In *Blur* Keuss delivers a text consistent with what was promised in the introduction. Most chapters and points are consistently presented and rest on clearly articulated theological foundations. He reviews what he believes to be the weaknesses of traditional youth ministry, especially considering the impermanent culture(s) of today. He identifies how youth are misunderstood and want to be understood, relying on past and present research/interviews for support and illustration. Lastly, Keuss provides many instructions to those in youth ministry as to how the church and para-church can reach youth more effectively today. Summarily, he suggests that youth workers should work less and simply “be faithful, relax, and love” (p.19).

*Blur*’s nine chapters flow into one another smoothly, organized by the blurring of: definitions (1), culture (2), faith (3 & 4), youth (5), the self (6), books (7), images (8), and sound (9). All chapters center on two primary assertions, that youth are sacred and mobile, and the main theme, distinguishing between weaknesses of traditional ministry and the strengths of the recommended new paradigm. Chapter 5 discusses the idea of sacred mobility thoroughly.

Youth are sacred because they are created in God’s image (p.10). They’re mobile because they “live in a complex, ever-shifting, ever-morphing world with multiple cultures” (p.185). Keuss believes this provides today’s teenager with opportunities for depth of life that those in previous generations did not have. Because many in ministry see the state of today’s culture negatively, according to Keuss, there is a “growing chasm between the perceptions of who teenagers are and who they really are” (p.24), and that “more than ever” it’s important for youth workers “to humbly acknowledge and actively support alternatives to traditional youth ministries” (p.23).
He contends that those who utilize a traditional ministry model [i.e. those who focus on program and numeric growth (p.15); serve youth by emphasizing restriction and social control (p.91); categorize youth and limit their capacity for change (pp. 11, 18); operate in fear and panic (p.14); advocate Christian privilege and idealize Christian orthodoxy (p.63); suggest any separation from culture (p.187); detachedly teach with reasoned ethical constructs (pp. 11); and magnify the importance of religious literacy (p.31) and certitude (p.109)] cannot be effective. They neglect the potential and very relevant “power of the narrative process” (p.128), what should be a mutual “Imago Dei” journey (pp.92-93, 121).

Conversely, Keuss offers many suggestions for how youth-workers can join youth on their journeys and help them to reconcile themselves with the world. Firstly, the church must rethink what constitutes deep and vibrant faith and what it considers to be orthodox beliefs, while youth must be allowed to develop faith as a work in progress. Youth-workers need to learn to listen, trust the Lord, and relax. Their ministries should provoke youth to take steps of risk and encourage them to express selfhood. Youth-workers have to stop treating the blurriness of life as a problem and radically embrace the blurred identities of the youth. To help with this process, youth workers need to read young adult books, listen to non-Christian music, and watch videos that call “for a new level of transcendence” (p.185). Youth leaders should also share what “we think we know” (p.123) of God as we abandon the idea of keeping the church separate from the culture and let the youth drive the conversations. Youth leaders should choose a form of faith which allows for “cohabitation” with others as they “get personal” with adolescents (p.188).

This text has several strengths. Keuss thinks deeply, offers informed perspectives, and argues well. While appealing to many theologians, such as Barth, Bonhoeffer, and Brueggemann, the essence of his arguments suggests that the most influential philosopher/theologian on Keuss was Derrida. He thoroughly and provocatively argues “why” youth ministry approaches in the 21st century have to change [e.g. his discussion regarding “shema”- the Scriptural call for an intergenerational journey
His research and accompanying observations greatly emphasize the importance of listening in ministry and contribute to a better understanding of today’s teenager [e.g. illustrated with discussion regarding the “divine spark”, the “deep speaking to the deep”, and “the gentle whisper” (p. 121f)]. Lastly, Keuss offers optimistic perspective relative to the delicacy of ministry in an evanescent cultural climate [e.g. “God moves faster and more profoundly than the accelerated culture” (p.145) and (youth today have a far greater opportunity for depth of being than those of other eras)].

The text also has some weaknesses. Keuss recommends a “new paradigm” which implies that he believes that the traditional approach to youth ministry remains preponderant today. In reality, he advances an argument for a ministry approach that is not new; similar ideas have been presented and practiced in many youth ministries for the last several decades. His ideas reflect those previously presented by Larson and Osbourne in The Emerging Church (1970) and Metz in The Emergent Church (1981). In fact, some of his ideas (e.g. one’s identity relating to the reconstruction of memories, pp.116-118) suggest Keuss’ own keen awareness of Metz’s work. The essence of what Keuss offers has already been popularized by Tony Jones, see Post-modern Youth Ministry (2001) (among others) - almost fifteen years ago. Other texts discussing these notions include Mike King’s Presence-Centered Youth Ministry (2006) and Dan Kimball’s, The Emerging Church (2009). Readers interested in Blur, should enjoy these slightly older texts as well.

Another weakness of the text seems to be several inconsistencies between what Keuss endorses/criticizes and practices. Keuss’ believes that “fixed definitions rarely- if ever- allow for the eclectic and mysterious experiences of God”(p.62), while providing many specific and personally crafted definitions (e.g. sacredly mobile, reconciliation, the life poetic, etc.) in explaining God and the work that He desires from the church. Keuss discourages the traditional church’s penchant for categorization, yet categorizes (labels) all traditional ministry relative only to those who have done it incompetently. No one
in any era has done ministry perfectly, and just because some have failed with an approach, this does not mean that the approach is wrong.

Also, much of what is stated in Keuss’ depiction of a “new paradigm” describes what many caring and careful traditional youth leaders have been doing for many years (listening to youth, trusting the Lord, encouraging spiritual risk, reading YA novels). Admittedly, there is also much in the “new paradigm” that many “traditional” churches would never do (rethink orthodox beliefs or abandon the admonition of 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 to separate in some ways from the world). In stating his Biblical position, he also curiously avoids contrary Old Testament and Pauline teaching completely.

Practitioners and those doing research will benefit by reading Keuss’ book. Those who agree with Keuss (and Jones, etc.) will find that he fills in cracks of some previous work. Those who disagree with Keuss will nevertheless find his arguments well thought out, explained, informative, and intellectually challenging. After reading the text, many workers may feel freer to immediately apply his encouragement to “just relax” and “trust that the pace of transitions is not too fast for God”. Researchers will find that Keuss’ text provides a rich mine field of concepts (“traditional youth-ministry”, “morphing world”, “religious literacy”, “religious certitude”, “Imago Dei journey”, and “mobile youth”) needing clarified definitions. Additionally, they should consider perspectives and concepts needing further academic exploration relative to type of ministry and real or imagined correlations to successes and failures in the “chasm between perceptions and reality of who youth are”, “listening”, “encouraging spiritual-risk-taking”, etc.

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