenty thousand rickshaws and other animal-drawn vehicles piled the few narrow winding streets, endangering pedestrians and stray dogs alike. . . . The slum-like conditions of most dwellings, coupled with poor water-supply and an inefficient sewerage system, presented additional health problems.”<sup>62</sup> Sng’s assessment of the early sixties does not paint a much prettier picture:

At the beginning of that decade, it was estimated that at least one-quarter of the people lived around the lower reaches of the Singapore River, giving rise to a population density of over 100,000 per square mile. Most of the dwellings were in a degenerate state with poor ventilation and inadequate sewerage system. Not uncommonly, a whole family could be found living in just one room, eating and sleeping within the same area. Besides these people, another one-third of a million lived in the outlying areas of the island as squatters. It became evident to the new government that the provision of good and cheap housing for all these people would be one of its major challenges.<sup>63</sup>

Correctly perceiving the challenge, the government launched a new initiative. Sng explains, “On 1 February 1960, the Housing and Development Board was set up with the twin objectives of slum clearance and the provision of public housing. With limited land space, the Board could only plan to build upwards with high-rise flats.”<sup>64</sup> This was the beginning of what would become an enormous social change in Singapore. Because

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 82.

<sup>62</sup>Sng, *In His Good Time*, 148.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 266.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

they can only build upward and not outward, high rise flats are now the norm on the island. The housing developments are an incredible achievement of careful urban planning and have amazingly provided for the great housing needs of a large compact city.

The factors that have helped Singapore succeed in its transition from the Third World to being considered a First World nation are numerous. All of them worked together to write one of the most amazing stories of nation-building in history. Lee Kuan Yew and the generation of Singaporeans that lived to sing four different national anthems have provided tremendous opportunities for those who have followed them.

### **Relationship with Malaysia**

As mentioned previously, Singapore and Malaysia have many historical ties. Today these links are not as strong, but noteworthy nevertheless. Tension between the two nations is still common. An article in *The Straits Times* noted recently, "The problems that arise cover a wide expanse, beginning with questions of race, to the military, water supply, air-traffic systems, the stock market, and even to frivolous issues that result in name-calling between our two nations."<sup>65</sup>

The most contentious of these problems presently is the dispute over water. As previously noted, Lee Kuan Yew told a former Malaysian Prime Minister that one of the main reasons for their creation of the SAF was to deter the possibility of Malaysia cutting off their water supply.<sup>66</sup> When Singapore was granted independence, the two nations signed agreements concerning the sale of Malaysian water to Singapore. Because Singapore's domestic water supply only meets forty percent of their needs, they are still

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<sup>65</sup>Hishammuddin Tun Hussein, "Ties Between Malaysia, S'pore: Time for Consensus" (March 21, 2002) [on-line]; accessed 22 March 2002; available from <http://straitstimes.asia1.com.sg/analysis/story/0,1870,109740,00.html?; 1>; Internet.

<sup>66</sup>Yew, *From Third World to First*, 243.

dependent upon this contract.<sup>67</sup>

Tensions hit a new high in July 2002 when Singapore released documents of correspondence between the two nations in order to prove its claim that Malaysia was trying to back out of previous agreements over the price of water.<sup>68</sup> *The Straits Times* article cited here chronicles the ups and downs of the Malaysian government making an agreement and then changing their demands on a whim. The original agreement in the early sixties is registered with the United Nations. Should negotiations fail entirely, Singapore has the option of raising the issue with them. Obviously, Singapore argues that the original contracts should be fulfilled. Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir has recently countered the argument by characterizing the water agreements as “allegedly unequal treaties foisted on Malaysia by the British. PM Mahathir said that the price for water under the agreements was too low and that as such practically, they (Singapore) get their water free.”<sup>69</sup>

Mahathir criticized the public release of secret documents by Singapore and likened the move to “revealing letters sent to one’s girlfriend.”<sup>70</sup> A recent movie by Singapore Jack Neo entitled *Homerun* has been banned in Malaysia because of its playful reference to this comment by the Malaysian Prime Minister. It occurs as two boys are fighting over an agreement concerning a water well. Karl Ho explains, “When one boy shows a crumpled piece of paper as proof that the other camp reneged on a barter

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 254.

<sup>68</sup>S. Jayakumar, “Singapore Malaysia Relations: The Dispute over Water,” *The Straits Times* (January 25, 2003) [on-line]; accessed 15 March 2003; available from <http://straitstimes.asia1.com.sg/mnt/html/webspecial/bilateral/>; Internet. This is the copy of an address delivered to the Singaporean Parliament by the Foreign Minister, S. Jayakumar.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>Karl Ho, “No Need to Ban ‘Homerun,’” *The Straits Times* (September 17, 2003) [on-line]; accessed 17 September 2003; available from <http://straitstimes.asia1.com.sg/life/story/0,4386,210149,00.html>; Internet.

agreement, the act is likened to revealing a girlfriend's letter."<sup>71</sup>

Unfortunately, The dispute has become more serious than simple verbal sparring. Singapore's Foreign Minister, Jayakumar, took issue with the talk of war as well as other aggressive actions by Malaysians in his Parliamentary address: "Loose talk of war is irresponsible and dangerous. It whips up emotions that could become difficult to control. In such an atmosphere, the Malaysian navy and marine police vessels have escalated their intrusions into Singapore territorial water off Pedra Branca in the past one month. Such provocative actions are not only senseless but dangerous."<sup>72</sup>

There are fundamental differences between Singapore and Malaysia that will continue to cause conflict. Hussein provides some insight into these differences by outlining their perceptions of each other: "While Singapore views Malaysia as 'antiquated' and too bound by tradition, Malaysia views Singapore as being 'too American, too legalistic, and insensitive to the point of straining relationships with neighbours.'"<sup>73</sup> Perhaps this is illustrated by the playful jab at Mahathir in *Homerun*. Hussein concludes, "It could be said that our differences in world views and cultures complicate our ability to understand each other, as well as our attempts to solve problems."<sup>74</sup> Yew adds, "The root cause of recurring problems in Singapore-Malaysia relations is our diametrically different approaches to the problems facing our two multiracial societies."<sup>75</sup> However, the former Singaporean Prime Minister ends the section of his book concerning Malaysia with words of optimism.

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

<sup>72</sup>Jayakumar, "Singapore Malaysia Relations."

<sup>73</sup>Hussein, "Ties Between Malaysia, S'pore."

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>Yew, *From Third World to First*, 254.

Three decades after separation, the close ties of families and friends still bind the two peoples. At the end of the day, however deep-seated the differences between the two, both sides know that if they lash out at each other without restraint, there is a risk of unscrambling the interracial harmony that holds each country's multiracial society together. Malaysia needs multiracial tolerance as much as Singapore does. A younger generation of leaders will soon be in charge in both countries. Free from the personal traumas of the past, they can make a fresh start at a practical working relationship.<sup>76</sup>

### Singaporean Culture

The values of Singaporeans cannot be understood except when viewed through the backdrop of the preceding section, "Building A Nation." For it is this desire to succeed and to achieve a means of living beyond simple survival that has determined a broad range of Singapore's cultural traits. For example, *In Search of Singapore's National Values* begins with a section on the reasons for Singapore's economic success. After examining several such reasons, Quah concludes, "All this will be fruitless, however, if racial conflicts and tension between ethnic groups make employers and investors fear for their lives and property. Thus racial harmony is a necessary prerequisite for economic growth and increasing the population's standard of living."<sup>77</sup> In other words, racial harmony serves the end of economic prosperity.

In conclusion of a later section dealing with Singapore's policies regarding such cultural subjects as the Religious Knowledge program, education, and bilingualism, Quah asserts, "We have seen that the government's promotion of economic development is perhaps the most important strategy for nation-building in Singapore because without continued economic growth it would be quite difficult to motivate its citizens to have a stake in the country. Furthermore, the other strategies cannot be implemented if the Singapore economy does not grow."<sup>78</sup> Therefore, when considering the common values

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<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 256-57.

<sup>77</sup>Quah, *In Search of Singapore's National Values*, 18.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 60.

among the many ethnic groups in Singapore that allow for harmony, the most prominent appears to be the commitment to modernization – the desire to live economically prosperous lives.

### Diversity and National Identity

Despite the incredible diversity, it can be argued that there exists a core of unifying factors that provide Singaporeans with a national identity. Clammer suggests that these factors include common public housing, one unchallenged ruling party, and the commitment to modernization.

The situation of how this has come about requires that attention be paid to three dimensions: the historical, the cultural, and the ideological. Taken together, these point to what I will argue is a unifying concept – that of a *political culture*. Historically, several factors are important and these include: (1) the fact that the population of Singapore is almost entirely of migrant stock; (2) the colonial heritage; (3) the evolving world system of which Singapore rapidly found itself a part; and (4) the deep attachments of many members of the population, via culture, kinship, education, political sentiment, and economic links, to ancient and still vibrant places of origin.<sup>79</sup>

While these four concepts are said to be unifying, they also contain an inherent tension concerning Singaporean identity. The existence of modernism and a colonial heritage side by side with traditional religious affections will always create a certain amount of dissonance. To put it more simply, Singapore is a microcosm of the complexities that occur when East meets West. Modernization and urbanization tend to de-emphasize the family while the religious structures that encourage strong family ties tend to be a hindrance to multiculturalism. “The problem is essentially this: how to develop harmonious multiracialism while simultaneously promoting the cultural traditions of each of the main ethnic groups?”<sup>80</sup> Whereas the government previously discouraged the public discussion of religion, they reacted to this problem in the eighties

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<sup>79</sup>Clammer, “Singapore,” 9.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 10.

by introducing religious studies into secondary schools. The students were allowed to choose one religion to study, and the Bible was one of the options offered. However, there was strong pressure to choose a religion closely related to one's ethnic heritage.

There is another reason, however, for the government's decision to add the Religious Knowledge program. It is not simply multiculturalism that is in tension with ethnic religious structures, but modernism as well. In this case, the tension is the desire to continue to modernize while maintaining religious and, more specifically, family structures. Andrew Hwang writes, "As the country is becoming more modernized as well as westernized, the people are becoming individualistic and materialistic. The problems of divorce, immorality, loneliness, and the disintegration of traditional value systems are becoming increasingly serious."<sup>81</sup> Therefore, the institution of religious studies in the public school system is best understood as an attempt to stem these types of problems among the younger generations.

#### **Four National Values**

Another reaction to this unique milieu of values in tension was the proposal and promotion of four national values. These values can be found in a variety of literature throughout Singapore and have served to provide the categories of debate.

They are as follows:

1. Nation before community and society above self.
2. Family as the basic unit of society.
3. Consensus instead of contention.
4. Racial and religious harmony.<sup>82</sup>

Quah provides the background of the emergence of this list.

The notion of a national ideology was first raised by the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence, Goh Chok Tong, in his speech to the People's

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<sup>81</sup>Andrew Hwang and Richard Ng, "Singapore: Uniting Social Concern and Evangelism," *Urban Mission* 7 (1990): 36-37.

<sup>82</sup>Quah, *In Search of Singapore's National Values*, 1-2.

Action Party Youth Wing on 28 October 1988. According to him, the values of Singaporeans were being transformed as the result of their daily exposure to external influences. Relying on the two major concepts of individualism and communitarianism, Goh argued that during the last decade 'there has been a clear shift in our values' from communitarianism to individualism especially among the younger Singaporeans.<sup>83</sup>

Therefore, while this list of values can be argued to be fairly accurate, they should be further understood as another national campaign to transfer the older generation's values to the young. Below I will examine several specific topics and explore whether or not they conform to the official four national values above. They will also be compared and contrasted with the West. These topics are the freedom of the press, human rights, language, the Great Marriage Debate, the Religious Knowledge program, authoritarian government, education and work emphasis, and Singapore's festivals.

**Freedom of the press.** Singapore does not offer the freedom of press that most Western-oriented nations require as a litmus test for genuine democracy. Lee Kuan Yew is very candid about his views concerning the press. He writes, "My early experiences in Singapore and Malaya shaped my views about the claim of the press to be the defender of truth and freedom of speech. The freedom of the press was the freedom of its owners to advanced their personal and class interests."<sup>84</sup> Those owners Yew opposed most vehemently were internationals who tended to paint Singapore in an unfair light. He asserts, "We have to manage this relentless flood of information so that the Singapore government's point of view is not smothered by the foreign media."<sup>85</sup>

Cherian George, who wrote a dissertation on the subject of Singapore and freedom of press provides some valuable insight into their national values with an article

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<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 1.

<sup>84</sup>Yew, *From Third World to First*, 186.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 196.

in 1998. He begins by listing government restrictions and heavy behind-the-scenes influence in the media world. He outlines a list of laws that serves to grant considerable influence to the government regarding what is printed in the press. For example, The Newspaper and Printing Presses Act of 1974 takes control behind the scenes, precluding the need for messy public battles with the press. This piece of legislation requires newspaper companies to be publicly listed, and their shares to be divided into ordinary and management shares. Under the Act, the government decides who gets management shares. This ensures that the government has a say in the composition of the board of directors of newspaper companies, and through them, an influence in the appointment of group editors and newspaper chief editors.<sup>86</sup>

The conclusion of the article, however, is quite interesting. After questioning why the practice of censorship has been allowed to continue relatively unchallenged, he offers the following:

Libertarian wishful thinking would have us believe that an unfree press system would crumble under the weight of its own contradictions, and that Singapore would be swept by the same revolutionary democratic tide as so many other countries in the world. The fact that this has not happened in Singapore, and shows no sign of happening, is due in no small part to the fact that the victims of the illiberal press policy – the press and the public – actually accept this state of affairs. In the end it is difficult to avoid the conclusion, as much as one may want to, that Singapore's political and press culture is sustained not just by coercion, but also by consent.<sup>87</sup>

The insight to gain here is the genuine acceptance of the twin values, “nation above community and society above self” and “consensus before contention.” It is difficult for someone in an individualistic-oriented society to grasp how the majority of a nation would willingly accept censorship, but for a nation oriented toward communitarianism it is another story. Combine the latter with the fact that the PAP has

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<sup>86</sup>Cherian George, “Newspapers: Freedom From the Press” [on-line]; accessed 22 September 2003; available from <http://www.singapore-window.org/80402cg.htm>; Internet.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid.

consistently gained the confidence of the populace and one can more readily understand their stance.

**Human rights.** In the early days of the formation of the four core values, there was a different proposed value that is most often left off the list. In 1989 an official government proposal of national values, *The White Paper*, included “regard and community support for the individual” as the third of five national values.<sup>88</sup> It is the constant tension with the first value, “nation before community and society above self,” that leaves Singaporeans wary of placing too much emphasis on the individual and embracing what they see as the major flaw of the West.

One illustration of this contrast between Singapore and the West is in the area of justice and punishment. While Asians often see the West as being too lenient on criminals, those in the West view the penalties for crime in countries such as Singapore as being cruel and unjust. Perhaps no incident illustrated this difference than the Michael Fay incident. Yew recounts,

In 1993, a 15-year-old American schoolboy, Michael Fay, and his friends went on a spree, vandalizing road and traffic signs and spraypainting more than 20 cars. When charged in court, he pleaded guilty and his lawyer made a plea for leniency. The judge ordered six strokes of the cane and four months in jail. The American media went berserk at the prospect of an American boy being caned on his buttocks by cruel Asians in Singapore. They raised so much heat that U.S. President Clinton appealed to President Ong Teng Cheong to pardon the teenager.<sup>89</sup>

The sentence was later reduced to four strokes, but this did not make the American media happy. Yew puts the incident in perspective with the following: “After the Michael Fay incident, Singapore suddenly became persona non grata because we were not following the American liberal prescription for how to become a democratic and developed country.”<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup>Quah, *In Search of Singapore's National Values*, 106-13.

<sup>89</sup>Yew, *From Third World to First*, 214.

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*, 496.

This was not the only time the American government challenged Singapore on a human rights issue. Whereas previous American administrations had focused on Singapore as an ally against communism, Jimmy Carter made it clear that his primary interest with respect to the island nation was the promotion of human rights. In 1978 Carter sent assistant secretary of state Patricia Derian to push for the abolition of detention without trial in Singapore. Yew responded, "I told her the law had been challenged by the opposition at every election and each time an overwhelming majority of the electorate had voted for us and for the law. Singapore is a Confucianist society which placed the interests of the community above those of the individual."<sup>91</sup>

The older generation in Singapore remembers all too clearly the racial riots in the sixties. They also remember World War II and how quickly the instabilities of their region of the world can change their lives. Because of these experiences, they have placed a high value on civil order. Whether or not the youth express this same value juxtaposed to human rights will be explored in chapter 4.

**Selecting a language.** Many societies around the globe struggle to find a balance between preparing their young to compete in the modern world and instilling in them the traditional values of their native culture. When Singapore was faced with decisions that would affect the future of their students, perhaps none were more crucial and tangible than the selection of a language. In a section of his book concerning language, Quah explains, "To contribute towards nation-building, the educational system in Singapore must impart to students not only those skills required for an industrializing and modern Singapore, but also inculcate in them those values that will ensure their loyalty and commitment to the nation."<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 488.

<sup>92</sup>Quah, *In Search of Singapore's National Values*, 56.

The government responded to this need to modernize and yet keep traditional ties by instituting a bilingual policy. Every student must learn English as a second language and one of the other three languages, usually the mother tongue of the student. Quah writes, “The government has relied on its policy of bilingualism to foster racial harmony and integration. The rationale for adopting the bilingual policy in schools was the assumption that a bilingual person would be able to communicate and interact not only with his own community but also with members of another linguistic group.”<sup>93</sup> In addition to the emphasis on the establishment of four official languages, Lee Kuan Yew began the “Speak Mandarin” campaign in 1979. This was done in order to both unite those who spoke different Chinese dialects and to increase business opportunities abroad by speaking the dominant Chinese dialect. In the first decade, Mandarin-speaking families increased from 26 percent to over 60 percent.<sup>94</sup>

The language policies kept most of the population content and helped racial harmony, but there was significant disagreement among some of the Chinese-speaking population. Yew recalls, “A hard core of the Chinese-educated did not welcome what they saw as a move to make English the common working language, and they expressed their unhappiness in the Chinese newspapers.”<sup>95</sup> English did, in fact, become the trade language of Singapore and they were correct to perceive that this was by design. Yew credits this decision for helping to prevent conflicts between races, for the growth of the economy, and for their ability to adapt to the Internet. In summary, it should be said that the decisions regarding language have been cohesive with the two values of “consensus over contention” and “racial and religious harmony.” While there are dissenters, the overall harmony of the majority has been achieved. Also, the unofficial value of building

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

<sup>94</sup>Yew, *From Third World to First*, 154.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 146-47.

the economy has also been greatly enhanced through language.

**The Great Marriage Debate.** There are two main factors that have combined to cause concern among Singaporean leaders about the priority of marriage and family among the population. First, the national birth rate has been falling for the last couple of decades. There is a fear that the population will fall to a number that will make it difficult to maintain their present productivity. Second, as Singaporean women have become more educated and successful, their focus on marriage and having children has decreased markedly. The latter came to the attention of the government in the early eighties. After Lee Kuan Yew had finished analyzing census reports from 1980, he realized, “It showed that our brightest women were not marrying and would not be represented in the next generation. The implications were grave. Our best women were not reproducing themselves because men who were their educational equals did not want to marry them. About half of our university graduates were women; nearly two-thirds of them were unmarried.”<sup>96</sup> Combined with research revealing that the single most important determining factor in a child’s success was educated parents, this prompted Yew to give his “Great Marriage Debate” speech.<sup>97</sup> Following the speech, he remembers, “I urged them to marry their educational equals, and encouraged educated women to have two or more children.”<sup>98</sup> Years later, the government gave financial incentives in the form of tax breaks to encourage more children.

The response to the government’s pleas has not been very positive. Two decades later, the percentage of unmarried successful and educated women continues to grow. A recent article in *The Straits Times* comments on the women who have filled its

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<sup>96</sup>Ibid., 136.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., 137.

own offices: “They are representatives of a new breed of highly-educated women in Singapore, and in many parts of the developed world, who are surging ahead of their male peers as they move in ever larger numbers into the captain's cockpit to steer the new global economy.”<sup>99</sup> The priorities of these women are continuing to drift away from marriage and family. The author of the article, Richard Lim, reveals, “In a survey carried out by the Social Development Unit in 2000, Singapore women between the ages of 21 and 35 ranked marriage fourth in their hierarchy of needs, after financial security, career success and travel. Setting up a family, or having babies, came a distant sixth, after further education.”<sup>100</sup>

Because monetary incentives to produce children failed, the government has responded to new surveys showing a decreased fertility in a new way – the “Romancing Singapore” festival. Karl Ho explains,

It was the first time such an event was held, and it was organised by the Family Matters! Singapore Task Force, the Singapore Tourism Board and the five community development councils. Its working budget was \$400,000, and it featured more than 100 activities, from picnics to plays. Many businesses such as hotels and restaurants joined in the spirit of the event and offered promotions. The festival comes on the heels of surveys showing that Singaporeans are marrying later and that the national birth rate has taken a nosedive.<sup>101</sup>

The campaign featured well-known ministers on television recounting how they fell in love and encouraging the use of dating services. The idea was to simply create a mood where Singaporeans would stop and think about their priorities and instill a desire for marriage and family. The idea, however, irritated many who resented the idea of the government trying to teach them about love. Ho writes, “The festival reinforced

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<sup>99</sup>Richard Lim, “The Men Don’t Get It,” *The Straits Times* (September 25, 2003) [on-line]; accessed 29 November 2003; available from <http://straitstimes.asia1.com.sg/columnist/0,1886,239-145888,00.html>; Internet.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid.

<sup>101</sup>Karl Ho, “Does Love Need To Be Taught?” *The Straits Times* (March 3, 2003) [on-line]; accessed 25 September 2003; available from <http://straitstimes.asia1.com.sg/columnist/0,1886,1141-174768,00.html>; Internet.

Singapore's reputation as a nanny state. From teaching its citizens everything from how to flush the toilet to how to speak Mandarin and how to be courteous, it has now taken on the role of advocating how Singaporeans should love. Are we such losers to have to be taught that?"<sup>102</sup> Pointing to what he sees as the root of the problem, he comments further, "The festival failed to address the fact that people today are too stressed out to fall in love and settle down. There are also many who are having too good a time to want to tie the knot or cut the umbilical cord."<sup>103</sup> Whatever the real reason for more people remaining single, it is clear that the national value of "family as the basic unit of society" is taking a back seat to education and careers for many.

**The Religious Knowledge program.** A 1979 study entitled "Report on Moral Education" revealed that students in mission schools showed a strong religious background that supported their educational endeavors. This prompted the government to introduce the Religious Knowledge program. Quah writes,

In January 1984 Religious Knowledge was made a compulsory subject for Secondary Three and Four students, who were offered six options: Bible Knowledge, Buddhist Studies, Confucian Ethics, Hindu Studies, Islamic Religious Knowledge, and Sikh Studies. The *raison d'être* of the Religious Knowledge programme was to anchor the moral values learnt [sic] by the students during their first eight years in school (Primary One to Secondary Two) by means of studying one of the six alternative religious traditions offered.<sup>104</sup>

The new curriculum did, in fact, increase the religious knowledge of the students. However, it had more effects than what was originally planned by the government. "The programmed exposed students to particular religions of their choice and had the unintended effect of increasing their religious fervour."<sup>105</sup> After students

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<sup>102</sup>Ibid.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid.

<sup>104</sup>Quah, *In Search of Singapore's National Values*, 54.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., 61.

increasingly began to propagate their faith, the Religious Knowledge program was dropped.

Conversions from one faith to another as the result of proselytism was perceived as being negative for race relations and general harmony on the island. Although there were some Chinese who were not particularly happy about conversions from Buddhism to another religion, it was primarily the conversions of Malay Muslims that inflamed their communities and spilled over into the media. Sng recounts that the 1986 Singapore Islamic Missionary Convention addressed Christian outreach to Muslims as a major problem they were currently facing.

With regards to the latter, *The Straits Times* reported some of the concerns: 'Christian pamphlets being distributed to Muslim households, Bible correspondence courses directed at Muslims, and 300 Muslims becoming Christians.' Quoting extracts from a preamble, the newspaper added: 'Such activities, the preamble said, had affected the faith in Islam of some Muslims. This, in turn, had affected the community's tolerance towards freedom of religion in Singapore.'<sup>106</sup>

Articles continued to emerge in the local papers urging tolerance of religion and discouraging proselytism. These were especially aimed at Christians because their numbers and overall percentage were increasing greatly in Singapore. In 1990 the government introduced the Maintenance of Religious Harmony bill which set up a Presidential Council for Religious Harmony. Sng explains that, under this bill, "the Minister may issue orders prohibiting persons from continuing with their course of actions, and set forth the penalties for those who contravened such orders."<sup>107</sup> While the measures decreased the freedom of religion, they reinforced Singapore's values of racial and religious harmony, consensus over contention, and nation above community and society above self.

**Authoritarian government.** Although Lee Kuan Yew always enjoyed a high

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<sup>106</sup>Sng, *In His Good Time*, 320.

<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.*, 323.

approval rate, no one can deny that his People's Action Party exercises a high degree of authority. Their strict prohibitions against such actions as trivial as chewing gum are both resented and appreciated. These laws that seem somewhat banal actually provide great insight into how the government runs the nation. They reveal the mindset that any desired change can be planned and implemented. A recent article from *Asiaweek.com* about the recent global economic downturn reveals the heavy influence of the government regarding economic policies:

Whatever happened to the nanny state? Singapore was always known for its government-led plans that pointed to certain future success. For more than 30 years, the government has orchestrated the city-state's emergence as a manufacturing powerhouse. . . . But Singapore is ready to offer a paternal helping hand. The government just announced a \$6.2 billion stimulus package, more than wiping out the island's budget surplus.<sup>108</sup>

Regarding another example of authoritarianism, Brooke asserts that "The anti-litter campaign shows how the government typically solves social and other problems in Singapore: Conduct a big campaign to educate the people about the problem and if necessary, pass legislation to drive the message home."<sup>109</sup>

Carroll quotes a Singaporean principal who laments that rules have to be so strictly enforced for there to be order: "You can see that Singapore is very clean and beautiful. But, remove the fines [for littering, spitting, etc.] and what do you have? Is everything from within? I think much of the discipline of the people is out of fear [of being caught and fined]. The government needs to internalize in the individuals the values that are good for the nation so that the discipline is motivated from something inside the person, not outside."<sup>110</sup> These imposing regulations are best understood as an

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<sup>108</sup>"A Setback for Best-Laid Plans," *Asiaweek.com* (October 26, 2001) [online]; accessed 14 March 2002; available from <http://www.asiaweek.com/asiaweek/magazine/enterprise/0,8782,180176,00.html>; 1; Internet.

<sup>109</sup>Marcus Brooke, *Singapore* (New York: Prentice Hall Travel, 1993), 20.

<sup>110</sup>Carroll, "Towards a Culturally Relevant Strategy," 46.

effort to establish order. Clammer argues that it is this order that makes the system work and that there can be no toleration for ambiguity. Therefore, everyone must be committed to modernization and a particular ethnic heritage at the same time.<sup>111</sup>

In conclusion, it must be stated that the people generally do not mind this type of government. As long as the ruling party is corruption-free and economically successful, it is doubtful there will be any serious discontent for a long time. In George's article detailing the government's control of the press, he explains their acquiescence:

The PAP did not stop at silencing its critics; it went on to win the political argument. It did not just deliver on its threats; it also delivered on its promises. It achieved high economic growth with social equity, such that today, some 90 percent of Singaporean families own their own homes. Its economic management has been so sound that today, it consistently runs budget surpluses even though tax rates are so low that 70 percent of workers pay no income tax at all. Its system remains one of the cleanest and most transparent in the world, according to foreign auditors such as the World Competitiveness Report. Even the on-going Asian economic crisis has in fact strengthened the PAP's reputation for good governance.<sup>112</sup>

It is also worth noticing yet again an underlying and unifying priority behind the communitarianism – the economy.

**Education and work emphasis.** The high degree of modernization is evident by their emphasis on education and hard work. As a young person in school, there is no greater evaluation of worth than what is reflected in their grades. There is an obsession with excelling academically that can be traumatic to youth. This will be further discussed in another section of the paper.

Singaporeans also place a high value on their job performance and they generally enjoy working. "A Survey of Singaporeans has found that most workers are happy with their jobs. . . . They also prefer to work more than 40 hours a week and like an element of stress in the workplace."<sup>113</sup> As a consequence of this high value placed on

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<sup>111</sup>Clammer, "Singapore," 12-13.

<sup>112</sup>George, "Newspapers."

<sup>113</sup>"Most S'poreans Happy with Stressful Jobs," *The Straits Times* (February

work, many adults are progressively establishing their identity through their chosen profession as opposed to their ethnic or religious heritage.

In addition to the establishment of identity through profession, their system of education and modernization has had another unintended consequence. Quah explains,

The system of meritocracy has, undoubtedly, contributed to the importance of education as a channel for upward social mobility in Singapore and the selection and promotion of the 'best and brightest' in the public sector. However, the focus on doing well in examinations, the emphasis on paper qualifications, and the special treatment given to the 'scholar' civil servants have certainly reinforced the appeal of individualism among Singaporeans.<sup>114</sup>

This will most likely continue to pose a threat to Singapore's communitarian ideals for a long time. The individualistic reward system will have to be offset by communitarian emphases in other spheres of life.

**Singapore's festivals.** The general racial and religious harmony among this pluralistic nation creates an enjoyable atmosphere for their many religious festivals. Chinese festivals include the Lunar New Year, Qing Ming, the Feast of the Hungry Ghosts, and the Mid-Autumn Festival. Muslims celebrate Hari Raya Puasa to celebrate the end of Ramadan and Muharram, a New Year's celebration. Hindus celebrate the Tamil New Year and Thaipusam and Deepavali, which is also celebrated by Sikhs. Christmas is celebrated in Singapore and seems to be as heavily commercialized as in the West.

An article written from the perspective of a British expatriate in Singapore comments, "The multiracial mix is such that most Singaporeans celebrate more than just the festivals of their own ethnic group. So a Chinese Christian might go to church, but also partake in the cultural rites in some Chinese festivals. Even when they don't actually

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27, 2002) [on-line]; accessed 2 February 2002; available from <http://straitstimes.asia1.com.sg/breakingnews/story/0,1895,105138,00.html?>; Internet.

<sup>114</sup>Quah, *In Search of Singapore's National Values*, 93.

celebrate certain festivals, many will visit their friends and neighbours from other ethnic communities to join in the fun.”<sup>115</sup>

As one can easily perceive, the nation of Singapore is a unique place. From its successful modernization and provision for a booming population to its great ethnic and religious diversity, it is a sociologist’s dream for a case study. The information above provides insight into the heart of the people of Singapore and provides a background for understanding the church on the island.

## **The Church in Singapore**

### **Introduction of Christianity**

The Portuguese introduced Catholicism to the general area in the sixteenth century. Sng records, “In 1511, Alfonso d’Albuquerque successfully stormed Malacca with a fleet of 19 ships carrying 800 Portuguese and 600 Indian troops. On board the ships were eight Roman Catholic priests. It was unfortunate that Christianity had to be introduced to the shores of Malaya through the barrel of a gun.”<sup>116</sup> Although the total number of Catholics at the beginning of the nineteenth century has been estimated at a dozen, by the 1830s there were around 400 Roman Catholics in Singapore.<sup>117</sup>

Protestant Christianity existed on the island through the presence of Dutch believers in the early eighteenth century, but they were not active in spreading their faith. It was not until after the Pietist Movement and the revivals in America and England that Protestant missionaries were sent to Singapore.<sup>118</sup> Presbyterian missionary Robert

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<sup>115</sup>The British Club: A Home from Home in Singapore, “Society and Culture” (March 15, 2002) [on-line]; accessed 15 March 2002; available from <http://www.expatsingapore.com/general/culture.htm>; 1; Internet.

<sup>116</sup>Sng, *In His Good Time*, 24.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., 26-27

Morrison had come to China with the London Missionary Society (LMS) in order to learn the language and to translate the Bible in to Chinese. Sng writes, “Morrison’s interest in the education of the Chinese drew him to Raffles and they corresponded regarding the possibility of setting up an educational institution in Singapore.”<sup>119</sup> The endeavor did not amount to much, but it did illustrate Raffles’ openness towards Christianity. Although his early impressions of Christians in the area were decidedly unfavorable, his attitude changed to the point where Sng could write, “It is apparent that the work of the LMS missionaries was facilitated in no small measure by Raffles’ generous attitude towards them.”<sup>120</sup>

Nevertheless, the early efforts of Protestant missionaries were not impressive. Sng comments, “Despite the many missionaries who came to Singapore, the net result of their combined efforts can only be described as disappointing. After 20 years of ministry, no strong indigenous church was established. Practically all the mission schools did not stand up to the test of time.”<sup>121</sup> In review of the entire century, Sng writes, “The influence of Christianity in Singapore during the 19<sup>th</sup> century was minimal.”<sup>122</sup>

### **Twentieth-Century Growth**

The growth of the Singaporean church improved during early parts of the twentieth century, but it was in the seventies when things began to escalate on a large scale. The combination of housing redistribution and a rising interest in the gospel among young people led to the establishment of house churches. Sng comments, “One obvious result of having house groups was that it allowed for the emergence of many

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<sup>119</sup>Ibid., 29.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., 40.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid., 145.

capable young people who might otherwise have remained unnoticed in a larger congregation. These new leaders often injected a new vitality and a sense of urgency to the work, leading to further expansion.”<sup>123</sup> Parachurch youth organizations also had a great influence on evangelistic work. Sng records, “during the first ten years of its existence, Youth for Christ recorded a total of some 10,000 young people who indicated their desire to become Christians. . . . Other youth organizations like the Inter-School Christian Fellowship, Navigators, Eagles Evangelism, Campus Crusade and Fellowship of Evangelical Students, all saw increased numbers of young people turning to Christianity.”<sup>124</sup> In summary of the main factors contributing towards church growth before the seventies, Sng writes,

We have noted how the emergence of a new generation of youths injected a fresh vigour and vision into the churches. Also, Singapore’s independence through separation from Malaysia, allowed Christians to concentrate their financial and manpower resources on the island. Furthermore, the massive relocation of people, resulting from various housing development projects, encouraged the people to be more open to religious change.<sup>125</sup>

The primary growth in the seventies, as well as the latter part of the twentieth century, has been associated with the charismatic renewal. Sng adds, “1973-74 may be looked upon as a turning point for the church for it began what is now seen as a decade of renewal and significant growth of church membership and attendance. The *raison d’être* for this may be attributed to the influence of the modern-day Charismatic renewal in the church.”<sup>126</sup> The charismatic renewal will be discussed in more detail later.

### **Current Demographics**

Although the percentage of Christians is not much greater than twenty years

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<sup>123</sup>Ibid., 269.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid., 307.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., 306.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid., 332.

ago (from 10 percent to 13 percent), the excitement of Christians concerning the growth is understandable when one considers that in 1970 the percentage of Christians was estimated at 1.86.<sup>127</sup> Furthermore, when one considers the fact that the total population grew from 2.4 million to 4 million since 1980, the last two decades still represent significant numerical growth.<sup>128</sup>

There can be no doubt that the greatest growth has occurred along linguistic and cultural lines. “Singapore residents who have adopted English as their home language appear to have greater exposure to the influence of Christianity.”<sup>129</sup> For example, among those fifteen years or older who spoke English most frequently at home, 39.8 percent were Christians. Also, among those who spoke either Mandarin or another Chinese dialect most frequently at home, 18.2 percent were Christians.<sup>130</sup> Although there has been some responsiveness among Tamil-speaking Indians (6.7 percent), the Malay population is firmly Islamic and contains less than one percent Christians.<sup>131</sup> Therefore, the pattern is that the Chinese – more specifically, the English-speaking Chinese – are the most open to the gospel.

### **Affluence in the Church**

The next cultural element to take into account is affluence. The 2000 census studied the relationship between one’s religion and their respective housing. The categories were as follows: one and two bedroom apartments, three room apartments, four room apartments, five room apartments, and finally, private flats and houses.

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<sup>127</sup>Tan, “More Good Years,” 20.

<sup>128</sup>“Singapore Population,” 2.

<sup>129</sup>“Singapore Census of Population, 2000,” 7.

<sup>130</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup>*Ibid.*

Christians had the highest percentage of those who lived in private flats and houses – 34.3 percent.<sup>132</sup> Carroll references a survey conducted in 1988 that reveals these same tendencies. He explains, “Because of this Christianity was associated with social prestige and influence, and was likely to continue to grow. They concluded that Christians in Singapore ‘exert an influence greater than the proportion of the population they represent,’ and, in that sense, ‘Christianity is becoming a dominant religion in Singapore.’”<sup>133</sup>

While this has its advantages, it is still a challenge for the church in Singapore to reach out to those in lower socio-economic categories. Mary Yeo Carpenter comments on this situation:

The churches in Singapore have been highly elitist. While only 16 percent of the general population hold professional, technical, or administrative positions, some 53 percent of Christians fall into that category. The situation is serious. While 75 percent of the population lives in public housing, less than 17 percent of the churches are even in the vicinity of public housing estates. Concerned church leaders have warned of the danger of the church being ‘geographically, socially and occupationally separated from the largely unevangelized sector of the economy.’

To plant a church in the midst of one of Singapore’s largest housing estates is surely an act of faith.<sup>134</sup>

### **The Charismatic Renewal**

The largest church growth in recent decades has been experienced in charismatic churches. Clammer asserts that the “charismatic renewal” in Singapore “is of particular interest because of the considerable number of its adherents, the fact that many of these adherents are senior professionals, academics, businessmen, and even politicians, because of certain interesting continuities in form (if not content) between the movement and some varieties of Chinese ‘folk’ religion and because of the seemingly profoundly

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<sup>132</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>133</sup>Carroll, “Towards a Culturally Relevant Strategy,” 55-56.

<sup>134</sup>Mary Yeo Carpenter, “A Success Story from Singapore,” *Urban Mission* 14 (1997): 42.

anti-secular thrust of Charismatic theology.”<sup>135</sup> The characteristics that have made it appealing are its warm community, lively worship, anticipation of prophecies or healings, and the experiential aspect it possesses.<sup>136</sup>

The emergence of the movement unified many across denominational lines and also caused the usual concerns among others worried about excesses. The unity of charismatic believers was made tangible by the annual Spiritual Renewal Seminar in which many denominations participated. When this meeting was discontinued in 1980, there was a shift in focus. Sng comments, "Gradually, the focus of leaders shifted from broadbased promotion of charismatic teachings to a concern for growth of their respective churches. As each church took stock of itself, fundamental questions of the relationship between the charismatic movement and its own church structure or tradition had to be addressed."<sup>137</sup> Furthermore, Pentecostals began to speak up to preserve those aspects of their theology particular to their denomination.<sup>138</sup> The refocus on denominations, however, does not mean that the influence of the Charismatic Renewal was lost. Charismatic characteristics remain strong today within the various denominations.

On the surface, Singapore does not seem to fit the context in which charismatic activity would thrive. In most cases, charismatic practices and theology thrive where there is a strong sense of powerlessness. Understandably, this is normally associated with the poor. Because of the Singapore's affluence, the spread of the charismatic movement in would seem to be an anomaly. Clammer, however, suggests that the issue

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<sup>135</sup>John Clammer, *The Sociology of Singapore Religion* (Singapore: Chopmen Publishers, 1991), 45.

<sup>136</sup>*Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>137</sup>Sng, *In His Good Time*, 333.

<sup>138</sup>*Ibid.*, 333-34.

of powerlessness still applies.

The highly bureaucratic, paternalistic and centralized nature of Singapore political culture really does mean that the average citizen has little or no control or influence over public policy or how his environment is arranged, and given the tiny scale of Singapore there are few 'outs' – very little wild countryside, no mountains, only neat man-made suburban beaches and rather sterile parks for recreation. This has created a real 'value-problem' in Singapore – few political outlets, a controlled urban environment and no great social causes with which to identify. In this sense there is a profound powerlessness in Singapore for the bulk of the population. Charismatic activity transcends this by providing community in an individualistic society, meaning in a meaningless one, spiritual power in one where few share in social or political power, and interpretation of life and of history, a scale of values and satisfying experiences and activities.<sup>139</sup>

The charismatic movement in Singapore is likely to continue to thrive in the future. While the evangelical community should stand on strong theological grounds and avoid the extremism associated with certain types of charismatic activity, they would be wise to learn from them also.

On the whole, the church in Singapore represents one of the greatest success stories of Christian missions in Asia. Their leadership is indigenous; they are self-supporting; and they are self-propagating. There has been a great interest in missions in churches on the island, and they are actively sending missionaries to other parts of the world. Given the vibrancy of the church and their generous financial resources, there is reason to expect continued growth within Singapore and a greater influence through missions in the general region.

### **Baptist Churches in Singapore**

The Oversea-Chinese (Swatow) Baptist Church of Singapore, formed in 1937, was the first Baptist church on the island.<sup>140</sup> The early signs of growth had been encouraging, but it was not long until the Baptist churches were experiencing noticeably

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<sup>139</sup>Ibid., 54.

<sup>140</sup>Oh Hock Teck, *A History of Baptists in Malaysia and Singapore*, ed. Lillie O. Rogers (Eurasia Press, 1971), 1.

less growth than other denominations. The research problem of Carroll's dissertation in 1989 revolves around this fact. Carroll chronicles the many different strategies implemented throughout the latter part of the twentieth century and how they ultimately failed. Vast resources were poured into various research projects and new strategies, including the attempt of Ralph Neighbour and his brief tenure in Singapore. Carroll details several mistakes made by Baptists during those years: Remaining isolated from other denominations, lack of ownership of the plans by the Singaporean Christians, ignoring studies that pointed toward the importance of youth work (something I will address later), and an anti-Charismatic aura that tended to stifle the Holy Spirit and rely on strategies instead of having simple faith in God.

The situation regarding lack of growth has not changed much since Carroll's doctoral work. Rich White, a former youth minister in Singapore, writes, "The Baptist world here in Singapore is rather small. The total number of members is something like 5,000 in 28 churches. Ten of the churches do not currently have pastors."<sup>141</sup> Of course, there are exciting things happening in some of the churches. Nevertheless, when other denominations are experiencing significantly more growth, the perceptions are that much more could happen within Baptist churches in Singapore.

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<sup>141</sup>Rich White, e-mail to author, 10 April 2002.

## CHAPTER 3

### GLOBAL YOUTH CULTURE

The preceding discussion on Singaporean history and values provides a backdrop that will engender an understanding of young people in Singapore. At this point it might seem appropriate to launch directly into a study of the values and lifestyles of Singaporean youth. However, after examining Singaporean culture and history in general we have only studied one of the major cultural influences of their lives. Singaporean youth are not only inheritors of this culture, but also the ubiquitous global youth culture which is found in urban areas all over the globe. Global youth culture must be examined to see how its forces and influences forge together with Singapore's historical and cultural context to form today's Singaporean youth culture.

#### Official Age of Youth

To begin such a discussion, I must give a general definition of youth. The fact is that there exists no worldwide agreement on what specific ages constitute a person being a youth. In some cultures, the range can be as wide as eight to forty. Because of this, many international organizations have, in the past, chosen not to attempt to create a definition. Jennifer Gidley elaborates, "Yet, increasingly, as an outcome of globalization over the past ten to fifteen years, the recognition of youth, globally, as a category of human existence requiring human acknowledgment, has gained the attention and focus of such organizations such as the United Nations (UN), especially UNESCO, the World Bank, and the World Health Organization (WHO)."<sup>1</sup> The United Nations defines youth

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<sup>1</sup>Jennifer Gidley, "Global Youth Culture: A Transdisciplinary Perspective," in *Youth Futures: Comparative Research and Transformative Visions*, edited by Jennifer Gidley and Sohail Inayatullah (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 3.

as “those persons falling between the ages of 15 to 24 inclusive.”<sup>2</sup> They recognize the reasons behind the variations across cultures, but they have set this official age in order to study global youth in a manageable fashion.

Other definitions of youth specify the characteristics of adolescence requiring recognition. For example, Madelene Maria cites a definition of youth as “those who do not have the full legal status and roles of adulthood, and consequently, unlike adults, they do not have access to family, professional, and political rights.”<sup>3</sup> She explains that most states in Southeast Asia (SEA) agree with the latter and that, “Guided by this general definition, SEA states prescribe varied age ranges in identifying who belongs to this age category. In the Philippines, youth are legally defined as those who are 15 to 30 years old. In Thailand, youth are those who are 15 to 25 years old. In Malaysia, the state’s Youth Council defines youth as those from 15 to 40 years of age.”<sup>4</sup> Singapore’s National Youth Council defines youth as being from the ages of 15 to 29.<sup>5</sup> This includes youth in secondary schooling, university studies, and well into their working years.

### Macrolevel Changes Affecting Adolescents

Most studies of youth culture tend to focus on the immediate context in which adolescents live. As mentioned above, there is a larger, global context to be considered. Jeylan Mortimer and Reed Larson assert, “The paths adolescents take from childhood

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<sup>2</sup>*Youth at the United Nations*, The United Nations [on-line]; accessed 24 February 2004; available from <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/qanda.htm>; Internet.

<sup>3</sup>Madelene Santa Maria, “Youth in Southeast Asia: Living within the Continuity of Tradition and the Turbulence of Change,” in *The World’s Youth: Adolescence in Eight Regions of the Globe*, ed. B. Bradford Brown, Reed W. Larson, and T.S. Saraswathi (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 2002), 171-72.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ho Kong Chong and Jeffrey Yip, *Youth.sg: The State of Youth in Singapore* (Singapore: National Youth Council, 2003), 21.

into adulthood are shaped by broad demographic, institutional, and technological forces.”<sup>6</sup> For example, as availability of automobiles increased in the early twentieth century, the dating habits of youth in the United States changed considerably.<sup>7</sup> In this section I will examine some specific changes that are currently taking place on macrolevels across the world and affecting adolescents as they are transitioning into adults.

### Demographics

If the world youth population of over a billion young people were to consist of a hundred people living in one village, it would look like this:

There would be fifty-one young men and forty-nine young women. Forty-nine would live in the village center and fifty-one would live in the rural outskirts. There would be sixty young Asians, fifteen Africans, nine Latin Americans and Caribbeans, and only sixteen young people from the industrialized countries of the world. Fifteen of the villagers would be ‘illiterate,’ nine of them young women . . . . Sixty-four would be living on an average of less than US \$1,000 per year, while only eleven would be earning an average income of more than US\$10,000 per year. By the end of the year, one person would have contracted the HIV virus.<sup>8</sup>

There are some very interesting trends concerning youth that should be of great concern to missiologists today. First of all, the sheer numbers of youth alone should gain our attention immediately. In 2000, there were 1.06 billion young people from the age of 15 to 24.<sup>9</sup> There were 2.35 billion (nearly forty percent of the world) people under the age of 20.<sup>10</sup> An accompanying phenomenon of these statistics is that, while the

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<sup>6</sup>Jeylan T. Mortimer and Reed W. Larson, “Macrostructural Trends and the Reshaping of Adolescence,” in *The Changing Adolescent Experience: Societal Trends and the Transition to Adulthood*, ed. Jeylan T. Mortimer and Reed W. Larson (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 2.

<sup>8</sup>Gidley, “Global Youth Culture,” 3-4.

<sup>9</sup>The United Nations, “World Youth Report 2003” [on-line]; accessed 24 February 2004; available from <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/wyr/ndocuments/english.doc>; Internet.

<sup>10</sup>Statistic from Todd M. Johnson (an editor of *World Christian Encyclopedia*

population of Western countries is ageing significantly, non-developed countries are seeing a great swell in the percentage of their youth population. John Allan adds that “the proportion of teenagers in the total population increases annually, and most of them are being born in places where the church is weakest.”<sup>11</sup> Some countries have an astoundingly young population. “Leighton Ford observes that in no Two-Thirds World city is the median age greater than twenty. In Mexico City, which will be the world’s largest city by the year 2000, the median age is fourteen.”<sup>12</sup> Charles Sackett writes, “There are fifty-eight countries with populations in which forty percent or more of the people are under fifteen years of age.”<sup>13</sup>

Concerning underdeveloped countries, the United Nations comments, “The majority (almost 85 percent) of the world’s youth live in developing countries, with approximately 60 percent in Asia alone. A remaining 23 percent live in the developing regions of Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean. By 2025, the number of youth living in developing countries will grow to 89.5 percent. Therefore, it is necessary to take youth issues into considerations in the development agenda and policies of each country.”<sup>14</sup> These numbers are staggering. They urge us to take age into consideration when we are considering cross-cultural missions.

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with David Barrett), e-mailed to author by Paul Borthwick, November 2001. The latest edition of *World Christian Encyclopedia* was originally supposed to have three volumes – this information was cut out of the final two.

<sup>11</sup>John Allan, “New Strategies for Winning Unreached Youth,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 25 (April 1989): 131. Although this quote is somewhat dated, the trend has proven to be true.

<sup>12</sup>Paul Borthwick, “A Global Family of Teenagers,” *Youthworker* 8 (Winter 1992): 35.

<sup>13</sup>G. Charles Sackett, “Preparing to Minister Internationally in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” *Youthworker* 8 (Winter 1992): 39.

<sup>14</sup>The United Nations, *Youth at The United Nations*.

## Ageing Trends

A closer look will reveal the different ageing trends of developed and non-developed countries. As developed countries have improved medical technologies, the average age of their populations has increased. Mortimer and Larson illustrate this by asserting, “To time travelers from the past, one of the most striking features of postindustrial societies – once they get beyond all our gizmos – would be the comparatively small number of children and youth and the large number of elderly.”<sup>15</sup> One of the phenomenons this creates is the percentage of dependents in a nation. “In general, the economically active, adult population is shrinking relative to those who are economically dependent, including both older and younger generations.”<sup>16</sup>

## Urbanization and Migration

The rapid urbanization of the world is being led by the young. Harvie Conn writes, “In Mexico City the average age is 14.2. Sixty-eight percent of the urban population of Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, and Costa Rica are made up of young people between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four. In Brazil, Mexico, and Venezuela it is 75 percent.”<sup>17</sup> In general, people have been coming to the cities to seek employment and opportunity amidst crises in their homeland. Sackett asserts, “It only makes sense that many of the new urban dwellers will be young people seeking to escape the ravages of drought, war, and poverty, only to find the city equally destitute of hope.”<sup>18</sup> The cities seem only to multiply the social problems of youth. These problems range from alcohol

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<sup>15</sup>Mortimer and Larson, “Macrostructural Trends,” 3.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Harvie Conn and Manuel Ortiz, *Urban Ministry: The Kingdom, the City, and the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001), 22.

<sup>18</sup>Sackett, “Preparing to Minister Internationally in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” 39.

and drug abuse, gang violence, poverty, to child prostitution.<sup>19</sup>

### **Mandatory Education**

An often overlooked factor in shaping youth cultures everywhere is the relatively recent historical development of compulsory education. Once a state mandates by law that children must go to school until a certain age, they have made a decision that carries great implications. They have decided both where their children and youth will spend a very large percentage of their waking hours and with whom they will spend it. They have also provided the children and youth with a body of knowledge and experiences that they will hold in common. In other words, they have created a new culture in which to live.

Dave Adams adds that there are many political influences that shape the life of youth. A state decides the legal ages for voting, being drafted, drinking alcoholic beverages, and penalization for crimes as an adult. With compulsory education, the government decides to punish parents who do not submit to their wishes by either imprisonment or taking children away. Government subsidy is usually based on the number of students in a school. Therefore, immaculate records and accountability are encouraged throughout the system. Furthermore, the school clearly regiments with whom the youth will spend the majority of their time based on age, grade, and sometimes, gender. All of this has an incredible influence on the environment in which adolescents live.<sup>20</sup>

So far, I have only asserted that many nations have moved toward the mandatory education model for their children. In and of itself, this only suggests a great influencing factor within each of these cultures. It does not automatically follow that the

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<sup>19</sup>Borthwick, "A Global Family of Teenagers," 35. He writes that there are over 30,000 girls under age 15 working as prostitutes in Bangkok.

<sup>20</sup>Dave Adams, telephone conversation, January 7, 2004.

results are similar across cultural borders. However, there can be no doubt that the model being adopted worldwide is based on the West and also that much of the content is based on a western influence. Gidley and Inayatullah believe, “Globalization has an impact on non-western youth resulting from at least two other major processes: mass education (based on the factory model) and the media. In a critique of the model of education put forward by the World Bank a decade ago at the Education for All (EFA) meeting in Jomtein, Thailand, a number of educationists and social activists cite this model as a further attempt to assert the values and culture of the western materialist worldview.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, she believes that the common trend is that youth are becoming less religious and more secular.

### **Secularism and Materialism**

As youth become less religious, they tend to look to material possessions to satisfy their needs. Computers and other electronics have become quite commonplace in Asia as well as the West. Karnjariya Sukrung writes about what a study conducted on Southeast Asian youth revealed about teenagers in Bangkok:

The sight of teenagers toting mobile phones, sitting in front of a personal computer tapping into the cyber world, or clicking away at their play stations, is more and more common these days, whether on television programmes, in the streets, or right in your living room.

So it came as no surprise when the ‘Study of Youth in the Asia-Pacific Region, New Generations 2000’ survey – launched in a presentation to media and advertising people last week at the Discovery-Centre – revealed that having a PC, surfing the Internet, and owning a mobile phone are some of the most important goals for Bangkok youth.<sup>22</sup>

The result of materialism is lack of meaning and an obscure value system. This is not only having a negative effect on secular youth, but also in the church – even in

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<sup>21</sup>Gidley, “Global Youth Culture,” 5.

<sup>22</sup>Karnjariya Sukrung, “Youths Worship Gadgets, Claims Survey” [on-line]; accessed 5 September 2001; available from [http://www.thailandlife.com/thaiyouth\\_21.html](http://www.thailandlife.com/thaiyouth_21.html); Internet.

areas where the church is quite strong. Stan Guthrie discusses the material prosperity of Korea and some of the negative consequences for the church. He writes, “The country’s economic expansion has greatly contributed to the church’s contraction – especially among young people.”<sup>23</sup> He then quotes Bong Ro, former executive director of the World Evangelical Fellowship’s Theological Commission as saying that “The Korean churches are losing the teens. . . . I think material affluence is certainly one factor.”<sup>24</sup>

### **Family Structure and Values**

For various reasons, family ties are being loosened in many places around the world and youth are left without a strong social foundation. The infidelity rate in Latin America is approximately seventy percent due to the widespread acceptance of the male ideal of *machismo*.<sup>25</sup> Borthwick recalls, “A youth worker in India identified ‘family dissolution’ as the greatest cause of poverty.”<sup>26</sup> As young members of traditional societies leave for the cities, they become open to many new influences. While this may create an open door for the gospel, it is also a great cause of the loss of basic family values.

Another great influence on family structure in more educated societies is the prolonging of schooling because of the need for higher degrees. Mortimer and Larson explain,

For many youth, the transition out of school occurs at older ages as they extend their years of education. Advances in technology require youth to attain more years of schooling to obtain the more desirable jobs. . . . While youth must postpone the economic rewards that derive from full-time labor force participation, their prospects for future economic well-being are enhanced. As a result, across post-

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<sup>23</sup>Stan Guthrie, “Korean Church Catches a Whiff of Trouble in the Air,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 32 (April 1996): 200.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup>Borthwick, “We’ve Got to Win the Younger World,” 247.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 248.

industrial societies, the proportions of youth obtaining college and postgraduate degrees have been increasing over many decades, with no end in sight.

In addition to prolonged education, other key markers of the transition into adulthood have been postponed, including acquisition of full-time work, marriage, and childbearing.”<sup>27</sup>

The lengthening of the transition into adulthood affects the heart of adolescence. The key issues during this time of a young person’s life are their desire to develop a personal identity and to become an autonomous adult. Mortimer and Larson write,

Fewer young people are becoming adults in what might be considered a traditional, normatively prescribed sequence of events, that is, leaving home and finishing their educations, acquiring full-time jobs, marrying, and having children. Instead, these sequences have become more variable or disorderly. . . . As young people go to school and postpone entry to adult roles for longer periods, up to and sometimes beyond the third decade of life, their experiences may become inconsistent, their age status blurred.<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, this not only profoundly affects the experience of youth globally, it actually changes whether or not they are still considered to be youth in the first place. The lack of any kind of clear initiation into adulthood simply leaves a void that many youth will seek to fill by other means. Gidley and Inayatullah write,

The importance of honoring the esoteric nature of the crucial changes involved in puberty transition has been ignored by our postmodern Western culture at its peril. It has been suggested that if a society, or the responsible adults, do not provide some adequate initiation or orientation for adolescents, one of two things may happen: They may seek to initiate themselves through drugs, and other customs referred to as part of ‘youth subculture,’ – dress, body mutilation, ‘street living,’ and even risk-taking behaviors. They may become disorientated and lose their own sense of meaning or hope about the future, or at worst attempt to take their own lives.<sup>29</sup>

### **New Technology**

One of the most obvious ways in which the lives of youth worldwide are being impacted globally is the constant advent of new technology. Increasing availability of

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<sup>27</sup>Mortimer and Larson, “Macrostructural Trends,” 10.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>29</sup>Gidley, “Global Youth Culture,” 15.

personal computers, mobile phones, the Internet, and computer games are opening up new modes of communication and new avenues for entertainment. Ronald Anderson writes,

For contemporary youth, the most immediate consequences of the growing information infrastructure are the technologies that help them interact with friends and family. With personal computers and hand held mobiles, more and different forms of interpersonal communication have become possible. New forms of leisure, shopping, and working also have become possible. Perhaps most noteworthy is the rapid access to new forms and types of knowledge.<sup>30</sup>

The invention of the Internet has greatly increased interaction between cultures. The first generation to grow up with it is being exposed to unprecedented opportunities of exposure to different forms of knowledge and entertainment. Of course, these great opportunities come with great concerns. Anderson explains, "Adolescents inevitably are attracted to adult entertainment, and the Internet greatly simplifies access to adult pastimes such as gambling and sexual interaction. The genre of computer and Internet games tends to be dominated by violent content."<sup>31</sup> Upon entering certain chat rooms, it is not uncommon to be solicited by other users wanting one to have sexual interaction online through erotic conversation, the exchange of online pornographic photos, and masturbation.

Anderson cites a study of American youth which revealed that, "One in 4 youth (about 6 million) during the past year had been subjected to an unwanted sexual exposure, defined as unexpected pictures of naked people or people having sex. One in 5 youth (about 4.5 million) had received a sexual solicitation, defined as a request for sex or sexual information."<sup>32</sup> Although it will be difficult to calculate and define, the impact

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<sup>30</sup>Ronald E. Anderson, "Youth and Information Technology," in *The Changing Adolescent Experience: Societal Trends and the Transition to Adulthood*, ed. Jeylan T. Mortimer and Reed W. Larson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 175.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 176.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 187.

of such interpersonal sexual interaction as a young person's first sexual experience can be very damaging to their ability to have meaningful relationships later in life. Anderson concludes, "It is likely that most young people will follow their elders and choose physical contacts with intimates, but those with disabilities and those with negative beliefs about their attractiveness may be more likely to follow these new patterns of gratification online."<sup>33</sup>

Computer games present their own set of problems. While they are many times a benign source of fun that develop computer skills needed later on in the workplace, the types of games played are worrisome to many. Gidley's concern regarding this subject is what she calls "the colonization of imagination." She explains, "The education of the imaginations of children and youth has changed from the nourishment of oral folk and fairy tales to the poisoning of interactive electronic nightmares. Since the advent of television, and video game parlors, followed by the use of computer games (originally designed to train and desensitize soldiers before sending them off to the killing fields), western children and youth have been consistently and exponentially exposed to violent images."<sup>34</sup> The desensitization toward violence will likely be a consistent theme of future global youth studies.

### **Global Targeting of Youth**

Whereas the church many times does not place a high priority on the potential of youth, the secular world makes no such mistake. The entertainment industry spends billions of dollars each year on music and the items mentioned above in an attempt to catch the attention of the young. Corporate marketers are ahead of the church. For example, Patricia Widener reports, "A youth travel expert has told industry leaders and

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 198.

<sup>34</sup>Gidley, "Global Youth Culture," 9.

national tourism organisations that it is a big mistake to believe young travelers are low yield, low quality clients. A youth traveler is a loyal traveler who can be marketed to for the next 50 to 60 years."<sup>35</sup>

In Benjamin R. Barber's book, *Jihad vs. McWorld*, he paints a picture of a clash between two worlds – free market capitalism and a religious, tribal, fundamentalism desperately trying to resist the influence of secularism. He has some chilling words regarding the role of youth in this milieu:

Indeed, as we complete this brief tour of the struggle against McWorld *within* the nations where capitalism has been most successful, what becomes apparent is that the confrontation of Jihad and McWorld has as its first arena neither the city nor the countryside, neither pressured inner cities nor thriving exurbia, but the conflicted souls of the new generation. Nations may be under assault, but the target audience is youth. . . . For it is the young who carry the guns for the I.R.A. and the Serbian militias and the young who wear the headphones of the Sony Corporation and Nintendo. It is the young who rock to the hard music of MTV and Star Television and the young who roll to the still harsher siren song of ethnic identity and other-hatred.<sup>36</sup>

Barber concludes, "The outcome inside their struggling souls will likely condition the outcome for global civilization, whose prospects, consequently, do not seem terribly promising."<sup>37</sup>

David Livermore provides a missiological perspective to the situation: "While we meander over the implications of global youth ministry, everyone else is going after them! The world at large is responding to the clear statistic that more than half the people in the world are under 18."<sup>38</sup> He is not saying that nothing is being done for youth

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<sup>35</sup>Patricia Widener, "New Focus On Young Travelers Urged" [on-line]; accessed 5 October, 2001; available from <http://www.ttg.com.sg/current/archive/1996/0531-06/neo519963116.html>; Internet.

<sup>36</sup>Benjamin R. Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism Are Reshaping the World* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995), 193-94.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 194.

<sup>38</sup>David Livermore, "Billions to be Won! Going After the Largest Mission Field in the World – Youth," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 37 (July 2001): 332. He does not reference this statistic.

ministry, although there are certainly places where that is the case. His argument is that the situation of youth worldwide demands a much greater priority than it is currently being given – priority in the form of resource mobilization and strategic missiological planning. Livermore concludes, “Imagine what could happen around the globe if youth were targeted by evangelicals the way corporate marketers target them. We must allocate resources to meet the need.”<sup>39</sup>

It is clear from the above that today’s youth are facing a crisis unique to human history. Their plight and vulnerability should be cause for great concern among the evangelical community in general and for those called to international missions specifically.

### Universal Youth Culture?

Daniel Offer and his colleagues produced a significant work in 1988 entitled *The Teenage World: Adolescents’ Self Image in Ten Countries*. Written primarily from a psychological perspective, the authors conclude that teenagers display significantly similar characteristics all over the world.

Today’s teenagers share both a collective personality and a collective consciousness. They watch airplanes in the sky above them, listen to the radio, and watch a rocket launched on TV. They think of these as everyday events. A 14-year-old in Bangladesh may watch the same television program as a 14-year-old in West Germany, Israel, Japan, Turkey, or Taiwan. Media knows no borders; ideas and events are transmitted to all corners of the globe, defining what is new or desirable, and are assimilated by young minds.

It does appear, then, that we do live in a ‘global village’ as McLuhan proclaimed. . . . The process we are pointing out is one that will in all likelihood have an even greater impact on the generation of teenagers to follow this one.<sup>40</sup>

In the preceding section I have examined many different changes that are occurring in societies globally and are changing the experiences of the adolescent

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Daniel Offer et. al., *The Teenage World* (New York: Plenum Press, 1988), 115-16. The last line here has proved to be a prescient comment. Also, it is noteworthy that these words were written well before the popularization of the Internet.

transition in profound ways. It must be stated that not all youth are exposed to these various factors. However, most youth today who live in either affluent nations or in an urban setting do experience most of these elements and the influence of the mass media mentioned above.

This study begs the question, “Do today’s youth constitute a universal youth culture?” For missiologists, the question becomes, “Can they be seen as a people group?” According to the Lausanne Strategy Working Group’s definition, the answer could possibly be “Yes.”<sup>41</sup> There are many organizations, Christian and secular, who are now using terms such as “global youth culture” and the “universal adolescent” to refer to such a people group.

It must be said that not all scholars who focus on the area of global youth culture agree. B. Bradford Brown and Reed W. Larson write, “We speak of the emergency of a ‘global youth culture’ in which young people – at least in the middle class – wear the same clothing and hair styles, listen to some of the same music, and adopt similar slang expressions. . . . We emphasize the commonality of experience among youth as opposing ideologies falter and economic systems begin to meld.”<sup>42</sup> They argue for the metaphor of a kaleidoscope to accentuate the differences among the world’s youth. However, they still eventually admit the remarkable similarities. “More and more youth are growing up in urban environments, preparing for jobs in capitalist labor

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<sup>41</sup>C. Peter Wagner, *Strategies for Church Growth: Tools for Effective Mission and Evangelism* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1989), 181-82. Lausanne’s definition of a people group is, “A significantly large sociological grouping of individuals who perceive themselves to have a common affinity for one another. From the viewpoint of evangelization this is the largest possible group within which the gospel can spread without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance.” Proving this would require another dissertation. I do assert that local youth cultures qualify as a people group based on the Lausanne definition and how they differ from adult culture around them.

<sup>42</sup>B. Bradford Brown and Reed W. Larson, “The Kaleidoscope of Adolescence: Experiences of the World’s Youth at the Beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” in *The World’s Youth: Adolescence in Eight Regions of the Globe*, ed. B. Bradford Brown, Reed W. Larson, and T. S. Saraswathi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1.

markets, extending their education in age-graded schools that promote peer relationships outside the family, and consuming components of youth culture that features standard elements of dress, grooming, and entertainment.”<sup>43</sup>

Regardless of their capitulation, one must appreciate their caution against assuming all teenagers are exactly alike. Although the similarities of youth globally are striking, I am stopping short of asserting that they are a distinct people group on a global scale.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, I do believe that many local youth cultures qualify for this identification based on their differences from their immediate cultural history and context.

It seems that the common denominator in this globalization of youth is the mass media. Through media, youth all over the world are coming into contact with the same music, movies, and television shows instantaneously. Marian Maher states, “Due to enormous advances in technology, the ‘youth’ around the world are becoming more alike. Unlike young people years ago, youth today are introduced to many different cultures and lifestyles from which they can choose freely.”<sup>45</sup>

Unfortunately, most of the common results of this influence are not positive. In an article about Thai youth, Patchara Samutavanit is quoted as saying, “Globalisation and hi-tech communication networks, which bombard Thai teenagers with taboo subjects like sex and drugs, entice youngsters away from mundane school lessons to more tangible real-life experiences.”<sup>46</sup> The movies and music of the West consistently encourage

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>44</sup>I will continue to speak of “global youth culture” to refer to the similarities shared among urban and affluent youth.

<sup>45</sup>Marian Maher, “Youth,” *International Review of Mission* 83 (October 1994): 621.

<sup>46</sup>Ukrit Kungsawanichu, “Sex, Lies, and Generation Y” [on-line]; accessed 5 September 2001; available from [http://www.thailandlife.com/thaiyouth\\_8.html](http://www.thailandlife.com/thaiyouth_8.html); Internet.

lifestyles and individualistic approaches to life that are destructive for societies. In youth, these influences manifest themselves in rebellion against parents, a secular worldview, and licentious living.

Gidley argues that the dominance of western culture has the effect of instilling an inferiority complex into youth in the receiving cultures. She writes,

One of the paradoxes of the media's Western cultural influence is the tension between the homogenizing effect of a dominant culture on diverse cultures, and the inherent individualism at the center of the Western cultural model. This creates a push-and-pull effect of 'look-alike' teenage role models masking the ongoing struggle for individuality and identity that is at the heart of adolescence. However, when individualism being promoted in tandem with the global media images of Western lifestyles is blended with aggressive market-driven consumerism, it can be a rather toxic brew for youth living in poverty unable to attain the image."<sup>47</sup>

### A New Mutual Influence

Although this effect upon receiving cultures is true, the time has now come that we should no longer see the different lifestyles of youth in non-western countries as being influenced solely from the West. Nisid Hajari writes an article for *Time* from Bombay describing indigenous movements in pop culture. The most notorious movement in the area is the movie-making industry popularly dubbed "Bollywood." Through local movies and music, Hajari believes that youth are now simply finding different ways to be Indian, Singaporean, Thai, and so on. He writes,

Indians, and Pakistanis and Bangladeshis to a lesser extent, have begun to create a third force – distinct from both western entertainment and an older South Asian culture.

Pundits naturally eye such developments as worrying signs of westernization. The fusions that the nations of South Asia are forging, however, have become varied and rooted enough to qualify as a culture unto itself.<sup>48</sup>

Regardless of whether or not the new youth culture in non-western countries is

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<sup>47</sup>Gidley, "Global Youth Culture," 6.

<sup>48</sup>Nisid Hajari, "Fusion Power" [on-line]; accessed 15 September 2001; available from [http://www.aHavista.com/r?ck\\_sm=8bb3239c&ref=20080&r=http://www.time.com/time/magazine/1997](http://www.aHavista.com/r?ck_sm=8bb3239c&ref=20080&r=http://www.time.com/time/magazine/1997); Internet.

directly from the West, we must recognize that global youth culture is a major influence. Youth culture that is a combination of the indigenous culture and a larger influence is still, as Hajari writes, a “culture unto itself.” As we will see below, Singapore is no exception to the elements that create a distinctive youth culture. Nevertheless, we will need to examine their lifestyles and values in light of both global and indigenous cultures.

### **Potential of Youth for World Evangelization**

At the end of this section on global youth culture it is appropriate to point out the incredible responsibility and opportunity the modern day church has been given for world evangelization. In reference to the high percentage of youth in many countries, John Mark Terry states that, “demographics indicate a priority of reaching a younger generation who are not as bound by social traditions as their parents and who, indeed, will be the leaders of tomorrow.”<sup>49</sup> The modern missionary movement is replete with examples of youth leading the way in missions. From Samuel Mills and the Haystack Prayer Meeting to John Mott and Robert Wilder of the Student Movement, they have consistently displayed a zeal for sharing Christ with the nations. Therefore, we need to think beyond the difficulties of reaching youth to the enormous potential they possess for the Great Commission.

If our greatest concern is for those who have never heard the name of Jesus, then it seems that one of the best ways to raise up laborers for the task is to go to the fertile fields of global youth. They are more likely than adults, who have families and other commitments that tend to keep them sedentary, to be flexible enough to plan their lives around the goal of cross-cultural missions. Paul Borthwick asserts that, “Youth represent the greatest challenge *and the greatest resource* facing the church worldwide

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<sup>49</sup>John Mark Terry, “The Present Situation in Missions,” in *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions*, ed. John Mark Terry, Ebbie Smith, and Justice Anderson (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1998), 32.

toward the year 2000.”<sup>50</sup> (emphasis mine) He believes they are the greatest resource “because young people who respond to the love of Christ can be subsequently disciplined and equipped to be part of the mobilized force who will complete the Great Commission of Jesus Christ.”<sup>51</sup> He offers examples ranging from Urbana, Mexico City, to Sri Lanka where hundreds, even thousands of students have been making commitments to cross-cultural missions. It is clear that the youth of the world possess tremendous potential that we should not be negligent to utilize.

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<sup>50</sup>Borthwick, “We’ve Got to Win the Younger World,” 245.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER 4

### SINGAPOREAN YOUTH CULTURE

Among adults in Singapore there is a great concern over the state of the younger generation. I am not asserting that there is a general pessimism concerning them. Rather, there is a realistic evaluation of the changing world around them and how it may or may not affect the transmission of the adult's value system to the young. The foreword of former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's recent book, *From Third World to First*, acknowledges that the primary motivation for writing about Singapore's late 20th century history was to teach today's youth the lessons learned by a young nation. He writes, "I wrote this book for a younger generation of Singaporeans who took stability, growth, and prosperity for granted. I wanted them to know how difficult it was for a small country of 640 sq. km with no natural resources to survive in the midst of larger, newly independent nations all pursuing nationalistic policies."<sup>1</sup>

The study, *In Search of Singapore's National Values*, is primarily written as a reaction to the new values that were being transferred to the young. It materialized as the result of First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence Goh Chok Tong's speech to the PAP in 1988 in which he acknowledged a shift of values from communitarianism to individualism, an event he called a "value transformation."<sup>2</sup> Written in conjunction with government officials, the book's effort at defining four core values of Singapore can only be understood in light of the threat new value systems present to the younger

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<sup>1</sup>Lee Kuan Yew, *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story: 1965-2000* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2000), xiii.

<sup>2</sup>Jon S. T. Quah, *In Search of Singapore's National Values* (Singapore: Institute of Policy Studies, 1990), 1.

generation. Tong has lobbied for these four national values to be “formalized into a national ideology and taught in schools, homes, and work-places, as ‘our way of life’ for two reasons: to immunize Singaporeans from the undesirable effects of alien influences and to bind them together as a nation.”<sup>3</sup>

This chapter focuses on the values and lifestyles of Singaporean youth culture in light of the dual influences presented by the indigenous adult culture and global youth culture.

### Demographics

The Youth Research Network of Singapore’s National Youth Council defines youth as those between the ages of fifteen and twenty-nine.<sup>4</sup> In 2000, they represented twenty-one percent of the population.<sup>5</sup> Singapore defies the trend of other non-western countries. Paul Borthwick has noted that “While the United States and the western countries are ‘graying’ . . . the non-western world is getting younger and younger.”<sup>6</sup> United Nations statistics clearly show a disproportionately large amount of youth among African and Asian nations.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, a glimpse at Singapore’s immediate neighbors reveals the

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Youth Research Network, “Definition of Youth and Youth Development” (2001) [on-line]; accessed 15 March 2002; available from <http://www.youthresearch.org.sg/youthdefinition.asp>; 1; Internet.

<sup>5</sup>Singapore Department of Statistics, “Census of Population 2000: Population by Age Group” (November 2000) [on-line]; accessed 2 May 2002; available from <http://www.singstat.gov.sg/keystats/c2000/topline9.pdf>; Internet.

<sup>6</sup>Paul Borthwick, “We’ve Got to Win the Younger World,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 28 (1992): 245. United Nations statistics do not affirm that the average age of underdeveloped countries is getting younger, but it does affirm that their average age is a great deal younger in comparison to that in developed countries.

<sup>7</sup>The United Nations, “Youth at the United Nations” [on-line]; accessed 24 February, 2004; available from <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/qanda.htm>; Internet.

conspicuous trend of the island nation. A 2001 United Nations study shows the percentage of Southeast Asian nations ages 13 through 23. The results are as follows: Cambodians in this age range constitute 22.8 percent of the population. Indonesian youth are 23.9 percent; Malaysian youth are 23.2 percent; Myanmar has 25 percent youth; Filipino youth are 25.1 percent; Thai youth are 22.6 percent; and Vietnamese youth are 25.4 percent. Singapore's population ages 13 and 23 are noticeably low at 15 percent.<sup>8</sup>

Though Singapore is not a western country, they follow the trend of western countries in that the median age is increasing considerably. In 1957 the median age was nineteen. In 1980 it registered at twenty-four. In the year 2000, the median age of Singapore was thirty-four.<sup>9</sup> This is largely due to the government's family planning program. When faced with the future of a significantly rising population and little space on the island, the government did what they have always done – create a program and begin a campaign. In 1966 they instituted the Family Planning and Population Board. Carroll comments that “the results were immediate and dramatic. The crude birth rate fell from 29.9 per thousand in 1965 to 17.8 by 1975 and the annual population growth rate fell from 4.4 percent in the 1950s to 1.2 percent in 1980. The ‘Two is Enough’ slogan, to encourage two-child families, caught on with the people in the late 1970s and early 1980s.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Madelene Santa Maria, “Youth in Southeast Asia: Living within the Continuity of Tradition and the Turbulence of Change,” in *The World's Youth: Adolescence in Eight Regions of the Globe*, ed. B. Bradford Brown, Reed. W. Larson, and T.S. Saraswathi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 172.

<sup>9</sup>Singapore Department of Statistics, “Singapore Census of Population: Median Age.”

<sup>10</sup>Charles Cowan Carroll, “Towards a Culturally Relevant Strategy of Evangelism and Church Planting for Baptists among English-Speaking Chinese in Urban Singapore” (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989), 61.

## Religious Distribution

Christians are the third numerous group between the ages of fifteen through twenty-four. Buddhism grew from 29.1 percent to 38.9 percent between 1990 and 2000 in this age range, making it by far the fastest growing religion among youth in Singapore.<sup>11</sup> Muslims were 18.6 percent in this age group, and Christians comprised 12.8 percent – a decline from 13.2 percent in 1990. Although Christianity was the third leading religion, it was actually fourth in the overall categories listed – 17.3 percent of those fifteen to twenty-four listed no religion at all.<sup>12</sup> These percentages shift when academic attainment is considered. Christians comprised 33.5 percent of university graduates – a full ten percent ahead of Buddhism.<sup>13</sup> The statistics report commented, “While Christians still formed the largest religious group among university graduates, their proportion had declined in 2000 compared with 1990. One out of three university graduates was a Christian in 2000.”<sup>14</sup>

## Major Elements of Singaporean Youth Culture

### The Economy and Materialism

As discussed in chapter two, the economy is extremely important to Singaporeans. A careful observation of studies on Singaporean youth will reveal that one of the great concerns adults have with the young is how they will carry the future economy. This is one of the driving forces behind the writing of *Values and Lifestyles of Singaporean Youth*.

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<sup>11</sup>The majority of Buddhism’s growth came from those who formerly adhered to Chinese traditional religions.

<sup>12</sup>Singapore Department of Statistics, “Singapore Census of Population 2000: Religion,” 5.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 5.

That young Singaporeans uphold the virtues of hard work and thrift is vital to the growth and development of Singapore. Being a small economy with no natural resources apart from human resources, Singapore must make full use of her human resources by relying on their hard work and thrift to provide the driving force for the economy.<sup>15</sup> *Values and Lifestyles* comments, “One important aspect of Singapore’s economic strategy is to develop a second wing, that is, to regionalise and globalise its business operations, especially into China, India and Indonesia. To achieve this, our youth need to be encouraged to read and write in their mother tongue as effectively as they read and write in English, as part of the preparation to run business operations effectively in those countries.”<sup>16</sup>

The most recent study of Singaporean Youth, *Youth.sg: The State of the Youth in Singapore*, begins by listing five reasons it is important to understand today’s youth. The first reason on the list is “Youth are at the forefront of the new economy.”<sup>17</sup> Ho Kong Chong and Jeffrey Yip elaborate:

As Singapore responds to the economic and social influences associated with globalisation, youth are exposed to the new complexities, challenges and uncertainties of the global economy. Advances in various forms of media and computer technology have changed the way in which young people communicate and interact with information. We are interested to know if youth are tenacious, creative, adaptive, and entrepreneurial. We want to know if the transition from school to work is well-managed.”<sup>18</sup>

I do not mention the adults’ interest in how youth will do with the economy as a primarily negative or simply materialistic concern. For the older generation, it was the growth of the economy that established for them both a means of providing for their

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<sup>15</sup>Chew Soon Beng, Mike Leu Gwo-Jiun, and Tan Kim Heng, *Values and Lifestyles of Young Singaporeans* (Singapore: Prentice Hall, 1998), 11.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>17</sup>Ho Kong Chong and Jeffrey Yip, *Youth.sg: The State of the Youth in Singapore* (Singapore: National Youth Council, 2003), 19.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*

families and establishing national security in an insecure region of the world. It is quite natural and good that they have a high interest in how their children will compete in the global marketplace. Nevertheless, there are negative aspects to their economic well-being.

For the younger generation, growing up with all their material needs and more has made them more materialistic and less concerned about spiritual things. For many young people, religious aspirations have given way to what Singaporeans call the five C's: Cash, credit card, car, condo, and club membership.<sup>19</sup> Although Singaporeans of all age ranges increasingly claim no religious affiliation, the pattern is most evident among the young. The 2000 Census report summarizes, "For the Chinese, the level of religious affiliation is positively correlated with age: the higher the age, the higher is the level of religious affiliation. Conversely, the younger the age, the higher is the proportion reporting no religion."<sup>20</sup> For these young people who claim no religion, materialism is the chosen vehicle to fill the spiritual void.

Studies on youth have often focused on the question of whether or not they are materialistic. When a 1998 survey asked Singaporean youth to respond to the statement, "The most important goal in life is to make money," only 21.6 percent agreed strongly with the statement. The other responses included 26 percent who disagreed strongly and 52.4 percent who had no strong opinion.<sup>21</sup> The interpretation of these findings was that their young people are not the materialists most people thought they were.<sup>22</sup> The National Youth Council's most recent study, while asserting that youth have many "post-

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<sup>19</sup>"Singapore's Five C's of Success" [on-line]; accessed 24 February 2004; available from [http://www.wayan.net/exp/se\\_asia/five\\_c.htm](http://www.wayan.net/exp/se_asia/five_c.htm); Internet.

<sup>20</sup>Singapore Department of Statistics, "Singapore Census of Population, 2000," 4.

<sup>21</sup>Beng, Jiun, and Heng, *Values and Lifestyles*, 17.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 63.

material” concerns such as belonging, self-expression, and quality of life, has some revealing statistics on the issue of money and priorities.<sup>23</sup> When young people were asked to list their life goals in order, the top two responses were preparation for the economy and having money. Chong and Yip write, “Topping the list of aspirations is a desire expressed by 91 percent of the youths surveyed to acquire skills and knowledge. Given that the new economy will require workers to continually develop new skills and knowledge as a crucial strategy to adjust to the changes in the economy, it is a very good indication that our youth embrace this value of constant and life-long learning.”<sup>24</sup> Second on their list of aspirations was “to earn lots of money,” chosen by 77 percent of youth. Getting married and having children were third and fourth respectively.<sup>25</sup>

The government has been concerned about materialism among the young. In August 2000 the Communications and Information Technology Minister Lim Swee Say encouraged youth to pursue a family as the highest value. An article in the *Singapore Window* commented, “Singapore’s youth were told today that raising a family is the greatest source of happiness, amid disturbing findings that career and money have become primary obsessions.”<sup>26</sup> True to form, the government implemented a program to encourage marriage – partially to encourage the stability of the family and partially to increase fertility rates.

Singaporean political candidates know very well that the way to secure the vote of the young is to focus on the economy. A recent article in *The Straits Times* revealed the results of a survey that showed these tendencies among youth. The

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<sup>23</sup>Chong and Yip, *Youth.sg*, 139.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>26</sup>Singapore Window, “Youth Told: Forget Cash and Fall in Love” (August 19, 2000) [on-line]; accessed 6 March 2002; available from <http://www.singapore-window.org/sw00/000819af.htm>; Internet.

following is an example of one of the responses in the survey: “When asked about the issues she was most concerned with, sales assistant Sherlyn Tay, 26, said: ‘Money is the most important. I hope the economy gets better and I have enough cash to spend.’”<sup>27</sup>

Today there is great concern by all Singaporeans over the state of the economy. Unemployment, terrorism, and the SARS epidemic have all taken their toll. The youth are very concerned over this state of affairs as they see their future opportunities looking more and more bleak. Many of them are having to face the reality that they may not be able to buy a car or own their own home anytime in the near future. *The Straits Times*’ journalist Laurel Teo writes, “This, to Singaporeans who grew up on upgrading and the idea of home ownership as a birthright, is tantamount to the shattering of their ‘Singapore Dream.’”<sup>28</sup> Jobs that were once seen primarily for immigrants are currently being taken over by Singaporeans for their own financial survival. Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong acknowledged these developments in a recent speech in which he praised the perseverance of these young people. “Mr. Goh also observed that some graduates have taken to roasting chestnuts and running a porridge stall for a living. ‘They did not sit around and moan and groan. They went out and made a living for themselves. These graduate hawkers would not be stuck forever in these positions,’ said PM Goh. He believes they will become ‘successful entrepreneurs’ in time to come.”<sup>29</sup>

The Prime Minister is most likely correct. Regardless, the youth of Singapore are still wealthy by almost any standard. It is partially due to their affluence that a

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<sup>27</sup>“The Youth Worry About Only One Thing – Economy,” *The Straits Times* (October 26, 2001) [on-line]; accessed 26 February 2002; available from <http://www.straitstimes.asia1.com.sg/ge/story/0,1870,79774,00.html>; 2; Internet.

<sup>28</sup>“Not the End: Youths Must Seize the Day,” *The Straits Times* (August 18, 2003) [on-line]; accessed 18 March 2003; unavailable archived issue; Internet.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*

distinctive youth culture has emerged in the first place. Leong Wai Teng, a sociology professor at the National University of Singapore, elaborates on this subject:

Youth culture is an inevitable product of an affluent society. . . . In very poor societies, there is no opportunity for the emergence of adolescence as we know it. Children who cannot afford formal schooling are compelled to work as child labourers. At an early age they are thrown into the world of work, carrying bricks, selling sweets on the streets or sweating in factories. They assume adult roles and responsibilities and enter into an adult world.<sup>30</sup>

Affluence generally provides a younger generation the luxury of leisure time. Teng writes, “The basis of youth culture is leisure; without leisure, youth culture will not develop.”<sup>31</sup> This is a basic requirement for the common activities in which youth participate. Their activities, which are generally spent on doing things they enjoy, give rise to the culture in which they live. Teng asserts that “youth culture is essentially a fun culture.”<sup>32</sup> Another way of saying this is that it is entertainment-oriented. Therefore, the wealthier a nation is, the more adolescents will have access to leisure time and entertainment. As a result, they will be more likely to experience a strongly distinctive youth culture. Singapore is no exception to the rule.

#### **Accusation of Western Influence**

Perhaps the greatest critique of Asian urban youth today is that they are becoming too “westernized.” Indeed, there are countless trends that do flow from Hollywood and western music studios and their imprint is evident. However, there is much more at work here than simply the West sending entertainment and Asian youth consuming it en masse.

First of all, as Teng argued above, youth culture is inevitable when youth have

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<sup>30</sup>Leong Wai Teng, “In Defence of Youth Culture” (June 1994) [on-line]; accessed 2 May 2002; available from <http://www.happening.com.sg/commentary/defence.html>; 5; Internet.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 3.

a certain amount of wealth, leisure time, and formal schooling. If western cultural patterns are not offered, something else will fill the void. Second, there are now many indigenous sources to Asia that are creating the formerly “western-style” culture with their own unique blends. For example, an Associated Press article reported that “Glittery Hong Kong dramas dominate prime time in Malaysia and Singapore. . . . In Vietnam, viewers follow the tangled twists of a half-dozen Chinese dramas.”<sup>33</sup> An Asian production manager was quoted as saying, “Asians are growing sick and tired of Hollywood products. They are sick of seeing white people and black people on their screens.”<sup>34</sup>

Therefore, Asian youth culture has taken on a life of its own. Although there is still a substantial influence from the West in Singapore, it is not the only cultural force impacting the youth.<sup>35</sup> Singapore’s youth are influenced by cultures from the East as well as West. On the surface, this would seem to defy the trend of global youth culture’s western clothes. However, as discussed at the end of the previous chapter, the fusion of local youth cultures with both global influences and others nearby is a distinct phenomenon of global youth culture.

### Education

Singaporeans place an extremely high value on education. Because they have been largely successful economically and academic standards are high, there is much

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<sup>33</sup>Tini Tran, “Local TV Soaps Most Popular in Asia” (May 2002) [on-line]; accessed 2 May 2002; available from [http://story.news.yahoo.com/news?tmpl=story&u=/ap20020502/ap\\_on\\_en\\_tv/ap\\_on\\_tv.soaps\\_in\\_asia2](http://story.news.yahoo.com/news?tmpl=story&u=/ap20020502/ap_on_en_tv/ap_on_tv.soaps_in_asia2); Internet.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>It is not my wish to de-emphasize western influence here. In my research on the Internet, I found little difference between western websites and the style and content of most Singapore youth websites, with the occasional exception of some sites in Mandarin. Typical examples would include: NBA news, Britney Spears, MTV Singapore, promotion of the most recent Hollywood films, and other generally popular entertainment icons from America.

pressure on individuals to compete. This is easily the greatest source of stress and anxiety for the average Singaporean adolescent. Chong and Yip explain their school system as follows:

The Singapore school system is presently organised around six years of primary school with four to five years of secondary schooling depending on the student's academic ability. In primary and secondary school education, a broad-based syllabus is taught, with the core subjects of English, Mother Tongue, Mathematics, Science, Humanities and Moral Education. Following the first ten years of primary and secondary school education, the Institute of Technical Education (ITE) provides one to three year courses for students interested in vocational and technical training. The rest who complete secondary schooling have the option of three-year diploma courses at the polytechnics or another two years of junior college before they become eligible for the university.<sup>36</sup>

There are three streams of education in which a student will permanently remain upon the completion of standard tests after the sixth grade. The three streams are Normal, Express, and Special/Gifted.<sup>37</sup> Those in the top stream are generally destined for the highest levels of education and a promising economic future. Those in the "normal" stream have virtually no chance of being accepted in a university and generally resign to a future in a job that requires a lower level of skill. In other words, a great portion of a child's future is determined by their performance in primary school.

There is perhaps no other force in a young Singaporean's life that organizes their culture and experiences like these three streams of education. Students who perform poorly are grouped at a young age with others who perform poorly with no real chance of changing the situation. Because poor school performance is often linked with the education level of their parents, it becomes a natural that parents also develop peer relationships with the parents of children in the same stream of education. Many parents and teenagers in the highest stream of education are seen as snobby and unwilling to relate to children and parents of children in the lower streams, as they tend to be the

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<sup>36</sup>Chong and Yip, *Youth.sg*, 31.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 169.

educated professionals living in different circles as those in the lower class.

A recent film entitled “I Not Stupid,” written by a Singaporean, explores (among other things) this dynamic of the three streams of education and how children see each other based on this standard. One of the protagonists in the movie is a kid in the lower stream of education. There are several scenes where both other children and adults make disparaging remarks toward him and deride him for being in the lower stream. The movie also examines the pressure many kids feel to perform in school. The writer, Jack Neo, inserted a scene where a teenage son was being caned by his mother for not making high enough grades. Warren Fernandez, a writer for *The Straits Times* asserts that “(Jack) Neo’s social commentary – some might say political satire – hits home precisely because the stereotypes he portrays are both funny and familiar.”<sup>38</sup> Because the academic competition is tight, the standards tend to be unrealistic for most youth, and worries about the future are frequent. Fernandez writes,

Horror of horrors, what future can there be with only three As when 1,364 students – or 12 per cent of the cohort – managed a perfect score in last year’s A-level examination? At some top junior colleges, four to five in 10 bagged four As. . . . But this is no laughing matter. For the relentless pressure to score As – and many of them – gives rise to the stresses and strains in the education system that many parents lament. Parents, teachers, principals and students themselves – as well as ‘the system’ – are all culpable, as Neo makes clear in his film.<sup>39</sup>

Aside from the external pressure listed above, the internal pressure to excel in school comes from a genuine desire to succeed. I have already documented that Singaporean youth list as their highest aspiration the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Therefore, parental pressure, desire to succeed, and a very competitive academic atmosphere all combine to make studies the highest stressor youth face in daily life.

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<sup>38</sup>“Do Schools Suffer from ‘As Inflation’?” *The Straits Times* (March 21, 2002) [on-line]; accessed 21 March 2002; available from <http://straitstimes.asial.com.sg/education/story/0,1870,108681-1016315940,00.html?; 1>; Internet. This movie was highly recommended to me by Singaporean students while I was there in January 2003. They assured me that it was realistic in its portrayal of the Singaporean experience.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.

*Youth.sg* gives evidence with the following: Given six different stressors, 56 percent of youth questioned rated studies as the top source of anxiety. Career placed second at a distant 13 percent.<sup>40</sup>

Not surprisingly, school performance is also related to self-esteem. It must first be affirmed that Singaporean youth rate high in the area of self-esteem in general.<sup>41</sup> The degree of self-esteem, nevertheless, can be clearly distinguished by education streams. Youth in the Normal (Technical) stream scored a 38 percent self-esteem level. Those in the Normal (Academic) stream scored 49 percent. Youth in the Express stream scored 54 percent. Finally, those in the Special/Gifted stream scored 62 percent.<sup>42</sup> The authors caution simplistic interpretations of these facts and point out that there are other factors, such as the family, to consider. “While we understand that the low self-esteem faced by students is tied to the social stigma attached to normal streams, we also note that attention must be paid to why students perform poorly.”<sup>43</sup> Either way, these results reveal quite a bit about Singaporean youth culture.

**New technology.** The adaptive and progressive educational system in Singapore has gone to great lengths to make sure that their youth are on the cutting edge when it comes to the latest technology. In a survey of 21 industrialized nations that measured the percentage of multimedia-ready computers in lower secondary schools, Singapore was first on the list, with 98 percent. They tied for first with Iceland in the category of lower secondary schools with Internet access at 100 percent.<sup>44</sup> This gives

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<sup>40</sup>Chong and Yip, *Youth.sg*, 41.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 167. Of those surveyed, 91 percent agreed with the statement, “On the whole, I like myself.”

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup>Ronald E. Anderson, “Youth and Information Technology,” in *The Changing Adolescent Experience: Societal Trends and the Transition to Adulthood*, ed. Jeylan T.

them a great advantage in the new global economy.

Being on the cutting edge of technology goes beyond the classroom and the economy. It heavily influences the daily life and experiences of youth. The insights discussed in the previous chapter concerning global youth culture and new technology all apply in the Singaporean context.

### Family Values

Family values in Singapore seem to remain fairly strong in comparison to the West. A few encouraging signs include the following: *Youth.sg* reports that 80 percent of youth report enjoying dinner with their family.<sup>45</sup> “Ninety percent of young people indicated ease in communicating with the mothers, while 72 percent indicated ease in communicating with their fathers.”<sup>46</sup> *Values and Lifestyles* reveals more related statistics: “81.4 percent believe strongly in the family providing warmth, love and support. 91.8 percent believe strongly in being filial towards their parents. 85.8 percent believe strongly in respecting their elders. 92.4 percent believe strongly in supporting their aged parents.”<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, the basic unit of the family continues to be seen as a man and a woman being married and having children.

Nevertheless, there are trends in the area of family values that are the greatest source of concern for Singaporean adults. The lengthening of years spent in school that has become the hallmark of industrialized countries worldwide is very pronounced in Singapore. The last twenty years show a steady rise in this area. In 1980, the mean in years spent in school was 7.5. In 1990 it was 9.3. Results for the year 2000 showed a

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Mortimer and Reed W. Larson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 181-83.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 80.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 72.

<sup>47</sup>Beng, Jiun, and Heng, *Values and Lifestyles*, 13.

mean of 11.5 years spent in school for Singaporean youth.<sup>48</sup>

In the previous chapter, we noted the trend towards a lengthening of the education process as increasingly larger numbers of Singaporeans opt for tertiary studies. These factors influence family formation. Today, there are more singles, families without children, families with fewer children as well as single parents families, compared to earlier decades.<sup>49</sup>

One of the related dynamics created in this process is the amount of years youth live with parents relying on them as providers. Ninety-four percent of single youths (15-29) live with their parents. Sixty-one percent of those ages 27-29 continue to live with parents. Due to high prices on property, even 37 percent of married youths continue to live with their parents.<sup>50</sup> Overall, this dynamic means that their adolescence is lengthened along with their years spent in school.

There is another trend beyond the fact that youth remaining single for longer periods of time. There is a change in their attitude concerning whether or not they want to marry in the first place.<sup>51</sup> Chong and Yip write,

Comparing the 2002 National Youth Survey findings with a similar 1997 State of Youth Survey in Singapore and a 1999 World Youth Survey, one notices a slight change in attitudes, away from beliefs in the value of marriage. 42 percent of Singaporean youth in 2002 indicate that 'one should marry,' a decline of 4 percent from the 46 percent in 1997. A significant increase is found however, in those indicating 'it is not necessary to marry.' 24 percent of youths in 2002 indicated the latter, compared to 15 percent in 1997.<sup>52</sup>

They are still more pro-marriage than the United States, Germany and Japan, but this is a

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<sup>48</sup>Chong and Yip, *Youth.sg*, 38.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>51</sup>I wrote in chapter two that this was a growing trend among Singaporeans in general. Still, the age range studied for those statistics -- 20 through 35 -- are mostly youth. This trend is not common among the parents of today's youth.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 125

significant trend that marks a downward decline.<sup>53</sup> This means that more youth are focusing on a career and money in order to spend it on themselves as single adults instead of providing for a family.

Attitudes toward the legitimacy of divorce have also changed considerably. *Youth.sg* reports that 24 percent of youth believe one can divorce if they have no children. 23.3 percent said that a couple could divorce regardless of children and 16.2 percent agreed that a couple could divorce if there was no more love.<sup>54</sup> Although more youth took a strong stand against divorce in 2002 than in 1997, a survey of the past few decades shows a decline. More important than attitudes reflected in a survey are the rates of actual divorces in Singapore. *The Straits Times* sounded the alarm last year when divorce statistics from 2002 were in.

Last year, a record number of 5,825 marriages ended in divorces and annulments - almost a three-fold increase over 20 years. The figure was 2,111 in 1982. And the divorce rate is highest among those in the 20-24 age group. This same group has shown the greatest increase over the past decade, according to fresh data from the Department of Statistics. Family counselors said the upward trend was not surprising, given that divorces have been on the rise in developed countries.<sup>55</sup>

Laurel Teo also revealed an apparent related factor to the divorce percentage. "A close look at the figures shows that the number of break-ups also surged in 1998 and 2002, when the economy was not doing well. During the Asian financial crisis in 1998, 27,000 jobs were lost. That year, the number of marital splits jumped by 16 percent to 5,651."<sup>56</sup> Regardless of the root causes, these numbers are not encouraging for parents.

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 126

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 128.

<sup>55</sup>Laurel Teo, "Singapore Reports Record Divorce Rate for 2002," *The Straits Times* (June 7, 2002) [on-line]; accessed 7 June 2002; unavailable archived issue.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

**Dating.** The western pattern of dating, instead of arranged marriages, is the general practice of Singaporeans. *Youth.sg* reports that 13 percent of youth have their first date in the range of 12 to 15 years of age. The most common period for one to have their first date is from 16 to 18 years of age.<sup>57</sup> The most common meeting place for youth is by far their schools. After completion of school, the workplace is the most common place to meet. An interesting insight is that, “For working youths, it is significant that pubs are not dating places. . . . Singaporeans prefer occasions that are more socially intimate (such as community clubs, social gatherings, religious places) where interaction may be among acquaintances (known, recognizable others) or defined in terms of membership. Within this context, pubs discos and karaoke are places to hang out with friends, not to make new friends.”<sup>58</sup> This more conservative approach to meeting dates is most likely a healthier alternative to western patterns.

Another insight into Singaporean youth and dating is the fact that they are not heavily influenced by the felt need to have a boyfriend or girlfriend as often experienced in the West. There is no stigma attached to not dating and no particular added respect towards teenagers who are dating. This lack of pressure to date no doubt contributes to Singaporean youth’s ability to perform in school.<sup>59</sup>

**Attitudes toward sex.** Results from most government studies suggest pre-marital sex is not as great of an issue for Singaporean youth as compared to western nations. The Fei Yiu Counselling Centre released survey results last year of 3,086 students who were questioned about whether or not they had experienced pre-marital sex. “In the survey, 259 students said someone had tried to get them to have sex in the past 12

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<sup>57</sup>Chong and Yip, *Youth.sg*, 122.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>59</sup>This is an insight I obtained through talking with youth while in Singapore.

months, and 83 gave in.”<sup>60</sup> While the percentage was not considered extremely high, surveyors were alarmed at the reason given for why the majority did not give in. “Those who turned the person down usually did so out of fear – fear of pregnancy, fear of contracting sexually-transmitted diseases or fear of losing self-respect. The fact that they were not motivated to do so because they believed it was wrong, shocked the handful of people *The Straits Times* spoke to.”<sup>61</sup> Regarding how many youth feel that pre-marital sex is right or wrong, a survey has revealed the following:

In a survey conducted by National Youth Council in 2000, 48 percent of our youth perceives sex before marriage as unacceptable even when two people love each other. The youth surveyed were split in their views as to whether pre-marital sex is ok if the couple practices safe sex – 34 percent strongly agreed or agreed with the statement while 35 percent held the opposite view. Similarly, people were split in their views regarding the idea of living together as a couple before getting married – 32 percent concurred with this statement while 35 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed.<sup>62</sup>

Another disturbing factor concerns the number of sexual partners. While Singaporean youth have sex less frequently than adolescents in developed nations, The National Youth Council found that they have a relatively high percentage of sexual partners per year.<sup>63</sup> This suggests a lower commitment level among adolescents who are sexually active.

Furthermore, studies revealing a high rate of teenage abortion are not encouraging. Minister of State Chan Soo Sen said, “Almost 1,700 teenage girls here had

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<sup>60</sup>Jane Ng, “We’re Forced to Have Sex, Say 5 in 100 Students,” *The Straits Times* (March 27, 2003) [on-line]; accessed 27 March 2002; unavailable archived issue.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>National Youth Council, “A to Z Guide on Singapore Youth” [on-line]; accessed 18 August 2002; available from <http://www.nyc.gov.sg/yrn/atoz.asp>; Internet. It is an interesting omission that in both *Values and Lifestyles of Singaporean Youth* and *Youth.sg* there are no statistics showing actual sexual behavior of youth. Furthermore, neither these sources nor any governmental online sources used in this dissertation contain any exact statistics regarding unwed pregnancies.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

abortions in 2001.”<sup>64</sup> Such abortions accounted for thirteen percent of all Singaporean abortions that year.<sup>65</sup> The National Youth Council reports that forty-seven percent of all youth “claimed that they knew someone who has had an abortion and forty-six percent claimed that they knew someone who has had an unwanted pregnancy.”<sup>66</sup> Abortion is practiced liberally in Singapore and teenagers are not required to give parental consent.<sup>67</sup> The government has responded with nationwide abstinence programs. It seems that they are in the ironic position of both discouraging unwed pregnancies and encouraging married couples to have children.

**Homosexuality.** There is no overtly pro-gay agenda in Singapore. As a matter of fact, homosexual behavior is frowned upon almost universally. “In a survey conducted by the National University of Singapore, it was found that most young Singaporeans hold negative attitudes towards homosexuals and are generally quite conservative on the matter. Almost 9 out of 10 said they would be disappointed if they realised that their child was homosexual. Eight out of 10 agreed with the statement: ‘I would be upset if I learned my brother or sister was homosexual.’”<sup>68</sup> This is one area where foreign media has not yet made a significant impact.

**Respect for elders.** *Values and Lifestyles* documents an interesting development concerning attitudes toward one’s elders. While 85.8 percent of youth

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<sup>64</sup>getforme.com, *The Portal* [on-line]; accessed 20 February 2004; available from [http://www.getforme.com/health\\_abortion%20institutions.htm](http://www.getforme.com/health_abortion%20institutions.htm); Internet. This is a website offering general information for Singapore. It is quoting *The Straits Times* (May 30, 2002). The same information can be found in the resource contained in the previous footnote. The statistics include ages 13-19 and are not inclusive of all youth - 15-29.

<sup>65</sup>National Youth Council, “A to Z Guide on Singapore Youth.”

<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

agreed strongly with the statement, “Respect your elders,” only 56.7 percent agreed strongly with “Listen to the advice of elders.”<sup>69</sup> The authors write, “This apparent contradiction is easily explained: although most of the young people would have acquired from the parents the Confucian value of respect for elders, mass education and the media would also have made them more independent in their thinking.”<sup>70</sup> While Singaporean youth generally have more respect for elders than their western counterparts, the trend can again be seen as drifting away from their indigenous traditions.

Respect for elders is often given as a reason not to convert to Christianity. This is certainly the case with Malay Muslims. Quah reports that only twelve percent of Muslim parents in Singapore indicated that they would not object to their children converting to another religion.<sup>71</sup> However, parents ascribing to Chinese religions and Hinduism are more open. Seventy-three percent of Buddhist and Taoist parents and sixty-five percent of Hindu parents indicated an openness to such a prospect.<sup>72</sup> As suggested in chapter three, the reason for this could possibly be that the large bulk of today’s parents grew up primarily as secularists who had to affiliate with their ancestral religion to please their parents. Now that they are the parents, they are not as stringent on their children. Not surprisingly, the greatest openness to religious conversion is found among non-religious parents. Eighty-eight percent of those not ascribing to a religion are open to their children converting.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>Beng, Jiun, and Heng, *Values and Lifestyles*, 13.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>71</sup>Quah, *In Search of Singapore’s National Values*, 69.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid. Results from a survey sent to Singaporean Baptist youth workers revealed that, while some of the churches frequently experienced parental objections to conversion, others did not.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

**Support for the elderly.** As young drift toward the pattern of choosing singleness and careers, it has many adults concerned about whether or not they will follow through with the expected duty of taking care of elderly parents when they are older. Across the board, Singaporean youth express the attitude that they believe this is an important duty. *Values and Lifestyles* reported that 92.4 percent agree strongly with the statement, “I would support my aged parents.”<sup>74</sup> These results are encouraging to parents who are entering their later years.

Overall, attitudes toward marriage are still higher than in most industrialized countries and the national value of “family as the basic unit of society” is relatively intact. However, there is a trend towards a lowering priority of marriage that stands out when looking at the results of surveys. This is further evidence of the forces of global youth culture and globalism in general having a significant impact on the nation of Singapore.

### **Peer Influence**

Because youth spend a great deal of time at school and in extracurricular activities, peer influence is very high. *Youth.sg* reports that youth spend more time with their peers than their parents.<sup>75</sup> This influence is not a source of lament to researchers because peer influence indicators point to a generally positive mutual influence.<sup>76</sup>

Peers rate high on the list of who Singaporean youth would turn to for advice. However, seventy-five percent of youth rated their mother first on this list. Friends were second at sixty-five percent followed by fathers at fifty-seven percent. For youth ages twenty-seven to twenty-nine the highest rating goes to friends.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>75</sup>Chong and Yip, *Youth.sg*, 86.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 89.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 73.

When youth were asked who they would turn to for emotional support, however, the order changes. Seventy-nine percent listed friends followed by their mother at seventy percent. Fathers fall well below with 46 percent. Teachers, adult mentors, grandparents, religious leaders, and counselors were all listed by well under ten percent of youth surveyed.<sup>78</sup>

### Search for Identity

*Youth.sg* reports a high rate of national pride among youth. “Ninety-five percent of youth surveyed indicate that they were proud to be Singaporeans.”<sup>79</sup> This should not be surprising considering the enormous success and achievements of the small island and their emergence as a significant power in Southeast Asia. However, a poll taken in 1999 revealed that “one in five young ethnic Chinese Singaporeans would rather be white or of another race.”<sup>80</sup> Not only did this contribute to much debate in Singapore, but it revealed a great ambiguity concerning their identity. Carroll quotes a Singaporean leader as saying that youth in Singapore are in a “state of value-ambivalence, or having a lack of certainty about the past. They feel cut off from their traditions – forgotten – lost – and they have nothing to fall back on.”<sup>81</sup>

In the midst of this search for identity, they are constantly bombarded with images from movies, music videos, and even local clothing advertisements featuring beautiful white westerners. Besides being physically cut off from their motherlands, the lack of connectivity to their ancestral traditions is further complicated by the fact that

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<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 87.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 131.

<sup>80</sup>“Singapore Youth Rather Be White,” *The Hongkong Standard* (December 18, 1999) [on-line]; accessed October 11, 2001; available from <http://www.sfdonline.org/Link%20Pages/Link%20Folders/Political%20Freedom/WhiteYouth.html>; Internet.

<sup>81</sup>Carroll, “Towards a Culturally Relevant Strategy,” 66.

most Singaporean youth speak, read, and write in English more than their mother tongue. *Values and Lifestyles* reports that “68.1 percent and 35.4 percent of Chinese respondents read *The Straits Times* and *New Paper* (both in English) very frequently, respectively, compared to only 21.5 percent for *Lian He Zao Bao* and *Lian He Wan Bao*. Hence, Chinese youth consistently read much more frequently in English than in their mother tongue.”<sup>82</sup>

Because much of culture is embedded in language, it is no surprise to know that Chinese youth feel disconnected to their ancestral homeland. Still, the fact remains that English is the most widely spoken language on the island. For all the reasons examined in chapter 2, many youth tend to place the highest priority on speaking English and view the prospect of improving their Chinese as a difficult and unnecessary task. The impact this has on their sense of identity is usually an unforeseen result.

It must again be asserted that Singaporean youth have a high overall self-esteem and seem proud to be Singaporeans. Given the different ethnic groups this is very significant. As a matter of fact, “eight in ten (youth) view themselves as Singaporeans first rather than members of distinct ethnic groups.”<sup>83</sup> Still, their lack of immediate connectivity to a cultural past and the regular visualization of white role models are clearly creating an insecurity among some adolescents.

### Religious Pluralism

Although religious pluralism is a global reality today, it is still rare for a country to have no religion that encompasses over half of the population.<sup>84</sup> Although the Chinese are easily the majority ethnic group in Singapore, the different religions they

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<sup>82</sup>Beng, Jiun, and Heng, *Values and Lifestyles*, 133.

<sup>83</sup>National Youth Council, “A to Z Guide on Singapore Youth.”

<sup>84</sup>See “Demographics” in chapter 2.

practice – Buddhism, Taoism, traditional religions, and Confucianism (if Confucianism qualifies as a religion) – make this possible. For the youth, it means growing up in a society where many choices are presented. While the Malays and Indians may feel like they have little option except to be Muslim or Hindu respectively, the Chinese young people are experimenting with the options. This presents an open door for the gospel in many cases and competition in others.

The bewildering variety of religious options and influence of global youth culture with its inherent postmodern viewpoints presents significant difficulties for the exclusive message of the gospel. In a masters thesis on Singaporean youth ministry, Janet Yan observes, “The present generation of youth is exposed to making many choices. Their innate desire is to have the freedom of choices that allows them to feel real, to be touched, or to experience. Truth is defined by each individual and the community of which each individual is a part. The key to it is pragmatism.”<sup>85</sup> She continues by explaining that the young people of Singapore make religious choices similar to someone who is shopping for a commercial product. Furthermore, “Postmodern youth tend to make decisions based on feelings rather than on truth of conviction.”<sup>86</sup>

As one would expect, Singaporean youth reflect a high level of religious and ethnic tolerance. *Youth.sg* reports that 96 percent of youth do not mind working with those of other ethnicities. Furthermore, 54 percent report that they have a close friend of another ethnic background.<sup>87</sup> This falls in line with the national value of “racial and religious harmony.”

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<sup>85</sup>Janet Yan Yin Wai, “Effective Youth Ministry: A Study to Understand and Identify Factors That Contribute to an Effective Youth Ministry in the Context of Singapore Churches” (M.A. thesis, Singapore Bible College, 2002), 34.

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup>Chong and Yip, *Youth.sg*, 131.

## Sports

Compared to the United States, Singapore is not a nation obsessed with sports. *Values and Lifestyles* blatantly writes, “Young Singaporeans are no great lovers of sports.”<sup>88</sup> The authors followed up that statement from 1997 with a prescient declaration toward the end of the study – “However, this state of affairs is likely to change as the government pays more attention to and spends more on sports and the arts.”<sup>89</sup> *Youth.sg* cites a 2003 report revealing that regular sports participation is up by eight percent.<sup>90</sup> Sixty-eight percent of youth ages 15 to 19 and 46 percent of youth ages 20 to 29 participate regularly in sports. Also, sports viewership is high among youth relative to other programs watched.<sup>91</sup>

It is not surprising to find out that the most popular sport among Singapore teenagers is soccer, with 20 percent of those fifteen to nineteen involved. Some may not expect to learn that the next popular is basketball, with almost 16 percent of those 15 to 19 active in participation.<sup>92</sup> The popularity of basketball has increased greatly over the past decade on a global scale. Most of the teams in the National Basketball Association (NBA) have members from other nations as the result of their respective nations pouring much time and money in the development of players.

There is a cultural impact upon youth that grow up loving a sport whose most famous players are on teams in the United States. Almost any visit to the front page of the *The Straits Times* will reveal the latest story of an NBA player. Many of the stories are not specifically sports-related and instead focus on the tragedies and moral failures in

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<sup>88</sup>Heng, Jiun, and Beng, *Values and Lifestyles*, 93.

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>90</sup>Chong and Yip, *Youth.sg*, 151.

<sup>91</sup>Heng, Jiun, and Beng, *Values and Lifestyles*, 143.

<sup>92</sup>Chong and Yip, *Youth.sg*, 154.

the basketball stars' personal lives. This can lead to negative influences in the lives of some young Singaporeans. If nothing else, it is one more vehicle that keeps youth in touch with a broader culture at large.

### Recreation

The most common recreational activities of Singaporean youth are watching sporting events, playing computer games, travel and sightseeing, shopping, and eating out. Activities such as fishing, attending plays, going to discos, and attending concerts are not very popular. Sixty-nine percent of youth watch sporting events at either an average or high frequency. Fifty-five percent play computer games at average or high frequencies. Fifty-nine percent participate in travel and sightseeing. Eighty percent window shop, and 85 percent eat out at either an average or high frequency.<sup>93</sup>

### Media

As a result of young Singaporeans being well-educated, they are active readers. Newspapers, magazines, and books are all commonly read. In a 1999 study on reading habits of youth, the National Youth Council reported,

The vast majority of the respondents read newspapers. Only 10 percent of the respondents said that they do not read newspapers. The most commonly read topics are home news (30 percent) followed by sports (19 percent) and world news (10 percent). The two most commonly read newspapers among the young people are *The Straits Times* and *The New Paper*. 54 percent of the respondents said that they read magazines on a regular basis. There is a vast range of magazines read by the sample. The most popular magazines are *8 Days* and *Her World*. On readership of books, the most preferred are cartoons/comics (17.3 percent), romance (16.7 percent) and adventure (15 percent). 64 percent said that they buy books and the number of books purchased a year ranges from 1 to 4 books (24 percent) to over 15 books (15 percent).<sup>94</sup>

Notice that 90 percent of youth read newspapers. The two newspapers most read, *The Straits Times*, and *New Paper*, are relatively different in their focus. While *The*

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<sup>93</sup>Heng, Jiun, and Beng, *Values and Lifestyles*, 92.

<sup>94</sup>National Youth Council, "A to Z Guide on Singaporean Youth."

*Straits Times* has information on culture and entertainment, it is primarily devoted to world and local news. The fact that this is one of their most read publications suggests a younger population that is in touch with the world around them. This is in contrast with many youth in the United States who do not keep up with current events.

The most common form of media entertainment among Singaporean youth is listening to music. *Values and Lifestyles* reports that seventy-three percent listen to music with high frequency and twenty-four percent listen with average frequency. Most youth listen to similar music styles and artists as youth in the West. Interviews with youth reported by *Youth.sg* twice make reference to the infamous American rapper, Eminem.<sup>95</sup> Radio stations in Singapore are mostly separated between English and Chinese programming. A visit to the top ten or twenty hit singles on the English stations' websites will reveal the dominance of western, particularly American, music.<sup>96</sup> The most popular music for youth in the Chinese genre tends to be a mix of Mandarin lyrics with a mostly western-style mix of instruments. While the English genre of music is obviously a distinctly western influence, the latter should be seen as a local pop culture. Nevertheless, both should be seen as a result of the direct influence of global youth culture.

The second most popular form of media is watching television. Fifty-five percent watch television with a high frequency and thirty-eight percent watch with an average frequency. American programs promoting liberal values are frequently viewed by youth.<sup>97</sup> Movies are another source of largely American influence and are also the

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<sup>95</sup>Chong and Yip, *Youth.sg*, 76-78.

<sup>96</sup>A few examples of such lists on Singaporean radio stations can be found at the following websites: [http://www.getforme.com/Musictoptenalbums\\_jun2000.htm](http://www.getforme.com/Musictoptenalbums_jun2000.htm); <http://www.power98.com.sg/programmes/Top30/top%2030.htm>; and <http://perfect10.mediacorpradio.com/Top20.htm>; Internet.

<sup>97</sup>Heng, Jiun, and Beng, *Values and Lifestyles*, 142.

third most popular form of media in Singapore. A 1999 National Youth Council study reports, "Compared to people in other Asian countries, Singaporeans are considered heavy cinema goers. In the study, twenty-three percent said that they go to the cinema at least once a week. Thirty-five percent said that they go at least once a month. The sample prefer many types of films. These range from western action and adventure (22 percent), to comedies (18 percent) to award-winning movies (17 percent). The most cited reason for going to cinema is to relax (33 percent) followed by the desire to see favourite stars (21 percent)."<sup>98</sup> While local television provides regular options for Chinese programs, the movies are almost completely dominated by Hollywood.

It is always difficult to quantify the influence of media exposure, but the National Youth Council's 1999 study revealed some interesting insights.

40 percent of our youth said that they wish sometimes to be like characters in the movies they see. . . . As to whether the media help them to become aware and understand the forces that shape their lives, 68.7 percent said they do. Only 7 percent disagreed. 41 percent said that TV programmes show more understanding of their problems than the adults they know as against 21 percent who disagreed. Again, the majority of the respondents (40 percent) agreed that the media provide useful role models and guides for them. The majority (47 percent) agreed that there was too much sex and violence in foreign TV programmes. When the same question was asked about local TV programmes, the vast majority (57 percent) disagreed. 46 percent believed that the media in general are doing very little to promote values that are important to Singapore.<sup>99</sup>

This seems to be a mixed result as far as ascertaining the impact of the media. While a significant percentage said that they would like to be like movie characters they see and many agree that the media gives them useful role models, another significant percentage believes that the media are not doing well at promoting values important to Singapore. *Values and Lifestyles* interprets similar findings with the following explanation: "Despite the frequent exposure to American programmes on Channel 5 and the more liberal values that such programmes portray, our youth tend to retain their

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<sup>98</sup>National Youth Council, "A to Z Guide on Youth in Singapore."

<sup>99</sup>Ibid.

conservative values. . . . This must be credited to the countervailing influence of our two key modes of transmitting values: the family and the school.”<sup>100</sup>

### Crisis Issues

By the relative standards of industrialized nations, Singaporean youth do not experience a high degree of problems regarding risk behavior and adolescent crisis issues. They do, however, have many of the same general problems and there exists a social awareness regarding them.

The overall statistics for alcohol consumption among youth is relatively low. In a study based on drinking patterns among the various education levels, Junior College represented the only demographic among youth who had almost twenty percent of students who consumed alcohol on a weekly basis. The most worrisome statistic was that six percent of secondary students reported consuming alcohol on a daily basis.<sup>101</sup> With a view to the future, Chong and Yip write, “While the consumption of alcohol by Singaporeans is moderate compared to the rest of the world, the growing affluence and the association of alcohol with leisure and eating may increase its consumption in years to come, particularly among youths.”<sup>102</sup>

The use of illegal drugs is not at all prevalent among Singaporean young people either. This is not surprising to anyone who has flown into the nation and viewed the various signs reminding everyone that those caught selling illegal drugs will receive the death penalty. *Youth.sg* found that the highest indicator of use among the various education levels was among Institute of Technical Education (ITE) students. Six percent of those surveyed affirmed that they had at least once tried an illegal drug.<sup>103</sup> Among

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<sup>100</sup>Heng, Jiun, and Beng, *Values and Lifestyles*, 142.

<sup>101</sup>Chong and Yip, *Youth.sg*, 157.

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.*, 159.

sixteen to twenty-one year olds who indicated that they had tried illegal drugs, eighty-eight percent of these were also involved in gangs, or “secret societies.”<sup>104</sup> Therefore, the majority of substance abuse can be observed among youth who are already involved in regular delinquent behavior.

The section on Singaporean education showed that the highest stressor for youth is by far related to their studies. One would conclude, therefore, that the majority of teen suicide would be related to school. However, Chong and Yip write, “Contrary to popular opinion, suicide rates among Singaporean youths are not study or work related but linked to stresses in various intimate relationships. Youth workers and parents therefore need to pay more attention to help young people cope with relationship problems.”<sup>105</sup>

#### **Attitude Toward the Government**

*In Search of Singapore's National Values* concluded that today's youth are more skeptical of the PAP than the older generation. Today's youth grew up in a safe and politically stable environment and have had substantial influence from the West regarding freedom of speech as an absolute value. As a result, they “have grown up in a very different Singapore and carry little of the emotional baggage of the previous generations.”<sup>106</sup> They have expressed desires for greater latitude concerning the boundaries of speech in the media and the classroom. “Looking around at our neighbours, young Singaporeans feel that, as we are far more stable politically, we should have a freer political environment than in the past. In this they are encouraged by their own exposure to western liberal traditions through an English-language education, the

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<sup>104</sup>Ibid.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., 171. Chong and Yip write, “Suicide rates among young Singaporeans have hovered between the 40 and 55 (per 100,000) range in the last decade” (ibid.).

<sup>106</sup>Quah, *In Search of Singapore's National Values*, 83.

mass media, imported western mores and personal contacts with the outside world.”<sup>107</sup>

Regarding the older generation’s ideal of deciding by consensus, “Some of them (youth) have even wondered if the proposed national value of consensual decision-making is just a ploy of the ruling PAP to perpetuate its political dominance.”<sup>108</sup> Such intellectual pursuits were granted at least on some level with the government’s institution of the Singapore 21 – a governmental program designed to provide a venue for public dialogue and debate.<sup>109</sup>

The rising desire for increased freedom of speech, however, should be balanced by consideration of the viewpoint of an outside liberal perspective. *Youth Futures*, a secular study on global youth, includes a chapter on Singapore which seems to lament the youth’s lack of speaking out against the status quo. Alfred L. Oehlers asserts that Singapore is

conspicuous by the distinct lack of any form of youth protest, organization, or movement, despite recent upheavels in the region. In sharp contrast to their brothers and sisters in neighboring countries, youth in Singapore appear to be content to conform to visions of their future elaborated by the ruling Peoples’ Action Party (PAP), rather than articulating and pursuing their own. Many, indeed, appear to subscribe fully to the conservative values championed by the PAP and which will lie at the foundation of a PAP-defined future.<sup>110</sup>

He continues by suggesting that the intentional efforts of the PAP to inculcate Confucian values and communitarianism over individualism has been successful. From a liberal perspective, this would seem overwhelmingly true. The tools used by the government in this process have been the educational system, legislation, the mass media, and national service. Referring to the latter, Oehlers writes, “In Singapore, all males

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<sup>107</sup>Ibid., 86.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid.

<sup>109</sup>Alfred L. Oehlers, “Imagining the Future: Youth in Singapore,” in *Youth Futures: Comparative Research and Transformative Visions*, ed. Jennifer Gidley and Sohail Inayatullah (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 119.

<sup>110</sup>Oehlers, “Imagining the Future,” 111-12.

attaining the age of eighteen are required to perform at least two years of military service. During this time, they are immersed in a hierarchical and authoritarian structure that cultivates an intense nationalism, as well as discipline and an unswerving obedience to authority.”<sup>111</sup>

Although Oehlers makes it clear that his desire is for a more liberal Singapore, he does provide some perspective as to why there is relatively low dissent in Singapore. Insights gained in chapter two revealing the primary reason for the lack of resistance among Singaporeans as a whole, however, should provide a more balanced outlook. The evidence suggests that the adults live contently with restrictions in freedom of speech because the government does a good job managing the economy and the overall affairs of the nation. There is no reason to believe that the youth, with their material desires and emphasis on future jobs, are wholly different. Regardless of the interpretation of the evidence, the national value of “consensus over contention” seems to apply to the youth as well as the nation as a whole.

**Law and order.** *Values and Lifestyles* reports that Singaporean youth are unambiguous in their high support for law and order.

This is reflected in the fact that 78.8 percent strongly support the caning of criminals for serious crimes, 79.6 percent strongly support the capital punishment of murderers, and 76.7 percent strongly support capital punishment for drug traffickers. While these forms of punishment for criminals are abhorred in many western nations, it appears that Singapore’s youth are not swayed by their abhorrence.<sup>112</sup>

Opposition to tough penalties on crime are usually articulated in terms of human rights and respect for the individual. Therefore, Singaporean youth in this case clearly reflect the official national value of “nation before community and society before self.”

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<sup>111</sup>Ibid., 116.

<sup>112</sup>Beng, Juin, and Heng, *Values and Lifestyles*, 16-17.

### Differences between Youth and Adults

It must be asserted at the beginning of this section that the values of Singaporean youth are more similar to their parents and grandparents than global youth culture as a whole. When viewed from the perspective of the influence of global youth culture on other nations, it is apparent that the efforts of the PAP as well as society as a whole to transfer their values to the young have been relatively successful. Nevertheless, there are distinct differences that should be examined.

The great success story of Singapore began with a generation in great tumult, change, and uncertainty. The World War II generation paved the way for the future. Their first and foremost drive was to survive their times. They had the chance in later years to strive toward living well. Though the second generation after the new Singapore did not have to lead the nation through the extremes on the scale of their parents, they did live with close memories of those years combined with the witnessing of ethnic riots during the sixties and seventies. *In Search of Singapore's National Values* comments, "They were filled with the drive not only to survive but to succeed."<sup>113</sup> For both of those generations, the importance of the economy should be seen through their desire to both survive and provide for their families.

Today's youth have the same drive to work and succeed, but in many cases the ultimate goal is different. Instead of wanting to succeed in order to provide for their family, many are choosing not to marry. Therefore, their desires to do well in the workplace and make a lot of money are for more self-centered aspirations. Chong and Yip explain,

Having reaped the fruits of material security, the young are able to externalise themselves in larger social concerns or aesthetic ambitions. This corresponds with Inglehart's (1997) theory on the generational shift towards postmaterial values. Inglehart posited that individuals in advanced industrial societies tend to move beyond material concerns to place priority on what he described as postmaterial

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<sup>113</sup>Quah, *In Search of Singapore's National Values*, 82.

concerns – concerns with issues such as belonging, self-expression, and quality of life.<sup>114</sup>

This does not mean they are unconcerned with material things. He is simply saying that they have the additional goal of self-actualization.

The materialistic worldview behind both their western education and the influence of global youth culture seem to have also made many of the youth more secular. We have already noted the increase in those who choose no religion among youth and how it is markedly different than the older generations. The constant exposure to liberal views of a postmodern culture is making it more difficult for youth to believe that any one religion can be true and, consequently, they are remaining agnostic.

The other distinctions of Singaporean youth culture are related to where they spend their time, what they spend their time doing, who they look up to, and what they wear. In order to understand their culture, one must have a firm grasp on these latter characteristics regardless of how it affects their value system. Some examples include common television programs and movies watched, video games they play, popular malls and entertainment centers, experiences on the Internet, style of music preferred, popular brands of clothing, and everyday life experiences at school. Paul Hiebert argues that such characteristics within advanced societies should be viewed in light of their own context.

In complex societies, such as the United States and Canada, it is hard to speak of a single culture. Some beliefs and practices may be accepted by all, such as driving on the right side of the road. But the differences are also significant. In such societies it is useful to speak of ‘cultural frames.’ A cultural frame is a social setting that has its own subculture – its own beliefs, rules for behavior, material products, symbols, structures, and settings.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup>Chong and Yip, *Youth.sg*, 139. They are quoting a Princeton study: R. Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic and Political Change in 43 Societies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

<sup>115</sup>Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 41.

All of these characteristics add up to a particular frame of reference through which Singaporean youth communicate. Wearing certain designer labels makes a statement about one's style and financial status. Particular types of clothing may also suggest a preference of a music genre that provides a subcultural identity. While describing an incident they witnessed, they may compare it to a scene in a popular movie instead of a traditional ancestral story handed down from generations past. Furthermore, today's youth have grown up on the Internet where new types of communication have been forged through such innovations as instant messaging.<sup>116</sup> All of these "cultural frames" add up to a distinct culture that sets Singaporean youth apart from adults. Regarding the value systems of the young, we have already seen how they are mostly similar to their parents yet with significant changes regarding career goals and family. These changes suggest a greater individualism than existed in previous generations.

Regardless, the great efforts of the government and adults in general to transfer their value system to the young in spite of the onslaught of western culture have been mostly successful. The momentum, however, is on the side of global youth culture. Time will tell whether or not the values of young people will remain steady or whether the current value shifts will be viewed in retrospect as the period in which global youth culture simply gained its foothold in the hearts of youth.

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<sup>116</sup>Examples include the use of emotiocons and abbreviations, such as "lol" for "laugh out loud."

## CHAPTER 5

### SINGAPOREAN YOUTH MINISTRY

Youth ministry is not an unknown practice in Singapore. Many of the greatest evangelistic accomplishments have been the result of specific outreach to English-speaking Chinese youth. Before undertaking the development of strategies to train youth ministers, I will provide an overview of the history of youth ministry during the last few decades in Singapore.

#### **Singaporean Youth Ministry History**

##### **General Youth Ministry**

There is no doubt that the most receptive segment of the population to Christianity has been English-speaking Chinese students. The statistics from the 2002 census listed above confirm this, as well as almost every Christian source that even mentions Singapore. While a noteworthy percentage of Mandarin-Chinese speaking youth are also receptive, most youth ministry has been conducted among the former group.

**YMCA.** The YMCA in Singapore was founded in 1902. It is believed that the British General Secretary in Singapore, Rowland Lyne, had the idea to found such an institution to counter more negative influences in the area. Raymond Flower writes, “Substance was given to the idea by the fortuitous stopover in Singapore of Dr. John R. Mott while on one of his numerous world tours.”<sup>1</sup> During the opening ceremonies, “Speakers stressed that the YMCA was to be a place where the young men of the town

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<sup>1</sup>Raymond Flower, *The First 100 Years in Singapore: 1902-2002* (Singapore: Young Men’s Christian Association of Singapore, 2002), 6.

could meet together under good influences, and hoped that it would inspire them to go to church.”<sup>2</sup> Almost ten years after its founding, the YMCA moved from its location on Armenian Street to the building on Orchard Street, where it has remained a permanent fixture to this day.

Although the YMCA is no longer one of the main tools for evangelism in Singapore, it was a key concern throughout its years of service to the community for the last century. Unlike today’s YMCAs in the United States, there is still a distinctly Christian emphasis in Singapore. During this past decade, “The Board decided to establish a Christian Emphasis Division under the Chairmanship of Edward Ong, to re-emphasize the ‘C’ in the Y. Informal lunches for staff from the various departments included ‘singspiration,’ Bible studies and games.”<sup>3</sup>

**Christian schools.** The founding of Christian primary and secondary schools had a great influence during the twentieth century as a whole. Bobby Sng states, “Before the War (WWII), the main factors that influenced growth of the church were the arrival of immigrant Christians and the role played by mission schools.”<sup>4</sup> Although there is some debate over the influence after World War II, there were two revealing studies in both 1969 and 1976. The first study was conducted by a professor at the National University of Singapore. It compared the religious beliefs of parents with those of their children who were enrolled in Christian schools. The study showed that “there had been a dramatic drop in the followers of Buddhist and other Chinese traditional beliefs among the younger generation. On the other hand, Christianity had increased its following

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 92.

<sup>4</sup>Bobby Sng, *In His Good Time: The Story of the Church in Singapore 1819-1992* (Singapore: Graduates’ Christian Fellowship, 1993), 306.

noticeably.”<sup>5</sup> The 1976 study was conducted among the students at two Catholic mission schools and had similar results. The influence of secondary schools in the last couple of decades has waned, but Sng affirms, “This decline in the role of mission schools was more than counter-balanced by the good work put in by the various parachurch youth organisations.”<sup>6</sup>

**Youth for Christ.** There are many parachurch student ministries in Singapore today, but Youth for Christ (YFC) stands out for its long labors for the hearts and souls of Singapore. While Ralph Neighbour came to Singapore for the purpose of developing a strategy for the Baptist church, his 1990 reflection on his time spent on the island guided his mind toward those who were reaching the youth. He writes,

The one bright spot in those days was the aggressive ministry of Youth for Christ in secondary schools. As a missionary from 1974-1977 in the nation, I took advantage of every opportunity to speak to these young men and women. . . . Y.F.C. estimated that in one year alone, as many as four thousand had accepted Christ.<sup>7</sup>

Neighbour’s generous praise of YFC only contained one lament: “With the passing of years, these young men and women became young adults. As they moved into their own flats, they ‘came out of the closet.’ Sadly, few were motivated enough to join the traditional churches.”<sup>8</sup>

Christopher Tan, National Director of Singapore Youth For Christ (SYFC), has a different perspective of their long-term influence: “Through more than four decades of existence, the Lord has led many youths through the doors of SYFC. Many who were involved in their younger days are currently key Christian leaders in Singapore churches and mission agencies.”<sup>9</sup> Concerning their influence today, he writes, “On an annual basis,

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 307.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ralph W. Neighbour, Jr., “Singapore 1990,” *Urban Mission* 7 (1990): 57.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 57-58.

<sup>9</sup>Christopher Tan, e-mail to author, 23 April 2002.

SYFC has been reaching an average of 12,000 youths with the gospel. We have the joy of witnessing 300-400 youths coming to know the Lord and accepting Him as our Saviour and Lord.”<sup>10</sup>

There are other effective parachurch organizations in Singapore as well. After praising YFC, Sng writes, “Other youth organizations like Inter-School Christian Fellowship, Navigators, Eagles, Evangelism, Campus Crusade and Fellowship of Evangelical Students, all saw increased numbers of people turning to Christianity.”<sup>11</sup> Although parachurch organizations have inherent weaknesses, such as Neighbour’s assertion that many of those involved did not join a church, there is no doubt that they have been used to saturate the island of Singapore with the gospel.

### **Baptist Youth Ministry**

This history of Southern Baptist missions to youth in Singapore is not a glamorous one. Although it began with Lillie Rogers’ successful tenure as a teacher in Nanyang University, Charles Carroll could not find anything else of note to report in his 1989 dissertation.<sup>12</sup> To be fair, there were a couple of understandable reasons for the Baptists’ lack of focus in this area. Carroll tells the story of one Southern Baptist student worker who, in 1968, was discouraged by existing parachurch workers from starting a student ministry because

It would create a negative reaction if all the churches were to start student work and if all student work were done along church lines. This creates a problem in evangelism. It gives bad impressions to non-Christians that Christians can’t work together. A non-Christian who is converted says: ‘I’ve struggled to make a decision for Christ – now I have to make a decision regarding what church on campus to

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Sng, *In His Good Time*, 307.

<sup>12</sup>Charles Cowan Carroll, “Towards a Culturally Relevant Strategy of Evangelism and Church Planting for Baptists among English-Speaking Chinese in Urban Singapore” (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989), 238.

join.<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, the Baptist Mission did not want to start a ministry that would not eventually be taken over by the local Baptist Christians.

Nevertheless, this course of non-action defied every statistic and study that was conducted by Baptists in Singapore. For example, the “In-Depth Study” conducted by a joint committee of Singaporean Baptists and missionaries reported that “71 percent of church members had been converted before the age of twenty.”<sup>14</sup> Pointing to the fact that the English-speaking Chinese students have been the most responsive to the gospel, Carroll laments,

Evaluators and strategists have consistently raised this issue with both the Mission and Convention. James Wong, Francis DuBose, Leslie Hill, Ralph Neighbour, David Finnell, John Clammer, and Johnson Lim, among others, have all challenged Baptists to get involved in a conscious effort to reach students. In 1981 the Missions voted to ‘challenge the Convention until *they* recognize the need for student work and rise up to meet it.’ This was a costly mistake. How effective was this challenge if the Mission itself demonstrated by this action that it was unwilling to involve itself in this critical ministry?<sup>15</sup>

Baptist churches are still feeling the effects of this mistake. The Baptist Convention as a whole admits that they are weak in the area of youth ministry and greatly desire that this situation be corrected.

### Current Situation of Baptist Youth Ministry

Youth ministry among Baptist churches today is a great felt need. In January 2003, I sat in a meeting with approximately ten Singaporean youth leaders and representatives from both the Convention and the Baptist Theological Seminary of Singapore (BTS Singapore). They were all unequivocal with their pleas towards Dave Adams, Vice-President of Youth Ministry International (YMI) and the IMB representative to bring someone to train youth ministers. I also met with former BTS

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 136-37.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 152.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 238-39.

Singapore interim President Thomas Chin and others from the school who expressed that there was both a great need and great opportunity to begin a youth major at the school. The Local Missions Coordinator of the Singapore Baptist Convention, Leonard Heng, lamented, "I am sorry to say that we do not have a formal or systematic way in training our youth ministers. It was done at an ad-hoc basis either at church camps or seminars."<sup>16</sup>

Heng's 2003 survey of Baptist youth leaders asked, "What do you think the Convention can do in supporting the church's youth ministry?" The greatest response was by far the 70 percent who answered, "provide leadership training for youth ministry."<sup>17</sup> Chin agrees with these statements also.

There are youths all over Singapore but there is a terrible lack in youth leadership and youth ministries. . . . I have heard many churches saying they do not know what to do with their youths. I think most Baptist churches have some kind of youth fellowships in their churches. The youth leaders say that they have are not trained. The greatest need now is to train the youth leaders.<sup>18</sup>

Only a third of Singapore's Baptist churches today have any kind of youth ministry.<sup>19</sup> Two years ago there were only two full-time youth ministers and both of them were from the United States. Now there is only one American working full-time and other youth workers are serving on a volunteer basis.<sup>20</sup> The remaining American youth minister is working at International Baptist Church (IBC), one of the largest Baptist churches. An IMB missionary describes IBC's youth ministry history with the following: "International Baptist Church has consistently had youth pastors for probably at least the

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<sup>16</sup>Leonard Heng, e-mail to author, 15 October, 2003.

<sup>17</sup>Heng conducted an independent study during the Summer of 2003 and sent the results to me.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Based on my own personal surveys and emails from missionaries, Convention leaders, and nationals, I came across no other minister who is currently being paid for youth ministry.

past 15-20 years – initially they were journeymen who served for two years and left. The past 6-8 years they have hired their own from overseas – but again on a two year basis.”<sup>21</sup> Without a youth leader who even has the intention of staying for the long haul, there will never be anyone who can build relationships that will last. Nor will there be the possibility for someone to cast a long-term vision and then follow through with implementation and execution of a strategy. In the end, there will always be limited expectations for such a position. The need for Singaporeans to take over these positions is clear.

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<sup>21</sup>E-mail to author, 27 October, 2003. Because the IMB missionary also works in a closed country near Singapore, I am not using his name.

## CHAPTER 6

### MISSIOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR TRAINING INDIGENOUS BAPTIST YOUTH MINISTERS

The overview of youth ministry in general and Baptist youth ministry specifically provides a good introduction to the proposed strategies for Baptist churches. The goal of all strategies listed below is the establishment of indigenous youth ministers and a system of training future youth ministers that is reproducible and maintainable by the indigenous Baptist churches. The current felt need among the only churches to have hired full-time youth ministers to recruit youth workers from the United States is a serious issue greatly hampering effective youth ministry in Baptist churches. Until they have trained indigenous youth workers in whom they have confidence, the situation will remain unchanged.

Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson are known for developing the three-self principles of missions in the nineteenth century. They asserted that churches planted by missionaries should be self-governing, self-sustaining, and self-propagating.<sup>1</sup> They correctly criticized the modern mission movement as being fraught with a stifling dependence on foreign money, foreign control, and a subtle paternalism that was stripping national Christians of their God-given responsibilities to become spiritual leaders. Although missiologists today generally believe that it would be a mistake to hold to these three principles in a rigid and inflexible fashion, they are still held as the general qualities of a healthy indigenous church. When the current strategies and practices of Baptist Singaporean churches in the area of youth ministry are seen through a

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<sup>1</sup>William A. Smalley, "Cultural Implications of an Indigenous Church," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader* ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1992), C-149.

missiological lens, there are several unhealthy characteristics that come to light.

### **Leadership Dependence**

The first missiological weakness is the strategy of hiring foreigners for youth ministry positions. Americans who come to Singapore generally cannot be expected to stay for a long enough period to establish the kind of relationships in the community that give a church's youth ministry its necessary credibility. However, if they came under the understanding that their job was to train others to do the ministry when they left, it could possibly be a healthy situation. Tom Steffen has noted that such a "phase-out" strategy is consistent with Venn and Anderson's principles for vibrant and indigenous churches.<sup>2</sup> However, this strategy has not been the case. Instead, the current practices tend toward an unhealthy dependence on outsiders.

In the same way that it is unhealthy for a Singaporean church to rely on foreigners for a pastoral position, dependence on outsiders for youth ministers stifles the development of national leaders who would otherwise be gaining experience and credibility and also could be training other nationals. Therefore, the present approach that has been used to hire the only full-time youth ministers in Baptist churches, though initiated by national leaders, is inherently paternalistic. It lends credit to the idea that maybe Singaporeans simply cannot be effective leaders to their own youth and instead need to look for a cool young American who will be more impressive to today's younger generation.

### **Multiplication**

Furthermore, this method limits the number of youth ministers to those who are willing to come from overseas. Most of today's church planters preach a strategy of

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<sup>2</sup>Tom A. Steffen, *Passing the Baton: Church Planting that Empowers* (La Habrada, CA: Center for Organizational and Ministry Development, 1997), 14.

planting a church, developing leaders, and then handing over the ministry to the nationals who are expected to continue the process of developing leaders and planting other churches. This creates a multiplication of leaders and churches instead of simply having one missionary and one church. National youth ministers who had the time to pour their lives into the ministry would be able to disciple and train leaders over a longer period of time who would soon have the experience and skills to go to another church and work with youth, thereby multiplying youth workers.<sup>3</sup>

So far I have been talking about the need for paid youth ministers as a given necessity. This is an issue that needs to be addressed. The argument that I would like to make here is twofold. Both are based on the fact that Singapore is an affluent society. First of all, the Baptist churches in Singapore have the money to pay a youth minister as long as it is considered a high enough priority and they believe they had a qualified candidate.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, their highly competitive marketplace requires workers to pour a high amount of hours into their work. Given the large number of professional workers in Singapore, this becomes a great hindrance for volunteer youth workers. A volunteer simply cannot spend the amount of time necessary to plan events, disciple youth, train volunteer workers, build relationships with families, raise money, initiate evangelistic relationships with young people on their respective campuses, prepare for the teaching times, and oversee the entire program in general.

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<sup>3</sup>The inherent difference, I admit, is the fact that the number of youth ministers are limited to the number of churches in existence. However, Dave Adams has observed the fact that in places such as Ukraine, “youth churches” (made up of young adults and youth) are developing as youth leaders and adult volunteer workers are planting their own churches in an effort to avoid the legalism of traditional worship. Furthermore, even in the United States it is not uncommon for a successful youth minister to plant their own church, as Bill Hybels did. The multiplication of youth ministers often prepares leaders not only for youth ministry, but for ministry to the next generation of adults. Furthermore, trained youth ministers in Singapore could possibly have opportunities in nearby nations such as Malaysia.

<sup>4</sup>All ten Baptist pastors who responded to the question, “Would you hire a national youth minister part-time or full-time if you perceived you had a trained and qualified candidate?” affirmed that they would. This was my e-mail survey sent out to the Baptist pastors.

### Buildings and Finances

One of the temptations for mission agencies when establishing a new work is to erect a building to be used for fellowship, teaching, or evangelism. Places such as coffeehouses and sports-oriented facilities are effective in attracting youth and can be a great outreach to benefit the local church. Training schools are also helpful and tend to lend visibility and credibility to the endeavor. Such methods, however, should be avoided. The indigenous principle of self-sustenance maintains that missionaries should build not build structures which would be permanently dependent upon foreign aid. While an argument could be made that Singaporeans might possibly be able to afford it, there are still other reasons against building. Roland Allen, an influential missiologist at the turn of the twentieth century, formed many of his convictions of the importance of an indigenous church while in China. One of his arguments against foreign agencies building structures was the practical issue of time management. He lamented,

We load our missionaries with secular business, negotiations with contractors, the superintendence of works, the management of a considerable establishment, to which often added anxiety about the supply of funds for providing and maintaining the establishment. In this way their attention is distracted from their proper spiritual work, their energy and power is dissipated, and their first contact with the people whom they desire to evangelize is connected with contracts and other purely secular concerns.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, buildings for outreach purposes should be avoided and classes used for training should be provided by the existing church. This avoids unnecessary expense and frees up the cross-cultural missionary to focus on the business of training national leaders.

### Language and Culture

Although it would be tempting to speak solely in English, the youth ministry trainer should take the time to learn the local heart language. Without language

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<sup>5</sup>Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1962), 57.

competency, the missionary will always be at a disadvantage when it comes to how the nationals think and learn. According to the Sapir-Whorf theory, one of the reasons that people from distinct cultures think differently is because the construction of languages forces thinking in certain directions.<sup>6</sup> For example, an Eskimo language may have up to eleven different words for snow in order to depict their distinctions. The fact that there is only one word for snow in English means that we do not often think about whether or not there may be different kinds of snow. The lesson here is that we should be prepared for others to understand reality differently than ourselves. These are the types of issues that combine to form the worldview of people from other cultures. It is only by understanding how they think that we can effectively communicate. Furthermore, an understanding of the nuances of the language will help the missionary to evaluate the leadership effectiveness of those they are discipling and training for ministry.<sup>7</sup>

Other key goals upon arrival would be to learn the particulars of Singaporean culture and build relationships with the people. Missionaries should always be learners before they are teachers. Preliminary study about a culture will always be limited.

George Patterson explains,

Knowing a people means more than finding how many tons of figs they exported last year, that the average adult male has 7.4 children or that their legislature has two chambers. It means touching the heart of individuals. Laughing with those who laugh. Weeping with those who weep. Playing marbles with 2-year old Chimbo and checkers with his grandpa. It may help if you let him beat you.<sup>8</sup>

All cultures have particular ways of relating to each other that are difficult for an outsider to grasp. Furthermore, it should not be assumed that the nationals will relate

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<sup>6</sup>Edward Sapir, *Culture, Language and Personality* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1945).

<sup>7</sup>The choice of which Singaporean language to learn and the fact that English is widely spoken will be discussed later.

<sup>8</sup>George Patterson, "The Spontaneous Multiplication of Churches," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, rev. ed. (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1992), D-78.

to an outsider in the same way they relate to each other.

Delbert Chinchén provides insight into possible scenarios of building relationships cross-culturally. He identifies what he calls the “patron-client system.”<sup>9</sup> In this situation, the missionary, who is substantially more wealthy and possibly older than the national involved, is the patron. He believes that missionaries in traditional societies will always be considered in a higher bracket and that it is a fact we should accept. The national in the relationship is the client. Chinchén suggests that, “It takes four steps to establish a relationship with a potential patron: admiration, visits, token gifts, and requests.”<sup>10</sup> If the giving and receiving are reciprocated, he asserts that the relationship can continue to develop. Lopsided giving on either side is to be avoided. If missionaries fail to learn the system they may miss opportunities to build relationships. The application, therefore, is that the cross-cultural youth ministry trainer should seek out a mentor in order to have someone who can mentor him in the cultural ways of building relationships.

### **Youth Ministry as Cross-Cultural**

Another important philosophy behind the training strategies proposed will be that Singaporean adults involved in youth ministry must be taught to approach the task as a cross-cultural missionary. This approach to nations where a distinct youth culture exists is something that the Western church has been slow to recognize, but is true nevertheless. Paul Borthwick is unequivocal in his assertions regarding this.

Youth ministry is cross-cultural work. Youth ministers require the skills of missionaries, taking biblical truths and applying them to specific cultures. Increased secularization, post-modern thinking, and our post-Christian culture have set youth in a culture distinct from that of adults.

As soon as young people – with their distinctive music, symbols, attire, and norms – are identified as a distinct ‘culture,’ the work of the adult youth leader

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<sup>9</sup>Delbert Chinchén, “The Patron-Client System: A Model of Indigenous Discipleship,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 31 (October, 1995): 446.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 447.

becomes cross-cultural.<sup>11</sup>

In other words, we should be engaged in exegesis of the culture in order to find pathways for sharing the gospel. For example, Connie Neal suggests that we use the Harry Potter stories in North America to find redemptive analogies to help communicate the story of Christ. She compares this to Don Richardson's lesson of *The Peace Child*, where he used an ancient Sawi tradition to open the eyes of a cannibalistic tribe in New Guinea.<sup>12</sup>

Missionaries all over the world should pray for God to reveal to them culturally relevant ways to advance the knowledge of Christ to youth. We should not assume that they will be reached simply because some of them may be related to adult church members. It is generally recognized as poor missiology to think that a small group of Pakistani Christians in Chicago will automatically mobilize to reach a group of Indian Sikhs who live down the road. In the same way, is wrong to assume that adult national Christians will instinctively know to approach the youth with a cross-cultural mindset and with cross-cultural strategies. It must be taught.

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<sup>11</sup>Paul Borthwick, "Cross-Cultural Outreach: A Missiological Perspective on Youth Ministry," *Christian Education Journal* 3 (Fall 1999): 62, 64. Although his reference to "our 'post-Christian culture' primarily refers to the youth ministry in the West, it should be noted that Borthwick is a prolific author on the subject of international missions. He is also one of the few who have written published articles on the need for youth ministry overseas. Combined with the fact that even Singaporean writers are referring to their youth as "post-modern," the use of this quote is not out of context. For example: Janet Yan Yin Wai, "Effective Youth Ministry: A Study to Understand and Identify Factors That Contribute to an Effective Youth Ministry in the Context of Singapore Churches" (M.A. thesis, Singapore Bible College, 2002), 34.

<sup>12</sup>Connie Neal, "Youth Workers as Cross-Cultural Missionaries: Is Harry Potter the New Peace Child?" *Youthworker* 17 (July/August 2001): 40-43.

## CHAPTER 7

### INFORMAL CROSS-CULTURAL YOUTH MINISTRY TRAINING STRATEGIES

As we have seen, the perceived need for youth ministry training among Baptists in Singapore is great. I will propose both informal and formal training strategies to meet the need. Before developing strategies for informally training youth ministers cross-culturally, wisdom would dictate that I should first consider the strategies of organizations who have been successful in this endeavor. Although there are only a few such organizations in existence, both Youth Ministry International (YMI) and Sonlife have training experiences from which to learn. I find their approaches to be exemplary and missiologically sound.

#### **The Global Strategies of Sonlife and YMI<sup>1</sup>**

Both YMI and Sonlife share the common vision of working with national churches to raise up indigenous youth workers and subsequent trainers of such youth workers to continue a multiplication of youth ministry after they leave. YMI states that its ultimate goal is “the establishment of youth ministries in foreign lands that are capable of functioning independently of YMI’s resources and input.”<sup>2</sup> Whereas YMI is focused solely upon cross-cultural youth ministry, Sonlife began as a North American youth ministry organization and continues this part of its ministry today. However, they eventually became involved in cross-cultural training and launched the Global Youth

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<sup>1</sup>Randy Smith is President of YMI. Dave Livermore is President of the international wing of Sonlife.

<sup>2</sup>“YMI’s Ultimate Goal” [on-line]; accessed 13 November 2001; available from <http://www.gospelcom.net/yimi/goal.html>; Internet.

Initiative (GYI) as its missionary arm.<sup>3</sup> GYI's mission statement is "Mobilizing indigenous movements of church-based youth ministries so that every young person in every culture has the opportunity to respond to the claims of Christ."<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that neither is seeking to multiply their respective organizations. An eventual retraction of staff is essential in their strategies.

### Overview of Strategies

**Church-based.** Both Sonlife and YMI have a strong belief in the importance of strategies that are church-based. While there are a plethora of parachurch youth organizations working all over the globe, YMI and Sonlife participate in no training or ministry that does not directly benefit local churches. Dave Patty of GYI explains:

Many groups have found that ditching the church rids the ministry of a lot of baggage, and opens up key doors into the broader venues of society. There has been pressure on our staff to do an end line run around the church as well. Pragmatically, it would greatly speed up the task of reaching lost young people.

But we can't. Theologically, it is not an option, if we want to follow Christ's marching orders. Though it often takes more time, we must bring life to the Church. If no good churches exist, we must plant new ones.<sup>5</sup>

YMI concurs with Sonlife's conclusions. "Youth discipleship is ultimately the ministry of the national/local church. Therefore all YMI strategies are supportive, based on local church involvement and direction."<sup>6</sup> It is this mutual commitment that separates these two youth missions organizations from the majority.

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<sup>3</sup>GYI brochure, *Urgency and Opportunity*, states, "GYI is an intentional partnership of distinct organizations committed to a common mission, core values, and a common strategy of youth ministry based on the life of Christ." Because they are so closely related, I will refer to Sonlife and GYI interchangeably at times.

<sup>4</sup>1997 *GYI Forum Papers* [on-line]; accessed 2 November 2001; available from <http://www.sonlife.com/pdf/gyi/papers.pdf>; 3, Internet.

<sup>5</sup>Dave Patty, "A Strategy for Global Youth Ministry" [on-line]; accessed 2 November 2001; available from <http://www.sonlife.com/pdf/gyi/papers.pdf>; 6; Internet.

<sup>6</sup>"YMI Ministry Distinctives" [on-line]; accessed 13 November 2001, available from <http://www.gospelcom.net/yimi/distinct.html>; Internet.

Although their strategies are focused on an existing national church, YMI is still involved in the church planting process. Randy Smith says that most of their trainers are involved in following up recent church plants in order for them to cultivate a strong foundation in youth ministry while they are still in the early stages of development.<sup>7</sup> The other option is usually an older church that presently has no youth ministry.

**Peer-to-peer evangelism.** In many churches across the world it requires an extraordinary paradigm shift to consider training the youth for active ministry in the church. However, as family influence and social structures have decreased worldwide, the influence of peers has greatly increased. Therefore, the influence they are having on each other can be transformed into a positive impact for Christ. “Youth Ministry International believes that youth are capable not only of being trained to be leaders, and thereby replicate Jesus Christ in others, but that youth are actually the most important part of developing a new generation of Christian leaders in developing countries.”<sup>8</sup> Dave Patty writes, “Peer-to-peer evangelism as a style of life must be a characteristic of a movement of God among young people. It is this that gives the movement its energy, vitality, and transforming influence.”<sup>9</sup>

**Worship.** YMI teaches youth workers to find leaders among the youth and involve them immediately in leading worship. They train the workers in principles of biblical worship and encourage cultural relevance, but the decision is up to the youth workers in the host culture. Randy Smith says that the resulting worship is sometimes controversial, particularly in ex-communist countries, but has been a success

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<sup>7</sup>Randy Smith, telephone interview by author, 16 November, 2001.

<sup>8</sup>“Trained In Order To Train” [on-line]; accessed 13 November 2001, available from <http://www.gospelcom.net/yimi/goal.html>; Internet.

<sup>9</sup>Patty, “A Strategy for Global Youth Ministry,” 6.

nevertheless.<sup>10</sup>

### **YMI's Six Essential Steps for Church-based Youth Evangelism**

YMI's vision for cross-cultural youth ministry consists of six basic steps.<sup>11</sup> First, they send out Quest Student Mission Teams from the United States on the invitation of the local church in the host country. In general, YMI chooses cultures where the language barrier is at a minimum. This makes it easier for the American students, high school and college-age, to work together with national youth in evangelistic efforts. The goal is not only to see people won to Christ on this trip, but also to "demonstrate the impact of student-to-student evangelism."<sup>12</sup>

The second step occurs when the national church catches the vision of student-to-student evangelism. YMI believes that the existence of such a vision cannot be taken for granted because "youth ministry, even in churches to their own kind, is almost nonexistent in most cultures outside the U.S!"<sup>13</sup> Vision will hopefully lead to the third step – when the national church requests a YMI youth trainer to come and work under their authority. YMI provides the training, "but the success or failure of youth ministry lies directly with the local church and its leadership."<sup>14</sup> In the fourth step, a YMI trainer desiring to move to a foreign country for a period of two years is selected. The trainer is supported by a Partnership Ministry Team (PMT). The PMT is responsible to help the trainer through guidance, networking, and resources. After the trainer raises support, they are placed.

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<sup>10</sup>Smith, interview by author.

<sup>11</sup>"Essential Steps To Church-Based Youth Evangelism" [on-line]; accessed 13 November 2001; available from <http://www.gospelcom.net/yimi/essential.html>; Internet.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

The next step is the actual training of national youth workers. The trainer's goal during this period is to network and teach a core of adult nationals who have a burden for youth. "Beginning with this core, the trainer spends many more months adapting YMI's Biblical youth ministry philosophy to the needs of the students to assure it is culturally sensitive and productive."<sup>15</sup> The sixth step occurs when the nationals begin training nationals. The goal is for this last step to begin within a year of the trainer's arrival. Eventually, the entire program is handed over to a church-based youth ministry that will be responsible for continuous training in various churches. Now the ministry is truly theirs as youth workers and students are sharing Christ within their local communities.

### **Sonlife's Four Phases**

GYI's ministry in a host culture begins with a "First Wave Trip." These trips consist of proven youth leaders from Sonlife Ministries and Reign Ministries. "The purpose is to jump-start a disciple making ministry to youth in the region."<sup>16</sup> A major priority of these leaders is to spread a vision for Christ's strategy of multiplication of disciples. The youth leaders then "develop culturally appropriate training and coaching to mobilize indigenous youth leaders."<sup>17</sup>

Dave Patty prescribes four phases within the training process. Unlike YMI's six steps, their first phase begins with the trainer already on the field. Phase one is called "Foundation." "The overall goal of the foundation phase is to lay a relational and spiritual base that will support both expansion and multiplication."<sup>18</sup> He includes several

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>David Livermore, "Mobilizing a New Generation of Leaders" (Sonlife brochure); 7.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Patty, "A Strategy for Global Youth Ministry," 8.

steps within this phase: Acquisition of language and culture, emerging models of ministry, building trust in relationships, developing a core of tools or training materials, developing a core of nationals who share the vision, and an increasing passion for the vision. “Somewhere passion has to ignite, lives have to be radically transformed, and God’s power has to begin to be evident.”<sup>19</sup> Local youth ministries should begin to be established during this phase. Phase two is “Deepening the core.” Now that there are many youth workers actively involved in their local churches, the challenge is to give further training to a select few in order to develop leaders who can lead other national youth workers. Patty proposes focusing on character and godliness, expanding their world, delegation of key areas, and spreading the vision further.

The third phase is entitled “Multiplication.” “Here key responsibilities must be delegated, and key producers must be trained to equip others. Structures and strategies must be put in place that deliver supplies to the troops and lines of communication must be set up that focus and connect the activities.”<sup>20</sup> Patty envisions six tasks in this phase: The creation of organized structure and delivery systems, expansion of evangelism, expansion of training, forming of key coalitions, expansion of the leadership base, and championing the vision. Perhaps the most important part of this phase is the selection and discipling of future trainers. Jeffrey Wetherill relates three characteristics he sees in the selection of Jesus’ disciples that should be utilized. “I believe there were three traits that ‘surfaced’ which led to their selection. These three included a hunger and a desire to *know the Messiah*, to *understand his message*, and to *experience his ministry*.”<sup>21</sup> He also emphasizes the importance of praying for God to reveal the right person as well and

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>21</sup>Jeffrey Wetherill, “Disciplemaking: Identifying and Developing Key Leaders” in *1997 GYI Forum Papers* [on-line]; accessed 2 November 2001; available from <http://www.sonlife.com/pdf/gyi/papers.pdf>; 42; Internet.

looking for evidence that the Holy Spirit is working in their life.

The fourth and final phase is “Departure.” All the other phases are planned around this exit strategy so that the church is enabled to take full ownership of the ministry. It is here that the ministry becomes fully indigenous.

Another way that Sonlife casts its vision is through the use of the TEAM acrostic – Transforming communities, Equipping leaders, And Mobilizing resources. These are teams made up of U.S. leaders and nationals that focus on specific areas. They work together to build strategies for the following: To meet physical needs in the community, train leaders, build systems and strategies for the national leaders, and to organize resources such as prayer, financial support, and personnel. Livermore writes, “We envision 237 TEAMS, one for each country of the world.”<sup>22</sup> These TEAMS have a vision for youth, but are designed to work with all church leaders to develop a vision for multiplication.

### **Requirements, Recruiting, and Training Cross-Cultural Youth Ministry Trainers**

**Approach of YMI.** In order to become an International Youth Leadership Trainer (IYLT) for YMI, there are several requirements for a potential candidate. “First and foremost, they must have a heart for Christ and for students worldwide.”<sup>23</sup> They must also have a bachelor of arts or sciences (or an equivalent degree), at least one year of formal training in local church youth ministry, and an agreement with YMI’s statement of faith, philosophy of ministry, and guiding principles.<sup>24</sup> Following the interview with YMI, the IYLT must “apply to and be accepted by International Teams for a four month

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<sup>22</sup>David Livermore, “Global Multiplication” [on-line]; accessed 2 November 2001; available from <http://www.sonlife.com/international/html>; Internet.

<sup>23</sup>“Call To Action!” [on-line]; accessed 13 November 2001; available from <http://www.gospelcom.net/yml/call.html>; Internet.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

cross-cultural training period, which they must complete in preparation for the term on the field.”<sup>25</sup>

As mentioned earlier, YMI’s trainers are supported by a Partnership Ministry Team (PMT). PMTs are “a volunteer team formed to work with one of YMI’s projects as a partner, providing management, resources, and guidance.”<sup>26</sup> They consist of four key team members – a State-side youth professional (the team leader), a Christian businessperson, a church senior pastor, mission pastor, or educator, and a national in a key leadership position. PMTs have a variety of functions. They help with the development of a long-term strategy, preliminary research, trainee selection of national workers, and funding of projects. PMTs seek to minister to the trainers by involving their North American churches and traveling to the mission site in order to care for their needs.<sup>27</sup>

**Approach of Sonlife.** Sonlife’s philosophy of cross-cultural training can be found in the Forum Papers on their website.<sup>28</sup> Bill Hodgson’s chapter entitled “Cross-Cultural Adaptation in Youth Ministry Training” provides a vision for the training candidate to gain an understanding of worldview issues related to life and ministry. He discusses the importance of analyzing our own assumptions in order to avoid carrying too much cultural baggage into the host culture.

Livermore follows this paper up with an article entitled “Intercultural

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid. YMI’s website also specifies that their trainers receive a background in the philosophy of United World Mission’s School of Intercultural Studies.

<sup>26</sup>“YMI’s Partnership Ministry Team Strategy” [on-line]; accessed 13 November 2001; available from <http://www.gospelcom.net/yimi/pmt.html>; Internet

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Bill Hodgson, “Cross-Cultural Adaptation in Youth Ministry Training,” in *1997 GYI Forum Papers* [on-line]; accessed 2 November 2001, available from <http://www.sonlife.com/pdf/gyi/papers.pdf>; 16; Internet.

Competency.”<sup>29</sup> He believes that, although globalization has provided unprecedented opportunities for communication around the world, very few are taking into consideration how people of various cultures learn. “Therefore, though educational opportunities in diverse contexts are increasingly accessible all around the globe, much more needs to be done to adapt training to culture.”<sup>30</sup> Livermore then provides a “tri-contextual model” in order to convey the social construction of adult learning. His goal is to inspire trainers to think more clearly about intercultural competencies needed for accomplishing the task of raising up leaders. As stated above, Sonlife also fervently teaches their cross-cultural trainers the strategy of multiplication in order to produce more youth leaders and church-based youth ministries.

### **Finances**

YMI and Sonlife have similar philosophies regarding funding in that they desire to put no structures in place that will need to be maintained by national churches, and they require their trainers to raise their own support. This allows the organizations themselves to remain as small as possible. YMI’s statement on stewardship is as follows:

YMI does not operate from a position of either indebtedness or endowment, believing that the Lord will provide the necessary resources for His work. A major percentage of all donations go directly to the mission field; this is possible because YMI’s efforts are directed largely through volunteer leadership and all International Youth Trainers raise their own support.<sup>31</sup>

While Sonlife does provide some of the funding of training resources for nationals, their commitment to avoiding dependency remains. “We aren’t excited about multiplying the institution of Sonlife. Our commitment lies in gathering the resources

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<sup>29</sup>Dave Livermore, “Intercultural Competency,” in *1997 GYI Forum Papers* [on-line]; accessed 2 November 2001; available from <http://www.sonlife.com/pdf/gyi/papers.pdf>; 26; Internet.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>31</sup>“YMI Ministry Distinctives.”

needed to help national church leaders to develop capacities for ministry to younger leaders that are theirs to shape and nurture before God. . . . We invest funds internationally to leverage new capacities for ministry, not to maintain ministry.”<sup>32</sup>

### Partnerships and Networking

Another way that YMI and Sonlife are able to avoid a cumbersome bureaucracy is through their vision and commitment to build partnerships with other Great Commission ministries. Livermore writes, “The corporate sector has placed increased emphasis on networks and partnering. So, too, should we realize the strength that lies in strategic partnerships for global youth ministry.”<sup>33</sup> He believes strongly that there is a synergy created when ministries share resources. These resources come in the form of “common vision/strategy, our diversity, information, and finances.”<sup>34</sup>

YMI’s partnership with International Teams provides an example of how such networking can be effective. Because International Teams does their cross-cultural training for them, they do not have to create a new structure that would need to be maintained. Their partnerships make meeting new needs more realistic. An example from Sonlife is their conviction that they need to begin to do more about meeting the physical needs of those to whom they were trying to reach with the gospel. Livermore writes candidly, “We have little credibility when it comes to the practical implications of mobilizing laity in churches ridden with poverty, disease, war, and famine. That challenge is precisely why we are excited about our growing partnership with World

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<sup>32</sup>“Next Generation of Leadership Campaign” [on-line]; accessed 2 November 2001; available from <http://www.sonlife.com/financialneeds.html>; Internet.

<sup>33</sup>Dave Livermore, “Billions to Be Won: Going After the Largest Mission Field in the World Youth,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 37 (July 2001): 334.

<sup>34</sup>Dave Livermore, “The Synergy of GYI: Resources of GYI and Practical Funding Issues” [on-line]; accessed 17 November 2001; available from <http://www.sonlife.com/gyi/partnerships.html>; Internet.

Relief.”<sup>35</sup> YMI and Sonlife not only have partnerships with organizations with completely different areas of expertise, but they have a working relationship with each other as well.

### **Proposed Strategy for Informal Training of Baptist Youth Ministers**

In light of the above strategies, I will now give a general overview of my cross-cultural youth ministry training proposal. The proposed strategy for youth ministry training is a combination of three different entities: The IMB, YMI, and the Singaporean Baptist Convention. All of these organizations have discussed partnering in order to provide a youth ministry trainer for Singapore. As a result, most of YMI’s six steps to establishing youth training have already taken place. YMI was invited as early as two years ago by the IMB and the national church to come to Singapore and discuss plans for sending a trainer. I went with the vice-president of YMI, Dave Adams, on a vision trip last year and talked with the IMB and local leaders. Therefore, step one (the sending of a student evangelistic team) was not necessary, because the national vision (step 2) and request of a trainer (step 3) have already occurred. Because I was selected as the prospective trainer before we left for Singapore, step 4 has also been fulfilled. Obviously, the training of nationals (step 5) and the subsequent training of nationals by nationals (step 6) have yet to be done.

#### **Networking**

The proposed arrangement for the organizations involved is as follows: The IMB will support the trainer financially, provide the cross-cultural training, offer their extensive overseas support network, and will be the primary authority and accountability on the field. This is, of course, what they do for all of their missionaries. The only

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<sup>35</sup>Dave Livermore, “Partnerships” [on-line]; accessed 17 November 2001; available from <http://www.sonlife.com/organizations.html>; Internet.

difference is that they would subordinate the youth ministry trainer to the authority of YMI when it comes to many details of the youth ministry training itself. For example, the content of the material used to train youth ministers would be under the oversight of YMI. YMI would also provide resources for the translating of training materials, pay for preliminary trips to prepare for the trainer's arrival, and set up a PMT to support the trainer with necessary support and resources while on the field. They would also take occasional support trips to Singapore to help teach, raise awareness of YMI's training, and give the trainer further instruction and accountability.<sup>36</sup>

### **Intercultural Competency**

Sonlife's first phase is a great example of how to approach a cross-cultural ministry. YMI's general practice is to go to nations where the language barrier is at a minimum and teach in English. This might seem possible in Singapore because English is widely spoken. IMB regulations, however, require learning the heart language of the people before engaging in ministry. This is the best approach because knowing the heart language of most Singaporeans would allow for a greater understanding of the people and their culture. In this case, it would be wisest to learn Mandarin because Chinese are by far the majority on the island. Although there are different dialects spoken, Mandarin has been emphasized and implemented by the government as the only official Chinese language. Learning Mandarin, of course, is no easy task. The IMB strategy coordinator working with this project recommends going to China for at least a year, but longer if necessary. The reason for conducting language training outside of Singapore is that it would be too easy to get away with speaking English. In order to learn the language effectively and as quickly as possible, full immersion into a culture that speaks Chinese

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<sup>36</sup>There are no plans to partner with any organizations such as World Relief given the lack of dire poverty in Singapore. Such partnerships may form, however, in the future as youth ministers are taught to have a vision for missions and begin taking their youth on missions trips.

almost exclusively is the best method.

As mentioned by Sonlife and my previous section on missiological foundations, the youth ministry trainer should make learning the culture a top priority upon arrival. A cultural mentor who could guide him through the maze of relationship-building could be chosen among national Baptist leaders. They would not only be able to teach the missionary about Singaporean culture in general, but also instruct him concerning the particularities and decision-making structures of Baptist churches.

### **Church-based**

Because the proposed plan is an alliance between YMI, the IMB, and Singaporean Baptist churches, it is a church-based strategy from the start. As this suggests, it is not a plan for all churches in the nation, but is tailored toward the churches in the Singapore Baptist Convention. This does not mean that youth leaders from other denominations would be prohibited from coming to training seminars or other events. It does mean, however, that the training would be primarily for Baptist churches and that they would have complete ownership over the program.

### **Qualifications**

The qualifications for informal cross-cultural youth ministry training would be a combination of YMI and IMB standards. All of the above listed qualifications for YMI will be in place while the IMB will require the specific cross-cultural training they provide for all missionaries at the Missionary Learning Center in Virginia.

### **Adaptation of Training to Culture**

While YMI's model of training will be relied upon as a cross-cultural approach, adaptation of strategies and materials will be a work in progress. The goal is for indigenous youth workers to eventually take control of the ministry and for them to be the ones to ultimately influence the training to make it fit the cultural context of

Singapore. The emerging leaders should be heavily encouraged to develop indigenous training materials for those areas of youth ministry that currently have no relevant resources.

### **Facilities**

The facilities used for informal training would be the Baptist churches and the local Singapore Baptist Convention building. There will be no plans to create a youth training building that will necessitate sustenance by foreign or local funds.

### **Content of Informal Youth Ministry Training**

So far I have only discussed the general strategies used to begin the training, not the content of the training itself. The content of the training will be based upon YMI's "Philosophy of Youth Ministry" presentation which they have been teaching worldwide. Their informal training program for introductory seminars is detailed below with personal elaboration on the Singaporean context.<sup>37</sup>

### **Philosophy of Youth Ministry**

All teaching should begin by clarifying the goals of training content. This will eliminate needless arguments that arise when people are approaching the same subject with different assumptions. YMI's philosophy is summed up with the following: "The goal of youth ministry is to develop the culturally appropriate programs through which every young person will hear the gospel and have the opportunity to spiritually mature."<sup>38</sup> Much of the rest of the presentation is spent elaborating on this mission statement.

**Cultural imprints.** The determination of what a culturally appropriate youth

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<sup>37</sup>Dave Adams, "Philosophy of Youth Ministry Power Point Presentation," 2003. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list of training.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

program consists of can often be difficult for adults who have learned to connect the form of youth cultural expressions with the negative content with which it is often associated. Therefore, YMI begins by teaching adults to look at their own cultural imprints and prejudices in order to differentiate between what is biblical and what is cultural. YMI asserts that everyone is affected by three distinct cultural imprints that hinder their perception of people different from themselves. The first of these is one's "personal cultural imprint." Dave Adams explains,

This is the result of one's genetic heritage and family influence. Geographical location and family tradition come together to formulate one's worldview and self-image. The period of time and political make-up of one's world both contribute to the cultural imprint. How one dresses, enunciates words, embraces certain values, and deems those values appropriate all combine to formulate a sociological "bent" and personal cultural imprint.<sup>39</sup>

The second influence is the "church cultural imprint." Each church or associations of churches have their own characteristics that distinguish them from others in their own culture. In the same way Pentecostal churches in the United States have particular characteristics, Baptist churches in other lands shape the way their members perceive the world around them. Adams writes, "This is the result of the dynamic contributing factors such as denominational distinctive, core values, and socio-economic status. 'This is the way our church does certain things' is often a summary of one's church culture."<sup>40</sup>

The third cultural influence is the "community cultural imprint." Adams describes this with the following: "Socio-economic, geo-political, and sociological norms all contribute to the defining of the overarching community where one finds himself living and embracing a collective conscience."<sup>41</sup> When national workers can gain an

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

objective viewpoint of their own cultural biases, they are often more adept at developing cross-cultural methods to reach their young and are less likely to dismiss youth ministry principles on the basis of tradition.

In the same way missionaries approaching an indigenous culture are instructed to use appropriately contextualized strategies, YMI teaches national adults to think cross-culturally to reach the young. Adams elaborates, “The strategy of youth ministry is to identify the culture and use the culture to reach the culture. Youth ministry, by its nature, should be culturally sensitive to understanding the young. The gospel can change a person. The regenerated person can change the world as God directs. Only when popular culture obviously violates Scripture or biblical principles should we confront culture.”<sup>42</sup> Upon conclusion of this section, Singaporean adult youth workers should be encouraged to discuss their own cultural imprints and consider whether or not they are holding onto non-biblical traditions that are hindering outreach to the young.

**Young people.** The next important phrase in YMI’s mission statement is “young person.” On the surface, the identification of a young person should be obvious. In order to identify target groups, however, it could be useful to lead the national youth workers through an identification process. A consideration of the definitions of youth listed in chapter three could be one helpful tool. Youth workers should recognize the connections between global youth culture and Singaporean youth. They should also be taught the general principles outlined in chapter 3 that point to an emerging global youth culture.

National youth leaders should also be led to consider the social structures in their own culture which group young people together. The Singaporean education

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

system and the natural age groups in which their young people gather should be seen as the model to guide the different target groups for ministry. While it is true that many cultures consider people to be a youth until the age of forty, it would not make sense to group them all together in church based on that definition if they never group themselves together in that manner in any other sphere of life.

Singapore's definition of youth as being fifteen to twenty-nine should be examined by the nationals to see if their grouping is appropriate and effective. Singaporean Baptist churches generally organize youth into two different categories. The youngest group is thirteen through eighteen years of age, while the older group consists of those nineteen through twenty-nine. If this is the best grouping strategy, it should be maintained. However, if the nationals begin to perceive that grouping university and polytechnic students together with young working adults is a hindrance to outreach, they should be encouraged to change their approach.

The most effective outreach will occur when the church targets youth within their own defined cultural boundaries. While some churches have all youth meet together for a weekly service, it should be recognized that university and polytechnic students are in a separate sphere of life from secondary students. Because the goal of adolescence is to eventually achieve adult status, it is only natural that they would possibly desire to disassociate themselves from younger teenagers. When they visit the church and are grouped with secondary students, it is being communicated to them that the church still views them as teenagers instead of young adults. This could be a hindrance for motivating older youth visitors to come back. It may also discourage those graduating from secondary schools to continue to be involved in the church.

For those who would argue that encouraging a grouping system is tantamount to imposing our western cultural patterns, Adams counters with the following: "International organizations categorize youth for the purpose of disease control, educational concerns, and political 'human rights' issues. The adolescent phenomena,

though new to human history, has emerged as an international reality and has established its own identity of the one world global community. Global demographics and statisticians enable us to locate this target group.”<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, the Singaporean government is already actively categorizing them in this manner, as mentioned above.

The discussion of defining and grouping youth should be ended with an evangelistic focus. Statistics concerning youth worldwide are consistent in the assertion that people are far more receptive to the gospel when they are young. Baptist Singaporean adults should consider their own historical receptiveness to the gospel at young ages and their historical lack of sufficient strategizing and resourcing for this important ministry.<sup>44</sup>

**The gospel.** The next important phrase in YMI’s mission statement is “the gospel.” At this point in the seminar, the emphasis is on clarifying whether or not youth who attend Singaporean Baptist churches are truly receiving a fair hearing of the gospel. Smith writes, “It is the message of the gospel, the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ that is able to deliver each young person from an eternity away from God. It is true that ‘God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.’ The message of the gospel should be presented to each adolescent in such a way that a ‘fair hearing’ is the result.”<sup>45</sup> In the same way that we should not assume youth workers in the United States are clearly focusing on the gospel and its exclusive claims, it should not be assumed that Singaporean youth workers are having difficulty in this area.

**Spiritually mature.** It is a perennial problem in many youth ministries today that youth are not sufficiently challenged to become mature disciples of Christ. After

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<sup>43</sup>Adams, *Philosophy of Youth Ministry*.

<sup>44</sup>See nn. 14 and 15, chapter 5.

<sup>45</sup>Adams, *Philosophy of Youth Ministry*.

making a profession of faith, churches too often encourage them only to come to church and stay out of trouble. On the contrary, after accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior they should then be grounded in the spiritual disciplines and equipped for ministry in the local church. Smith teaches five attributes of a mature disciple. His presentation asserts that believers are to be converted, churched, craving the Word, have a compassion for the lost, and consecrated for ministry.<sup>46</sup> Youth workers should be led to evaluate and discuss the spiritual state of their youth. They should share ideas concerning what approaches to discipleship are working and those that are not.

### **Programming**

At this point in the seminar, the focus of the teaching should be on the total program of youth ministry. Because time is precious, especially to busy Singaporeans, great care should be taken to make sure that each program has a clear purpose and direction. Adams laments, “Often, planning a youth calendar is a spontaneous and reactionary occurrence. A successful program does not just happen, it is purposeful and intentional. Those responsible for the programming often fall into the trap of scheduling activities that they personally enjoy, rather than what is best for the ‘purpose driven youth ministry.’”<sup>47</sup> Adams instructs youth workers to consider the greatest needs of the youth ministry, then plan ahead to intentionally meet those specific needs. This will avoid the development of shallow, busy youth. YMI trains youth workers to work within the ministry paradigm of “5 Levels” of programming. Their five levels are packaged in a pyramid model with level one at the bottom and level five at the top. The bottom level is seen as the point of entry for new students and each level becomes more narrow as it requires one more level of spiritual maturity. These levels are designed to balance the

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid. Ironically, this acrostic of five Cs counters the Singaporean mantra referring to the typical person’s materialistic goals in life.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

youth minister's programming between purposes such as evangelism, discipleship, and meeting with the lay youth workers.

**Level 1.** The bottom of the pyramid contains the level of programming that should include the most people that will be involved in the ministry in any way. Its intentional focus is relationship building. As we have seen, peer relationships among Singaporean youth are extremely important. Friends are the most likely source a youth would turn to for emotional support and the second mostly likely source of advice. Furthermore, because effective evangelism begins with relationships, youth ministries need to facilitate friendships among youth. Peer to peer evangelism should be consistently taught and encouraged.

The programs included in this level are fun-oriented and non-threatening activities to which youth can invite their friends. The key to this strategy is to "provide ample opportunities for personal interactions."<sup>48</sup> Popular activities among Singaporean youth, such as a basketball tournament, a soccer tournament, traveling to another city, or simply going shopping and playing computer games at a local mall encourage and facilitate relationships among guest youth, adult youth workers, and youth in the church. The key is to find an environment and location that will not violate the cultural norms of the guest youth. When lost youth begin to see that the church cares for them personally and begin to get to know Christians within the context of the church fellowship, they become more open to hearing the message of the gospel. They also become more likely to attend programs at a church building.

**Level 2.** The next level of programming is evangelistic outreach. While level one is seen as a means to this end, it is a level two activity that will have as its main purpose sharing a clear presentation of the gospel. Although such programs can be

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

appropriate at the local church, Adams encourages youth workers to continue to use a culturally neutral location for such an activity without violating either cultural or biblical norms in order to attract the crowd. An example of a level two outreach is an evangelistic concert. Youth who make decisions for Christ should have their contact information gathered and be followed up by the youth workers in charge of the event. They should then be invited to the church and encouraged to grow in their newfound faith.

**Level 3.** YMI's third level of programming, Bible study, is specifically designed for converted Christians who are serious about coming to church in order to study the Bible and grow spiritually. Having attended events from level one and level two and having committed their lives to Christ, they are followed up and encouraged to come to Bible study. Students on this level are also more ready for serious corporate worship. There is no need for a fun activity to attract a crowd because these youth are already serious about their walk with Christ. Bible study groups should be small enough for serious inquiry into spiritual matters and encouragement of interaction. This event can be on Sunday morning or possibly at another time. Singaporean youth workers should evaluate their programs and determine when the best time is for serious Bible study to occur. If it is not on Sunday morning, then they should look for another time during the week.

**Level 4.** The fourth level is reserved for students who are involved in some type of leadership function. They would make a formal commitment to a particular ministry in the church and agree to a code of conduct to which they would be held accountable. Adams says that, "Such items for consideration would be faithfully attending church, tithing, observing church leadership standards, and generally

demonstrating Christian character at home, at school, at work, and every facet of life.”<sup>49</sup> Leadership ministries could include the worship band, drama team, being an usher, or anything else that gives them a visible place in front of the youth group. One commitment that all would make is to attend a regular meeting, or a level four event, in order to practice for or plan their particular leadership responsibility.

**Level 5.** The final level of programming is leadership development. It is here that the youth minister should make it a point to meet regularly with anyone who is in charge of other students in a level four role. Adams writes, “Those who attend this function have a supervisory role over people. They are placed in such leadership roles because they have earned it and everyone realizes it.”<sup>50</sup> For example, if a student is in charge of ushering, they would have a supervisory role over the other students on the usher team. Also, adults who teach small group Bible studies or have other leadership roles over students will need to be met with regularly for training and to discuss issues related to their specific ministries. With intentional focus on this level of ministry, the youth minister can be assured that they are consistently developing leaders who are reproducing their lives into others.

### **Frequency and Follow-up**

These five levels of programming represent a basic overview of YMI’s informal youth ministry training. The proposed strategy is to teach segments of this plan once a week for four consecutive weeks. The cross-cultural trainer will give specific homework to each youth worker regarding practical implementation of the programming strategy. For example, they may be instructed to begin planning a level one outreach event in order to build relationships with lost youth in their community.

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

In order for the training seminar to be most effective, the cross-cultural trainer should only teach those with whom he can stay in close contact afterwards. Because of the brief and less than ideal nature of informal training, roadblocks to implementing a comprehensive youth ministry program are likely. They will need assistance and encouragement to continue their efforts. It is during this period that the cross-cultural trainer enters a “consultant phase” and will serve as a mentor and guide as youth workers deal with problems in ministry. The cross-cultural youth ministry trainer should not spread himself thin and give the training to too many youth workers spread out over a large area. If he does, the credibility of the training will soon come into question as youth workers run into difficulties and, given no support, abandon their plans and conclude that comprehensive youth ministry programming is not possible.

### **Specialty Seminars**

After the original training and entering the consultant phase of ministry, the cross-cultural youth ministry trainer should occasionally offer specialty seminars dealing with specific issues of youth ministry and adolescence. Such seminars could include advice on counseling adolescents, information regarding Singaporean youth culture, an in-depth study of relevant Sunday School curriculum, tips on recruiting and training volunteer youth workers, how to run an effective retreat, communicating with adolescents, youth and family ministry, and youth missions trips. Topics should be chosen based on the primary needs of Singaporean Baptist youth workers.

Informal youth ministry training will be a continual necessity. There will always be unpaid youth leaders who have not had the opportunity to train in a formal setting. Furthermore, these training sessions are also greatly beneficial to volunteer youth workers who are working under a paid youth minister. They will be effective and necessary for both facilitating relationships and encouraging longevity among youth workers in the Singapore Baptist Convention.

## CHAPTER 8

### PROPOSAL FOR FORMAL YOUTH MINISTRY TRAINING FOR SINGAPOREAN BAPTISTS

#### **Justifications for Formal Training**

Despite the great importance of informal training, it is currently insufficient to meet the needs of Singaporean youth ministry. Therefore, I am proposing an undergraduate degree in youth ministry at BTS Singapore. Besides the obvious advantages of a general theological education, there are several reasons for the necessity of formal training. Many of these reasons revolve around the need for deployment of greater resources into youth ministry. Specifically, I am arguing that many Singaporean Baptist churches possess the money to hire either part-time or full-time paid youth ministers, and their youth ministries will continue to suffer if they do not take such action.

Singaporean adults are extremely busy people who are trying hard to keep up with long hours of work and family responsibilities. Because almost all Singaporean youth workers serve on a volunteer basis, their time to pour into the ministry is severely limited. As a result, it is common for workers to be trained informally, become involved in ministry, then experience burnout and leave the work to someone else. The responsibilities of coordinating events, training other lay workers, discipling and evangelizing, counseling, and leading in other ways quickly becomes too much for an already stressed professional urban worker.

One of the main reasons pastors and churches are not hiring paid youth workers is because they do not believe there are fully trained Singaporeans who qualify

for such positions. This is why the one current full-time youth ministry position at International Baptist Church continues to hire Americans on a two year contract. To confirm this, I sent an e-mail out to Singaporean Baptist pastors asking the question, “If you perceived that you had a trained and qualified Singaporean candidate, would you hire them as either a part-time or full-time paid youth minister?” All ten respondents affirmed that they would.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the current challenge to making a significant impact on Baptist Singaporean youth ministry is to generate the perception that it is a legitimate profession worthy of deployment of serious resources.

There is nothing in the highly specialized and educated nation of Singapore that creates the perception of professionalism like the possession of a degree. They place a high value on education and it is difficult for anyone to succeed in their world without a formal education in their respective profession. A specialized youth ministry degree would go a long way toward granting Singaporean youth workers the perception of professionalism necessary for a church body to financially commit to them. Gerald Lim, a volunteer youth worker, writes, “Anyone with a youth degree would stand a chance to be hired full-time.”<sup>2</sup> Pastor David Teo Boon Way writes, “In a high literacy society like Singapore, the attainment of a degree in Youth Ministry is definitely a prerequisite for employment or engagement in most churches for newcomers.”<sup>3</sup> While Baptist pastors insist that practical experience and one’s personal maturity in Christ are primary, there is no doubt that a degree in youth ministry would greatly affect the church’s desire to commit resources toward hiring a qualified candidate.

The final justification for creating a youth ministry degree program is simply the fact that greater depth of training content would simply help students to be more

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<sup>1</sup>I conducted the e-mail survey of Baptist Singaporean pastors at the end of 2003 and have received some responses as recently as January 2004.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

prepared and competent. Competence translates into effectiveness which, in turn, translates into perseverance for the difficulty of the youth ministry task.

A possible objection to the creation of an ongoing training program at BTS Singapore might be the fact that there are only about thirty Baptist churches in Singapore. Even if all thirty churches eventually hired paid youth workers, there could be the prospect of youth majors finishing a degree with nowhere to work in their own country. There are several reasons this should not be a deterrent. First of all, effective youth ministry produces effective church leaders. As youth ministers encourage their students to have a vision for missions, church planters will be called out and equipped for ministry. As new churches are planted, new youth ministry positions will be necessary. Even if students graduate with no immediate prospects in Singaporean Baptist churches, there would be the possibility of either Baptist churches in Malaysia or in churches of other denominations. Finally, it must be taken into consideration that there is no formal youth ministry training program in Singapore. Even the largest seminary on the island, Singapore Bible College, does not have a youth ministry major. This specialization of ministry would undoubtedly attract students from other denominations to come to BTS Singapore and train.

### **Structure of Formal Youth Ministry Training**

The proposal for formal youth ministry training in Singapore is a partnership between BTS Singapore and YMI. Because the president and vice-president of YMI are both professors involved with the National Center for Youth Ministry at Boyce College in Louisville, Kentucky, their official certification would add to the legitimacy of the educational endeavor. I have met with the leadership of BTS Singapore, and they greatly desire such a program and partnership with YMI. This partnership would allow formal cross-cultural youth ministry training to occur without the purchase of new facilities that would necessitate maintenance and resources by the national church. The only expenses

would be eventual hiring of a future indigenous professor of youth ministry and the general expenses that go along with the creation of a new major.

**Internships.** Students who enroll as youth ministry majors would not simply take various classes on youth ministry, but they would be required to be actively involved in a local church serving under the direction of the local youth minister. Only churches applying and qualifying for this opportunity would be the official approved sites for whom the youth majors would serve. The youth minister would oversee their particular assigned ministry and hold them accountable for their service. Each semester the student would earn a half hour of credit for their service in the approved site. The requirement of constant involvement in youth ministry would help to decrease the issues that arise when someone is competent in schoolwork and yet does not actually work well with people. Accountability through evaluation of internships will ensure that the youth major not only teaches youth ministry, but that the professor and approved site youth minister are also actively training students for practical ministry.

### **Curriculum for Formal Youth Ministry Training**

The development of curriculum for a youth ministry major will be a continual work in progress for the first few years. Lack of indigenous youth ministry texts would necessitate an early reliance on books in English containing sufficient cross-cultural principles to be relevant. YMI is currently the only youth missions organization that is offering formal cross-cultural youth ministry training. They recently began majors at Baptist seminaries in Ukraine and Kenya. The proposed curriculum for Singapore will be modeled after these two schools and will have the advantage of lessons learned over the next couple of years.

While BTS Singapore does have classes in Mandarin, they also have a significant portion of their classes in an English track. The early youth ministry classes will all be conducted in English until the translation of relevant materials, the writing of

new materials by Singaporeans, and a national is trained to take over the program. The classes required for a youth major are listed and explained below.

### **YM 101 Principles of Youth Ministry**

*Principles of Youth Ministry* will be an introductory class for those entering the youth ministry curriculum. Participation will be open to other majors, and they will be encouraged to enroll. The main purpose of the course is to introduce the students to the basic principles necessary for effective programming in youth ministry. It will include a brief history of student ministry as well as a survey of effective Singaporean church-based and parachurch student ministries. They will learn the five levels taught in the informal seminar and spend a considerable amount of time learning how to apply those principles to their particular cultural context.

*Principles of Youth Ministry* will also include a study on basic adolescent age characteristics of youth in general and Singaporean youth specifically. The rationale for this class is the same as the informal training seminar. Youth ministers who are not grounded in a basic philosophy of youth ministry will tend to program events that meet the purposes for which they are most inclined to lead. The result is a lack of balance and direction in the youth ministry program.

### **YM 102 Youth Culture**

In this class, the basic characteristics of adolescent culture will be examined and observed. Students will learn the global forces that are currently shaping youth culture internationally and observe how those factors are combining with indigenous culture to shape the environment of Singaporean youth. Students will be introduced to the anthropological principles behind the use of people groups as a means of understanding and targeting youth in their various subcultures. Sociological principles will also be taught as a means of understanding the macrostructure in which adolescents

live.

### **YM 202 Programs in Youth Ministry**

This class will build upon the foundation of programming principles taught in *Principles of Youth Ministry*. The student will learn administration and management skills for the total ministry to youth. Outreach and teaching strategies designed for youth and their families will be explored. The recruiting, training, and organization of a lay teaching staff will be included. The students will learn how to plan an annual calendar of events and how to plan and implement the corresponding budget for which they will be responsible.

### **YM 203 Foundations of Youth Ministry**

This class is designed specifically for the development of the small group Bible studies of the youth ministry. It will introduce the student to the variety of Sunday School curricula and teaching aids available. They will be exposed to the large amount of available English resources and Mandarin resources as well. They will learn how to plan a long range scope and sequence of learning goals for the youth from the time of entrance into the youth ministry until they transition into the adult ministry of the church. They will learn skills necessary to be an effective teacher of the Word of God and how to train others to have those same skills.

### **YM 223 Contemporary Communication to Adolescents**

This class will equip the youth ministry student with the general skills necessary to communicate to adolescents. It will build upon the foundation of teaching skills in *Foundations of Youth Ministry* and enable them to speak in large group settings as well. Students will learn the skills of sermon preparation, teaching strategies, and general speaking qualifications designed to be both biblically appropriate and culturally relevant.

### **YM 331 Counseling Youth**

As discussed in chapter 4, Singaporean youth are not conspicuous for their social problems. However, all youth are going through a very significant and transformative period of their lives. This class will examine the typical conflicts that Singaporean youth experience, such as stress related to studies and difficulties in family relationships. Also, it will discuss the more extreme problems occasionally experienced among Singaporean youth such as intimate relationships ending in suicide attempts. It will also equip the student with counseling skills necessary to meet the unique needs of Singaporean youth. The student will be introduced to basic psychological approaches to understanding youth development and grounded in a biblical philosophy and worldview for counseling. The student will learn conflict resolution skills and how to be a counseling resource for youth and their families.

### **YM 347 Discipleship in Youth Ministry**

This class will focus on the characteristics of the faithful disciple and how to instill the spiritual disciplines necessary for youth to experience a deeper walk with Christ. It will explore principles and methods of spiritual maturation in their environmental, cultural, and developmental context. It will move beyond the scope of small group ministries into different models of discipleship and mentoring of students. Students will learn mentorship strategies and programs of the Singapore National Youth Council and learn to extract from them those methods that are effective and biblically sound.

### **YM 350 Campus Outreach**

The focus of this course will be learning how to initiate a ministry on local campuses. Special attention will be given to evangelism strategies, how to develop relationships on campus, and working with school officials and legal issues. Students will learn how to develop student Bible studies off of the church grounds and how to

incorporate new believers into the local church. Baptist churches in Singapore have a small percentage of youth past secondary school involved in their youth programs.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, special attention will be given to ministry on university campuses. An overview of the campus ministries of various parachurch organizations in Singapore will be included.

#### **YM 448 Contemporary Youth Missions**

This class will introduce students to basic missiological principles, equip them to implement missions programs within the local church, and teach them to give students a vision for church planting and international missions. The class will include actual involvement in a short-term mission trip. Students will be taught how to plan and implement short-term mission trips for their local church and youth ministry. Students will learn the philosophies of indigenous church planting as well as the IMB's focus on church planting movements. They will also be taught how to be a cross-cultural youth ministry trainer.

#### **YM 451 Youth and Family Ministry**

This course will be designed to examine the adolescent within the context of their family dynamic and to explore strategies of reaching the entire family. Students will be exposed to experienced youth workers who can provide insight into the Singaporean family dynamic. Students will be trained to consider the needs and concerns of parents and to be a resource for them. The course will explore both the traditional home and the emerging non-traditional families in Singapore. Special attention will be given to evangelism and discipleship with students whose parents hold strongly to another faith.

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<sup>4</sup>Leonard Heng, Local Missions Coordinator of the Singapore Baptist Convention, conducted a study on Baptist youth ministries in 2003 which revealed that teens form the majority of seventy-five percent of all youth ministries. This is significant when reminded that youth are considered to be ages 15 to 29.

### **Maintenance of Formal Training Program**

The selection of texts and other teaching materials for these classes will be a collaborative process between the youth professor, BTS Singapore, the youth representative of the Singapore Baptist Convention, and local youth ministers who have been serving local churches for several years. The creation of new texts and teaching materials should be an immediate goal and a continual process. In order for the overall program to stay relevant and effective, it should be evaluated annually by all of the latter representatives.

## CHAPTER 9

### CONCLUSION

The city-state of Singapore has been quite a success story in many ways. The burgeoning economic growth and stability of the government have enabled national security and a high standard of living. Today's young Singaporeans have grown up in a country where they have the luxury of possessing goals oriented toward self-actualization instead of survival. Furthermore, the growth of Christianity has been very encouraging over the last half century. The spread of the gospel among English-speaking Chinese in Singapore has been one of the evangelical highlights of Asia.

While other denominations have experienced a high rate of numerical growth, the rate of growth among Baptists has been significantly lower. As we have seen, the situation among Baptist youth is serious. Baptist churches have the dual challenge of both reaching lost youth and transferring spiritual values to their own youth in the midst of a materialistic and westernizing society.

Macrolevel changes occurring on an international scale are seriously changing the lives of youth. These factors are combining to create global youth cultures possessing great similarities. These characteristics combined with the indigenous culture of Singapore to create a unique youth culture distinct from the adults. A cross-cultural approach to youth ministry, therefore, is necessary in order to reach them.

The need is not going to be met by either the current approach of the Baptist churches nor by the West sending more youth ministers. Indigenous youth ministers must be trained and reproducible systems of training more youth ministers must be implemented. Both informal training and formal training approaches are necessary to fulfill the current needs. Informal training is necessary because some churches may

never have the funds to hire a paid youth worker. Youth leaders in these situations are generally desperate for some type of training to give them direction for this difficult task. The churches that possess the resources will need to place a high priority on youth ministry and pay a youth minister in order to give them sufficient time to lead their ministry to its full potential. As we have seen, pastors have been reluctant to hire paid youth ministers because of the lack of qualified applicants. Formal training will equip youth ministers to fulfill the needs in a professional manner and help to create the impression among pastors and churches that graduates are qualified and deserving of being paid staff members.

Youth are the most receptive sector of the population to the gospel. They are also receptive to many other messages. While Singaporean Baptist churches are in a waiting phase for the implementation of serious training programs, international corporations are spending billions in order to reach youth with their ads and products. Both Hollywood and local entertainment industries are spending resources to create movies and television programs that are influencing Singaporean youth. Should the church mobilize to meet this need, they will not only reach a ripe harvest of souls, but they will also make an eternal investment in both local and global missions and evangelism.

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## ABSTRACT

### A PROPOSED STRATEGY FOR TRAINING INDIGENOUS YOUTH MINISTERS IN BAPTIST CHURCHES IN SINGAPORE

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This dissertation proposes a strategy for training indigenous youth ministers in Singapore as a means to reach and disciple Singaporean youth. Chapter 1 defines the problem of Singaporean Baptist youth ministry and argues that current needs could be met by training indigenous youth ministers.

Chapter 2 provides the historical and cultural background of Singapore. The characteristics of the church in general, as well as the Baptist church specifically, are explored. Chapter 3 analyzes the major global changes currently directing the shape of youth cultures worldwide. I assert that, in the same way that Singaporean youth are greatly influenced by the practices and lifestyles of the indigenous adults, they are also affected by ubiquitous global forces.

Chapter 4 is entirely focused on youth culture in the Singaporean context. Singaporean youth culture is compared and contrasted with characteristics of both global youth culture and indigenous adult culture. Chapter 5 explores the history of youth ministry in Singapore. There is consideration of both church-based and parachurch youth ministries. The Baptist church's missed opportunities to reach out to youth and their current desire to take the necessary steps for student evangelism are highlighted.

Chapter 6 proposes the missiological principles necessary for the justification of a cross-cultural youth ministry training program. Subjects discussed include the use of

buildings, the strategy of multiplication, problems of dependence upon foreign leadership, and the importance of implementing a cross-cultural approach to reach youth.

Chapter 7 proposes specific strategies to train indigenous youth ministers in Singapore on an informal basis. After the strategies of Youth Ministry International and Sonlife are examined, specific methods of informal training through the Singapore Baptist Convention are discussed.

In chapter 8, I present a model of formal training that could be established at the Baptist Theological Seminary of Singapore. The model includes mandatory internships and a list of classes necessary to make up an undergraduate youth ministry major. Chapter 9 contains the conclusion of the dissertation.

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