

# Exploring How Globalization and Migration Have Impacted the Transformation of Religious Practices among the Youth in Singapore

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**Abstract-** Youth expect religion to create meaning in life. These expectations play a significant role in practised religion and significant changes in the religious landscape. Participation in places of worship continues to decline. Organised religion might be facing a shifting landscape but this does not mean people are shunning religion. The interactions between religious institutions and an individuals' perspectives of religion are investigated to reveal the transformation of religious practices in Singapore, from the lens of globalization and migration. Kierkegaard's Theory of Existentialism is used along with non-probability purposive sampling with an objective to explore how globalisation has affected religious practices of Christian youth in Singapore and to investigate how migration has affected religious practices among Christian youth in Singapore. The key informants are six young Singaporean Christian adults between 25 and 30. Qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews, open-ended questions, in-depth interviews and thematic analysis is used.

**Index Terms-** Religion practices, participation, transformation, globalization, migration

## I. INTRODUCTION

The presence of a large migrant population in Singapore makes Singapore a religious marketplace. There are canonical world religions and animistic traditions followed. In fact in the last 20 years there has been a resurgence of religion and religion has returned to public life in a way that challenges traditional forms of secularization (Herbert, 2011). Christianity is also seen as a religion associated with 'outside' or 'Western' cultural influences. This positioning obliges Christianity in Singapore to constantly rationalize and adapt its processes on two fronts, simultaneously to locate itself within the nation as a rooted aspect of the national community, and also to capitalize on its global networks and its affinities to capitalist modernity. In this sense, it constantly has to undergo a 'flexible' positioning, creating or at least appearing to create a "modernity without deracination" (Ong, 1999, p. 52).

There are several ways to look at the human phenomenon of religion. This stems from the fact that religion being a phenomenon in itself can be examined on its own terms. The emergence of material plenty has generated transformational changes in economic life, social structure, culture, and politics. There is also the influence of capitalism on a large scale. The modernization and globalization processes are also significant factors influencing the evolution of religion in

Singapore. The ability to translate holy writings into common, non-academic language gave people the power to influence religion. By incorporating holy books into daily life, people are able to create and organize religion.

Religion has been a central part of the life of a person. Adaptations and modifications in religion became necessary because of the social, cultural, economic and political milieu in the Singaporean society. The purpose of socioeconomic development as a part of modernisation is to improve quality of life of an individual. This makes the institution of religion no longer very important in lives of people and younger people have more liberal viewpoints than older generations do. The part played by religion in the lives of people and their interaction in society and in geopolitics as well cannot be fully understood without the other perspectives being brought in.

### Background to the Study

Singapore, a small nation with a complex ethnic and religious composition is home to most of the world's major religions. There are several other religions, including Sikhism, Soka Gakkai, Sathya Sai Baba, Bahai, etc. sharing the same social space. The Singapore Department of Statistics compiles statistics on religion using information gathered from the General Household Survey and Census Population (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2021). Senior Assistant Director (Community Relations) Norhazlina Yusop at the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) has affirmed the

reluctance to talk about religion in Singapore (Masramli, 2018).

In 2020 a census was done of 150,000 households of the population of Singapore. The focus of this survey of June 16, 2021 was mainly the resident population (citizens and permanent residents) (Chiang, 2021). A comparison of the data of 2020 data with the census done previously in 2010, reflects a very marginal rise from 18.3% to 18.9% (+0.6%) in the number of Singapore residents aged 15 years and above. The proportion of people raised with “no religion” was 13%, but 22% of the respondents currently have “no faith” (Tham, 2023). The Pew survey reflected trends in Singapore’s 2020 census, which found a growing proportion of residents who have “no religion” (Department of Statistics, DOS, Singapore, 2020). But Pew also found that those who “do not have a religion” did not completely disavow religious or spiritual beliefs and practices (Pew Research Centre, 2023).

Today the youth in Singapore are exposed to a variety of morally contradictory ideologies, such as mass consumerism, market capitalism and its emphasis on self-gratification or disdain for authority. They have emotional conflicts, question faith, lack spiritual experience and are unsatisfied with responses from church leaders (Mathews et al., 2019). They are not prepared to accept a definite creed which involves a large number of statements of belief about which they are not sure. Many young people’s views on what comprises a family unit are no longer defined by Asian societal norms (Koh, 2023). Others are so influenced by the prevailing secular culture that religion seems to have lost its relevance. Still others are so disappointed with organised religion that they decide to sever ties with their churches.

By building a relationship with God one believes that this will give the comfort and hope that things will get better. According to Huber (2023) hope plays an important role in preventing demoralization when the prospects of success are dim. People find comfort and ease in religion when they experience hopelessness and despondency. In 2019, The Connected Generation project surveyed more than 15,000 young people aged between 18 and 35 years old across 25 countries and nine languages which included online interviews with 500 respondents who were quota-sampled for representation in Singapore (Ng, 2021). About two-thirds of the Singaporean Christian youth feel that hope is more relevant in hard times of life (Ng, 2019). With this feeling of hope the youth expects religion to create meaning in his life. The expectations of people play an important part in the way people experience organized religion. Hope, as a form of expectation, is an attitude towards the possible. Being young they always look with expectation to the future.

Further, in reality today people are moving to different places to work and religious practice of the past is difficult to follow.

The world has become a smaller place because of globalization. 74% of Singaporeans would relocate for work to be a part of a larger team and to have more access to resources considered appealing to the local workforce (Ranstad Press Release, 2019). The world is shrinking and becoming more globalized and interconnected. Further media and other means of communication play a crucial role in keeping the Christian faith alive for the Christian youth today (McGrath, 2020; Newport, 2020). The internet has recreated an expanded public sphere by allowing more religious individuals to access religious materials online. As a result of the process of secularization, traditional culture and religion is replaced by rational and modern thoughts and a decrease in the dependence on religion. However, no study so far in Singapore directly uncovers the most recent trends of globalization and migration and understanding the social implications of this transformation. Hence, this study attempts to uncover this relation by using data in Singapore. As religion changes, it inevitably accompanies other social changes.

### Research Objectives

The two research objectives in this study are as follows.

- To explore how globalisation has affected religious practices of Christian youth in Singapore.
- To investigate how migration has affected religious practices among Christian youth in Singapore.

### Research Questions

To fulfil the purpose of this study, two research questions were developed as seen below.

- To what extent has globalisation affected religious practices of Christian youth in Singapore?
- How has migration affected religious practices among Christian youth in Singapore?

### Significance of the Study

The findings of this study might inform church strategies and social policy, particularly in managing global religious diversity and youth engagement. Youth can seek satisfaction and well-being by participating in spiritual workshops. These innovative ways promote interaction, engagement and enjoyment to experience God. Encouraging the youth to voice their feelings towards the church will help the church understand their perspectives through their lens. The youth should be given a sense of ownership in the mission and vision of the church. True community helps to draw people towards it.

The two fundamental aspects of this sociological study of the transformation of religious practices: globalization and migration will be discussed using the theory of Existentialism (Kierkegaard, 1959). “Existentialism denies the validity of supposedly overarching, objective, or pre-existing structures that might lend meaning to human experience” (Krishnan, 2020, p.44).

### Operational Definition of Terms

Youth in Singapore, “are defined as aged 15-35 years old by Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth” (MCCY, 2021). Globalization can be defined as a process where cultural and social relationships transcend the boundaries of a territory and is limited to state actors of that country. In this globalized world people in different locations can experience the religious events simultaneously through information media. Migration refers to youth migration for economic reasons. Impact is seen in the way youth practice the organized faith.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The past studies are being reviewed looking at Globalization and migration.

Globalization and migration have affected religious practices. The growing interrelationship between the different facets of society viz. economic, political, cultural and technological is a phenomenon that emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century. As people move from one place to another globalization of religion takes place. Their practices, beliefs, values are seen in various spheres (Kong, 2018). In this process of religious globalization, the individual moving to the new country is required to adapt to the faith and culture of the new territory as well as share his own. By sharing and adapting the culture and religion the migrant’s personal views on religion get delocalized since it is now not the characteristics of just one territory (Kramer & Tong, 2024). This cosmopolitan religious globalization aims to minimize the power disparities between the new culture the individual has immigrated to and the home culture. Dialogues take place between the two religions as the youth acknowledges the new culture of the area where the youth has moved to for economic or other reasons (Koh, 2024). In this new area, new religious and cultural communities are formed by the individual. These religious communities serve as support networks fostering unity among the participants.

Migration causes changes in religious beliefs and also the changes in the person migrating. Though there may be disparities in culture, the practices of migrants may also be adopted by the people residing in these areas if these practices can be used in the realization of one’s goals (Zhang et al., 2023). In this context it can be referred that Christianity was adopted by some of the Chinese residents in Hong Kong as the Chinese culture was not able to provide them with the salvation they were looking for (Pluss, 1999). Others aspiring to attain admission in a university in the United States of America turned to Christianity. As a result, the religious characteristics of these migrants become transnational giving rise to cultural hybridization.

When accepting changes in their beliefs, adherents of a faith must be conscious of their psychological well-being and avoid

existential anxiety. One’s original religion might get dissolved if the new culture is strongly adapted (Golebiewski, 2014). What is implied here is that globalization is an economic process but it can have implications which are social and religious. While globalization causes religious tolerance it can also disrupt traditional communities, causes economic marginalization, and bring religions into conflict reinforcing their specific identities.

In fact secularization in modern times has made the influence of the church secondary resulting in belonging and practicing a religion experiencing a steep descent. Belief in God and service attendance has dropped in many countries in the world (Nordin & Otterbeck, 2023). In today’s world some churches have experienced a decline in followers potentially due to the merging of groups and a decrease in their numbers. At the same time very small faith groups like the Druze or Zoroastrians co-exist with Happy Science which are new religious movements and sects thus creating networks around the world (Nordin & Otterbeck, 2023).

In fulfilling the goals of commercialization, globalization universalizes culture. Young people engage with globalization in a way where the boundaries of identity are lost which gives them the chance to feel a sense of belonging. These changes are seen as part of the secularization processes in the sociology of religion and are closely related with modernization.

In the workplace, identities may be related to the careers or occupations a person does or to the teams and organizations the youth belongs to (Miscenko & Day, 2016). Personal life, social status and role behaviour gets meaning and structure from occupational identity whereas affiliation with a religious group gives an individual religious identity. The beliefs, values, and practices of that group make up the religious identity of the person (Héliot et al., 2020). This is critical of the sentiments of globalization (Mercier, 2022; Ramos, 2018; Awan, 2016). Today, global realities shape the perspectives of the individual in this growing globalized world. The life of the youth is challenged and undergoes change as globalization tends to detach social practices and cultural formations from localized territories.

Modernization brings with it revolutionary and radical changes. Traditional institutions and beliefs are challenged by reason and science. Modernization encourages secularism, creativity, freedom and autonomy of the individual and promotes tolerance. Religion loses its impact at the individual, institutional and societal level with secularization (Flatt, 2023). Although secularization is a common development principle in modern societies, it doesn't mean religion is completely removed from society. With education becoming secular and religious teachings no longer being enforced in schools more youth are turning away from churches (Song,

2019). Religion moves from the public sphere to the private sphere as this process of identity formation and radical empowerment of the individual occurs.

With economic development comes stability of social institutions and structures. When the expectations of people are met by other social institutions and the comforts in daily life are satisfied the religious behaviours of the members of the society changes. The Singaporean society has long been modernized. The rapidity and speed of modernization in Singapore is significant. Most sociologists would be of the opinion that religion would be impacted by the development of the economy in the country (Barro & McCleary, 2003; Korman, 2015). With economy being developed the people have economic security. Stability in the society no longer makes individuals prone to concerns about material survival (Inglehart, 1977). Modernization brings with it secularization but pushes religion to the periphery.

A recent census of the population indicated that Singapore is a multi-religious society with most Singaporeans belonging to a religion that is formal and organized (Office of International Religious Freedom Report, 2022). The percentage of Singaporeans following Christianity has increased from 18.3% in 2010 to 18.9% in 2020 but participation in religious activities has declined (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2020). Thus industrialization and development in economy has not led to a decline in religion in the Singaporean society. Therefore, examining how religious practices are a regular activity in this officially secular state would be interesting.

Finally, Gutenberg's printing press made the family Bible available. The world wide web has provided free information to anyone who possesses a computer and the internet through a library which can be globally accessed (Firth et al., 2020). In the past a young person modelled their behaviour on those people who were in close proximity to them such as parents, teachers, pastors, and leaders in the community (Waldfoegel, 2017). Today there are many different options for behaviour to model through the technologies of music, movies, and television.

Technological advances have changed the world around us resulting in relational consumerism and an emphasis on self-expression where people are also generating new forms of religious expression.

Religious leaders can also use the internet to prepare their sermons, for diplomas or degrees in theology and help to connect people in their religious journey channelling people and facilitating interactions with believers, who have been geographically separated but share a similar faith conviction or spiritual (McCants, 2021). Today rituals are conducted online. We need not be physically present when it is being conducted.

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is based on the questionnaires from Centrality of Religiosity Scale CRS-2012 (Huber et Huber, 2012), British Social Attitudes Survey (Clements, 2017) and YouGov Survey (2020). The Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS) is a measure of the centrality, importance or noticeable religious meanings in an individual.

Qualitative approach which is a form of social inquiry that focuses on how people interpret and make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live is applied. The purpose of the qualitative study is to seek narrative evidence for the interplay between scientific and religious ideas as it relates to studying things in their natural settings and attempts to interpret phenomena and make sense of it in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Thematic analysis based on responses from the key participants is used for analysing the data.

#### Instrumentation

Semi-structured interview with open-ended questions will be used with sub-questions to narrow the focus of the study but leave open the questioning. Non-probability purposive sampling helps to select the respondents on purpose. The interview will be based on two factors: to what extent has globalisation affected religious practice and how has migration affected religious practice.

In the first phase the six participants who are Singaporeans Christian young adults (n=6) were interviewed separately and what is important for each of them as individuals is presented. Respondents are always asked identical questions and open-ended responses are encouraged. At the end of the interviews there will be another opportunity for triangulation when respondents are asked if there is anything else they want to add to the recordings.

In the second phase data is read and re-read, and transcribed. Initial ideas are noted down in an active way searching for meanings, findings in the form of patterns, themes or categories and so on.

In the third phase field notes are studied extensively to find themes. During this phase, the researcher makes sense of what is just uncovered and compiles the data into sections or groups of information, also known as themes or codes" (Naeem et al., 2023). These themes or codes are consistent phrases, expressions, or ideas that reflect the underlying meaning of the key informants' responses. To mitigate potential bias like observer bias, transcription, methodological triangulation of data (interview and audio recordings), and member checking are all procedures used to increase the credibility of qualitative studies.



Research ethics as detailed in British Educational Research Association is followed (BERA, 2018). Voluntary informed consent will be obtained at the start of the study, and participation information and consent will be made clear to the respondents that they can withdraw at any point without needing to provide an explanation.

To maintain anonymity the participants were given a code as follows - Abigail (Participant 1) a university graduate, Abel (Participant 2) a PhD doing theological online theological studies from an American University, Beth (Participant 3) a Postgraduate, Brian (Participant 4) a PhD, works in the Pastoral Council and a religious teacher, Clare (Participant 5) a Postgraduate and Maurice (Participant 6) a Postgraduate. The respondent is free to stop and question the researcher at any time, or not respond to individual questions or end the interview early.

The qualitative method was applied through face-to-face in-depth interviews with each of the participants under study. Data was analysed and narrated descriptively using the thematic approach. The usable data is quality data that is used as important and meaningful data in this study, while the non-usable data will not give any value to the study and therefore it will be discarded.

#### IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Having analysed the responses of the participants, it is surprising how many of the youth battle with the idea of attending church. The youth are at a crossroads on the importance of going to church. All key informants (n=6) had a well-defined view of what being religious means to them, how they expressed their religion and whether attending worship in a church was important to them or not. There were several commonalities among the participants for not going to church.

A range of open-ended questions were thrown open to address the research questions. Among them the following were some of the research questions.

- Q1. Is attending worship in a church important to you?
- Q2. How much confidence do you have in churches and religious organization?
- Q3. Have you noticed changes in your belief system since becoming an adult?
- Q4. How important is your religious faith to you? Did you become more religious, less religious, or you have stayed the same because of globalisation and migration?
- Q5. What is important to you - Staying in your own community or going to a religious community where your friends are?
- Q6. Why has globalisation and migration resulted in transnational communities?

- Q7. How has globalisation affected communal practice (service attendance), individual practice (prayer)?
- Q8. Do you think higher education has an impact on religion leading to a disconnect between faith and the real world?

The overall, analysis of the six interview transcripts of the participants (n=6) led to identification of overarching themes. These themes were populated both at semantic and latent level in order to understand the behaviour of the young adults regarding the transformation in religious practices.

##### Decline in Religious Participation

The first theme that developed from the data is decline in religious participation. Traditional religion is not felt relevant to these young people. This was evidenced from the responses.

##### Abigail: "Attending Places of Worship is Not Important."

Abel: "It is boring. Going to mass is optional". Being religious for me does not mean attending church worship."

Beth: "worship is kind of stuck in where they are and attending a mass is very structured, to go to the place, to follow the timing."

##### Clare: "It is a Little Bit More Rigid."

While all true believers abide in Christ and the church, the perspective of these youth differ. Two participants (n=2) expressed "low confidence" in the church.

All the six young adults asserted it was not necessary to attend organised religious practices and religion should not be a building where one has to go at a fixed time and place.

##### Interiorization of Belief

The second theme that emerged from the data was interiorization of beliefs. There were changes in their belief systems since becoming adults.

Abigail: "Religion and faith are very much tied to your actions of your daily life. Religious affiliation for me has changed over the years from when I was young. Because when you are young, a child, a lot of your religious beliefs and affiliations are very much influenced by family. Post-secondary school I started to turn more to God and pray more and go to the church. The closer I got the more I went into my religion, the more I changed as a person. Now it is a habit every day to always pray."

Abel: "I have noticed a change since becoming an adult because I want to go to church. I feel comforted when I'm at church. Sometimes the sermons can, really knock you in the head. Sometimes it is a good wake-up call."

**Beth:** “When I was younger, my beliefs were traditional. I went to church every Sunday, like a Sunday Catholic. Then as I grew up, I definitely changed because I find that you can have a more personal relationship with God. You don't necessarily have to go to mass every Sunday.”

**Brian:** “Things evolve overtime because certain life experience you meet along the way change the way you look at life and definitely as a person who are more religious or more of a person who want to seek God. You want to ask questions about whether what you believe is godliness.”

**Clare:** “Not so very much. Ever since I was young as a child, up until my teenage years, I very much believed in my own interpretation of the Bible and that very much used to be just you.”

**Maurice:** “as we age and mature, we start to understand the differences of things in life and how people share things. One very prominent change for me is not believing that going to church is the only way to worship, to be with God. God is everywhere and being individual and free to practice what I believe in, in my manner is one big change done. Prior to becoming an adult, I believed that congregational worship was the only way to go but now I believe in being a good person and believing in one God.”

Responses showed that science, religion, and reality have led to a reduction in the acceptance of traditional beliefs. Shifts have happened from being a child to teenager to becoming an adult which does not explain its apparent absence in conjunction with a named religion.

### World Interconnected

The third theme that came out of the responses was globalization has made the world interconnected. Responses from participants about their religious belief in the context of globalization and migration showed how religion is practiced in other parts of the world and how globalization and migration has definitely resulted in transnational communities, in communities practicing religion in a particular manner bringing more diversity.

**Abigail:** “I have become more religious because of globalisation, a wireless person. At least for me, it is to hear the mass in many different languages, so every single country that I have been to, it is always nice to hear the same mass being said in a different language.”

**Abel:** “I have become more religious because of globalisation. I am in a fellowship program and I think for us it's called Fraternity Meets. You have a fraternity, a group with people of the same or similar beliefs. And it's not organised faith. Globalisation makes things a lot easier. When I attend mass online, I specifically do not choose it from Singapore. I attend

a mass like Italy or Korea or China, because it's just interesting.”

**Beth:** “I became more religious because when you get the opportunity to travel and go overseas and go to a church over there, then you see faith that is beyond what you are familiar with, the same God you know. I think it is quite nice because you see God's presence in their lives as well.”

**Brian:** “I don't think migration has much influence on my beliefs. Religion is being shaped by practises.”

**Clare:** “My religious practices have stayed the same. However, in the practise of going to church every Saturday, I have become less religious. My religious beliefs have not diminished over the years. They have very much remained the same even though it is globalised because it has just given me more access to different Catholic communities around the world as well, like a strong Catholic community in Korea.”

More importantly faith is a personal belief as long people are believing in something that is good for the greater good. Responses show most respondents have become more religious because of globalization. There is a dislodge from traditional moorings and a lack of religious attendance but they have become more world interconnected and there are new opportunities to hear mass or pray.

### Passive Belonging to a Community

The fourth theme that emerged from the data revealed participants having a passive belonging to a community. Regarding communities the participants would like to stay in their own community. They are exposed to seeing other people practice the same religion as theirs but do not believe that being in a community actually helps them. This was a paradox of globalization because they are not looking for social identity but interiorization of their own choices.

**Abigail:** “I stay in my own community. I don't have any friends who are in any religious communities either. But I would like to go into other religious communities and know what it is like.”

**Abel:** “You try and find somebody who is of your religion and associate with them and feel comfortable. But I do not have any friends there.”

**Beth:** “I prefer to stay in my own community. But when I think about travelling and I think about seeing other people from different cultures and languages practising the same faith, it definitely strengthens my own faith because I also wonder about them, where did they come from? What do they do? They're so different but we believe in the same God.”

**Brian:** “My journey changes quite a bit so I first have a belief, then I have to think. I guess I would definitely look for Christian group or Catholic group”

**Clare:** “I would like to be in a religious community where friends are to grow up and be exposed to things around the globe. This actually just helps me to reaffirm the fact that there are Catholics all over the world and it sort of broadens my perspective as opposed to restricting it. If I am observing what has happened in the churches that I have attended as well, I do think migrants find their own communities. The Filipino community is very strong in Singapore. When a lot of them actually come to work here, they tend to gravitate towards where they feel stronger. Perhaps local communities that they resonate with, so there are some churches that have a stronger Filipino community, Korean or Chinese community because they find a place like home in a church or community that speaks their language.”

**Maurice:** “Neither staying in my own community nor going to a religious community because I believe in individualism.” Responses showed for some belonging to a community will give them social identity and individual confidence. Others prefer to be on their own and practice their own faith not creating an eclectic mix of identities.

The fifth theme that emerged was online religion. The participants (n=6) use the internet, YouTube or Divine apps to pray while at work. The participants were creating meaning through technology as it assisted in individual and communal practice of religion. A lot of people depend on the Internet to find what they need and then realise that they do not actually need to have organised faith and they can organise their own way of practising their faith and religion.

**Abigail:** “At least for me, it is to hear the mass in many different languages, so every single country that I have been to, it is always nice to hear the same mass being said in a different language. Whenever I travel the first thing is always travel to a place that has a church.”

**Abel:** “Individual practise has increased. If I am unable to attend mass, my auto go to is the rosary. My prayer is not organised religion. I modify it to the place that I am going to. I say my daily prayers and when I went for a mission trip, we spent 20 minutes every day doing silent reflection. I had to omit my morning prayers. I attended mass every single day as opposed to just once on Sunday. I had to modify because I was a migrant in that country. So now that I am back in Singapore because I do not have daily mass experience. I do a 20-minute silent prayer every day. Now that has become part of my routine. I have my Sunday routine, but then I have incorporated this modification that I learned when I was in the migrant country and brought it back home to practise.”

**Beth:** “I myself, you know, watch YouTube. And then because it is very, very convenient. I do not visit the church after covid. Majority of the people have stopped going to church because church is at their fingertips. I read the Bible on the phone. Sometimes on Instagram I think I scroll through some prayers. I only read content on social media but do not share. I only share with, like, people who you know are close to me.”  
**Maurice:** “I go online. I think technology has helped me got even more connected with the faith I am able to watch like for example services online and I don't have to go all the way to church just to attend a service. I can watch the sermons from my computer and I don't really need to go to a particular place or congregation or worship for me to hear the sermons or to attend service when I can just do it from the comfort of my own home or in the case where I'm in a rush and I'm unable to do I still can participate in some way.”

The sixth theme that emerged was freedom and rationality of thought. Responses showed that there is a gap between science and religion. Science and religion each occupies its own frame. The participants would like to think independently and be rational.

**Abigail and Beth:** “Religion has influenced my understanding of religion.”

**Abel:** “Yes, it is possible to be a rational intellect and a person of faith, or to accept the world views of both science and religion.”

**Clare:** “I do not believe that is absolutely possible to be a rational intellectual and a person of faith also to accept the world views. It is sometimes a struggle.”

**Maurice:** “Absolutely not. I believe that religious learning does not lead to a disconnect between faith and the real world. I think higher education has actually helped and complemented faith and the real world being someone who is individual, someone who is free and someone who believes that you create your own belief system.

I think that it is interesting that we look at this in a different way and higher education has definitely allowed us to explore more options and allow us to be able to connect and understand the world from different perspectives and different faiths and the impact that higher education has is actually to connect both closer.”

Analysis of the interviewees' responses suggest that personal experiences may lead one's closeness of connection to Christ and the Church to vary. As humans we want to bring value and meaning to our life. Therefore, the confidence in the church is something they would like to explore rather than forced upon.

## V. RESULTS

The results from the data analysis were able to answer the two research questions. In terms of RQ1, the six young adults interviewed confirmed not finding attending church services relevant and the sermons are devoid of creativity and inspiration. The youth want to feel that their activities in this globalized world which constitute a part of their daily life, their emotions and concerns are important elements of theology. Despite the varying strength and energy of the level of religious participation all the six young adults asserted it was not necessary to attend organised religious practices and religion should not be a building where one has to go at a fixed time and place. The youth believe they can speak with God in prayer they are taught to pray by Jesus himself. They would like to say a silent prayer, a personal expression in their own words. They are using social media for listening to Sunday Mass. They acknowledge God as a personal being and don't use technology for sharing videos or prayers.

In terms of RQ2, young people though having to migrate for work are more concerned with their immediate world that includes relationships and social circles than the wider community. Young people are not moving into a sense of community norms and standards. These individuals value their identity and freedom of choice. Migrants working in their country on the other hand look for a common identity when they join communities as the language they speak is known here.

## VI. DISCUSSION

The aim of the study was to find out how globalization and migration have impacted the transformation of religious practices among the Christian youth in Singapore. According to the findings from the qualitative study of the six participants the following six themes emerged: Decline in religious participation, Interiorization of belief, World interconnected, Passive belonging to a community, Online religion, Freedom and rationality of thought.

The first theme identified was decline in religious participation. The data highlighted how the participants disaffiliated from their religion by not participating in church services. This theme is in alignment with studies showing that religious participation among the youth has declined (Tham, 2023; Department of Statistics, DOS, Singapore, 2020; Chiang, 2021). They do not want the church to be brick and mortar. It is not necessary to attend organised religious practices as religion should not be a building where one has to go at a fixed time and place.

The second theme that emerged was Interiorization of belief. The participants do not want to follow the religious practices

inherited from family members during their childhood. Many of the participants discussed how they attended church or religious services because it was the norm within their families. Some participants indicated a cultural component from within their community. Further, globalization structurally favours privatization of religion. Millennials pray often. Their prayers are not arranged but every day. Some of them turn to interpretation of religious scriptures and doing good in everyday life. This validates the studies seen in the review of literature that the youth are influenced by new ideas and contexts (Koh, 2024). There are other ways connections can be made. They can be made online at an interest group or an affinity group. But it also goes against previous studies that youth shun religion or are leaving religion (Nordin & Otterbeck, 2023). However, the young adults believe in God and they all feel a deep sense of well-being when they pray and do good things.

The third theme that emerged due to globalization and migration is the world is interconnected. All the six participants do not attend organized worship. Traditional religion is not felt relevant to these young people. Instead of going to churches many Christians are turning to apps and online services to express their faith. They are able to attend mass online and experience religious practises in other languages. This is in agreement with the finding that there may be disparities in culture, the practices of migrants may also be adopted by the people residing in these areas if these practices can be used in the realization of one's goals (Zhang et al., 2023). However, it contradicts with the finding that one's original religion might get dissolved if the new culture is strongly adapted (Golebiewski, 2014). Their practices have remained the same. They experience faith beyond what it is in their country and in a different language.

The fourth theme that emerged is passive belonging to a community. Mobility affects the identities, and sense of belonging of the migrants. Almost all youth migrants come into contact with religions communities other than their own. Nevertheless, they also stay connected with their communities back home, allowing them to be active in everyday life in fundamentally different ways than in the past (McCants, 2021). This does not validate the finding of the previous studies by Nordin and Otterbeck (2023) that communities will help create networks around the world because the youth in this study are not looking for communities for friends or for a family community. It also contradicts with the studies that religion will be delocalized since it is now not the characteristics of just one territory (Kramer & Tong, 2024). The youth in this study prioritize individualism.

The fifth theme that was found in the data was online religion. The youth attend to mass online. For some although social restrictions are lifted they still find online mass convenient as Additionally, churches can now provide virtual services that



members can attend from anywhere in the world. This is in accordance with previous studies that the internet helps to connect people in their religious journey and those who have been geographically separated (McCants, 2021).

The sixth theme was freedom and rationality of thought. The youth believe that religion should be in the heart and not just saying the prayers. They feel they have a relationship with God and don't need an institution. Religion for these youth is a matter of choice. They have the freedom to choose whether to be religious or not to follow a religion. The youth in this group were all educated. They want to accept both worldviews of religion and science. But neither education nor their economic stability affected the practise of religion. This disregards the findings of previous literature (Song, 2019). It also contradicts the study that religion loses its impact at the individual, institutional and societal level with secularization (Flatt, 2023). They have become more religious and religion does not disappear from the affairs of man.

Existentialism highlights that individuals have the freedom to make their own choice (Kierkegaard, 1959). These choices enable the individual to make a meaningful experience of their life and what it means for them to exist. Therefore, in this study, participants were able to identify these experiences and identify components that supported the choices of practising religion and their beliefs. They made their own choices regarding joining communities, making a rational choice and the use of social media.

Migration causes the feelings of loneliness and anxiety. Individual freedom and the search for identity causes people to feel isolated in a new country. In terms of joining communities consisting of members who speak the same language and from the same country the migrants came from belonging to a community and being connected worldwide is supported by the Existentialism. Participants in the study made their choices by which the world takes on a meaning for them instead of being estranged in the new world.

### Implications

Young people are the generation at the forefront of cultural and social change. Therefore, it is their engagement with religion, religious ideas and institutions that tell us how resilient beliefs and practices are, and how religions might adapt, transform and innovate in relation to wider social and cultural trends.

### Suggestions for Future Research

This study was conducted on a small group and the participants were very well qualified academically as well as theologically. For future study is to ask a creedal question, one based on doctrines of the church and why exactly there is a need for membership and belonging to the church. This study was based on the looser definition of belief in God.

Therefore, the percentages of the youth believing in God was high.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Young people today live in an age of globalisation supported by rapidly advancing media and communications technologies. This has impacted on how young people engage with religion, both in terms of belief and practice. As can be seen from the study the contemporary world is not witnessing the inevitable decline of religions but the decline in church participation. Religions are being transformed and with modernization would become invisible from the public sphere and unrecognizable. They do not believe in belonging to a religious community for having an identity or purpose but prefer not to belong to such communities. They believe in individualism and freedom to choose the way to practice religion. Traditionally recognized religions do not have a monopoly on the religious in contemporary global society. Finally, an important dimension of human experience is religion. These young Singaporean Christian participants certainly did not hold a 'whatever', 'ambivalent' or 'indifferent view of, or approach' toward, religion. Far from it, they took religion seriously, and all looked for a real experience of God.

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