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Engaging Millennials through the Tradition of the Holy Spirit and Mission of the Assemblies of God

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

ENGAGING MILLENNIALS THROUGH
THE TRADITION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT
AND MISSION OF THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF PORTLAND SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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has been approved by
the Dissertation Committee on March 1, 2018
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Global Perspectives.

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ABSTRACT

The American evangelical church is in crisis. All statistical data points to decline. Church growth is flat. It does not seem that the church will correct itself, especially in light of the Millennial generation. Millennials are fleeing the church quickly. The church must find a solution to this crisis. This research proposes that a refocus of the charismatic gifts (from an Assemblies of God perspective) to mission has the potential to re-engage Millennials, and because of its missions history the Assemblies of God sits in a prime position to engage this generation caught in an exodus. This research is divided into five primary sections.

Following an introduction and overview in chapter one, in chapter two we define the nature of the problem. By looking at demographic studies, we can see how the Millennials have left the church in droves. The church has a perception problem; therefore, members of this generation that were connected to the church in their early years have left, and all signs point to the fact that they are not returning.

We will explore Millennials in chapter three. Discovering what they value and what has made them the way that they are will be the primary areas that we explore. We will take in-depth views of Millennials' concepts of sexuality and faith and also see how they are products of globalization.

Next, we will trace the role of doctrine to see how we arrived at this era of church history. While the church primarily held to core ideas for nineteen hundred years, the past one hundred years have been tumultuous. The church of the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century has traded historic truths for political ideology.

In the fifth chapter, we will begin to explore the charismatic doctrine. We will look at the Old Testament, New Testament, Lucan theology, Pauline theology, and historic revivals to see how the Holy Spirit is intimately connected with the mission of God. In other words, the Spirit's activity has always led to man's activity. As we will see, Millennials are hungering for the transcendent, and the charismatic empowerment could be the experience they are looking for in the church.

Finally in the sixth chapter, we will look at the history of the Assemblies of God and how it has been a powerful missional force. We will also look at how Millennials can potentially connect to the Assemblies of God as long as it aligns to missiological principles that are empowered by the Holy Spirit.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The year 1980 does not seem that far away, yet it might as well be two millennia ago considering the changes that have occurred. The 1980s are the birthday for a new generation. They would be known as Millennials and they would be different than previous generations in many ways.

In the 1980s, most people obtained their information from three or four channels on their antiquated television sets. They listened to local radio, read newspapers, and only knew about the world from these primary sources. By the time the Millennials entered high school and college, many things had radically changed. Michael Serres, Stanford University professor of history, states of the Millennial generation:

Their predecessors met in classes and lecture halls that were culturally homogenous, whereas they [Millennials] mingle with students from numerous religions, languages, origins, and customs. For them [Millennials], and their teachers, multiculturalism is the rule....They do not inhabit the same global world; they do not inhabit the same human world. All around them, they encounter the sons and daughters of immigrants from less affluent countries, who have lived through vital experiences that are opposite of theirs.¹

It is not just the realm of multiculturalism that has changed, but seemingly everything has. Information is not gathered from a few sources. With a swipe of the phone, this highly technological generation can access thousands and thousands of bits of information from all around the world.

Perhaps this is why many of their decisions are no longer binary. Rather, each choice is among a litany of choices and each one of those is considered neither right nor

¹ Michael Serres, *Thumbelina: The Culture and Technology of Millennials* (London: Bowman and Littlefield International, 2015), 3.

wrong. From sexuality to religion, there is no good or evil, no moral high ground. Everything is choice. Serres points out, “Without even realizing it, a new kind of human being was born in the brief period of time that separates us from the 1970s.”² This new kind of human is changing the world before everyone’s eyes.

Any number of directions could be explored with Millennials; however, this research will focus on this generation’s relationship with the church. As will be discussed, Millennials are leaving the church at an alarming rate, and the implications of this are vast and cannot be discounted. Therefore, it is important to understand how to engage this generation. It is this research’s aim to demonstrate how a refocus of charismatic empowerment toward mission can help re-engage this generation in the church and how because of its history of missiology the Assemblies of God sits in a prime position to do so.

In chapter two, this research will explore the Millennial generation. It will not only attempt to understand the size of this generation, but it will also explore the relationship this generation has with the church. This chapter will define the problem that the remainder of this research will attempt to answer.

In chapter three, this research will define the Millennial generation. It will explore how Millennials view various topics such as sexuality and faith and compare these beliefs to those of other generations. Furthermore, this chapter will also look at what others believe about this generation. Are they “Generation We” or are they “Generation Me”? Finally, this chapter will determine what makes Millennials think and act the way they do by exploring how globalization shaped this generation.

² Ibid., 7.

Chapter four will explore how the church has become disconnected from the Millennials. It will take an in-depth look at church doctrine by viewing its history. This chapter will seek to understand if and where the church has drifted away from doctrine, and how those decisions have led to a disconnect for Millennials.

The next chapter of this research will begin to look at the Pentecostal movement as a whole. By examining both Old and New Testaments, Lucan theology and Pauline theology, as well as early twentieth century Pentecostal revivals, this research will connect the move of the Spirit with the mission of God. It will also explain how an experience with the Spirit could be the answer to the Millennial and church dilemma in part.

Finally, this research will explore the Assemblies of God. With its roots in the revivals of the twentieth century, the Assemblies of God blended both the experience of the Spirit and the worldwide mission of God and has become one of the fastest growing segments of Christianity around the globe. We will also examine how the Assemblies of God can potentially reach Millennials because it has historically been both experiential and missional, which are two aspects that Millennials seem to desire in the church.

While this research explores Millennials, it is important to note that any attempt at exploring generational studies can never be all-encompassing. This research by no means believes that every Millennial is the same, nor does it believe that every Assembly of God church in every city is the same. However, there are some patterns that may be true of a large majority of Millennials or a large majority of Assembly of God churches, and therefore determinations can be made regarding which best practices may work for either

party based off of generalized research. More will be said about the specific definitions in the upcoming chapters. Now, let us begin exploring the research.

CHAPTER 2: THE MILLENNIAL EXODUS

If one was to scroll through the vast pages of social media on any given Sunday afternoon, one would assume that all is right in the world of Christendom. It might even seem that Christendom and the church are thriving in this young century. Pastors are touting their weekend numbers complete with attendance, conversion records, and frequent claims that every service is full. However, the numbers that are championed throughout the Christian community seem to be at odds with statistical data pouring out from every organization that dares to study the American church. According to the Pew Research Forum,

The Christian share of the U.S. population is declining, while the number of U.S. adults who do not identify with any organized religion is growing, according to an extensive new survey by the Pew Research Center. Moreover, these changes are taking place across the religious landscape, affecting all regions of the country and many demographic groups. While the drop in Christian affiliation is particularly pronounced among young adults, it is occurring among Americans of all ages. The same trends are seen among whites, blacks and Latinos; among both college graduates and adults with only a high school education; and among women as well as men.¹

Furthermore, when one studies denominational growth, the picture reveals that while a few denominations have seen growth, many have either flatlined or declined. In a 2015 Hartford Institute study entitled *American Congregations 2015: Thriving and Surviving*, researchers find that more than half of all American congregations have less than one hundred congregants. Even more unsettling is the fact that the median weekend

¹ “Demographic Study: America’s Changing Religious Landscape,” Pew Research Center for Religion and Public Life, last modified May 12, 2015, accessed April 2, 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>.

attendance has fallen to eighty attendees. This constitutes a thirty seven percent drop since 2015.² Every year within the American Christian landscape, four thousand churches close their doors while only one thousand churches are opened.³ At the same time, 2.7 million adherents fall into inactivity. Compounding the problem, half of all American churches did not add one new member between 2010 and 2012.⁴ Studies conducted by Barna, Gallup, Pew, *Christianity Today*, *Huffington Post*, and many more all seem to be saying the same thing. Australian missiologists and church practitioners Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost comment on the decline this way:

The fact that the Christendom paradigm has presided over the last seventeen centuries in the West provides us with a substantial basis with which to test its success or failure. As we stand here at the roots of the 21st century, we believe that we must, at long last, give up trying to rejig the paradigm to suit the massively changed missional context of the Western church. It simply has not worked. In fact, in the increasingly complex situations we now find ourselves it has likely created more problems than it has solved. The church is in decline in almost every context in the First World.⁵

If the data is correct and Frost and Hirsch's assessment is right, then despite the social media buzz and the seemingly endless supply of megachurches, the American church is in drastic decline, and it does not seem that the decline will stop with the emergence of a new generation, the Millennials.

² David A. Roozen, *American Congregations 2015: Thriving and Surviving* (Hartford, CT: Hartford Institute for Religious Research, 2015), 1-17, accessed April 2, 2017, <http://hirr.hartsem.edu/American-Congregations-2015.pdf>.

³ Steve Hewitt, "Why the American Church is Dying," *Christian Computing Magazine* (July 2012): 3.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 27-28.

Definition of Terms

At this point, it is important to define common terms that will be used throughout this research. While the words Christian or church can be used to define many sects within their respective scopes, for the purpose of this research, the term Christian will relate to the Protestant evangelical church or a member of the same body. The research's goal in using this term is not to exclude or ignore the important contributions that brothers and sisters in the Christian faith outside of the evangelical world have made. However, due to the necessarily limited scope of this project, it is important to narrow the totality of this research to a particular brand of Christianity. The statistical data used will be from this arm of the church. While not all evangelical churches are alike, they do share some common ideals or practices. It should likewise be noted that the primary audience of this research will be pentecostals many of whom do not believe they lie within the popular definition of evangelical. However, pentecostals frequently embrace the more formal or academic definition of evangelical and share commonalities with this brand of Christianity. Because the term evangelical is used throughout this research, it is necessary to understand what this research means by the term.

David Bebbington, a key researcher and writer in the world of evangelicalism, describes evangelical commonalities this way:

There are four qualities that have been the special marks of Evangelical religion: conversionism, the belief that lives need to be changed; activism, the expression of the gospel in effort; Biblicism, a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be called crucietrism, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Together they form the quadrilateral of priorities that is the basis of Evangelicalism.⁶

⁶ David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 2-3.

Alister McGrath of Oxford University sees similar connection points in the world of evangelicalism and lays out six priorities of the evangelical church, which are:

1: The supreme authority of scripture as a source of knowledge of God, and a guide to Christian living. 2: The majesty of Jesus Christ, both incarnate God and Lord, and as the savior of sinful humanity. 3: The lordship of the Holy Spirit. 4: The need for personal conversion. 5: The priority of evangelism for both individual Christians and the church as a whole. 6: The importance of the Christian community for spiritual nourishment, fellowship and growth.⁷

These two broad definitions by Bebbington and McGrath help lay the foundation for understanding the particular tribe of Christianity upon which this research will focus. However, it is important to further narrow the focus of this research to the pentecostal world. While pentecostals share many beliefs with their evangelical brothers, they are rather distinct from them as well. Most of the existing research does not delineate between varied sects of evangelicals, but for the purpose of this research, the interpretation will be viewed through a pentecostal lens—specifically, an Assemblies of God lens, as noted below.

It is important to note that not all pentecostals are alike, so there needs to be a definition of what this research means when it comes to pentecostals. James K. A. Smith describes this meaning best when he states:

So, by “Pentecostal” I mean to refer not to a classical or denominational definition, but rather to an understanding of Christian faith that is radically open to the continued operations of the Spirit. . . . Thus when I advocate a pentecostal philosophy, “pentecostal” is meant to be a gathering term, indicating a shared set of practices and theological intuitions that are shared by Pentecostals, charismatics, and “third-wavers.”⁸

⁷ Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1994), 51.

⁸ James K. A. Smith, *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2010), xvii.

This research will primarily use this definition of pentecostal. It is a gathering term. When it comes to specific application and interpretation of the research, the primary response will come from an Assemblies of God voice. That is not to say that charismatics and other pentecostals have nothing to add to the conversation, for they do; Assemblies of God is simply the denomination to which this researcher belongs, and one he wants to support. However, the findings, interpretation, and application may be helpful to those in other pentecostal camps.

Additionally, this research will primarily focus on Millennials that have either left the evangelical church or have never been affiliated with a church. However, there will be times that statistical data may be used from Millennials within the church. The research will note this when this is the case. Furthermore, as this study analyzes comparative data of various generations, the following terms will be used: Millennials (born 1981–1996), Gen Xers (born 1965–1980), Boomers (born 1946–1964) and Silents (born 1928–1945).⁹ It should be noted there is no consensus on the dating of generations amongst researchers. Some studies may vary as much as three years. Also while other authors and researchers use various names, this study will use these terms to avoid confusion and provide continuity for this research.

Who Are the Millennials?

Before a thorough investigation of the Millennials we must first define the demographic. Millennials are anyone born between 1981 and 1999. Now, this is not an

⁹ Eileen Patton and Richard Frye, “How Millennials Today Compare with Their Grandparents 50 Years Ago,” Pew Research Center, March 19, 2015, accessed April 2, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/03/19/how-millennials-compare-with-their-grandparents/>.

exact science because there are those born in the 1980s who may tend to carry the value set of the previous generation, and there are those in the previous generation who may act more like Millennials.¹⁰ Nonetheless, we are looking at a large section of society and a generation that shares certain values. It is also important to note that “demographic transformations are dramas in slow motion. They unfold incrementally, but every so often, as the weight of change builds, a society takes a hard look at itself and notices things are different,” according to Paul Taylor and the Pew Research Center.¹¹ If this is true, then the Millennials did not just stumble upon their ideals, but rather they have been systematically taught their values either directly or indirectly by previous generations. While this will be discussed more thoroughly in the next chapter, quite simply the Millennials are a product of their worldviews, which are shaped by previous generations.

While it is problematic to distinguish one generation from another based purely on two sets of dates, there are two generations that have significantly shaped the Millennials. The Boomers (1946–1964) and Generation X (1965–1980) have been the primary drivers in shaping the Millennial culture.¹² According to William Strauss and Neil Howe, experts in generational research, a hero generation emerges once every long human lifetime, a pattern that dates back to the seventeenth century. The last great generation was what Tom Brokaw would describe as “The Greatest Generation,” those that would come of age during World War II. The following generations would be by-

¹⁰ Jean Twenge, *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled and More Miserable Than Ever Before* (New York: Atria Paperbacks, 2014), 6, Kindle.

¹¹ Paul Taylor and the Pew Research Center, *The Next America: Boomers, Millennials, and the Looming Generational Showdown* (New York: Public Affairs, 2014), loc. 104, Kindle.

¹² Twenge, *Generation Me*, 6.

products of that generation. The Millennial generation seems like the next great generation according to some demographers such as Neil Howe and William Strauss, authors of *Millennials Rising*.¹³

Each generation builds momentum off of previous generations. Essentially, generational differences are cultural differences. Children exposed to a culture in one generation may be exposed to an entirely distinct culture from what existed fifty years prior. Those individuals found on the tail end of one generation's culture are exposed to new social structures that in turn shape their fundamental beliefs.¹⁴

For instance, the "Greatest Generation" of the 1940s was steeped in war and loss. Their experiences fundamentally shaped who they were and how they would raise their children. The children of these parents would form the Boomer generation. These children were nurtured in the context of the loss and pain of war experienced by their parents, giving rise to attitudes that were increasingly anti-establishment. The Boomers' mantra of questioning authority has led to a Millennial generation that completely disregards authority.¹⁵

Another example of the Millennials being a product of the previous generations is the value they attach to the institution of family. For example, the 'helicopter parenting' and highly scheduled lifestyle forced upon the Millennials as children by their Boomer parents, which started the individualistic revolution of the 1960s, are leading to a

¹³ Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York: Random House, 2000), loc. 7863, Kindle.

¹⁴ Jean M. Twenge, W. Keith Campbell, and Elise C. Freeman, "Generational Differences in Young Adults' Life Goals, Concern for Others, and Civic Orientation, 1966-2009," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 102, no. 5 (May 2012): 1045.

¹⁵ Twenge, *Generation Me*, 34.

different style of parenting by a new, emerging group of parents. As *Time Magazine* reported:

These young adults (Millennials), having been raised to count individuality and self-expression as the highest values, are attempting to run their families as mini democracies, seeking consensus from spouses, kids and extended friend circles on even the smallest decisions. They're backing away from the overscheduled days of their youth, preferring a more responsive, less directorial approach to activities. And they're teaching their kids to be themselves and try new things—often unwittingly conditioning their tiny progeny to see experiences as things to be documented and shared with the world.¹⁶

The Millennials are profoundly shaped by the previous generations. Much of what is believed in the Millennial generation was seeded by previous generations. Nearly every strata of life is affected by this cycle. One generation's ideal gets fully formed and blossoms in future generations as a distinct value. At the same time, missteps in the previous generation get counterbalanced in the future generation. In other words, the Millennials build upon the perceived positives of their predecessors while carving a different path when they perceive that their predecessors got it wrong. In both cases, they are responding to the previous generation.

Millennials: Breaking Down the Numbers

While there are unending lists of how the Millennials are changing the American cultural landscape, this study will focus on how these changes have affected the current protestant Christian church. In the evangelical church, it has been long understood that young adults drift away in their early twenties only to return to church. However, within

¹⁶ Katy Steinmetz, "Help! My Parents are Millennials!" *Time Magazine*, October 26, 2015, accessed November 13, 2015, <http://wp.lps.org/tnettle/files/2015/03/Help-My-Parents-are-Millennials.pdf>, 38.

the last decade, this does not seem the case as Millennials are increasingly bucking that trend.¹⁷ Once this generation leaves the church in their twenties, they are not coming back after settling down into adulthood. Surprisingly enough, the Millennial generation is not departing from past precedent because of minimal affiliation with the Christian church. Quite the contrary, more than four out of five Millennials spent a good portion of their childhood within the church.¹⁸ It is not exposure to the church that they lack; rather, they seem disinterested with what the Christian church has to offer them as they mature.

According to research, Millennials are increasingly disconnected from the church altogether. In a 2015 survey, Pew Research Center discovered that 34 percent of older Millennials (born 1981–1989) and 36 percent of younger Millennials (born 1990–1996) are unaffiliated with any church or denomination. The research found that the share of “Millennials who do not identify with a religion is double the share of unaffiliated Baby Boomers (17%) and more than three times the share of members of the Silent generation (11%).” There is also a staggering 12 percent difference between the Millennials (34%–36%) and Generation X (23%) in the unaffiliated category.¹⁹ The research done by Pew also showed that the unaffiliated category was steady at about 12 percent between 1970 and 1980; however, there has been a rapid 11 percent jump in the unaffiliated category over the last twenty years.

¹⁷ Bob Allen, “Millennials Losing Their Religion,” Baptist News Global, June 25, 2012, accessed April 7, 2017, <https://baptistnews.com/article/millennials-losing-their-religion/#.WPu2ONlrJPY>.

¹⁸ David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 22.

¹⁹ Michael Lipka, “Millennials Are Increasingly Driving the Growth of Nones,” Pew Research Center, May 12, 2015, accessed April 7, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/12/millennials-increasingly-are-driving-growth-of-nones/>.

While some scholars would like to say that Millennials lack interest in faith in general, and there is some truth to this, Millennials are more disinterested in organized religion than they are disinterested in faith altogether.²⁰ It is important to note that Millennials are different from their parents and grandparents when it comes to faith. And if we are attempting to understand this new generation, we must know the religious values its members hold to and their religious demographic make-up.

Spiritual Beliefs of Millennials Compared to Previous Generations

The Millennials will reshape many ideas because of their massive population. Due to the rise of immigration, Millennial numbers will peak around eighty-one million people in America by 2036, which will outnumber Gen Xers by fifteen million and will be larger than the Boomers' numbers were at their peak.²¹ This emerging generation will carry vast amounts of influence on faith for the foreseeable future in America.

There has been a 17.6 percent decline between 2007 and 2014 in Americans who say that religion is very important to them. This has largely occurred because of this new generation. With their population size, the decline will only grow as Millennials reshape the landscape with the values that constitute their faith and spirituality, or lack thereof.

Consider these findings by Pew research:

Two-thirds of adults in the Silent generation say religion is “very important” in their lives and that they pray every day, as do about six-in-ten Baby Boomers and

²⁰ Barry A. Kosmin, “RESEARCH REPORT: Secular Students Today, a Joint CFI-ISSC Study American Secular Identity, Twenty-First-Century Style: Secular College Students in 2013,” Council for Secular Humanism, May 16, 2014, accessed April 7, 2017, <http://www.secularhumanism.org/index.php/articles/5283>.

²¹ Richard Fry, “Millennials Overtake Baby Boomers as America’s Largest Generation,” Pew Research Center, April 25, 2016, accessed April 12, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/04/25/millennials-overtake-baby-boomers/>.

more than half of Generation Xers. By comparison with older adults, Millennials exhibit far lower rates of involvement with religion. Fewer than half of older Millennials (adults now in their late 20s and early 30s) and roughly four-in-ten younger Millennials (adults now in their late teens and early 20s) say religion is very important to them and that they pray daily. And a majority of Millennials say they attend religious services a few times a year *at most*. Millennials' relatively low rates of religious involvement are attributable in part to the fact that many Millennials are religious "nones." However, on several of these measures, even young adults who are religiously affiliated are less observant than their older counterparts.²²

When it comes to believing in God, 64 percent of Millennials claim to hold this belief.

This may seem encouraging until one considers older generations; Millennials fall around 8 to 13 percentage points behind. When it comes to scripture and to prayer, the results do not fare any better.²³

Interestingly enough, Millennials still hold a high view of other spiritual matters. The research from Pew finds that "adults under 30, for instance, are just as likely as older adults to believe in life after death (75% vs. 74%), heaven (74% each), hell (62% vs. 59%) and miracles (78% vs. 79%). In fact, on several of these items, young mainline Protestants and members of historically black Protestant churches exhibit somewhat higher levels of belief than their elders."²⁴

²² "U.S. Public Becoming Less Religious," Pew Research Center Polling and Analysis, last modified November 3, 2015, accessed April 7, 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/11/03/u-s-public-becoming-less-religious/#generational-differences>.

²³ "Religion Among Millennials," Pew Research Center Polling and Analysis, last modified, February 17, 2010, accessed April 2, 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/2010/02/17/religion-among-the-millennials/>.

²⁴ Ibid.

The Cultural Beliefs of Millennials Compared to Previous Generations

The differences between Millennials and previous generations do not stop at the church door, either. Views of cultural issues, in which the church has historically spoken as a prophetic voice, are radically different for Millennials. Consider one belief change of Christian Millennials. Among this group, 54 percent believe that any union between two men or two women should be recognized as legal marriage. This is an 11 percent jump from Gen Xers and a 25 percent jump from Boomers.²⁵ Again, these percentage swings have a shaping effect within the culture.

While Millennials are more liberal than their generational counterparts in many statistical categories, surprisingly enough, they may carry more conservative beliefs in other categories. For instance, more young Millennials believe that government should do more, not less, to protect morality than do older Millennials and Gen Xers. Millennials also believe that houses of worship should be able to express their views on social and political issues to a greater degree than their predecessors do.²⁶

Christian Millennials are more conservative than previous generations in many other categories as well. On the issue of cohabitating with a member of the opposite sex, 49 percent of Christian Millennials say that this is not morally acceptable compared to 44 percent of Gen Xers and 41 percent of Boomers. When it comes to pornography, 72 percent of Christian Millennials say that this is not morally acceptable, compared to 48

²⁵ Barna Group, *Making Space for Millennials Report* (Colorado Springs, CO: Barna Group, 2014), 27.

²⁶ "Religion Among Millennials," Pew Research Center Polling and Analysis, last modified February 17, 2010, accessed April 2, 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/2010/02/17/religion-among-the-millennials/>.

percent of Christian Gen Xers and 65 percent of Christian Boomers. Interestingly enough, Christian Millennials actually align more with the Silent generation when it comes to pornography.²⁷

Whether or not a Millennial is affiliated with Christianity, it is evident through the research that this generation is quite unique. The values of the emerging generation are already putting a mark on society. As the Barna research team puts it, “Never before has a generation emerged into adulthood with nearly limitless access to diverse people, ideas, products, and information at the click of a mouse or a swipe of the finger.”²⁸ It has been this endless supply of data and access to the world that likewise makes their influence profound. This generation is at home with communications technology and adept at disseminating ideas, perhaps like no generation before. While their unique view of life has been shaped by globalization, technology, and exposure to new ideas rapidly and without discrimination, which will all be discussed in later research, discovering why so many Millennials are outside of a church they once called home calls for closer inspection.

David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyon, in their groundbreaking work *Unchristian*, call these Millennials that have either never had an affiliation with the church or they no longer have affiliation outsiders. Kinnaman and Lyon state, “There are about twenty-four million outsiders in this country who are ages sixteen to twenty-nine. It is significant to note that outsiders are becoming less and less a fringe segment of American society.”²⁹ In

²⁷ Barna, *Making Space for Millennials*, 26.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁹ David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 16.

other words for Millennials, a detachment from church is an increasingly normative behavior and is bucking the trend from their predecessors. The trend is certainly alarming. Journalist John H. Dickerson notes it this way:

We are piecing these massive, moving trends together, into one megatrend. The megatrend reveals a trajectory of massive regression—far larger than the sum of the parts. The decline of evangelical Christianity is not just that we’re failing at evangelism or just that we’re failing to keep our own kids or just that we’ll lose 70 percent of our funding in the next thirty years. It’s all those factors (and more) combined and gaining speed simultaneously.³⁰

Without a righting of the ship, the church will face some monumental challenges in the future. If all the warnings about Millennials leaving the church are true, then the church must go on a journey of discovery in order to ascertain the reasons why this is happening. Before this research can move forward to find solutions to this ever-growing disconnect from the church, we must explore Millennials in greater detail.

Why the Millennial Church Exodus?

In a letter to *Leadership Journal*, twenty-three-year-old self-described Millennial Robert Jewe states:

More than half of us will leave the church at some point. Those of us still here will find it increasingly difficult to stay. So what is it we’re looking for? What’s the magic answer? There is none. What will satisfy one person may not satisfy me, and vice versa...we’ve been marketed to since childhood and we can smell it a mile away. When we step into a church, and sense it, it’s patronizing and offensive. Your ‘Young Adult Outreach’ may be well intentioned, but it comes off as phony. When we sense you’re preoccupied with attendance amongst our demographic, we feel like you’re making us into a number, or even a dollar sign. We want to be known and valued as individuals. We may be the same age, but we have a diverse array of passions, dreams, and callings. Until the church recognizes

³⁰ John S. Dickerson, *The Great Evangelical Recession: 6 Factors That Will Crash the American Church...and How to Prepare* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 22.

this, like the rest of the world has, we will continue to be absent from your pews and our giving from your offering plate.³¹

While Jewe's letter may seem quite self-involved, his sentiments are echoing around Millennial circles. A quick internet search on Millennials and the church would reveal many popular blogs written about and by Millennials that express the same things about the church. Millennials defy being treated as a homogenous group and want their unique voices heard as to why they have left the church.³² Due to their fierce individualism, it is difficult to point to one specific key to their exodus. However, the Millennial exodus does share some rather broad trends that can be tracked.

The Church's Perception Problem

The old adage "perception is reality" could not be more fitting for the way the church is viewed by this emerging generation. These perceptions do not come from a lack of knowledge. Millennials are rather savvy when it comes to the Christian faith. Often, their understanding of church life is due to their extensive exposure to it when they were in their teenage years.³³ David Kinneman of the Barna group states, "This is not a uniquely Buster (Generation X) or Mosaic (Millennial) phenomenon, many Boomers did this too. Our tracking research suggests that today young people are less likely to return to church later even when they become parents."³⁴ This is a startling trend that does not

³¹ Robert Jewe, "Why I Won't Give to Your Church: An Honest Letter from a Millennial Believer," *Leadership Journal* 34, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 37.

³² Karl Vaters, "Why Millennials Won't Build the Kinds of Churches Their Parents Built," *Pivot: Innovative Leadership from a Small Church Perspective*, October 10, 2016, accessed April 12, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/karl-vaters/2016/october/why-millennials-wont-build-kinds-of-churches-their-parents-.html>.

³³ Kinnaman and Lyons, *Unchristian*, 23.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

bode well for the church. While young adults have always wandered during their twenties, they always returned in their thirties, and this is not the case any longer.

With many Millennials growing up within a church and not returning, it means that their up-close and personal view of church life will make it increasingly difficult to engage them. They have formed a fixed perspective of what church is, and they want nothing to do with it. In other words, church no longer fits within their cultural context. In a nationwide survey conducted by the Barna Institute and the Cornerstone Knowledge Network, researchers discovered that 66 percent of Millennials surveyed believe the church is hypocritical. The same study revealed that 37 percent of Millennials surveyed perceived the church to be too judgmental and another 16 percent perceived the church as always protesting something.³⁵ A Pew Research Center study revealed:

Since 2010, Millennials' rating of churches and other religious organizations has dipped 18 percentage points: 55% now say churches have a positive impact on the country compared with five years ago, when nearly three-quarters (73%) said this. Views among older generations have changed little over this time period.³⁶

This is a radical shift from twenty years ago. In 1996, George Barna was interviewed by the *Los Angeles Times* regarding his research findings. Barna noted in the article that 85 percent of Americans view the church as being a positive force in society while only 4 percent viewed the church as negative.³⁷ The church's favorability has dropped a

³⁵ "What Millennials Want When They Visit Church," Barna Research Group, last modified March 4, 2015, accessed April 12, 2017, <https://www.barna.com/research/what-millennials-want-when-they-visit-church/>.

³⁶ Hannah Fingerhut, "Millennials' Views of News Media, Religious Organizations Grow More Negative," Pew Research Center, January 4, 2016, accessed April 7, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/01/04/millennials-views-of-news-media-religious-organizations-grow-more-negative/>.

³⁷ John Dart, "Survey Shows Christians Held in High Esteem, Atheists Low," *Los Angeles Times*, February 10, 1996, accessed April 19, 2017, http://articles.latimes.com/1996-02-10/local/me-34417_1_christian-faith.

staggering twenty percentage points between 1996 and 2010, and as the twenty-first century moves on, this decline does not seem to be slowing down. This shocking statistic illustrates that the church has a major perception problem.

With the booming megachurches, the dominance of Christian jargon, and the use of Christian language, motifs, and images by both political parties, it may be hard to imagine that the church in America has an image problem, but when one explores the research, the problem is apparent and alarming. Many Millennials have a variety of reasons why they do not attend church any longer. Roughly a third of all Millennials say that the moral failings of many church leaders have a significant impact on the way they view the church.

Many Millennials have grown up during an age of public scandal with numerous ministry leaders, so it is no surprise if many feel distrusting towards religious leadership. After all, this generation grew up in the shadow of the notorious falls from grace of multiple Christian leaders. In the late 1980s both Jimmy Swaggart and Jim Bakker saw their empires crumble. Bakker's fall resulted in a prison sentence of forty-six years after it was discovered that he fleeced his flock for \$158 million. Along with these scandals, there has been the fall of evangelical superstar Ted Haggard, along with television evangelists and pastors Eddie Long, Creflo Dollar, and Marcus Lamb. At the same time, there have been terrible allegations of abuse by many within the Catholic church.³⁸ All of these scandals have received massive public attention, and they have made the church, both Protestant and Catholic, a laughing stock to many. Not only that, but there are no

³⁸ "Photos: Famous Pastor Scandals," CNN, last modified March 13, 2015, accessed October 15, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/06/11/us/gallery/pastor-scandals/index.html>.

doubt many smaller scandals that never become a public headline. All of these failures certainly have had an impact on this generation, quite possibly creating a strong distrust of clerical leadership. However, the perception problem due to scandal is not the only challenge for the Christian church.

The Church's Culture Problem

In an interview with the *Huffington Post*, Jean Twenge, a psychologist and prolific researcher on this generation, stated, "Unlike previous studies, ours is able to show that Millennials' lower religious involvement is due to cultural change, not to Millennials being young and unsettled."³⁹ There have been a number of cultural trends that the Millennials have embraced while the church has remained silenced. These trends will be discussed further, but for now it is important to understand that, as Millennials see it, the church is out of step with modern cultural ideals. While it is impossible to look at all the cultural trends, it is important to look at a few.

Sex and Sexuality and the Christian Ethic

Sex and sexuality has been an issue that every generation deals with and defines. This is likewise the case for Millennials. Yet, Millennials' sexual ethic seems to put them at odds with the traditional doctrine held by many evangelical churches. David Kinnaman states, "While few young Christians admit that their sex life specifically caused them to

³⁹ Macrina Cooper-White, "Millennials Are the Least Religious Generation Yet, and Here's the Surprising Reason Why," *Huffington Post*, May 27, 2015, accessed April 12, 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/05/27/millennials-less-religious_n_7452998.html.

drop out, many perceive the church as repressive.”⁴⁰ In an emerging culture where 85 percent of never-married young adults have engaged in some form of sexual conduct, 71 percent have had oral sex, 73 percent have had sexual intercourse, and many profess that this sexual exploration has yielded no regrets, hurts, or problems, then it is easy to see why the church’s views on sexuality are seen as repressive.⁴¹ There is a grand disconnect between a church’s sexual ethic and this emerging culture. If sex does not lead to hurt and pain, then in a Millennial’s view, it is not a bad thing. Take this new sexual ethic and combine it with other issues that are willingly embraced by this generation like transgenderism and homosexuality, and the church is not merely repressive, but is viewed as hostile, hateful, and archaic in this sexually permissive society. When one considers the church’s attitude toward sex and sexuality juxtaposed against Millennial attitudes, there is quite possibly a wide gulf. Consider a study brought to light by *Time Magazine*: Millennials are much more tolerant of premarital sex than earlier generations, but they tend to have slightly fewer partners than their parents did, according to a new study released Tuesday.

Over the last eight years, acceptance of premarital sex has moved from a minority position to a majority position, with 58% of respondents in 2012 saying they thought there was nothing wrong with sex before marriage (compared to 44% in 2004), according to a new study of over 33,000 people published in the *Archives of Sexual Behavior*. Over the 35 years before that, acceptance has gradually increased: 28% thought premarital sex was okay in 1972, then 38% in 1978, then 41% in 1982. As acceptance for premarital sex has increased, so has tolerance for

⁴⁰ David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 152.

⁴¹ Christian Smith Kari Christofferson, Hilary Davidson, and Patricia Snell Herzog, *Lost in Translation: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 149-155, Kindle.

homosexuality—in 1973, 11% of people believed gay sex was “not wrong,” but by 2012 that number had quadrupled to 44%.⁴²

While it may be easy to assume that Millennials are having more sex than their predecessors, the new sexual ethic of Millennials goes against the normative trends of their predecessors. Social scientist Jean Twenge discovered:

Among Americans aged 20–24, Millennials born in the early 1990s were significantly more likely to report no sexual partners after age 18 than Gen X’ers born in the late 1960s. Fifteen percent of 20- to 24-year-old Americans born in the 1990s had no sexual partners since turning 18, compared to 6% of the 1960s cohort.⁴³

There are a variety of reasons as to why this may be the case. From abstinence-only education, which emerged in the late 1980s, to many Millennials working towards their careers and opting to live at home with their parents, to numerous other reasons, Millennials are tending to have less sex and fewer sexual partners.

While Millennials hold variant views on sexuality, that is not to say that they are repressive or prudish in their thinking. Millennials have developed in a new framework. Prior to the sexual revolution in the 1960s, sex was a topic that went undiscussed. Mainstream American culture was repressive to say the least, and sexual activity outside of marriage was considered shameful and even scandalous at times. Women were expected to marry and fulfill their obligations of sex with their partner. There was very little talk of self-fulfillment regarding sex.

⁴² Charlotte Alter, “Exclusive: Millennials More Tolerant of Premarital Sex, But Have Fewer Partners,” *Time Magazine Online*, last modified May 5, 2015, accessed October 15, 2017, <http://time.com/3846289/boomers-generations-millennials-sex-sex-trends-sexual-partners>.

⁴³ Jean Twenge, Ryne A. Sherman, and Brook E. Wells, “Sexual Inactivity During Young Adulthood Is More Common Among U.S. Millennials and iGen: Age, Period, and Cohort Effects on Having No Sexual Partners After Age 18,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 46, no. 2 (February 2017): 435. Accessed October 15, 2017. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10508-016-0798-z>.

As the Boomers came of age, individual expression became the new narrative. The normative attitude as Gen Xers and Millennials came of age was that sex was about personal fulfillment and personal satisfaction. Kinnaman would state, “The rules of individualist sexual encounters are self-defined. The highest goals of sex (in this new narrative) are not just pleasure, but freedom and self expression.”⁴⁴ In other words, everything is acceptable as long as people were consenting and as long as it happened in the privacy of one’s own home.

While the Gen Xers and Boomers explored more sexually, Millennials have nevertheless grown up with the notion that individuality rules the day. So even though they may be having less sex, their attitudes are in favor of individualism. For Millennials, if one wants to act out in any sexual way, then that is the individual’s business. This is why it is a foreign concept to many Millennials that the church has strict standards when it comes to sexuality. After all, according to Kinnaman:

Young people have grown up with unprecedented access to sexual content via the Internet, television, movies, music, and video games, which have brought sexuality into their lives earlier and more easily than was true for previous generations. Their alienation from formative relationships (especially from absent fathers) has created a host of emotional issues, many of which are manifested in their sexual decision making. And their suspicion of authority, inherited from their Boomer predecessors, invites them to dismiss “old-fashioned” traditions without wondering first whether they might be healthy and life-giving.⁴⁵

When it comes to sex and how one engages in it, for Millennials, there is really an endless list of options. Millennials are comfortable being abstinent or sexually active, and

⁴⁴ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 155.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 157.

engaged in heterosexual or same-sex relationships. Sexuality is not a binary choice, but rather it is directional with varying shades of grey.

This thinking no doubt puts them at odds with the Christian evangelical church, which points to binary positions, especially churches within more conservative pentecostal tribes, such as the Assemblies of God. The purpose of humanity is not to find its ultimate glory in individualism; rather the church teaches self-sacrifice and submission to something transcendent. It is for this reason that the church is categorized, fairly or unfairly, as repressive by Millennials.

The Church as Exclusive

Along with viewing the church as sexually repressive, Millennials see it as largely exclusive and judgmental towards those that do not share the same beliefs. In a national survey, researchers found that 54 percent of Millennials believe that the church is not tolerant of other beliefs. Meanwhile, 44 percent believe the church is an exclusive club and another 66 percent would say the church is hypocritical and judgmental.⁴⁶ The church carries a set of dogmatic values that is increasingly at odds with this generation of people who are increasingly coming of age and are finding their place in society. Sociologist Christian Smith points out:

For many moderns, not to mention postmodernists, the idea of Truth with a capital “T” has become problematic. The belief that there exists objectively an unchanging foundation or standard that applies to everyone simply feels too narrow, too absolutist, too old-fashioned to maintain comfortably.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Barna Group, *Making Space for Millennials Report* (Colorado Springs, CO: Barna Group, 2014), 39.

⁴⁷ Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 126.

As a part of Smith's study of the evangelical church, he discovered that there is a 60 percent gap between those of the evangelical church who believe morals should be based on absolute truths (75 percent) and nonreligious people who affirm the same position (only 15 percent).⁴⁸ This means that the way evangelicals view the world is very different from the way nonreligious people do, and that gap will grow increasingly wider with this emerging generation. This large gap in fundamental moral beliefs only drives the perception of the church being judgmental and exclusivist even further. While there are a number of other factors that are driving the exodus that will be explored in later research, the fact remains that negative cultural perceptions are keeping Millennials away from the church.

Millennials: Is God Missing from the Church?

While there is an abundance of negative perceptions that the church must deal with, perhaps the most damning perception of Millennials is that the church no longer offers anything positive. The church used to be a place to commune with God, fellowship with believers, and be a force of good within the world. However, much of that has changed, at least in regards to the perception of many Millennials. In their groundbreaking research with teens and young adults in the early part of the twenty-first century, Christian Smith and Melinda Denton discovered that many young Americans were not raised on biblical Christianity, but rather on an Americanized version of Christianity. They coined the term for this new American religion as "Moral Therapeutic

⁴⁸ Ibid., 128.

Deism.” They go on to say that this religion “exists, with God’s aid, to help people succeed in life, to make them feel good, and to help them get along with others who otherwise are different in school, at work, on a team, and in other routine areas of life.”⁴⁹ Smith and Denton say that this religion is shaped not only by organized religion, but by other areas of pop culture such as talk shows, horoscopes, blogs, and the like. These cultural influences in their view insert themselves along with Christian doctrine to create an American religion.⁵⁰ This hybridized religion has been the Christianity that many young adults were raised in even within the Assemblies of God, and once out of the home they realize that they can find this form of their religion outside of the confines of the church.

Smith and Denton’s early study of Millennials is significant, and this American civil religion has consequences that are already being seen. In a study conducted by Barna and the Cornerstone Knowledge Network, they found that Millennials do not simply avoid church due to negative cultural perceptions, but rather they avoid church because there is nothing of substantive value within the church. Of the Millennials surveyed, 30 percent said that church was not important to them at all. Out of that number, 35 percent acknowledged that church was not relevant to them, 30 percent stated that they can find God elsewhere, while another 20 percent believed God was missing from church.⁵¹ When one combines Smith and Denton’s findings along with the Barna

⁴⁹ Christian Smith and Melinda Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), loc. 3527, Kindle.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, loc. 3533.

⁵¹ Barna Group, *Barna Trends: What’s New and What’s Next at the Intersection of Faith and Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016), 159.

survey, it becomes easy to connect the dots. Because this young generation was raised on Smith and Denton's concept of Moral Therapeutic Deism, then the church no longer has the power to compel this generation through her doors because it does not offer a unique place to connect with God. Out of all the reasons that Millennials do not connect in church, this by far is the most concerning, and will be explored at length in the second section of this research.

Conclusion to the Chapter

If the church is going to reconnect with this emerging generation, then it must meet the challenges addressed. First, the church must be a place where Millennials can connect to God once again. After all, a staggering eight out of ten Millennials say that learning about or growing closer to God are the two largest reasons for attending church.⁵² With this being the case, churches must make every effort to make God visible through worship, word, and sacrament. Second, the church must do its best to remove negative cultural perceptions while at the same time being faithful to its historic doctrine, which is something far easier said than done. Third, the church once again must become the embodiment of its rhetoric. If it hopes to reengage this generation, then it must be about the "Father's business," as Jesus Christ so eloquently states in the Gospel of Luke.⁵³ In other words, the church must be missional in purpose.

There is no doubt that the church is in decline in America and, particularly with this emerging generation, the church is losing more and more influence. Despite the

⁵² Ibid., 161.

⁵³ Luke 2:49 (ESV).

negative trends, the Millennials have potential to not only be reached, but to be thriving members of churches once again. Like never before, the church must have a renewed sense of vigor and determination to engage this increasingly lost generation.

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus tells a story of a young man leaving the comfort and safety of his home in order to explore the world on his own. Jesus tells us that after the son squandered his wealth, he "came to his senses" and returned home to his father. As the son returns, Jesus tells us:

And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.⁵⁴

While the Millennials have left the church in alarming numbers, this well-known parable can serve as a lesson. Much like the father anticipated and hoped for the return of his son, the church must have hope that this generation will return. Not only should the church hope for their return, but the church must also be ready to embrace them and find a place for them to fit into the community of faith again much like the father in this great story. This research's aim is to provide a path forward for the Assemblies of God in welcoming the Millennials back into its family. The Assemblies of God, which is founded upon missional principles, may be able to reengage this generation and bring them back into the community of faith by refocusing its historic charismatic gifts towards empowerment and mission.

⁵⁴ Luke 15:11-32 (ESV).

CHAPTER 3:
THE MILLENNIALS: WHO ARE THEY, WHAT DO THEY VALUE,
AND WHAT MADE THEM?

A seismic cultural shift has happened throughout the world. New markets are opening, emerging economies are coming to life, and a young generation has begun to take the reins of power and leadership in a century that is still in its infancy. The Millennial generation is the largest generation in American history, with ninety-five million living in the United States. This dwarfs Generation X by more than double, and by 2020, the Millennials will represent one-third of all adults living in America.¹ As an older generation known as the Boomers heads into retirement, the Millennials are shaping and redefining culture as we know it.

There is no greater example of this shift than when Millennials swept Barack Obama into power in 2008. The future president ran against John McCain, the long-term senator from Arizona. While McCain seemed like the typical candidate, having a great deal of experience as a legislator, and had been a war hero who survived torture in a Vietnamese prison camp, Obama was relatively unknown. The Democratic nominee, Obama, served for a time in the state legislature and had not yet finished his first term as a United States senator when he declared his candidacy. The race was a ‘David versus Goliath’ battle. Initially, it seemed like the new president would yet again be an older white male, and life would go on as it had for many years.

¹ Michael Hais and Morley Winograd, “Discussing America’s Transition to the Millennial Era,” Mike and Morley, LLC, accessed November 7, 2015, <http://www.mikeandmorley.com>.

This was not a normal year, though, and the culture was shifting. More and more younger people were headed to the polls. According to a *Huffington Post* article written in 2008 by Michael Hais and Morley Winograd, fellows at the New Policy Institute:

The first large wave of the Millennial Generation, about one third of the young Americans born from 1982-2003, entered the electorate to decisively support President-elect Barack Obama. Young voters preferred Obama over John McCain by a greater than 2:1 margin (66% vs. 32%). This is well above the margin given by young voters to any presidential candidate for at least three decades, if not at any time in U.S. history. More of them consider themselves liberals rather than conservatives (31% to 18%), as well. When it comes to policy, Millennials are liberal interventionists on economic issues, active multilateralists in foreign affairs and tolerant non-meddlers on social issues—a profile that most closely matches the Democratic Party’s platform as well as the new President’s agenda.²

As Barack Obama stepped onto the stage on a cold November night in Chicago, thousands of adoring fans, many of them Millennials, greeted him while holding signs with his signature campaign words of hope and change. The president-elect would guide this new generation into the future. Things would be different. For the new generation, change was coming, and it was sensed as Barack Obama thanked John McCain and began delivering his victory speech in Grant’s Park in his hometown of Chicago.³ The 2008 election was just the beginning of the shift from the Boomer generation to the Millennial generation.

While the 2016 election of Donald Trump may seem to indicate the American electorate has shifted back to pre-2008 numbers, one must consider a finding from the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, which states:

² Michael Hais and Morley Winograd, “It’s Official: Millennials Realigned American Politics in 2008,” *The Huffington Post*, December 18, 2008, accessed November 20, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-hais-and-morley-winograd/its-official-millennials_b_144357.html.

³ Barack Obama, “Transcript: This is Your Victory,” Cable News Network, accessed November 20, 2015, <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/11/04/obama.transcript>.

Young voters made their voices heard in Tuesday's presidential election, making up one-fifth of the electorate, and almost two-thirds of them rejected Donald Trump's candidacy for president even as older Americans seem to have coalesced around the Republican nominee and propelled him to an unexpectedly strong, and possibly winning, electoral performance. As in other recent electoral processes, such as the "Brexit" vote on the United Kingdom's status in the European Union, young people voted drastically differently than older segments of the electorate but may have come up short in definitively shaping an outcome in an election that they believed would affect them personally. Young voters, ages 18-29, supported Hillary Clinton over Donald Trump by 55% to 37%. Among young people of color, Clinton won by even more decisive margins. The 37% youth support for the Republican candidate in 2016 equals the support garnered by Mitt Romney in 2012. However, youth support for the Democratic candidate dropped: it was 60% for President Obama's reelection in 2012, and 55% for Clinton this year. Notably, while in the last presidential election 97% of young voters chose one of the two major party candidates, this year only 92% did so, as nearly 1 in 10 youth (8%) selected a third-party option or otherwise eschewed voting for Clinton or Trump.⁴

Despite the 2016 election results that placed Donald Trump in the White House, it does seem that Millennials have altered the political map and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. These new trends are not just isolated to the political area, but rather the shift is throughout a much broader scope of culture. From religion to politics and everything in between, the Millennials have begun to put their stamp on all walks of life. This shift is not reserved for major metropolitan areas such as New York or San Francisco, but is occurring in many statistical categories across the United States, although at a slower pace in some regions.

While this research cannot look at all the areas the Millennials are influencing, it is important to note that these shifts are not happening in a vacuum, but rather the shift is a phenomenon not seen since the mid-1900s. Primarily, this research will focus on

⁴ "Updated: Young People Reject Trump, But Older Voters Propel Him to Unexpected Victory," *The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement*, last modified November 9, 2016, accessed October 17, 2017, <http://civicyouth.org/too-close-to-call-young-people-reject-trump-older-voters-key-to-his-unexpectedly-strong-performance>.

asking: what brought about this phenomenon, and what are the current values of this new generation? It will analyze statistical data that gives indicators of where these shifts are and how they are taking place.

What Makes a Millennial?

In the book of Acts, chapter 17, the apostle Paul is reasoning in the synagogue as he typically did in every city he visited. While lecturing on Christ, philosophers and stoics overheard him and invited him to discuss these things at the Areopagus, which was in the shadow of the great Parthenon where many pagan shrines were constructed on one of Greece's holiest sites. Luke, the writer of Acts, records:

Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, "What does this babbler wish to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities"—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean." Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new. So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we are indeed his offspring.'"⁵

⁵ Acts 17:16–28 (ESV).

As Paul is in Athens, he sees the religious artifacts, the idols, and the temples and works to find common ground in order to share the Gospel. He was a student of culture. He did not put his head in the sand and ignore the world, but he was actively engaged within the world. In order for the church to engage the Millennials, then, it must understand the values of this generation and how they developed these values.

In order to understand this, we will explore some primary concepts or values that the Millennials represent. There are certainly two schools of thought. Some believe that Millennials are a generation full of greatness. However, many believe that this generation is one of the most narcissistic generations. This research will explore both concepts. Secondly, we will explore their view of sexuality and the impact it is having on society. This research will also look at how globalization and technology has shaped this generation. Finally, we will try to understand their faith. All of these areas play an important role in shaping the American Millennial culture. Without this understanding, it is impossible for the church to engage this generation.

Millennials: A Generation We Perspective

Researchers are divided on the self-identity of Millennials. There are primarily two schools of thought when it comes to this budding generation. On one end of the spectrum, there are those who declare the Millennials to be more civically minded, more compassionate, and more aware of their global surroundings. These scholars would dub this young generation as Generation We (Gen We). However, there are others that would describe the Millennials as self-absorbed, narcissistic, and more concerned about the opinions of others. These researchers would assign the Generation Me (Gen Me) moniker to the Millennials. Both schools of thought are worth considering.

There are admirable commonly found traits of Millennials, and those people who consider this generation in a positive light point out some key components to making them a great generation. Researchers observe that this generation is more diverse, high-achieving, well behaved, politically active, tolerant, and civically minded.⁶ These traits seemed to serve Barack Obama well, matching as they did with his campaign platform, and it certainly seems that culture is changing rapidly to keep up with the beliefs and values of this generation. Despite all the positive traits that this generation may offer, considering the Millennials to be a great generation may be presumptive. After all, the earliest Millennials are in their mid-thirties and the youngest of the generation are just now moving into their twenties. So while many Millennials are well into adulthood, many are still barely out of high school. For this reason, it is somewhat difficult to estimate their potential. This may be partly why there are mixed reviews regarding this generation.

A good example of these fluctuating ideas on the Millennials can be seen in political polling. While the Millennials turned out in record numbers for the election of Barack Obama in 2008, the percentage of voters in the following midterm election, when Obama was not on the ticket, was typical for previous midterm elections.⁷ Furthermore, when compared to previous generations, it does not seem that the Millennial generation is remarkable in voter turnout.

⁶ Michael Hais and Morley Winograd, "Discussing America's Transition to the Millennial Era," Mike and Morley, LLC, accessed November 7, 2015, <http://www.mikeandmorley.com>.

⁷ Julia Glum, "Election Results 2014: At 21.3 Percent Millennial Turnout About the Same as In Previous Midterms," International Business Times, accessed November 10, 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.com/elections-results-2014-213-percent-millennial-turnout-about-same-previous-midterms-1719624>.

In 1976, when boomers were between 18 and 30 years old, their turnout rate was 50 percent. In 2008, 51 percent of Millennials—ages 18 to 28 at the time—voted. And in 1972, when boomers had many incentives to go to the polls, including the Vietnam-era draft, the numbers still weren't too different. A total of 54 percent of boomers voted in the Nixon-McGovern election, versus 49 percent of Millennials in the 2004 Bush-Kerry race.⁸

It seems that it is quite possible that the over-enthusiastic prognostications of Millennials being civically minded might have had to do more with the historic nature of Barack Obama's presidential candidacy than it did with an intrinsic value wired into the generation itself.

Politics aside, there are other key concepts that give many an optimistic outlook for this generation. Winograd and Hais point out:

Teen pregnancy and birth rates rose by more than 20 percent from the time the last Baby Boomers entered their teens in the early 1970s, to the early 1990s, when the greatest number of Gen-Xers were teenagers. Rates declined more than 35 percent from that peak until the years right after 2000, when the first wave of Millennials entered high school. Over the same period, the teenage abortion rate more than doubled and then fell by more than 50 percent as Millennials reached their teen years. Abortion rates for Millennial teenagers did rise slightly in 2006 and 2007, although they never came close to where they had been when Boomers and Xers were teens, and they began to decline again in 2008.⁹

Researchers would argue that this change is not just about a new sexual ethic, which we have addressed and will look at a bit further, but it highlights the fact that the Millennials are more socially aware and conscious of their choices.

Another positive aspect that researchers point to with this generation is how they actually engage in society. According to commissioned research in 2008 by the Case

⁸ Michael Winerip, "Boomers, Millennials and the Ballot Box," New York Times Company, October 29, 2012, accessed November 11, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/29/booming/voter-turnout-for-boomers-and-millennials.html?_r=0.

⁹ Morley Winograd and Michael Hais, *Millennial Momentum: How a New Generation is Remaking America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011), loc. 2324.

Foundation, they identified the Millennial generation as being deeply committed to causes.¹⁰ After all, the Millennials are the first generation that was required to serve as a part of middle school curriculum. The research discovered that 83 percent of public high schools and 77 percent of middle schools require community service. Furthermore, the study discovered that overall volunteerism declined between 1974 and 1989 (20.9 percent and 13.4 percent). However, during the time many Millennials were going into middle school and high school that number more than doubled. In 2005, the volunteerism percentage had grown to 28.4 percent. In addition to that, volunteerism amongst college students between 2002 and 2005 increased 20 percent. This indicates that the mandatory curriculum in middle school and high school has carried on in college volunteerism when there was no requirement.¹¹

These are just a few examples of why so many researchers are encouraged by the Millennials. However, while there are certainly positives with this generation, as any generation has, many researchers are not so impressed. They would argue that the Millennials do not value others as much as they value themselves. It is for this reason that some researchers have dubbed this generation as “Generation Me.”

Millennials: A Generation Me Perspective

The Millennial generation is often associated with the Internet, social media, and other forms of technology. This generation of young people who were raised by

¹⁰ “Social Citizens,” The Case Foundation, last modified June 26, 2007, accessed August 1, 2017, <http://casefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/SocialCitizens.pdf>.

¹¹ Corporation for National and Community Service, “Volunteer Growth in America: A Review of Trends Since 1974,” accessed July 1, 2017, https://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/06_1203_volunteer_growth.pdf.

“helicopter parents,” were given trophies for participating, and posted their lives for all to view on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Periscope, Twitter, and the like has emerged not as the optimistic, well adjusted, and civically minded generation so many hoped for; instead, according to some, Millennials are a product of their environment. Studies point to the rise of a generation that is obsessed with self.

This generation’s obsession with self did not happen in a vacuum. They did not arrive at this place by nature. Rather, the raging self-confidence comes as a product of the nurturing they received at home. Dr. Jean Twenge observes that parents of this generation are largely to blame. In her study, she found that “GenMe’ers” parents gave their children unique names more than those in previous generations. The number one cause for this is so that they would stand out. She states, “In 1950, one out of three boys received one of the top ten names. By 2012, less than one out of ten did. Girls receiving a common name dropped from one out of four to less than one out of ten.”¹² Twenge goes further to state that the GenMe’ers who are now parents are continuing the trend if not taking it a step further: “Boys names that increased the most in popularity between 2011 and 2012 included Major, King and Messiah.”¹³ This new generation seems to have an overabundance of self-esteem. Interestingly, the idea of self-concept or self-esteem is largely new. It was not widely used until the late 1960s and was not really in the common vernacular of popular culture until the 1980s.¹⁴ The self-esteem movement became full blown in the 1990s during many Millennials’ formative years.

¹² Twenge, *Generation Me*, 32.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 62.

Like a prophet in the wilderness, columnist Tom Wolfe explains that this self-esteem movement did not happen overnight. Rather, it was something that formed out of the robust economic period after World War 2. Wartime spending set off an economic boom for thirty years. Finally, according to Wolfe, Americans had disposable income. Most every segment of the population could pursue ideals that for centuries were reserved for the wealthy class. Namely, they could pursue self-fulfillment and self-esteem. Wolfe goes on to discuss how the 1970s was the “decade of Me.” He states:

The old alchemical dream was changing base metals into gold. The alchemical dream is: changing one’s personality—remaking, remodeling, elevating, and polishing one’s very self. . . .and observing, studying, and doting on it (Me!). This had always been an aristocratic luxury, confined throughout most of history to the life of the courts, since only the wealthiest classes had the free time and the surplus income to dwell upon this sweetest and vainest of pastimes. It smacked so much of vanity, in fact, that the noble folk involved always took care to call it quite something else. Much of the satisfaction well-born people got from what was known historically as ‘chivalric tradition’ was precisely that: dwelling upon me and every delicious nuance of my conduct and personality.¹⁵

Wolfe goes on to say that in 1970s America, this me-centric lifestyle had reached a fever pitch almost emulating a religious experience, and therefore caused him to dub this movement as America’s Third Great Awakening. Speaking of nearly every American who has benefited during the post-war economic boom, he adds:

They’ve created the greatest age of individualism in American history. All the rules are broken. The prophets are out of business! Where the Third Great Awakening will lead—who can presume to say? One only knows that the great religious waves have momentum all their own. Neither arguments nor policies nor acts of the legislature have been any match for them in the past. And this one has the mightiest, holiest roll of all, the beat that goes. . . .Me. . . .Me. . . .Me. . . .Me.¹⁶

¹⁵ Tom Wolfe, “The Me Decade and the Third Great Awakening,” *New York Magazine*, August 23, 1976, accessed July 1, 2017, <http://nymag.com/news/features/45938/>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

It was within this new self-esteem awakening that many of the parents of Millennials were emerging into adulthood and starting families of their own. Researchers Sara Konrath and Paul Anderson had a similar finding in their study. They analyzed the number of books published between 1900 and 2000 featuring the concept of self-control versus the concept of self-esteem. In the early 1900s, the scale tipped radically towards the concept of self-control. By the mid-twentieth century, the concept was getting close to even. Starting in the 1970s the trend had reversed. There were more books published with the concept of self-esteem than self-control, and the change is ever growing.¹⁷ In their findings, they state:

We found the number of self-references (1st person singular pronouns) in song lyrics between 1980 and 2000 is correlated with the same number of mentions of self-esteem in books between the same years. This suggests that the current method may indeed be tapping into sociocultural trends in self-focus over time.¹⁸

This research uncovered by both Konrath and Twenge is important to understanding Millennials. In many ways, this new concept of self-esteem and individualism adopted by their parents has profoundly shaped the Millennial mindset.

In a survey of Americans of age eighteen to twenty-nine, researchers discovered that most Millennials did not see the need to help others. The same study discovered that only 4 percent of Millennials really are civically minded. Not only that, but the Millennial generation seems to be less environmentally conscious compared to the previous generations.¹⁹ This is quite surprising considering the bombardment that Millennials were

¹⁷ Sara Konrath and Paul Anderson, "A Century of Self-Esteem." In *Handbook on Psychology of Self-Esteem*, eds. Stefan De Wals and Katerina Meszaros, (N.p.: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2012), 8.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Christian Smith, Kari Christofferson, Hilary Davidson, and Patricia Snell Herzog, *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood*, 100.

under as children by both media programming and educational curriculum. Twenge, a primary proponent of the idea that Millennials are more narcissistic, states:

Almost all of the empirical evidence demonstrates a rise in self-focus among American young people, including narcissism, high expectations, self-esteem, thinking one is above average, and focusing on personal (vs. global) fears. Cultural products such as books, TV shows, and popular music also show a rise in self-focus in the United States. The generational decreases in empathy, trust in others, civic orientation, concern for others, and attitudes toward helping the downtrodden also point toward Generation Me and away from Generation We.²⁰

Certainly, the researchers are mixed in their findings. While the outlook on the Millennials may not be as bleak as Twenge and other researchers perceive it, it is hard to ignore that the Millennials have a high self-worth and are optimistic of the future. While this is a shift from the self-reliant yet cynical Generation X, many are hopeful that some of the narcissism will fade away, and they will become more like the previous generations.²¹ The Millennials' positive view of self may be what makes them into a revolutionizing generation. After all, as Robert Salkowitz points out in his important work, it is this generation's optimism and confidence that will drive them to find better solutions for the global dilemmas that the twenty-first century certainly holds.²² Despite the confidence or overconfidence brought about by the self-esteem movement, one positive aspect to the Millennials is that they truly believe they can change the world in which they live.

²⁰ Jean M. Twenge, "The Evidence for Generation Me and Against Generation We," *Emerging Adulthood* 1, no.1 (March 2013): 14, accessed November 17, 2015, <http://eax.sagepub.com.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/content/1/1/11.full.pdf+html>.

²¹ Sharon A. DeVaney, "Understanding the Millennial Generation," *Journal of Financial Service Professionals* 69, no. 6 (November 2015): 13.

²² Rob Salkowitz, *Young World Rising: How Youth Technology and Entrepreneurship Are Changing the World from the Bottom Up* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2010), 7.

Millennials and Globalization

The world has changed during many of the Millennials' lifetimes. According to author and journalist Thomas Friedman, the world has not become increasingly bigger, but radically smaller due to globalization, and the Millennials have a ringside seat for this substantial change. Friedman argues that during the last five hundred years there have been three great eras of globalization. The first occurred in 1492 when Columbus set off on his great expedition, and this era lasted all the way until the 1800s. In Friedman's view, the world went from larger and relatively unknown to a medium size. This era was defined by countries and governments dominating by sheer force, and this competition brought about new technologies that propelled the world forward.

The second era that Friedman points to lasted roughly from the 1800s until the early 2000s. This era is marked by innovations such as the steam engine, railroads, and the telephone, which brought about rapid growth and the rise of the industrial revolution. This era gave birth to multinational corporations and the global economy, and in Friedman's opinion it was a time when walls began to fall around the world, transforming it from a medium-sized world to a smaller one.

The third and final phase of globalization began in the early 2000s. Friedman points out that "when Bill Clinton was elected president in 1992, virtually no one outside the walls of the government and the academy had email."²³ By the early 2000s, a whole new world seemed to emerge overnight. Due to such things as the Internet, email, social

²³ Thomas L. Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty First Century* (New York: Picador/Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2007), 11.

media, and the ease of travel, individuals could engage with others on an unprecedented global scale. Friedman states:

No one anticipated this convergence. It just happened - right around the year 2000. And when it did, people all over the world started waking up and realizing that they had more power than ever to go global as individuals, they needed more than ever to think of themselves as individuals competing against other individuals all over the planet, and they had more opportunities to work with those other individuals, not just compete with them. As a result, every person must, and can ask: Where do I as an individual fit into the global competition and opportunities of the day, and how can I, on my own, collaborate with others globally?²⁴

Friedman continues by claiming that Globalization 3.0 is not only going to be more and more driven by individuals, but also by a much more diverse—non-Western, non-white—group of individuals. Individuals across the world are being empowered. Friedman states that Globalization 3.0 makes it possible for so many more people to plug in and play, and we are going to see every color of the human rainbow take part.²⁵ In his book *Young World Rising*, Rob Salkowitz points out:

When Internet usage within a country reaches critical mass, it can dramatically impact top-line measures of economic growth. In a 2006 study of 27 developed and 66 developing countries, economists George Clarke and Scott Wallsten found that a one-percentage-point increase in the number of Internet users is correlated with a boost in exports of 4.3 percentage points and an increase in exports from low-income countries to high-income countries of 3.8 percentage points. The World Bank calculates that “a high-income economy with an average of 10 broadband subscribers per 100 people would have enjoyed a 1.21 percentage increase in per capita GDP growth. This potential growth increase is substantial given that the average growth rates of developed economies was just 2.1 percent between 1980 and 2006.”²⁶

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Salkowitz, *Young World Rising*, 28.

Because of this growth in technology that is in turn driving economies, it is no wonder that more and more business is being conducted overseas. In growing numbers, people are interacting with others whom they never would have connected with even ten years prior. This change is rapid and ever-increasing. As Friedman points out, “In 2003, some 25,000 U.S. tax returns were done in India. In 2004, the number was 100,000. In 2005, it was roughly 400,000. In a decade you will assume your accountant has outsourced the basic preparation of your tax returns—if not more.”²⁷

This global connectedness is putting Millennials in touch with the world at a rapid pace. Not only are products being exported from variant countries, but ideas are being traded rapidly. Millennials are no longer confined to the cultural and religious beliefs predominant in their neighborhoods, but because of technology and this global exposure, their essential beliefs about the ideals of other cultures are being shaped by myriad sources.

The Millennials and the New Sexual Ethic

The Millennials are living in an age when sexual expression and sexual freedom are celebrated. While their parents started a sexual revolution in the 1960s, the Millennials are willing participants in the revolt. They are both a product of their parents’ revolution and innovators of their own, and while they may be more conscientious, they certainly are not inhibited.

The new sexual ethic is not losing steam. While in the 1950s only 30 percent of young people believed it was morally acceptable to have sex before marriage, that trend

²⁷ Ibid., 13.

has changed with 75 percent approving of sex before marriage by 1990. Even more staggering is the effect the new ethic has had upon young women. Only 12 percent of women agreed that sex was morally acceptable in the 1950s outside of marriage, but 80 percent believe it is morally acceptable today.²⁸ The population is no longer shocked that young people are having sex before marriage, but rather it is shocked to find out that there is a small minority that has not done so. Jean Twenge, in her book *Generation Me*, conducted interviews with young Millennial women on their thoughts about sex. Here is what she discovered:

Many [of Millennials] ask how you'd know if you were sexually compatible with someone if you didn't have sex before you got married. 'You wouldn't buy a car you haven't test-driven, would you?' asks Emily, 25. Angela, 23, uses a similar analogy: Not having sex with your future husband is like not trying on clothes before you buy them.²⁹

When compared to the historic teaching of the evangelical church, which believes sex and any other sexual activity should be reserved for marriage, this is certainly a concerning trend in regards to the church's relationship with this generation. This new sexual ethic puts Millennials at odds with the church and can make it more difficult for evangelicals to bridge the gap. The new view on sex for Millennials does not just stop at sexual intercourse either. Oral sex is engaged in quite frequently and many of the participants are young teenagers. Both men and women are watching pornography more frequently, and nearly half of all American Millennials believe it is morally acceptable, nearly doubling those approving in Generation X.³⁰ Add to all these stats, the hook-ups,

²⁸ Twenge, *Generation Me*, 224.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 224.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 228-232.

pole dancing classes, and the women that have plastic surgery to look more and more like porn stars, and the new sexual ethic may have dire consequences.

With this newfound sexual freedom, there is a price to pay. In a culture steeped in sex, it is no surprise that college men at Old Dominion University posted banners that were directed to the incoming freshmen. “Hope your baby girl is ready for a good time,” one exclaimed while the other stated, “Drop off mom too.”³¹ While the banners found the ire of the college president and the fraternity was put on suspension, colleges around the country face the same problem. The culture of rape on college campuses has become an epidemic with one in five women reporting a rape during their four years in college.³²

The new sexual ethic that has been inherited from the Boomers and is now being perpetrated in today’s society is certainly complex, and it is quite challenging for the church. While the free love movement of the 1960s seemed like young adult rebellion, the sexual ethic of the Millennials is now rather commonplace for many. Now, it may seem odd to point out these sexual ethics, but it is important to note that this young generation has lived on a constant stream of sex. This makes it extremely important to the Millennials, and their ideals are remaking the sexual culture. The Millennials are both living with and perpetuating their own sexuality, which is challenging evangelical churches to rethink their approach to this generation when it comes to sex. After all, the “free love” movement is giving way to a “be what you want to be” movement, even if it means changing gender identities. Individual fulfillment and pleasure is the pursuit of this

³¹ “Under-40 New Research Findings: Millennials Perspective on Race, Police Brutality, Same Sex Marriage, and Other Hot Button Issues,” PR Newswire Association, LLC, accessed November 21, 2015, <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/rareus-under-40-poll-new-research-findings---millennials-perspective-on-race-police-brutality-same-sex-marriage-and-other-hot-button-issues-300092980.html>.

³² Eliza Gray, “Nation: Sexual Assault,” *Time Magazine*, May 26, 2014, 22.

generation, which makes the evangelical church's traditional doctrine on the matter seem quite puritanical and has an impact on church attendance. Mark Regnerus, associate professor of sociology at the University of Texas, states:

A key reason why emerging adults are MIA from their congregations is the collision of sexual and religious impulses in their lives. The two seem incompatible. In fact, emerging adults are marrying, on average, five years later than their parents did. Those are five libido-packed years, let me remind you. The impulse toward sexual oneness is a strong one, but young Christians are beginning to resist the centuries-old narrative that marriage is good, earthy and feasible—that it's what Christians in love are supposed to do next. Too many emerging-adult Christians are settling for cohabitation, convinced that in a divorcing culture they're being shrewd to proceed with caution. Moving in together, however, has a way of squashing the religious impulse—the one that motivates us to meet together in public worship, which has long been a hallmark of our common faith. Rising together for Sunday morning worship just seems odd in that scenario. So, it goes dormant in favor of other forms of spirituality.³³

The decision by Millennials to place feelings, both emotional and physical, above a moral standard regarding sex will become increasingly problematic for the evangelical church.

Millennials and Faith

Understanding Millennials' sexual ethic gives us a glimpse into their concept of morality. That is not to say that Millennials are immoral; it just goes to show us that Millennials' concept of morality is certainly unique compared to that of the evangelical church. This leads many in the evangelical church to view Millennials' attachment to faith as nominal at best. While not all the news about faith is bad for the Millennials, there are definite battles that must be won by pastors and churches alike if they hope to see Millennials re-engage with their faith.

³³ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 220-221.

While it is not new that previous generations explored their faith outside the walls of the church, a new trend is emerging. According to a Pew Research Center study on the religious landscape of Americans, only 11–12 percent of the Millennials are certain in their beliefs about God while 15–17 percent are fairly certain. When compared to their predecessors, they miss the mark by about 15–20 percent. The same question was asked to Generation X (28 percent certain and 29 percent fairly certain) and the Boomers (34 percent certain and 29 percent fairly certain). It is important to point out that there was very little change between the two previous generations. However, there has been a steep decline of religious beliefs amongst Millennials, making them the least religious Americans of the last hundred years.³⁴ While theologians and pastors may argue regarding the reasons why this trend is occurring, it is apparent that this may have major implications for the future.

So before this research can move forward, one must ask: what has caused this steep decline? Has the decline of faith accelerated rapidly or has it been a slow erosion over time? While it may seem that Millennials have walked away from their faith rather quickly, one does have to consider the landscape in which they were raised. As stated previously, the advance of globalization and technology has put a wealth of information at their fingertips. One has to speculate that this has impacted their thinking regarding faith.

Mapping the causes of the move away from faith, as well as determining its impact, is a difficult endeavor. After all, many Millennials are just now coming into adulthood, with the oldest in their generation in their mid-thirties. However, if the past

³⁴ “Religious Landscape Study,” Pew Research Center, accessed December 1, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/belief-in-god>.

cultural slide into secularism and pluralism and the present result are any indicator, then one could assume that the future holds some ethical dilemmas that will prove challenging for many evangelicals. It is true that many Millennials see the role of faith as meaningless, dangerous, or at best neutral, meaning it has no impact upon the future. If this is the case, then evangelicals have a herculean task ahead of them, and accomplishing it is not just good for the church, but as some would argue is likewise good for society.

Examining the danger from undermining faith in societies reveals a deadly trend. As history records, societies that persecuted faith, outlawed faith, and had an open disdain for faith were societies that saw a cataclysmic loss of life. In the twentieth century alone, these faithless societies saw over ninety-four million people killed.³⁵ Will the twenty-first century see the same destruction with a generation increasingly devaluing faith? Maybe not, but it is something that must be mentioned and discussed.

Furthermore, people who have religious faith tend to give more charitable contributions and volunteer time. According to a study conducted by *Policy Review*, religious people are 25 percentage points higher when it comes to charitable giving and 23 percentage points higher when it comes to volunteering.³⁶ If these figures hold true for the future generations, then this could have major implications for organizations that assist those who are most dependent on these funds. A generation that devalues religion is not a minor problem within the culture; it is something that must be reasonably

³⁵ David J. Wolpe, *Why Faith Matters* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 64.

³⁶ Arthur C. Brooks, "Religious Faith and Charitable Giving," *Policy Review*, no. 121 (October/November 2003), accessed December 2, 2015, 41, <http://heritage.org>.

discussed and researched because of its implications upon society. As Robert Woodberry of the National University of Singapore points out:

In particular, conversionary Protestants [a term he uses for evangelicals] were a crucial catalyst initiating the development and spread of religious liberty, mass printing, newspapers, voluntary organizations, most colonial reforms, and the codification of legal protection for non-whites in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These innovations fostered conditions that made stable representative democracies more likely.³⁷

For Woodberry, faith, particularly evangelical faith, is critical in the growth and stability of the civilized world.

While the idea that faith is good for society may seem like an extreme jump in our secular society, it needs to be reconciled with the values of the Millennial generation. This young and self-confident generation must ask tough questions about the role that faith will play in their generation. If Millennials abandon faith altogether, then they must live with the consequences. While there are those actively engaged in faith, the steep decline in numbers by this generation is certainly concerning. Even though the extent of the impact due to the moral decline of industrial Western nations is not fully felt, there are visible signs.

The Millennials are certainly not carrying the banners of faith like the previous generations. However, it does seem as if this generation values a form of religion; this religion is unique in that it worships self, human achievement, and Western equality. Now, it is accurate to say that every generation has a percentage of people who base their values on subjective whims. However, for Millennials, this appears to be the rule more than the exception. With Millennials abandoning faith rapidly, they are abandoning an

³⁷ Robert D. Woodberry, "The Missionary Roots of Liberal Democracy," *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 2 (May 2012): 244-245.

objective measure for morality and ethics, which can have enormous consequences. A society governed by subjectivism rather than truth or facts is at the mercy of emotive whims of the day. Self-determined morality, which is what many Millennials seem to be in favor of, is proverbial shifting sand. This is why it is crucial for the evangelical church to engage this generation. The church must come up with a method and a language that this generation understands. Again, this generation is used to being catered to, so when it comes to faith, they do not necessarily drift to objective reason, but they often choose what feels correct to them. This is certainly a challenge for anyone who believes that faith is important. Now more than ever, the faithful must do as the apostle Peter instructed and “give a reason for their hope” if they want to engage a generation that is seemingly at odds with traditional Christian doctrine.

Conclusion to the Chapter

The world is being remade in real-time. Globalization and technology have exponentially changed the way we access and digest information. While the changes in our society have been radical and swift at times, Millennials certainly are by-products not only of these changes but of the past. The “Greatest Generation,” the Boomers, and Generation X have all contributed to the ideals that the Millennials hold currently. As the Millennials emerge and flood into leadership positions in politics, education, religion, and many more areas, which will in turn connect them to the larger world and its values, their beliefs are being transformed and are transformative. It is impossible to ignore their impact in shaping the future. As Neil Howe and William Strauss point out:

Those who disregard generational change have been surprised by the last several turns in the American mood. Those who continue to disregard it will be just as surprised the next time the new decade and a new generation alter the nation’s

course...the young people of America will dazzle the nation much as Boomers did in the '60s, though to a very different effect.³⁸

There is certainly a mix of reviews regarding the Millennials, which is partly due to the young nature of this new generation. Many have not even entered into the workplace, and it may be too early to determine their full impact even though there are signs. Whether the Millennials are worthy of the positive reviews they receive from scholars or the dread that follows them from other researchers, it stands to reason that they will profoundly remake the world as we know it. They have more technology and are more globalized than any generation previously; therefore, they will have an opportunity to affect the world in a greater fashion, even as the world is continuing to shape them as well. Meanwhile, the church seems to have lost its prophetic voice to the Millennials. Can this generation be re-engaged with faith in this brave new world?

³⁸ Howe and Strauss, *Millennials Rising*, loc. 8695.

CHAPTER 4:

THE CHURCH, DOCTRINE, AND THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

As stated previously, many Millennials seem at opposite ends of the spectrum compared to the American evangelical church. Because of this, it does seem evident that the American evangelical church is in crisis, but what is the answer to this problem? Does the church offer any solutions, and can it engage a generation of Millennials that want nothing to do with religion? The church must find its purpose again and focus on its mission. In order to understand the church's original purpose, this research must take a brief sojourn in discovering the role doctrine played in the early church and how that doctrine has shifted in the twenty-first century, in both the evangelical world and the pentecostal and Assemblies of God world, which has helped us arrive at our current state of crisis.

A large reason for the decline seems to be that the church is no longer a place where people connect with God as stated previously. According to Barna Research Group, 44 percent of Americans attend church to feel closer to God while 27 percent say they attend church because they want to learn something about God. However, Barna's report goes further and states:

Although people cite their primary reasons for attending church as growing closer to God and learning more about him, Barna Group finds such closeness is a rare occurrence. Fewer than two out of 10 churchgoers feel close to God on even a monthly basis. Additionally, while almost two-thirds of those who value church attendance go to learn more about God, fewer than one in 10 (6%) who have ever been to church say they learned something about God or Jesus the last time they

attended. In fact, the majority of people (61%) say they did not gain any significant or new insights regarding faith when they last attended.¹

As churches have shifted away from doctrine and theology, the people within its walls have suffered, wondering what the point of their church attendance was. This has led to an erosion of faith and spirituality and has left many churches empty.

While there is a plethora of research that focuses on the church's decline through analyzing statistics, the church's crisis is not external. In other words, the crisis is not coming from the outside, *per se*, but rather the erosion of morality and loss of prophetic vision from the inside is the church's undoing. What has caused a healthy biblically-centered Western church to lose its love for doctrine and theology and instead trade the precious doctrine for cultural relativism, sentimental experiences, and political power? In other words, the church has drifted from disciple-making through proper doctrinal pursuits and has settled for short-term relevance without understanding the implications on the generation it is trying to reach.

In order to understand this shift, there must be significant focus on the role of doctrine by partaking in a brief sojourn through the historical church, doctrinal controversies, and the priority doctrine played in the development of the Christian world. This journey will serve as a springboard to further discussions on the role the preacher plays in the development of doctrine and doctrinal understanding, connecting that doctrine to the Charismatic experience and to the church's missional purpose. Furthermore, this research will compare core doctrines of the church such as sin and judgment, salvation through justification, the role of sanctification in the life of the

¹ "Americans Divided on the Importance of Church," Barna Research Group, last modified March 24, 2014, accessed July 1, 2017, <https://www.barna.com/research/americans-divided-on-the-importance-of-church/#.VL09cYh0ycx>.

believer, and the work of the Holy Spirit with the modern doctrines that are being taught within the Western church. Understanding these critical doctrines could help re-engage Millennials and will provide a foundational understanding for the remainder of this research.

Consider a study by *USA Today* that focuses on those who profess to be believers and their beliefs, and one can see why the church is in sharp decline. According to their research:

Among 3,412 adults surveyed, only 2% correctly answered at least 29 of 32 questions on the Bible, major religious figures, beliefs and practices. The average score was 16 correct (50%). 19 percent of all Protestants know that salvation comes through faith alone, not by works. 45 percent cannot name the four Gospels. 55 percent know that the Golden Rule is not one of the Ten Commandments.²

CNN reported, “The Bible may be the most revered book in America, but it is also one of the most misquoted.”³ Not only that, but according to a Pew Research Center study only 25 percent of Christians believe that Christianity is the only way to heaven. Other evangelical beliefs do not fare much better with most Christian Americans. For example, only 68 percent believe in Hell, 83 percent believe in Heaven, and 80 percent believe that there is actual life beyond death.⁴ These appalling examples demonstrate that America’s churches are not only declining but they are no longer developing people and transforming their lives with the Gospel. The church must begin to fight for its doctrine

² Cathy Lynn Grossman, “Most Americans Believe in God but Don’t Know Religious Tenets,” *USA Today*, September 29, 2010, accessed April 1, 2016, http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/2010-09-28-pew28_ST_N.htm?loc=interstitialskip.

³ John Blake, “Actually, That’s Not in the Bible,” CNN, June 5, 2011, accessed April 1, 2016, http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2011/06/05/thats-not-in-the-bible/?hpt=hp_cl.

⁴ “U.S. Religious Landscape Survey: Religious Beliefs and Practices,” Pew Research Center: Religion and Public Life, last modified June 1, 2008, accessed November 17, 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/2008/06/01/u-s-religious-landscape-survey-religious-beliefs-and-practices/>.

and theology much like the historic church did centuries ago if it hopes to become influential in the twenty-first century.

Doctrine and the First Church

During the first century, Jesus's small band of followers took the Gospel message all around the known world. This rapid expansion helped establish churches throughout the Roman Empire. The apostle Paul and other Christian missionaries established churches in Syria, Asia Minor, Egypt, Greece, Rome, and then later into Western Europe and North Africa within a few decades from the birth of this new religion. Before Paul's arrest and subsequent execution, the great apostle made it known that he had the desire to go to Spain to preach the Gospel and establish a church there as well. The spread of the Gospel was helped along by the period known as the Pax Romana (Roman Peace), which extended from the end of the Roman Civil War in 27 BC until AD 180. This was a significant help to the Gospel's expansion because there was relative safety in traveling due to the lack of warfare and piracy.⁵

While this expeditious growth was welcomed by the early church, there were many issues that sparked letters of encouragement, correction, and discipleship written by the leaders within the church. After all, this new movement saw many Gentile pagans and former religious Jews worshipping side by side. Furthermore, this movement brought in both slave and slave-master, poor and wealthy, the elite and those operating on the fringe. The first-century church was a diverse house of cards waiting to topple under any wind of

⁵ Kevin P. Sullivan and Paul W. Ferris, "Travel in Biblical Times," eds. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015).

doctrinal error. As Craig Blomberg states, “The inconsistencies of communicating messages in the first-century empire create some other inadequate belief systems in Acts, which the early Christians must correct.”⁶ While one could spend a great deal of time on how all the apostles addressed issues of doctrine, orthodoxy, and heresy, an understanding of the apostle Paul’s approach will suffice for this research.

The Apostle Paul and His Letters

Paul, a prolific writer who established many churches in the Gentile world, addressed many issues within his churches. Most of his letters addressed various forms of doctrinal error, albeit some more than others. The Corinthian church, for example, is certainly an interesting study. It contained a panoply of problems. There were divisions focusing on human leaders (chap. 1–4); sexual sin (5:1–13; 6:12–20); lawsuits (6:1–11); arguments regarding idol meat, gender roles, Holy Communion, and spiritual gifts (chap. 8–14); as well as some denying the bodily resurrection (chap. 15).⁷ It is actually quite remarkable that this church was even able to survive. Paul’s letter directly addresses these issues so as to establish proper instruction within the church in regards to doctrine and practice.

Another example is found in his letter to the Galatian church. Paul skips many of the formalities and launches into his fiery lecture:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even

⁶ Craig Blomberg, “The New Testament Definition of Heresy (or When do Jesus and the Apostles Really Get Mad),” *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 45, no. 1 (March 2002): 65.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 67.

if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.⁸

Paul's language is strong in addressing the Galatians' issues. However, it is important to note the context in which Paul writes. For the great apostle, the issue he is addressing in the Galatian church is not some minor offense, but rather he is addressing an issue which to him will have bearing on someone's salvation.⁹ J. Gresham Machen concludes that "Paul was convinced of the objective truth of the gospel message, and devotion to that truth was the great passion of his life. Christianity for Paul was not only a life, but also a doctrine, and logically doctrine came first."¹⁰

The Apostle Paul's Focus on Doctrine in the Pastoral Epistles

As Paul is departing Ephesus, the book of Acts records his emotional plea:

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.¹¹

Paul's plea is bookended by strong exhortation to be vigilant in the face of false teachers. He instinctively knew that as the Gospel moved from generation to generation, then there was a strong chance of the message being corrupted.

⁸ Galatians 1:6–8 (ESV).

⁹ Blomberg, "The New Testament Definition of Heresy," 66.

¹⁰ J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), loc. 222, Kindle.

¹¹ Acts 20:28–31 (ESV).

As a matter of fact, some of Paul's very last letters written are known as the Pastoral Epistles. These epistles, First and Second Timothy and Titus, were designed by Paul to pass on the Gospel message pure to his young proteges. Paul's intent on writing these letters were to emphasize the importance of a consistent Gospel message. One commentator notes, "Paul was a prisoner in a Roman dungeon when he wrote this, the last of his epistles, to Timothy (cf. 2 Tim. 1:8, 16; 4:6–13). The date, as best it can be established, was approximately AD 67. Not long afterward, according to tradition, the apostle was beheaded."¹² It should be also noted, "From 62–67 Paul traveled more or less freely, leaving Timothy in Ephesus and Titus in Crete, and then subsequently writing each of them a letter. Thus the approximate dates for 1 Timothy and Titus are perhaps 63–66."¹³ This places these letters as some of Paul's last addresses which should help us understand Paul's priority as he realized that perhaps he had limited time left. Furthermore, Paul is writing to a younger Timothy and a younger Titus. Both of these men would be in charge of the churches in their respective communities. Consider how many times Paul mentioned the idea of a true and pure doctrine. In 1 Timothy 1, he states:

As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.¹⁴

¹² A. Duane Litfin, "2 Timothy," *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, eds. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 749.

¹³ A. Duane Litfin, "1 Timothy," *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, eds. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 729.

¹⁴ 1 Timothy 1:3–7 (ESV).

Paul reminds Timothy why he sent him to Ephesus while going towards Macedonia. The purpose of his young protégé was to watch over and guard the right and proper doctrine according to Paul. Paul also tells Timothy to:

Command and teach these things. Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.¹⁵

Paul was not merely writing personal letters to Timothy. It is evident that Paul had another thought in mind. The words written to Timothy regarding the purity of doctrine would be not just for him, but for the entire church. Lenski states it this way, “Timothy is the mouthpiece for the Word, for all these churches regarding all their doctrine and their practice, and he saves others only as God’s instrument.”¹⁶ Scripture reading and teaching were crucial tasks in the church. Many had very little access to God’s word, so the church leader was to publically read the scriptures orally so that all could hear. Then, the leader would teach or apply what was read, so all could understand. This was continued in the second century when Justin Martyred commented on how church life was conducted. It is similar to what the Apostle Paul is describing:

And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as

¹⁵ 1 Timothy 4:11–5:1 (ESV).

¹⁶ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon* (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1937), 650.

long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things.¹⁷

The proper role of the church for Paul near the end of his life was to focus on doctrine and teaching, and he would pass this priority on to Timothy.

For Paul, Timothy was a trusted younger protégé. Timothy was a third-generation Christian (2 Tim. 1:5) and Paul considered him a spiritual child (1 Tim. 1:2). He traveled with Paul during missionary endeavors, and the great apostle trusted Timothy with one of the most crucial tasks, pastoring the important church in Ephesus.¹⁸ Understanding Paul's letters to Timothy as well as his emotional plea to the Ephesians in Acts can only be done in context with their connection to the great city of Ephesus.

The great port city of Ephesus was one of the largest in the Roman world. Serving as the capital of the province of Asia, this city held significant influence in the ancient world.¹⁹ According to Craig Keener:

Ephesus was a strategic cosmopolitan area that exercised a much wider influence in the province and region. Many people from the rest of the province visited Ephesus, and visitors to Ephesus exposed to a new movement would carry news about it with them when they returned home or traveled....Spreading from a major center, new ideas would make their way even to villages that might have been more resistant initially. Although disciples sometimes disagreed with their teachers, they nearly always respected them, and they usually propagated their ideas.²⁰

¹⁷ Justin Martyr, "The First Apology of Justin," in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, eds. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 186.

¹⁸ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 2070.

¹⁹ F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 553.

²⁰ Craig Keener, "A Spirit-Filled Teaching Ministry," *Trajectories in the Book of Acts*, eds. Paul Alexander, Jordan Daniel May, and Robert G. Reid (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 58.

In other words, what happened in the rest of Asia was significantly influenced by what happened in Ephesus. The provincial capital was central to the continual spread of the Gospel. For this reason, Paul leaves his most trusted young protégé Timothy to not only pastor the church, but to keep a watchful eye over the doctrine of the church in Asia. This is why he tells Timothy in his letter: “Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.”²¹

It is important to note that Paul’s last letter, written to one of Paul’s most trusted sons in the faith who was pastoring in one of the most strategic cities in all of Rome, primarily dealt with sound doctrine. It seems Paul emphasizes this topic because he knew that Timothy and Titus would be the new generation of pastor and preacher and he wanted to ensure the Gospel would remain pure. Gordon Fee states, “In a sense it is a kind of last will and testament, a ‘passing on of the mantle.’”²²

While there is much more that could be explored regarding Paul and the priority he places on sound doctrine, it must be stated that Paul did not address these issues without cause. He was largely concerned with the impact the false teachers, false doctrine, and heresies were having upon the salvation of those within the church. Blomberg observes, “Paul never vilifies his opponents with such harsh language except where people’s eternal destinies clearly hang in the balance.”²³ This must be kept in view. If a wide net is cast, then it has bearing upon the salvation of men, and if the net is too

²¹ 2 Timothy 1:13–14 (ESV).

²² Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 13.

²³ Blomberg, “The New Testament Definition of Heresy,” 66.

narrow, it will also affect salvation. The biblical goal of addressing the false teaching, heresies, and false doctrine served one purpose and that was to draw people to God through salvific faith in Christ.

Doctrine in the Canon and Councils

As the dawn settled in on the age of the apostles, new church leaders took on responsibilities, a canon of scriptures emerged, and a once small band of twelve turned into a powerful force within the world. With the church age, there came a new set of problems and difficulties that could only be solved by courageous leaders dedicated to a strong orthodox. While it would be impossible to focus on all the councils and creeds that were debated in the church age, a few examples will serve as a foundation.

The Formation of the Canon and Its Centrality in the Formation of Doctrine

Nothing serves this research better than an understanding of the formation of the canon of Scripture. It is, after all, the collections of the apostles' teaching delivered by the Holy Spirit and is God's revelation to man. The Canon therefore would serve as foundational for the formation of church doctrine, which would be carried by the patristics in order to instruct their followers. While many point to the canon not being official until after Nicea in the fourth century, many of the central doctrines of the church were well established based off of what they viewed as Scripture. Biblical scholars point out:

The Muratorian Canon was composed in the later part of the second century...the list included the four Gospels, Acts, Paul's thirteen letters, Jude, Revelation, 1

John and either 2 John or 3 John or both. Thus, at least twenty-one or twenty-two books are listed as authoritative before the end of the second century.²⁴

F. F. Bruce goes further in discussing scripture when he says, “The New Testament was complete, or substantially complete, about AD 100, the majority of the writings being in existence twenty to forty years before this.”²⁵ This early gathering of sacred writings not long after the apostles were gone is relevant to this research. The church was not listless and unorganized, but rather it had an established pattern of apostolic teachings that would keep it on mission. Furthermore, Scripture would serve as a platform from which all other teachings would be judged. Bruce states:

One thing that must be emphatically stated. The New Testament books did not become authoritative for the church because they were formally included in a canonical list; on the contrary, the Church included them in her canon because she already regarded them as divinely inspired, recognizing their innate worth and generally apostolic authority, direct or indirect.²⁶

The worth found in the Scriptures is invaluable for the church, and when the church strays away from core doctrine, then it can find itself perilously irrelevant.

Protecting the Faith against Heretics

It would be impossible to explore every battle in which the church engaged heretics. Two examples will suffice for this research: Irenaeus against Gnosticism and

²⁴ J. Ed Komoszewski, M. James Sawyer, and Daniel B. Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus: How Contemporary Skeptics Miss the Real Jesus and Misperceive Popular Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2006), loc. 1189, Kindle.

²⁵ F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable* (Downer’s Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1981), loc. 98, Kindle.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, loc. 292.

Augustine against Pelagius. Both of these examples will point to men defending the faith against false doctrines that were within the Christian church.

Irenaeus was the Bishop of Lyons and one of the early church fathers. This great writer and theologian was both a pastor and missionary in the first half of the second century.²⁷ Primarily, Irenaeus spent a great deal of his time battling the Gnostic heresy that was spreading into Gaul. This was a crucial time in early Christianity and this mystical teaching bent on secret or hidden knowledge was being perpetuated by Valentinus, a candidate for the all-important²⁸ position of Bishop of Rome, which would later become the papacy. Stephen Miller points out:

Valentinus proceeded to reinterpret the Bible—misinterpret, charged critics such as Irenaeus and Tertullian. For Valentinus, the most important lessons of Scripture came not from the obvious meaning but from the symbolism beneath the words. This method of biblical interpretation, called allegory, allowed Valentinus to create elaborate stories and teachings that blurred the lines between Christianity, mysticism, philosophy, and Judaism.²⁹

It was in the midst of this controversy that Irenaeus wrote his important work, “Against Heresies,” designed to shut down this heresy and to keep the church on track doctrinally. The Bishop of Lyons writes that after he has read and become familiar with Valentinus’s writings he will “explain them to all those with whom thou art connected, and exhort them to avoid such an abyss of madness and blasphemy against Christ.”³⁰

²⁷ St. Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” *Apostolic Fathers Volume 1*, ed. Paul A. Boer, Sr. (N.p.: Veritatis Splendor Publishing, 2012), 19.

²⁸ *Christian History Magazine-Issue 51: Heresy in the Early Church* (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, 1996).

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ St. Irenaeus, 66.

One of the greatest theologians in the historical landscape is Augustine of Hippo. Writing in the fourth century and fifth century, this giant battled for the church regarding orthodoxy. While Augustine fought many battles in his day, his greatest is perhaps against Pelagius in the late fourth century.³¹ Pelagius was a noble and respected monk; however, he was convinced that there was no such thing as original sin and emphasized that human beings are born free from the contamination of Adam's fall.³² Pelagius wrote, "A man can be without sin and keep the commandments of God, if he wishes," he wrote, "for this ability has been given to him by God."³³ This enraged Augustine to fight against Pelagius. To Augustine, the idea of humans without original sin meant that they could be their own saviors, thus eliminating the need for God's grace. Augustine responded, "A man's free will, avails for nothing except to sin...."³⁴ He wrote, "But this grace of Christ, without which neither infants nor aged can be made whole, is not paid for merits, but is given gratis; and for this reason is termed 'grace.'"³⁵

While these two ancient battles may seem to have very little meaning for our modern context, it is important to note the seriousness with which the ancient church guarded precious doctrine. Without a focus on their doctrine, the Christian landscape could look radically different than it does today. Also, it should be noted that the attack

³¹ James Stevenson and B. J. Kidd, eds., *Creeds, Councils, and Controversies: Documents Illustrative of the History of the Church A.D. 337-461* (New York: Seabury Press, 1966), 214.

³² *Christian History Magazine-Issue 51: Heresy in the Early Church* (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, 1996).

³³ "Fighting Words," *Christian History Magazine-Issue 67: St. Augustine: Sinner, Bishop, Saint* (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, 2000).

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Stevenson and Kidd, 238.

on various teachings in the early church followed Paul's pattern as well. Both Irenaeus's and Augustine's defense against ill-conceived doctrines were hotly contested because they were regarded as salvific issues. Without their contribution as well as those of many others, the church may have lost the teachings of the authority of Scripture, original sin, the deity of Christ, the grace of God, and the all-important "solas" of the great Reformation. It is hard to argue against the need for doctrine within the church when the historical record does not show a laxness towards doctrine but rather a war for the right doctrine to remain consistent within the church. After all, it is the central teachings of the church that makes it Christian. Any movement away from central doctrines leaves the church without its power and authority within the world.

The Formation of Christendom within the United States and the Doctrine of the Church

We have already explored briefly the concept of "moral therapeutic deism," as coined by Christian Smith and Melinda Denton; however, it would be helpful to look at the broad tenets that Denton and Smith espouse. Specifically, they state the beliefs of moral therapeutic deism as follows:

First, a God exists who created orders of the world and watches over human life on earth. Second, God wants people to be good, nice and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions. Third, the central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself. Fourth, God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem. Fifth, good people go to heaven when they die.³⁶

Smith and Denton's research revealed that this was the dominant religion of young adults; further it argues that this has also become the dominant version of evangelicalism

³⁶ Smith and Denton, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Young Adults*, 154.

in America. After all, this Americanized religion promises the American dream as Hauerwas and Willimon argue: “Western democracies tend to have a problem with meaning. They promise their citizens a society in which each citizen is free to create his or her own meaning—meaning which, for the most of us, becomes a little more than the freedom to consume at ever higher levels.”³⁷ This seems to be the point Smith and Denton are driving home in their assessment that the church has instructed increasingly in line with moral therapeutic deism. In other words, the church by and large has focused on teaching a version of western capitalism and the American dream, and this is illustrated in the many messages that instruct the listener on “how to become a better you.” Hauerwas and Willimon observe, “Our society is vast supermarket of desire in which each of us is encouraged to stand alone and go out and get what the world owes us.”³⁸ If what Smith, Denton, Hauerwas, and Willimon point out is true, then this may illuminate why teaching in the pulpits has shifted away from doctrinal concern within the church in favor of personal self-help messages across the Christian landscape.

A Brief History of Christendom

Complicating the situation is the historical conception of Christendom. The roots of this concept can be traced to the Constantinian era. While Christianity did not become the official religion of Rome until later in the fourth century, the die had been cast in 313

³⁷ Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens: A Provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People Who Know That Something is Wrong* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 2014) loc. 1104, Kindle.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, loc. 1103.

AD at the Edict of Milan where official persecution ended and Christianity became recognized by the empire. David F. Dean at the University of Edinburgh explains:

Although the Milan summit decreed only strict parity for Christians alongside other religionists, hindsight reads between the lines and discerns the hint of things to come. Before the end of the fourth century, orthodox Christianity had become the sole official religion of the Roman Empire. For Christianity, the changes were momentous. To this day state churches perpetuate the alignment between Christianity and the Empire worked out in the fourth century. Meanwhile, Christians in independent, “free” churches have long regarded the Constantinian revolution as little short of the fall of Christianity, almost as calamitous as the fall of Adam and Eve.³⁹

The Roman concepts established during the edict and Christianity’s establishment as a part of the focus of the state have reverberated even within modern societies. Hauerwas and Willimon connect the dots between the Constantinian era and the modern era. They state that:

Constantinianism always demanded one, unified state religion in order to keep the empire together. Today, the new universal religion that demands subservience in not really Marxism or capitalism but the entity both of these ideologies serve so well, the omnipotent state.⁴⁰

They would go further in stating:

The habits of Constantinian thinking is difficult to break. It leads to judge their ethical positions, not on the basis of what is faithful to our peculiar tradition, but rather on the basis of how much Christian ethics Caesar can be induced to swallow without chocking. The tendency therefore is to water down Christian ethics, filtering them through basically secular criteria like “right to life” or “freedom of choice” pushing them on the whole world as universally applicable common sense and calling that Christian.⁴¹

³⁹ David F. Wright, “313: The Edict of Milan,” *Christianity Today*, last modified 1990, accessed November 1, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-28/313-edict-of-milan.html>.

⁴⁰ Hauerwas and Willimon, loc. 622.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, loc. 1025.

In other words, Hauerwas and Willimon are arguing that the Christianity of the modern era seems spend a significant time reshaping society through politics and less about being a peculiar people shaped by ancient teaching. Hauerwas would argue in other writings that, “The primary social task of the church is to be itself, that is, a people who have been formed by a story that provides them with the skills for negotiating the danger of this existence, trusting in God's promise of redemption.”⁴²

Instead of viewing the church as a peculiar people born out of right doctrine, many within the evangelical Protestant church seem to believe that their mission in life is to reshape society into a new Christendom. While the Roman Empire was the first to use the church to propel the notion of Christendom, the modern version of this concept entered the fray in the middle of the twentieth century in America.

Christendom in Mid-Twentieth-Century America

The inauguration of Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1952 established a presidency that was radically different from those of his predecessors. During his campaign, the Republican candidate for president of the United States regularly promised that he was on a “crusade” or asserted that the nation was in need of a “spiritual renewal.” Eisenhower regularly slipped scriptures into his stump speeches and often sought counsel from Evangelical revivalist Billy Graham as he formed his speeches and policies. The newly elected president, according to Kevin Kruse, “turned spirituality into a spectacle.”⁴³ In

⁴² John Berkman and Michael Cartwright, eds. *Stanley Hauerwas: The Hauerwas Reader* (London: Duke University Press, 2001), loc. 2686.

⁴³ Kevin M. Kruse, *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), loc. 169, Kindle.

stark contrast to his predecessor Truman, Eisenhower announced his prayer services. Sherman Adams, chief of staff for the Eisenhower White House, remembered an invitation to join the Eisenhowers in prayer at the National Presbyterian church but also that “[h]e [Eisenhower] added hastily as an afterthought that, of course, no Cabinet member should feel under pressure to go to the Presbyterian services...anybody could go instead to a church of their own choosing.”⁴⁴

The mood for the new Eisenhower regime was certainly set at the numerous religious services held in many churches in Washington, D.C., on inauguration day. The fervor reached as far as Louisiana through print media. Kruse writes,

An oilman from Shreveport, Louisiana, printed the prayer as a pamphlet, with the cover showing the President on the left, the American flag on the right, and the cross directly above. At the bottom ran the oilman’s own prayer, “God Save Our President Who Saved Our Country, and Our World.”⁴⁵

There was a definitive shift in 1952, and that shift changed the doctrine of the church in America. This is not to say that the seeds of this shift had not been planted in the 1930s and 1940s, but the Eisenhower administration did not simply usher in an economic boom for America; it also brought about a Christian boom for America.

During the Eisenhower administration, Congress followed Eisenhower’s lead and added the phrase “under God” to the pledge of allegiance. The popular phrase “In God We Trust” was added to the postage stamp in 1954 and then to paper money the following year. By 1956, “In God We Trust” became the national motto.⁴⁶ Kruse points out:

⁴⁴ Ibid., loc. 169.

⁴⁵ Ibid., loc. 170.

⁴⁶ Ibid., loc. 273.

The percentage of Americans who claimed membership in a church had been fairly low across the nineteenth century, though it had slowly increased from just 16 percent in 1850 to 36 percent in 1900. In the early decades of the twentieth century the percentages plateaued, remaining at 43 percent both 1910 and 1920, then moving up slightly to 47 percent in 1939 and 39 percent in 1940. In the decade and a half after the Second World War, the percentage of Americans who belonged to a church or synagogue suddenly soared, reaching 57 percent in 1950 and then peaking at 69 percent at the end of the decade, an all-time high.⁴⁷

It would be myopic to think that the Eisenhower administration was the single driver of this religious development. Undoubtedly there were other factors; two devastating wars that remained in people's minds, a nation that in its recent history was on the brink of an economic collapse, and a new religious revival known as Pentecostalism all contributed to the nation's religious growth rate. However, it is safe to say that the Eisenhower administration blended politics and faith, particularly Christian faith, masterfully. Both Eisenhower and his vice president, Richard Nixon, were constantly intertwining God and government in persuasive ways. Consider Nixon, who said, "If we study history, we will find that more great civilizations, more great nations, have been destroyed because of moral decay from within than have been destroyed because of an armed attack from without."⁴⁸ The Eisenhower administration created a "Back to God" campaign that was promoted through Eisenhower's speeches, in which the president would make statements like this one from 1954: "In our fundamental faith, we are all one. Together, we thank the Power that has made and preserved us as a nation. By the millions, we speak prayers, we

⁴⁷ Ibid., loc. 273.

⁴⁸ Ibid., loc. 74.

sing hymns, and no matter what their words may be, their spirit is the same—‘In God is Our Trust.’”⁴⁹

Without belaboring the point, it is important to understand that the origin of America’s ties to Christianity is murky at best. While the founding fathers believed in natural laws and a veil of separation between the state and the church, it was the second generation of Americans that began to employ the myth of America being founded in Christianity. The myth started in 1790, but it gained much broader appeal by the early nineteenth century. It does not seem that those who employed the myth had evil intent, but rather they were on a mission to form a national identity. This identity would be deployed to support the claim that God had a greater plan for this budding nation. After all, the surprise victory over the British begged additional explanation, and citizens in the nineteenth century seized on the notion that God had a divine plan to bless America. As Steven Green states regarding this new identity, it was “one that would reinforce their ideals and aspirations for the new nation.”⁵⁰

This undercurrent of Christianity in America remained strong into the twentieth century, and after World War Two the powerful linking of Christianity and American identity reached new levels. The Eisenhower administration certainly propelled this linkage forward, and it was seized upon by politicians, marketers, and industrialists around the nation.

⁴⁹ Ibid., loc. 75.

⁵⁰ Steven K. Green, *Inventing A Christian America: The Myth of the Religious Founding* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), loc. 199, Kindle.

In the early 1940s, advertisers and industrialists realized the potential afforded by religion to help change their public perception, which had been reeling ever since the Great Depression. Through a collection of meetings, the Advertising Council was formed. A year prior to Eisenhower's presidential victory, the council launched a radically successful campaign, "Religious Life in America." Kruse would point out the campaign's two goals: first, the campaign would accentuate the importance of all religious institutions as the basis for American life; second, they would urge all Americans to attend church or synagogue.⁵¹ As Kruse states, "Copywriters drew on their conventional strategies, pitching religion as a path to personal improvement and self satisfaction. 'Find yourself through faith,' the 1949 RIAL (Religion in American Life) campaign urged; 'come to church this week.'"⁵²

There can be no doubt that the campaign was strengthened by the religious renewal spurred on by the Eisenhower administration. Fred Seaton, Eisenhower's secretary of the interior, remarked, "I have only praise for this movement which takes the message of religion and morality out of the cloistered area of the church and synagogue and carries it right to the heart of the everyday world, puts it on streetcars and busses and carries it into millions of homes over radio and television."⁵³ He went on to comment that churches were beginning to market and sell their product on the street as well.

In the 1950s, religious renewal took off like a rocket. Ideas from advertisers and politicians alike spread as quickly as they did primarily due to the new mediums at their

⁵¹ Kruse, *One Nation Under God*, loc. 131.

⁵² *Ibid.*, loc. 132.

⁵³ Fred Seaton, transcript, first draft, "RIAL (Religion in American Life) Speech – March 7, 1957" (28 February 1957), Box 12, Speech Series, FAS.

disposal. It was an all-out assault in print, on radio, and on television. Add this to the fact that America had been through two world wars and had come out victorious, and that the nation had been pulled out of economic death, and all signs seemed to point to a divine source that was blessing America. These ideas would be employed once again by the Reagan administration and the Moral Majority in the early 1980s after the disaster in Vietnam and the economic malaise of the 1970s.

Christendom in the Form of the Moral Majority

After the tumultuous 1960s, Christianity once again ruled the political sphere. Prior to the sexual revolution, American voters' political choices were largely determined by economics. This is not surprising given the Great Depression was within the nation's recent history. This all changed in the early 1970s as Americans assembled in moral enclaves.⁵⁴ As Thomas Byrne Edsall discussed in the *Atlantic*:

It is an axiom of American politics that people vote their pocketbooks, and for seventy years the key political divisions in the United States were indeed economic. The Democratic and Republican Parties were aligned, as a general rule, with different economic interests. Electoral fortunes rose and fell with economic cycles. But over the past several elections a new political configuration has begun to emerge—one that has transformed the composition of the parties and is beginning to alter their relative chances for ballot-box success. What is the force behind this transformation? In a word, sex. Whereas elections once pitted the party of the working class against the party of Wall Street, they now pit voters who believe in a fixed and universal morality against those who see moral issues, especially sexual ones, as elastic and subject to personal choice.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Rod Dreher, *The Benedictine Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Sentinel, 2017), 79.

⁵⁵ Thomas Byrne Edsall, "Blue Movie: The Morality Gap Is Becoming the Key Variable in American Politics," *The Atlantic*, last modified February 2003, accessed November 1, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2003/01/blue-movie/302657/>.

This shift would emerge out of Eisenhower policies, but it would begin to blossom fully in the mid-1970s.

In 1976, *Newsweek* declared that this was the “Year of the Evangelical.” Once again this merging of advertising, politics and Christianity was brought about by a highly visible “born-again” Christian candidate, Jimmy Carter. While Carter’s term was underwhelming and the odds of his re-election were slim, America’s love for Christianity did not wain. Leading up to the 1980 election, Gallup discovered that more than thirty-percent of Americans claimed to be born-again. This was an astounding statistic. At the same time, religious broadcasting was experiencing a boom with more than 130 million listening and profits flirting with the one billion dollar mark. In addition to this, Krues points out Michael Lienesch’s *Newsweek* article at the time. In it Lienesch reports that the influential religious broadcaster Pat Robinson declared, “We have enough votes to run this country, and we people say ‘we’ve had enough, we’re going to take over the country.’”⁵⁶

The religious right did take over. With their newly elected president, Ronald Reagan, claiming that America was a shining city on a hill (a reference to Jesus’s sermon on the mount), the 1980s shaped up to be a new era in Christendom. The lines blurred between government and religion. Churches used their pulpits to promote Christendom, if not necessarily Christianity. Ethics and morality were not seen as things to be followed as an act of worship, but rather the new mantra for many Christians was that the government must legislate morality.

⁵⁶ Michael Lienesch, “Redeeming America: Piety, Politics in the New Christian Right,” *Newsweek*, October 25, 1976.

Millennial Reaction to Christendom

Because of this radical shift towards Christendom in a large part of the twentieth century, the church's doctrine has been obscured by the notions of American exceptionalism and American blessing. Pulpits have been largely used, at least by evangelicals, to help spread Christendom's desire to legislate morality. Over the last three decades, pulpits have been used to fight against abortion, drugs, homosexuality and same-sex marriage, and poverty, and have even been used to promote wars. Morality, not doctrine, has been the primary push by many in the church. Instead of taking up the apostle Paul's argument that the church must defend doctrine, this message has been diluted and at times hijacked by Christendom, and America's version of Christendom is blessing and living out the American dream.

While it is a stretch to say that every church has a political agenda or is watering down doctrine, it is important to understand the stereotype that many Millennials believe about the church, one perpetuated in part by the church's emphasis on Christendom and morality. Many believe that the church is too tied into the political spectrum and really has nothing to offer their generation. Hauerwas explains it in this way:

Even if churches remained socially and politically powerful, they would have nothing to say as Christians about the challenges facing this society. That such churches have nothing distinctive to contribute is not surprising, since their social and political power originally derived from the presumption that there was little or no difference between the church and the principles of the American experiment. That presumption may, of course, also help explain the decline of such churches, because it is by no means clear why you need to go to church when such churches only reinforce what you already know from participation in a democratic society.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Stanley Hauerwas, *A Better Hope: Resources for a Church Confronting Capitalism, Democracy and Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2000), loc. 363.

By proverbially taking their eye off the ball, churches have lost their relevance. By preaching a steady diet of moral therapeutic deism and political ideology in favor of sound doctrine, there has been a drift away from the church. Theologian Michael Horton points out:

I think the church in America today is so obsessed with being practical, relevant, helpful, successful, and perhaps well-liked that it nearly mirrors the world itself. Aside from packaging, there is nothing that can be found in most churches today that cannot be satisfied by any number of secular programs and self-help groups.⁵⁸

In other words, Millennials no longer hear a unique prophetic voice in the church because the church has traded Christian doctrine for political platforms or practical insights for living, so Millennials have chosen to disengage. As A.W. Tozer would say, “We are not worshipping God on the throne but have come to the point of worshipping the shadow of the throne.”⁵⁹ Therefore, the church has lost its bite when it seems to be aligned more with a political agenda than the actual word of God. It no longer is offering anything unique when it moves away from doctrine.

The connection is clearly visible when one considers research by David Kinnaman and the Barna Research Group, which discovered that both non-churchgoers and churchgoers alike when asked to identify Christian leaders from any sector only were able to identify specific Christian leaders in politics. Furthermore, 62 percent of Millennials and Gen Xers believe that conservative Christians engaged in politics are a problem facing America today.⁶⁰ Kinnaman points out:

⁵⁸ Michael Horton, *Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 16.

⁵⁹ A. W. Tozer, *The Dangers of Shallow Faith: Awakening from Spiritual Lethargy* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishing, 2012), 18.

⁶⁰ Kinnaman, *Unchristian*, 154.

Young adults are less likely to support a ‘Christianized’ country. The increasingly secular mentality of young adults carries over as well. Millennials and Gen Xers are less likely to support keeping the motto ‘In God We Trust’ on our currency, the phrase ‘One Nation Under God’ in the Pledge of Allegiance, or the Ten Commandments posted in government buildings. They are also less likely than Boomers and Elders to support teaching creationism in public schools or to favor a federal marriage amendment defining marriage as possible only between one man and one woman.⁶¹

By almost a two to one margin over boomers, Millennials believe the will of the people is what should determine the laws of the land and not an ancient text like the Bible.⁶²

While the issues between the Millennials and the evangelical church are complex, it is fair to say that many Millennials are standing at polar opposites with the boomers, who embraced the views of Reagan and the Moral Majority and ultimately policies begun by Eisenhower. Because of this, the church has lost ground with the Millennials, who often times are drawn to Jesus but reject the church. In other words, many in this generation see a large disconnect between the teachings of Jesus and the teachings of the evangelical church.

Conclusion to the Chapter

There is both a biblical record and a historical record that point to the need for doctrine within the church. The church can easily slip into a powerless institution without it, and it would seem that the Western church has begun to decay, which has powerful repercussions in regards to the relationship it has with the Millennial generation. In Carlton Johnstone’s research regarding Millennials, he found that many Millennials felt that the churches they attended were lacking depth. Johnstone states:

⁶¹ Ibid., 162.

⁶² Ibid.

Participants [who] desire intellectual engagement suggests that the pre-eminence of emotions, or “heart” in preaching at the expense of the mind may be misguided. This hunger to be engaged by the intellectual side of Christianity points to something that transcends historical epochs such as modernity or postmodernity. It is not about a head-heart divide. I do not think this hunger is about rational or propositional versus more symbolic, emotive, or relational style of preaching. Rather, it is a desire to be led into a deeper intellectual understanding of God and faith that creates a “stirring in the heart.”⁶³

Johnstone, Smith, Denton, Horton, and Kinnaman are all pointing to the same thing.

Millennials have a desire for depth, and it is this research’s opinion that this depth is found in holding onto ancient Christian doctrine. Yet instead of turning back to the historical teachings of Scripture once again, is a push in many evangelical churches to abandon central teachings in order to contextualize and secularize the church as a part of efforts to see the church grow once again. This effort may certainly be shortsighted.

The church is at its strongest when it has a deep conviction of mission and doctrine. The distinguished Princeton professor J. Gresham Machen stated in his battle against liberalism and secularism in the early twentieth century: “But if any one fact is clear, on the basis of this evidence, it is that the Christian movement at its inception was not just a way of life in the modern sense, but a way of life founded upon a message. It was based not upon mere feeling, not upon a mere program of work, but upon an account of facts. In other words it was based upon doctrine.”⁶⁴

According to Machen, a church without doctrine is not a Christian church. This is why the twenty-first-century church must regain its passion for the truth. The central doctrines of the church must be kept in view, and those who lead the church must

⁶³ Carl Johnstone, *Embedded Faith: The Faith Journeys of Young Adults Within Church Communities* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013), 155.

⁶⁴ Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, loc. 211.

embrace the core doctrines once again. As Jesus promised, the church will never be destroyed; however, there is no guarantee that the Western evangelical church will continue to thrive. A transformation in modern culture is taking place and the church has not adjusted well in this metamorphosis. The church must first look deep within herself and find her bearings in order to transform a shifting world, and only this will make the church relevant once again.

CHAPTER 5:
THE MOVE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT,
NEW TESTAMENT, AND THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

Data reveals that 65 percent of all Millennials believe that church is a place to find answers in life.¹ If this is the case, then why is there a large disconnect with Millennials and their church attendance? Despite the data that reflects a growing number of Millennials wanting nothing to do with church, there is still a large percentage of Millennials in a quest to experience something transcendent. In an interview with PBS, Casper ter Kuile, a researcher at Harvard University, explains this search for transcendence within this generation. He says:

I grew up never going to church. And as a 30-year-old married man, I still don't, not because I don't value reflection, community, even the experience of the divine. I do. But traditional religious congregations don't appeal to me. And I'm not alone.... But what's really interesting is that the overwhelming majority of us "nones" aren't necessarily atheists. Two-thirds believe in God or a universal spirit, and one in five even pray every day.²

Casper goes on to describe how many Millennials are abandoning church but are experiencing the same quest for the divine, and seeking transcendence, through community engagement.

This new quest for spirituality for Millennials has blossomed in the midst of a post-modern and post-Christian era. As society has done its level best to throw off the

¹ Barna Research Group, *Making Space for Millennials*, 41.

² Judy Woodruff, "Millennials Haven't Forgotten About Spirituality, They're Just Looking for New Venues," PBS News Hour Transcript, last modified March 7, 2017, accessed December 1, 2017, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/millennials-havent-forgotten-spirituality-theyre-just-looking-new-venues>.

constraints of religion, it has actually led to what James K.A. Smith describes as an age being haunted by the divine. Smith says:

On one hand, we live under a brass heaven, ensconced in immanence. We live in the twilight of both gods and idols. But their ghosts have refused to depart, and every once in a while, we might be surprised to find ourselves tempted by belief, by intimations of transcendence...faith endures in our secular age, believing doesn't come easy. Faith is fraught; confession is haunted by an inescapable sense of contestability. We don't believe instead of doubting, we believe while doubting. We're all Thomas now.³

Both Casper ter Kuile and Smith are describing similar ideas. In an age where faith is not the default, there remains a desire in people to connect with something outside of themselves. There is a desire by Millennials and others to connect to and experience a transcendent being. While many within the Millennial generation are moving outside of the church for their spiritual experiences, the church, especially those within the Pentecostal tribe, have the ability to engage Millennials with a transcendent experience.

The Growth of Pentecostalism from the Beginning of the Twentieth Century

While the move of the Holy Spirit is as ancient as the Old Testament and New Testament record which will be explored momentarily, it will serve this research well to analyze the modern day emergence of spirit filled believers in the twentieth and twenty first centuries. Their embrace of the continual move of the Spirit is what makes pentecostals and Assemblies of God believers distinct from many of their evangelical counterparts. What once was categorized as a marginal movement that was found within lower middle class and poor societies has now blossomed into one of the fastest growing

³ James K.A. Smith, *How Not to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 4.

segments of Christianity. They are known as Pentecostals or Charismatics, and they will become one-third of the Christian population and reach 800 million adherents by 2025.⁴ This burgeoning sect of Christianity is remaking the world. As Donald Miller puts it, “Many recognize that the religious belief and practice (of Pentecostals) have the potential to tap into the most profound desires for human meaning—which for some people may involve service to others, the pursuit of social justice, and the possibility of unconditional love.”⁵ The movement is attracting untold millions into its fold annually, and it does not seem like that trend will stop within the foreseeable future.

For the purposes of this research, primarily we will use the term Pentecostal while referring to the movement. This research will only look at a segment of the Pentecostal movement, the Assemblies of God. While this research admits that Pentecostals come in all shapes and sizes and at times there are a variety of doctrinal positions within the movement, it is important to focus this research on the largest Pentecostal denomination, the Assemblies of God. For the most part, the term Pentecostal will be used for the Assemblies of God and vice versa. When a distinction with doctrine is needed to understand Assembly of God churches and parishioners, it will be noted within the research.

⁴ Ireland Letterkenny, “Ecstasy and Exodus: Charismatic Christianity Thrives Among People on the Move,” *The Economist*, last modified January 23, 2016, accessed December 1, 2016, <http://www.economist.com/news/international/21688880-charismatic-christianity-thrives-among-people-move-ecstasy-and-exodus?fsrc=scn/tw/te/pe/ed/ecstasyandexodus>.

⁵ Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 36.

With 2.6 million members in the United States and forty-eight million in 191 countries abroad, this denomination is a driving force behind the Pentecostal movement.⁶

According to the Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center:

The General Council of the Assemblies of God (USA), the largest white and Hispanic Pentecostal denomination in the United States, was organized in 1914 by a broad coalition of ministers who desired to work together to fulfill common objectives, such as sending missionaries and providing fellowship and accountability. Formed in the midst of the emerging worldwide Pentecostal revival the Assemblies of God quickly took root in other countries and formed indigenous national organizations. The Assemblies of God views itself to be a branch of the “one, holy, universal, and apostolic” church and has sought to be faithful to it.⁷

While seeking to remain faithful as a member of the “one, holy, universal, and apostolic” church, the Assemblies of God does adhere to distinct doctrines in regards to the empowerment of the Holy Spirit and the subsequent gifts associated with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit found in Acts and mentioned in Paul’s letters as well.

While the Charismatic gifts are important, the key to understanding Pentecostals lies in their belief that the Holy Spirit empowers for mission, and it is evident by manifestations of God’s glory. Like most Pentecostals, Assembly of God believers embrace the moving of the Spirit along with its ecstatic experiences, tracing its modern roots and doctrine and practices to revivals in the late 1800s and early 1900s. While there were pockets of revival where the Spirit moved in previous eras, the revivals of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century were more widespread and organized.⁸ However, the emotional experiences brought on by this new move of the Spirit, freshly

⁶ Miller and Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism*, 26.

⁷ Gary B. McGee and Darrin J. Rodgers, “Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center,” IFPHC.org, accessed December 9, 2016, <https://ifphc.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=history.main>.

⁸ Miller and Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism*, 26.

experienced by believers in the early days of the twentieth century, were not the ends to the movement, but rather a sign that God would bring these believers power to go throughout the world. Early Pentecostals sought this new-found power for the proclamation of the Gospel. Allen Anderson states:

Pentecostalism has always been a global missionary movement in foundation and essence. It emerged with a firm conviction that the Spirit had been poured out in “signs and wonders” in order for the nations of the world to be reached for Christ before the end of the age. Its missionaries proclaimed a “full gospel” that included individual salvation, physical healing, personal holiness, baptism with the Spirit, and a life lived on the edge lived in expectation of the imminent return of Christ.⁹

It is this missional focus that has led to a growing movement. While a move of the Spirit may seem new and difficult to interpret for many, Pentecostals of all stripes believe that they are fulfilling a prophecy in the ancient book of Joel which states:

And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.¹⁰

They believe they are getting back to the church’s primitive roots by being solely reliant upon the Spirit.¹¹ Pentecostals support this move of the Holy Spirit by their interpretation as to how the Spirit moved in both the Old and New Testaments. In order to better understand the thinking within the Pentecostal movement and more specifically the

⁹ Allan H. Anderson, “The Emergence of Multidimensional Global Missionary Movement: Trends, Patterns and Expressions,” in *Spirit and Power: The Growth and Global Impact of Global Pentecostalism*, eds. Donald E. Miller, Kimon H. Sargeant, and Richard Flory (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 39.

¹⁰ Joel 2:28-32 (ESV).

¹¹ Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), loc. 230, Kindle.

Assembly of God mindset, then a brief understanding of the move of the Spirit in both the Old and New Testament is necessary.

A Biblical Perspective on the Power of the Spirit

The Move of the Spirit in the Old Testament

Even though the move of the Spirit in the Old Testament was a rare occasion, and while the “specific term ‘Holy Spirit’ appears only three times (Psa 51:11; Isa 63:10, 11), in many cases, the word Spirit occurs in combination with the divine name—the Spirit of God (Gen 1:2; 1 Sam 11:6) and the Spirit of Yahweh/the Lord (Judges 11:29; 14:6; 15:14; 1 Sam 10:6; Isa 11:2),” according to Choi.¹² Also, the Spirit plays a significant role in the Hebrew Scriptures, occurring either in a specific reference or being inferred no less than 370 times.¹³ Furthermore, the writers of the Old Testament used various terms, some twenty-three different verbs, to describe the activity of this complex member of the Trinity.¹⁴ While it would be impossible to analyze every instance in which the Holy Spirit is present within the text of the Old Testament, it is vital to understand the behavior of the Spirit as it moved upon God’s people in these ancient documents.

It is fascinating to see the Spirit as it moved upon man within certain historical books of the Old Testament canon. Within the book of Judges, the Spirit is displayed as

¹² YunGab Choi, “Holy Spirit in the Old Testament,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

¹³ G. H. Davies, “The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament,” *Review & Expositor* 63, no. 2 (1966): 130, accessed November 30, 2016, doi:10.1177/003463736606300202.PDF.

¹⁴ Roger Stronstad, “The Influence of the Old Testament On the Charismatic Theology of St. Luke,” *Pneuma* 2, no. 1 (1980): 39, doi:10.1163/157007480x00035.PDF.

coming upon men as in the following examples. In the case of Othniel, “The Spirit of the Lord was upon him, and he judged Israel.”¹⁵ The same example is displayed with Jephthah, “Then the Spirit of the Lord was upon Jephthah, and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh and passed on to Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he passed on to the Ammonites.”¹⁶

Of course the most famous example of this happens with Samson. Judges tells us, “Then the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him, and although he had nothing in his hand, he tore the lion in pieces as one tears a young goat.”¹⁷ The pattern is continued with Samson as seen in both Judges 14:19 and 15:14. According to G. Henton Davies,

The Hebrew verb here describes the sweeping, almost leaping movement, describing the rushing action of fire and the sudden pounce of the Spirit as it rushes upon man. Indeed this is a favorite word to describe the coming of the Spirit, and it is used of Saul for prophetic behavior, for war or for madness (I Sam. 10:6, 10; 11:6; 18:10), and David to mark a stage on his career (I Sam. 16:13). The activity of the Spirit here marks the sudden insight, the frenzied decision, and the exalted and possessed consciousness of the visited soul.¹⁸

A closer look at these verses demonstrates the role of the Spirit as it moved upon men. It was not just mere ecstatic experiences that the Spirit provided, in fact not all examples provide ecstatic experiences. Rather, the Spirit moved upon the men in these examples specifically to perform a purpose. Roger Stronstad notes, “With few exceptions the charismatic activity of the Spirit of God is successively concentrated upon founding fathers, judges, kings, prophets and priests.”¹⁹ Whether it is leadership, battle, prophecy,

¹⁵ Judges 3:9–10 (ESV).

¹⁶ Judges 11:29 (ESV).

¹⁷ Judges 14:6 (ESV).

¹⁸ Davies, “The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament,” 131.

¹⁹ Stronstad, “The Influence of the Old Testament on the Charismatic Theology of St. Luke,” 34.

validating a position, or, in the case of King Saul, driving him to madness, the Spirit's movement was for a specific purpose at a specific moment in order to propel God's purposes forward. As Louis Berkhof points out in his *Systematic Theology*:

The judges whom God raised up for the deliverance of Israel were evidently men of considerable ability and of unusual daring and strength, but the real secret of their accomplishments lay not in themselves, but in a supernatural power that came upon them. It is said repeatedly that "the spirit of Jehovah came [mightily] upon them."²⁰

While it is true that the Spirit is described in a variety of different ways in the Old Testament, in regards to coming upon man, it was always for a missional purpose. Now, we must turn to the New Testament.

The Spirit of Power upon Jesus

There are numerous examples of Jesus being empowered or filled with the Spirit of God during his ministry. For this research, a brief examination of Luke will be sufficient. As F. W. Horn states, "Luke is surely the theologian of the spirit, not only in terms of statistics (*pneuma*, 106 times; *pneuma theou*, 75 times; *pneuma hagion*, 54 times) but also in terms of his reflection on primitive Christian testimony and ideas concerning the spirit from the perspective of a concept of salvation history."²¹ Starting as soon as the birth narrative is mentioned, the Spirit is present, but it is Jesus's beginning of public ministry which is most curious. Immediately following his temptation in the

²⁰ L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans publishing co., 1938), 425.

²¹ F. W. Horn, "Holy Spirit," *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, trans. Dietlinde M. Elliott (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 277.

wilderness, Luke records, “And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee.”²²

This was just the beginning of Luke’s reference to Jesus having the Spirit upon him.

While Luke records that Jesus was a popular teacher, he puts a special emphasis upon

Jesus reading the scroll of Isaiah publically:

He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”²³

It is important to note the connection between the Spirit of the Lord and the ability to accomplish one’s mission. Jesus was an embodiment of the Spirit for a missional

purpose. Leon Morris notes:

He read from Isaiah 61:1f. followed by 58:6. The words prophesy of the Messiah’s ministry to people in distress, *the poor*, *the captives* (‘prisoners of war’, Marshall), *the blind*, and the *oppressed*. Jesus’ application of the words to himself shows that the sense of vocation that came with the heavenly voice at his baptism remained strong (for the Spirit’s anointing, cf. Acts 10:38).²⁴

It is not by mistake that Luke then shows Jesus’s public ministry of healing and casting out the demonic realm shortly after his prophetic proclamation. Luke then mixes Jesus’s teaching and preaching with his performing of miraculous signs. It is through the manifestation of charismatic gifts of the Spirit such as healing and miracles that Jesus propelled his Gospel message forward and displayed the power of God. His missional purpose was uniquely assisted by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

²² Luke 4:14 (ESV).

²⁴ Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 3, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 126.

Luke's View of Empowerment in Acts

After the Ascension of Jesus recorded in Luke 24 and Luke's second volume in Acts 1, Jesus connects the mission of God with the Spirit of God by saying, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."²⁵ This potent statement in Acts serves as an outline for the Spirit's work in connection with mission and Gospel growth. Starting with Jerusalem and the outpouring of the Spirit and ending with the Gospel to the edge of the known world, the main character in Luke's second volume is the Holy Spirit who works in power. Stronstad notes, "The outpouring of the Spirit to the disciples, then is a transfer of the Spirit from the risen and exalted Lord to his disciples."²⁶

Luke's writing does not reveal the Spirit in just ecstatic experiences or the miraculous in Acts, although it should be noted that these concepts do occur. Nor does Luke solely focus on Gospel proclamation through the ministry of the word. Neither the charismatic experiences nor the proclamation occur in and of themselves, but they seemed to be woven together by the Spirit's power in order to drive the mission. In other words, both word and Spirit combined was the engine of mission. Murray Dempster highlights this when he discusses the theological role of preaching as it pertains to God speaking through men and women:

For this basic theological task, the church is anointed by the Holy Spirit for the express purpose of empowering its preaching with the same power with which

²⁵ Acts 1:8 (ESV).

²⁶ Stronstad, "The Influence of the Old Testament on the Charismatic Theology of St. Luke," 46.

Jesus was anointed, the church is enabled to proclaim the message of the good news of the kingdom.²⁷

It is evident in Luke's writings, and in the lives of the early twentieth-century Pentecostals that formed the Assemblies of God, that the intent of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit was to promote the spread of the Gospel message while at the same time the charismatic gifts of the Spirit such as healing, tongues, and prophecy were affirmation of this message. In order to understand this more clearly, a quick view of the Spirit's power from the perspective of Paul is beneficial.

Paul and the Missional Role of the Holy Spirit's Power

The apostle Paul has a great deal to say when it comes to the Holy Spirit. For Paul the Spirit meant the person of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit as the presence of God, and the Holy Spirit as God's empowering presence.²⁸ For the purpose of our research, the Holy Spirit as God's empowering presence according to Pauline theology must be in view. This will provide a better understanding to the Pentecostal perspective.

In Paul's vast corpus of Scripture, he certainly focuses on the Spirit of God. Out of thirteen letters from the apostle, there are 145 mentions of the Spirit. Primarily these refer to the Holy Spirit, although Paul uses various combinations of words to describe this third member of the Trinity.²⁹ The largest of Paul's material on the Spirit is found in

²⁷ Murray W. Dempster, "Evangelism, Social Concern and the Kingdom of God," in *Called and Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective*, eds. Murray W. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Peterson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1991), 25.

²⁸ Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 8.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

1 Corinthians 12–14. While Paul gives a list of nine gifts in chapter 12, they are not a comprehensive list of the Spirit’s activity. Rather, Paul was laying out a case for diversity within the gifts in order to show that one gift would not become the singular focus.³⁰

Often times, Pentecostals and Charismatics want to focus on this section along with Luke’s explanation of tongues in Acts 2 as their basis point for their doctrine on the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. However, it is this researcher’s opinion that this doctrine stops at a surface level and the empowerment of the Spirit is much deeper according to Paul. In describing the charismatic activity of the Spirit, Roger Stronstad offers this explanation: “By charismatic, I mean God’s gift of his Spirit to either an individual or to a group to equip them for divine service. This gift of the Spirit of God has both experiential and functional dimensions.”³¹ Stronstad’s view seems to align with the view of Paul and allows for more than mere surface level analysis of the gifts such as tongues, healing, and prophecy, which are so frequently cited. Rather, understanding charismatic activity as an experience with a function in service to God expands the field of view.

As one reads Paul’s theological treatises on the activity of the Spirit of God, one can certainly see that Paul was not interested in mere gifts or manifestations. While there is no doubt that he would not deny the existence of such gifts and saw their role, Paul was much more interested in an empowering Spirit to be employed for the spread of the Gospel. The empowering presence was meant for mission. The Spirit and empowerment

³⁰ Ibid., 160.

³¹ Stronstad, “The Influence of the Old Testament on the Charismatic Theology of St. Luke,” 32.

were one and the same.³² Furthermore, according to Fee, “Not only does he specifically use such terminology as the ‘power of the Spirit’ (Rom. 15:13, 19), but he also regularly joins the two terms in such a way that the presence of the Spirit means the presence of power (1 Thes. 1:5; 1 Cor. 2:4; Gal. 3:5; Rom. 1:4; Eph. 3:16; 2 Tim. 1:7).”³³

Paul’s understanding of the Spirit was broad. It was not merely focused on the miraculous. It was not some force, but the Spirit was the presence of God in the life of the believer displayed in power. From this framework, signs and wonders would follow because of a powerful God, but not just that. Overcoming suffering and adversity was made possible through the work of an active God as represented by his Spirit. Preaching and Gospel proclamation became transformational through the work of the Spirit. The Spirit of God living in the people of God would revolutionize their souls and transform their communities. Fee states, “Both Paul’s explicit words and his allusions to the work of the Spirit everywhere presuppose the Spirit as an empowering, experienced reality in the life of the church and the believer.”³⁴

For Paul this was not simply a theory, but practical experience that came from a first-hand account. Throughout his vocation as an evangelist and missionary, Paul is recorded by Luke as working miracles during his missionary journeys. Whether it was casting out the demonic realm in Acts 16 or seeing miracles take place through cloths that he prayed over in Acts 19, Paul’s life in the Spirit is equated with signs and wonders. The

³² Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 35.

³³ *Ibid.*, 36.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 897.

apostle never would have imagined a life without the miraculous as he proclaimed the Gospel through his life in the Spirit. For Paul, Spirit and mission were interconnected.

Throughout the Bible, the people of God's interaction with the Spirit of God was functional and missional in nature. This is evident in Judges, the life of Jesus, the writings of Luke, and the life of Paul. The Spirit's empowerment, embraced by Pentecostals, cannot be separated from mission in the biblical text. The early church would have assumed the manifestation of power as the spread of the Gospel intensified.³⁵ This would be the same concept carried by the early-twentieth-century Pentecostal movement.

The Spirit of God for a Missional Priority in Early Pentecostalism

While the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement, as well as the Assemblies of God, is often associated with ecstatic and emotional experiences, tongue talking, healing revivals, and expressive prayer and worship, it was fundamentally birthed as a missionary movement. William J. Seymour was the pastor of the Azusa Street Mission on 312 Azusa Street during the outbreak of the revival in which the Pentecostal movement was birthed. Despite humble beginnings in this dilapidated church, the fire of God fell, which would eventually lead to the formation of the Assemblies of God, Church of God in Christ, and a host of other Pentecostal organizations.³⁶ In summing up this powerful revival that shook the foundation of Christianity, Seymour stated:

We believe that God's design in raising up the Apostolic Faith Church in America was to evangelize over these lands. As proof hereof we have seen since 1906 that

³⁵ Ibid., 35.

³⁶ Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., "Launching a Global Movement: The Role in Azusa Street in Pentecostalism's Growth and Expansion," in *Spirit and Power: The Growth and Global Impact of Global Pentecostalism*, eds. Donald E. Miller, Kimon H. Sargeant, and Richard Flory (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 44.

time of an extraordinary work of God extending throughout the United States and Territories, and throughout the whole world.³⁷

Seymour did not overstate his case. Almost immediately workers carried their experience with them and used this new power to proclaim the Gospel.³⁸ Azusa Street Mission soon began to send missionaries around the world. Miller records that India, Sweden, Palestine, Angola, Liberia, China, and Japan all had Pentecostal missionaries by 1908.³⁹

He goes on to state:

By 1916, only ten years after the beginning of the Los Angeles Azusa Street revival, western Pentecostal missionaries were found in at least forty-two nations outside North America and Europe. This was indeed a remarkable achievement, especially in view of the lack of central organization and coordination, the naiveté of most of these missionaries, and the physical difficulties and opposition they encountered.⁴⁰

A deep move by the Spirit and an eschatological worldview that was undergirded by their biblical interpretation provided the framework for these missional approaches. Early Pentecostals did not see the spread of the Great Commission as an option. Rather, the fire of God that burned within these pioneers' hearts gave them the confidence that they could change the world with the Gospel through the power of the Spirit.

While early Pentecostals may have possessed a primitive understanding of theology, pneumatology, Christology, or soteriology, they possessed a robust understanding of mission. In some cases, as the *Assemblies of God Enrichment Journal* would point out,

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 54.

³⁹ Ibid., 55.

⁴⁰ Allan H. Anderson, "The Emergence of Multidimensional Global Missionary Movement: Trends, Patterns and Expressions," 25.

They believed that when they reached their destinations they would miraculously speak foreign tongues without needing to undergo the arduous task of language learning. Apart from isolated instances when some claimed this had happened, most were unable to speak in foreign languages. Many returned to the United States disillusioned. But most readjusted and persevered in their mission efforts.⁴¹

What these pioneers lacked in educational knowledge they made up for in courage, faith, determination, and a love for God that redefined Christianity in the modern era.

Conclusion to the Chapter

The fervor for Gospel mission under the influence of the empowering presence of the Spirit is what has turned the Pentecostal belief system as found in the Assemblies of God into a worldwide phenomenon. In a little over one hundred years, the Christian landscape has been radically transformed by the power of God. It is nothing short of miraculous that one out of every twelve people on planet earth has a Pentecostal Christian faith.⁴²

The story of the Pentecostal movement is simply remarkable. Largely due to Pentecostalism, Christianity is on the rise in the global south, Africa, and Asia.⁴³ While Christianity's decline in the West is well documented, the world is experiencing God's powerful presence and it is driving societal change. As we have seen, a large percentage of Millennials are no longer engaged in the Christian church in the West due to its

⁴¹ Allan Anderson, "Enrichment Journal - Enriching and Equipping Spirit-filled Ministers," The Azusa Street Revival and Global Pentecostalism, accessed December 9, 2016, http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200602/200602_164_AllPoints.cfm.

⁴² Wes Granberg-Michaelson, "Think Christianity Is Dying? No, Christianity Is Shifting Dramatically," *Washington Post*, May 20, 2015, accessed December 8, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/05/20/think-christianity-is-dying-no-christianity-is-shifting-dramatically/?utm_term=.127220bbb72d.

⁴³ Miller and Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism*, 20.

perceived irrelevance in life and lack of a connection to something transcendent.

However, a renewed Pentecostal focus on the power of God for the purpose of mission as described in this research has the chance to reverse the trends in the West. In describing Millennial communities, Casper ter Kuile explains how Millennials' new breed of spirituality is leading to a missional lifestyle. He states:

Now, you may dismiss these communities as simple entertainment, but we're convinced that this is the new face of religious life in America. Just as you would expect in a religious congregation, people in these communities build friendships and drive one another to the hospital when they need a ride. They help each other raise money to fight cancer. And some are even getting involved in struggles for more affordable housing. While a few thousand churches close every year, many fewer open. So, as you drive through your town and notice an empty house of worship, pay attention next time you see a community workspace, a climbing gym or a micro-brewery. They may just be the new center of soulful community that you have been looking for.

In other words, there is a connection between authentic spirituality and mission that is highly attractive to Millennials. They want to experience an authentic God and live the mission of God in very simple ways, which is very similar to the early church and its missional lifestyle that was birthed out of a move of the Spirit of God.

CHAPTER 6:
THIS ASSEMBLY OF GOD AND ITS MISSIONAL MANDATE

It has already been explored at length why the Millennials are leaving the evangelical church. To quote David Kinnaman, “Christianity has an image problem.”¹ Every statistic regarding Millennials and their affiliation certainly shows a drop. The question is not whether there is a problem, but rather, what are we to do about the problem?

In the previous chapter, we explored how Millennials are wanting to connect to the transcendent, and how the move of the Spirit in both the early church and the twenty-first century offer the divine encounter that this generation is seeking. However, the Millennials are not just on a quest for a divine encounter, but rather they believe that an encounter with God should lead to missional living. In discussing effective engagement of Millennials, Krish Kandiah, executive director of *Churches in Mission* in the United Kingdom, states:

We need to rediscover the Bible’s grand narrative and teach an all-encompassing, multi-dimensional gospel. By showing how the life and death of Christ brings reconciliation with God, neighbor, creation, and self, young adults will hear the call to live as a prophetic sign of God’s kingdom.²

Kandiah is not wrong. The move of the Spirit in the early church and the revival in the 1900s gave the church an opportunity to live out its prophetic witness. The church was able to live out what was written in the pages of the Bible as the revival fires rapidly

¹ Kinnaman, *unChristian*, 9.

² Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 216.

spread throughout America. Filled with the Spirit, the church began to earnestly live out its mission on earth.

While it may seem like the revival that took place on Azusa Street in Los Angeles in 1906 was something that occurred overnight, it was rather the fruit of an earnest desire for evangelism around the world. Historian Gary McGee points out:

As the twentieth century approached, believers on every continent were praying for revival and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Prophecy conferences in America warned the faithful that the time for evangelism had nearly expired, judgement knocked at the door, and only heaven-sent revival could stop the hell-bent destructive course of humanity. Surrounded by millions of non-Christian religions, mission leaders issued urgent calls to pray for a special manifestation of the life and power of God the Holy Spirit.³

To many, the answer to their prayers showed up in 1906 in Los Angeles. As the *Los Angeles Times* covered the strange religious revival, the newspaper categorized it as bizarre and wild. In one article, the reporter stated, “People were breathing strange utterances and mouthing a creed which it would seem no sane mortal could understand.” The *Times* continued in their critique: “Devotees of the weird doctrine practice the most fanatical rites, preach the wildest theories, and work themselves into a state of mad excitement.” Finally, the *Times* reported that “[c]olored people and a sprinkling of whites compose the congregation, and night is made hideous in the neighborhood by the howlings of the worshippers who spend hours swaying forth and back in a nerve-racking attitude of prayer and supplication.”⁴ Little did the *Los Angeles Times* know that they were reporting on a new movement that would shape Christianity in a radical way for the

³ Gary B. McGee, *People of the Spirit: The Assembly of God* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2014), loc. 448, Kindle.

⁴ Gary B. McGee, “William Seymour and the Azusa Street Revival,” *Enrichment Journal*, last modified Fall 1999, accessed November 2, 2017, http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/199904/026_azusa.cfm.

rest of the century. This move of God was not an isolated occurrence in California but was found in many small towns, as well as worldwide. McGee would cite:

After the turn of the century, awakenings followed in many countries, the most notable occurring in Australia (1902) and Wales (1904), with the latter prompting revivals in South Africa (1904), India (1905), the United States (1906) and Manchuria (1908). In the Welsh revival, approximately one hundred thousand people were converted in a matter of months. For many Christians, it looked as if their prayers had been answered—the beginning of the great end times outpouring of the Holy Spirit had begun.⁵

Pentecostals would find they differed in certain matters of doctrine and practice, and these discrepancies would inevitably push them into a variety of camps. Arguments arose over the nature of the Spirit's baptism, along with speaking in tongues, sanctification, the nature of the Godhead, and the concept of holiness. Eventually, these disagreements could not be pacified, so various groups of Pentecostal joined other like-minded Pentecostals to form denominations. For example, those that strongly identified with Wesleyan-holiness prior to the revival formed into better-known denominations such as the Church of God in Christ, the Church of God in Cleveland, Tennessee, and the Pentecostal Holiness church. Other new organizations developed a Reformed-Keswick view, such as the Assemblies of God. Each denomination formed its own style of church government and developed its own doctrines and purpose.⁶ Once these sects formed, growth followed. According to Daniel Wacker:

Denominational formation fostered numerical growth and social respectability. By the end of the twentieth century more than 200 distinct Pentecostal sects had established themselves on the American landscape. Most were pocket sized, yet the two largest, the Assemblies of God and the church of God in Christ, claimed millions of members apiece.⁷

⁵ McGee, *People of the Spirit*, loc. 448-449.

⁶ *Ibid.*, loc. 518.

⁷ Wacker, *Heaven Below*, loc. 157.

Out of these denominations, missionary movements developed. After all, the purpose of this new move of the Spirit would be focused on world-wide evangelism. This was the priority for the Assemblies of God.

The Formation of the Assemblies of God

The early 1900s was marked by a vast expansion of the Christian gospel globally. Over twenty thousand Protestant missionaries served around the world, and fundraising for these missions rose to an all-time high of \$39 million.⁸ Even the president of the United States recognized the growth in missions. Addressing the Ecumenical Missionary conference in 1900, McKinley stated:

I am glad of the opportunity to offer without stint my tribute of praise and respect to the missionary effort which has wrought such wonderful triumphs for civilization....The services and sacrifices of the missionaries for their fellow men constitute one of the most glorious pages in world history.⁹

While missionary movements were very robust in the early 1900s, the revival fires forming various Pentecostal denominations added a new dimension to missions work. As the Pentecostal movement grew and many leaders and missionaries joined the movement from other, more traditional Protestant denominations, they discovered that they would soon face ostracism. Many missionaries that became Pentecostal were outright dismissed by their boards. There was a great need for organization. McGee would state:

⁸ Gary B. McGee, *This Gospel Shall Be Preached: A History and Theology of Assembly of God Foreign Missions Since 1959 – Volume 2* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2007), loc. 247, Kindle.

⁹ William McKinley, “Address of the President of the United States of America,” in *Ecumenical Missionary Conference, New York, 1900: Report of the Ecumenical Conference on Foreign Missions, Held in Carnegie Hall and Neighboring Churches, April 21 to May 1* (New York: American Tract Society, 1900), 1:39.

Farsighted leaders among independent Pentecostals recognized the need to organize to assist the missionary activities they supported. Lack of legal recognition, inconsistent financial support, and questionable practices overseas by some missionaries, as well as other difficulties, caused several Pentecostal publications to address the need for cooperation. Many saw the formation of the General Council of the Assemblies of God in 1914 as a remedy to the ills of missions enterprise.¹⁰

The Assemblies of God formed in the spring of 1914 at the Grand Opera House in Hot Springs, Arkansas. Approximately three hundred ministers and leaders from Pentecostal networks met to form the first General Council of the Assemblies of God. Their goal was to promote unity and doctrinal stability, establish legal standing, coordinate the mission enterprise, and establish a ministerial training school.¹¹ McGee observes:

They hoped this would do a number of things: contribute to a greater unity among churches, conserve the work at home and abroad, lead to a better system for supporting missionaries, encourage local congregations to charter with a biblical name, and to start a new training school.¹²

The subject of missions was at the forefront of the discussion within this new denomination. According to many early leaders, concerns with emergent liberal theology and the decline of biblical authority, as well as accountability of funds and legal recognition for missionaries, all prompted their meeting and formation as a denomination. John W. Welch, a pioneer of the movement and general superintendent, would state, “The General Council of the Assemblies of God was never meant to be an institution; it is just a missionary agency.”¹³ McGee points out:

¹⁰ Gary B. McGee, *This Gospel Shall Be Preached: A History and Theology of Assembly of God Missions to 1959, Volume 1* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1986), loc. 1177, Kindle.

¹¹ “History of the Assemblies of God,” Assembly of God, last modified 2017, accessed November 2, 2017, <https://ag.org/About/About-the-AG/History>.

¹² McGee, *People of the Spirit*, loc. 1924.

¹³ John W. Welch, “The Missionary Department,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, no. 332 (November 13, 1920), accessed November 1, 2017.

In the months that followed the adjournment of the first General Council in April 1914, several hundred ministers joined its ranks. About twenty-seven of them were missionaries. The number of missionaries and records of its meetings illustrate that from the beginning foreign missions commanded the Council's attention.¹⁴

Not all was perfect in this new missional movement. Great challenges were on the horizon for the Assemblies of God; in fact, instability marked the mission's program during the first three years of its existence. While the Assemblies of God added 126 new missionaries between 1914 and 1918, only fifty-four stayed with the program. While there were certainly storms early on, the Foreign Missions Department of the Assemblies of God found an eventual footing. Their methods would become clearly defined in 1921 at the St. Louis General Council with a systematic statement:

First: The missionary work of the Council shall be on the "Cooperative faith" basis, viz. the missionaries, the Foreign Missions Committee and the home constituency shall look to God together to supply the needs of the work. Publicity will be given to the needs of the field through the printed page and by word of mouth, leaving the results with God. Furthermore, the work at home and abroad shall be conducted on a cash basis. Debts will not be incurred and the work shall be undertaken only as funds are available.

Second: The Pauline example will be followed so far as possible, by seeking out neglected regions where the Gospel have not yet been preached, lest we build upon another man's foundation (Romans 15:20).

Third: It shall be our purpose to seek to establish self-supporting, self-propagating and self-governing native churches.

Fourth: The system of supporting missions and missionaries shall be based on the principle outlined in Acts 4:34, 35, which principle found favor by the apostles and was put into operation by the early church in caring for its poor. The system is based on the principle of the common fund, placed in the hands of a committee for distribution among those who are eligible, according to their needs.

Fifth: If funds are needed for the support of native workers...no offerings for native workers shall be sent direct to the natives, but to the missionaries in charge of the station. The native workers should receive a call from God for the work, just as do the missionaries who go from the home base. When necessary, the training of these native workers should include industrial or agricultural work so that they will not look to the missionaries for their support, nor be actuated by the love of money in their choice for Christian service. All workers should be moved alone by a direct call from God and a burning desire to bring Christ to their own people.

¹⁴ McGee, *The Gospel Shall Be Preached Volume 1*, loc. 1338.

Sixth: The Foreign Missions Committee shall define proper standards for training and testing of candidates about their call and qualifications for foreign service, as the needs of the work shall require.¹⁵

While this statement was not perfect, it does display a concerted effort to provide structure, accountability, leadership, and training for future missionaries. Even with its limitations, the statement provided a stable ground from which to build its foreign missions department.

The Purpose of the Assemblies of God and Engagement with Millennials

The priority of the Christian church since its early foundations has always been marked by the power of the Spirit and a robust focus on reaching their community through the power of the Gospels. With that, the church has also incorporated elements of compassion since the age of the apostles. This strategy served the church well through its history.

With the advent of the Charismatic movement, the strategy moved to a more evangelical framework. In other words, a focus on winning lost people was critical in light of the imminent return of the Lord. This is true with the Assemblies of God. While the argument could be made that the early Pentecostals did recognize the role of compassion within their ministry, Pentecostals put a larger emphasis on evangelizing and the power of the Spirit as they rapidly advanced their mission. However, in the early 2000s, key leaders within the Assemblies of God recognized the problems facing their era and sought to bring resolution by adding compassion as a key purpose. As Assembly of God missionary Jerry Ireland states:

¹⁵ “General Council Minutes,” The Assemblies of God, 1921, 61-64.

A compassionate Church reflects the characteristics of the One we profess as our King. In showing compassion, our goal is not to usher in a utopian society—or even the kingdom of God. Only God brings about His kingdom. But by showing compassion, we give evidence that the King of Righteousness dwells among us and within us. How odd it would be to proclaim God as Lord and King—a God who demonstrates great concern for the poor—and not also practice His priorities. When we disregard the King’s concerns, we are not His faithful subjects.¹⁶

As the Assemblies of God added this missional purpose, it seems they did so in order to create a more holistic approach to their mission, which will be critical in not only advancing their global ministries but also effectively engaging Western Millennials as well as future generations.

As the Assemblies of God moves into its second century of ministry, it will play a key role in reaching Millennials. Quite frankly, this denomination is in a unique position to reach Millennials because of two distinctives.

First, as we have seen, the Assemblies of God is a Pentecostal denomination. This means that, along with sound doctrine, the Assemblies of God believes that God moves upon the life of the believer today. The very nature of the Pentecostal revival brought something to believers that Millennials seem to also long for, and that is experiencing God. As stated before, the Barna Group and Cornerstone Network studies found that Millennials who stated that they do not feel church is important to them did so because they could find God elsewhere (39%) or because they feel that God is missing from the church (20%).¹⁷ In other words, Millennials avoid the church because they believe they can connect with God elsewhere. They are not experiencing Him in the church. A robust

¹⁶ Jerry Ireland, “Keeping Compassion and Evangelism Together,” *Enrichment Journal* (Fall 2014), accessed November 2, 2017, http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/201404/201404_106_Compassion_Evangelism.cfm.

¹⁷ Barna Group, “Making Space for Millennials,” 40.

and active atmosphere where Millennials can come into contact with the transcendent is what is needed. In the same study, the Barna Group and Cornerstone Network reported that 67 percent of Millennials prefer a classical style and 77 percent prefer a church using classic terms such as “sanctuary.”¹⁸ Consider what Rachel Held Evans stated about her own faith journey as a Millennial:

When I left church at age 29, full of doubt and disillusionment, I wasn’t looking for a better-produced Christianity. I was looking for a truer Christianity, a more authentic Christianity.... What finally brought me back, after years of running away, wasn’t lattes or skinny jeans; it was the sacraments. Baptism, confession, Communion, preaching the Word, anointing the sick—you know, those strange rituals and traditions Christians have been practicing for the past 2,000 years. The sacraments are what make the church relevant, no matter the culture or era. They don’t need to be repackaged or rebranded; they just need to be practiced, offered and explained in the context of a loving, authentic and inclusive community.¹⁹

While Evans is not discussing Pentecost, it does seem that Millennials are looking for an authentic connection to the divine. They want the church to feel like the church. They want to connect with God in a deep and meaningful way. Because of its historic connection to revival and the belief in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Assemblies of God is in a unique position to help Millennials engage the divine.

A laboratory where Millennials are coming into contact with experiencing God through Pentecostal distinctions is taking place on America’s college campuses through Chi Alpha. Founded in 1953 at Missouri State University, formerly Southwest Missouri State University, Chi Alpha now is on three hundred college campuses across the United States. Their stated purpose is this:

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Rachel Held Evans, “Want Millennials Back in the Pews? Stop Trying to Make Church Cool,” *Washington Post*, April 30, 2015, accessed October 11, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/jesus-doesnt-tweet/2015/04/30/fb07ef1a-ed01-11e4-8666-a1d756d0218e_story.html?utm_term=.c772604018b3.

We believe that God longs to have each and every person be reconciled to Himself, and that the way that re-connection happens is through the representation of his people. Each of us who takes on the identity of “Christian” becomes Christ’s ambassador—or *christou apostoloi* in Greek, which we shorten to the first letters “Chi” and “Alpha” or XA. Our name is our constant reminder that each of us has a real part to play in this world. We each can carry Him within us to bring Him closer to the people around us.²⁰

Their statement goes further by pointing out, “We are a Spirit-empowered, diverse community of believers on university campuses, declaring in word and lifestyle our faith in Jesus Christ, equipped to fulfill our purpose in God’s global plan.”²¹ While Chi Alpha is an Assembly of God ministry, they are not merely reaching Assembly of God college students. A 2014 report, providing the statistical data from 2012–2013, stated that Chi Alpha had a little over twenty-six thousand students engaged in their meetings regularly. More than half (59%) had no Assemblies of God background. In that same year, Chi Alpha saw over five thousand salvations, over 800 documented healings, and over two thousand students baptized in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues. What was reported in 2014 was no anomaly. In a 2016 report, Chi Alpha reported an attendance over twenty-eight thousand, twenty-five hundred small groups, five thousand decisions for Christ, and thousands baptized in the Holy Spirit. While the sample size is small, Chi Alpha is on the cutting edge of reaching Millennials—many of them being unchurched or non-Pentecostal—with Pentecostal distinctives. Consider one testimony from a Stanford University student regarding her experience with the power of God through Chi Alpha:

Four weeks into fall term of my freshman year, I suddenly came down with a high fever. After weathering through a math exam, I basically just wanted to stay in my dorm room

²⁰ “Why We Exist,” Chi Alpha, accessed November 2, 2017, <https://chialpha.com/about/our-story/>.

²¹ Ibid.

and cry. I went to Vaden and tested positive for mono, and it also turned out that I had pneumonia and a sinus infection at the same time. I was told to expect symptoms for 4-8 weeks.

After about a week of resting in my room and trying to make it to my most important classes, I finally felt well enough to come to Chi Alpha, where Dr. Susan prayed over me. Within a couple days, my fever had gone away completely and I ceased having body aches and chills. A couple days later, all I had left was a minor lingering cough. Keep in mind that the doctors had predicted severe symptoms for at least another 3 weeks afterward. In short, my symptoms of mono had virtually vanished.

Soon after, I got a curious email from Vaden. They had kept a sample of my blood on their shelf. For some reason they tested the sample again—the same sample that had tested positive for mono a week earlier—and they were shocked to find no trace of virus at all!

In other words, not only did God heal me of mono, He erased all traces of the mono virus from my blood completely—even from the blood sample sitting on the lab shelf!²²

The move of God on college campuses through Chi Alpha is giving us a glimpse of what the church can do to engage Millennials through an experience with the divine. However, an experience alone is not what will engage them. Much like the revival on Azusa Street in the early twentieth century, the experience must lead to a purpose. In other words, Millennials want to feel God and the church make a difference in the world.

Missional Millennials

John Stott, former rector emeritus for All Souls Church in London and a leader in the evangelical movement, stated:

My hope is that, in the future, evangelical leaders will ensure that their social agenda includes controversial topics such as halting climate change, eradicating poverty, abolishing armories of mass destruction, responding adequately to the AIDS pandemic, and asserting the human rights of women and children in all cultures.²³

²² Isaac, class of 2018, post to “Testimonies – Stanford University,” April 21, 2016, accessed December 2, 2017, <http://testimonies.stanford.edu/>.

²³ Kinnaman, *Unchristian*, 226.

His statement served as a prophetic warning to the church. His argument is that the church must not just be the church within the four walls, but also must be the church engaged in world affairs. Sadly, many Millennials do not see the church as an agent helping to solve the crises of the world. Rather, they see the church often worried about its own survival. A large reason for the Millennial exodus is that they perceive the church and Christians as largely hypocritical. Nearly half of all Millennials view the church in this light. While there is no doubt that Millennials see Christians as being moralistic while not always living up to the standards they force upon others, they also see that many professing Christians seem to lack concern and compassion for the world around them.²⁴ For example, many southern churches were silent during the civil rights era of the 1960s. The church seemed to be slow in responding to the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s. Currently, many in the American evangelical church are slow to respond to the global refugee crisis. Fairly or unfairly, the narrative describes a church that is not actively living its mission out in a world that is broken. The church seems to have drifted away from what the apostle James calls pure religion: “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”²⁵

This disconnect between what the church believes and what it practices is not lost on Millennials, who are in tune to a variety of social causes. Because of their technological expertise and the effects of globalization, this generation is connected to

²⁴ Ibid., 40.

²⁵ James 1:27 (ESV).

issues that they want to solve at home and around the world. Research done by the Achieve Group and the Case Foundation study states:

This generation has affected more than just the nonprofit sector with their unique brand of social good and issue engagement. They have changed how the government responds with new social issue policies. They have changed the culture at corporate America to stand up for the disenfranchised and address the challenges within our communities. They are changing how nonprofits are defining philanthropy. This generation is more than an idle voice. They are a true force for social good that goes beyond the biggest philanthropist in the world because with their actions they can organize, drive awareness and influence the behavior of giving by other generations like never before.

The study also shows that a little over half of Millennials (53%) believe that being engaged in a form of social activism would lead to improvement in their world. However, they do not just believe in their individual responsibility when it comes to these causes. The survey found that 57 percent of Millennials also believe organizations have the ability to create change in their society.²⁶ The Case Foundation study cannot be lost on the church. Millennials understand the challenges that face our world, but not only that, the study demonstrates that they are willing to engage with organizations in order to incite change.²⁷

In another study in 2006, the Cone Millennial Cause Study defined this generation as follows: “Reared in a youth-centric culture, Millennials are self-assured and civic-minded. With sophisticated social awareness, Millennials believe community extends beyond their own backyard and feel empowered and compelled to make the world a

²⁶ Achieve and The Case Foundation, *The Millennial Impact Report, Phase 2: The Power of Voice: A New Era of Cause Activation and Social Issue Adoption*, last modified 2017, accessed December 10, 2017, <http://www.themillennialimpact.com/>.

²⁷ Ibid.

better place.”²⁸ Not only did they define Millennials as a caring and compassionate generation, but they also found that 78 percent of Millennials believe that companies should be just as invested in making the world a better place. According to this study, 70 percent of Millennials have purchased products because of cause. An overwhelming 89 percent of Millennials would switch brand loyalty for a cause as well. The researchers explain:

Millennials factor in much more than just quality and price when deciding which products or services to purchase. Sixty-eight percent stated that a company’s social and/or environmental commitment is important or extremely important when deciding which products to buy. A company’s social commitment also plays a critical role in a Millennial’s decision on where to shop, which products to recommend to others and which messages to pay attention to. 69% consider a company’s social and environmental commitment when deciding where to shop. 66% will recommend products or services if a company is socially responsible. 74% are more likely to pay attention to a company’s messages if the company has a deep commitment to a cause. Conversely, Millennials are also not afraid to target corporations that are not giving back and will punish companies that lack social/environmental responsibility. After learning that a company is not socially or environmentally responsible. 45% are likely to refuse that company’s products or services. 56% are likely to refuse to work at that company. 42% are likely to encourage family and friends to boycott that company’s products or services.²⁹

Both the Cone Study and the Case Foundation study point to a generation that will engage with organizations or companies that have a desire to make the world a better place. Because of this, the church that is engaged in missional practices can attract Millennials, but it must balance its Gospel proclamation and its ministry of mercy to the world around it. Alan Hirsch says it this way: “Our spirituality must move from primarily a passive/receptive mode, to an actional mode.”³⁰

²⁸ Cone INC. and AMP Agency, *2006 Cone Millennial Study: The Millennial Generation: Pro-Social and Empowered to Save the World*, accessed December 2, 2017, <http://www.centerforgiving.org/Portals/0/2006%20Cone%20Millennial%20Cause%20Study.pdf>.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁰ Hirsch and Frost, *The Shaping of things to Come*, 171.

The Assemblies of God has excelled in being missional or actionable around the world. Linked primarily with the move of the Holy Spirit and allowing the Charismatic gifts to empower them for worldwide evangelism, the one-hundred-year organization eclipses over sixty-seven million adherents. The driving cause has been there mission's arm. With over 2700 missionaries around the world, 10,000 short-term mission personnel, an annual budget of over 200 million dollars, and thousands of Bible colleges and extension sites worldwide, it is no wonder that a new believer is added every thirty-seven seconds, a new church is planted every ninety-five minutes, and one new minister is added every seventy-three minutes. The phenomenal reach around the globe has its appeal and will attract Millennials. Chi Alpha has once again been a great example of this.³¹ In 2016 alone, Chi Alpha hosted their semi-annual World Missions Summit. Out of the six thousand attendees, nearly one-third made a commitment to serve in a foreign field for one year. While the Assemblies of God's world missions strategy has been a remarkable achievement, in order to reach Millennials, they must show compassion to social causes as well.

Compassion Ministries and the Assemblies of God

Compassion has marked Christianity since its infancy. Immediately following the formation of the church in Acts 2, Luke records:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and

³¹ Assemblies of God World Missions, *Assemblies of God World Missions Vital Statistics*, last modified December 31, 2016, accessed December 10, 2016, <https://agwm.com/assets/agwmvitalstats.pdf>.

had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.³²

Even though the church expanded rapidly, Luke emphasizes that the church's compassion and charity program did not cease. In Acts 6, the apostles, guided by the Spirit of God, selected a handful of men to oversee ministry to the poor, the widows, and the orphans.

This was not a one-time occurrence, but it would be a defining value that Christians would be known for throughout history. Nor did the church's compassion stay within the walls of the church. The earliest Christian writers, pastors and bishops all seemed to implore their parishioners to give. This appeal was not to build the church, but to demonstrate compassion to the most helpless in their society. Tertullian is credited as assaying, "Every one deposits a moderate contribution monthly if he chooses...it is to support the interment of the poor, the bringing up of boys and girls who have neither property nor parents, the relief of the aged, the shipwrecked, and those who are in mines, in prisons, or in exile."³³ Similarly, as plague and pestilence ravaged Rome, it was Cyprian in city of Carthage that would implore his church by saying:

For if we only do good to those who do good to us, what do we more than the heathens and the publicans? If we are the children of God, who makes His sun to shine upon good and bad, and send rain on the just and the unjust, let us prove it by our acts, by blessing those who curse us, and doing good to those who persecute us.³⁴

Neither Tertullian nor Cyprian are isolated. Rather, a study of Christian charity in the early stage of the church would demonstrate that compassion was indeed a core value at

³² Acts 2:42-45 (ESV).

³³ Gebhard Uihorn, *Christian Charity in the Ancient Church* (New York: Scribner and Sons, 1883), 142.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 188.

the heart of the ancient church. While this research does not have adequate time to address a fuller view of compassion and charity throughout church history, it is sufficient to identify compassion and charity as hallmarks of Christianity from the beginning.

If one were to fast forward through church history to the nineteenth century, one would discover that this was the century for the Christian. Due in part to colonialization by Christian nations over so-called pagan nations, the great missionary effort of the nineteenth century focused on civilizing foreign nations. Missionaries and church leaders believed they could civilize people by Christianizing people as has already been pointed out by Robert Woodberry's research.³⁵ Much of the missionary effort was focused on conversion, but it was of course assisted by social development or "civilizing" a society as well. Therefore, missionaries of the nineteenth century also saw it as their mission to build structures such as schools and hospitals.

With the religious fervor that exploded onto the scene in the form of the Pentecostal revival, much of the leadership saw the need for more Gospel proclamation around the world that would be driven by the Holy Spirit. To say that these new Pentecostal leaders were against compassion, social justice, and reforms would be inaccurate. However, they were driven by a different set of principles. Byron Klaus argues:

It is very clear that Pentecostal efforts to reach the world were focused on evangelization that plants churches in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is also understandable historically why this ministry foci was so poignant. The 19th century had been what historians called the Christian century. The 19th century saw the modern mission's movement gain momentum and flourish. However, the great missionary effort had grown in the context of colonial empires worldwide.

³⁵ Woodberry, *Missionary Roots of Liberal Democracy*, 244-245.

A central part of missionary efforts worldwide was the “civilizing” of people as a part of Christianizing them.³⁶

For Pentecostals, they believed that as good as this focus on “civilizing” the world might be, it minimized the priority of Gospel proclamation with signs and wonders. Simply stated, the Pentecostal tradition rejected a focus on a social gospel and replaced it in favor of a Gospel of power.

Adding to this was the rise of a new concept at the turn of the century. Social programs, social justice, civilizing, and education all had to take a backseat to the larger priority, and that was preparation for the imminent return of Jesus Christ. As the new millennium approached, a group of radical evangelicals emerged on the scene. They were pastors, leaders, businessmen, professors, and broadcasters from varied denominations: Methodists, Baptists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and early adopters to Pentecostalism. These leaders from every area of the country and every financial station in life threw themselves into the study of the apocalypse. They attended prophecy seminars, exchanged pulpits, started magazines, and pioneered radio broadcast that all did one thing: preach the coming doom, divine judgement, and return of Christ.³⁷ It was in this spiritual climate that Pentecostalism would take root. For Pentecostals, McGee notes:

Influenced by the rise of premillennialism in the late nineteenth century, Pentecostals were convinced that civilization would get worse before it got better. Hearing the incessant rumblings of war on the international scene and fascinated by the concomitant stirrings of Zionism, premillennialist became convinced that the end was near. Their sense of urgency was reinforced by the words of Jesus in Matthew 24:14, ‘This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall come the end.’ To C.I. Scofield editor of

³⁶ Byron D. Klaus, “Compassion Rooted in a Gospel that Transforms,” *Enrichment Journal*, last updated Spring 2014, accessed December 3, 2017, http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/200402/200402_016_compassion.cfm.

³⁷ Matthew Avery Sutton, *The American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 14.

the dispensationalist Scofield Reference Bible, to A.B. Simpson, president of the Christian Missionary Alliance, and to the Pentecostals who avidly read their writings, this dictated a strategy for evangelizing every nation on earth in order to hasten Christ's return....Love for Christ, obedience to the Great Commission, and 'plucking brands from the burning' have continued at the core of missionary motivation over the years.³⁸

Prior to and in the midst of the Pentecostal revival, massive changes within the world were occurring. Radical urbanization, political upheaval, and rumors of war all impacted the thinking of Christians. For many, they believed that their way of life was under siege leading to an apocalyptic vision. Matthew Sutton points out that:

As radical evangelicals tried to make sense of the changing times, they began to find in the scriptures verses that they had not noticed before, while vague and obscure passages came into sharper focus. Informed by their historical context, their reading of church history, and the work of a few relatively obscure European apocalypticists, they came to the startling conclusion that they were not preparing the world for a godly millennium. Instead, they were living in the end times.... Rather than waiting for the kingdom of God to appear through moral reform or personal regeneration, they saw tribulation and death looming on the horizon.³⁹

Armed with theological underpinnings that, in their minds, were confirmed by the death and destruction seen in the Great War, the generation that saw revival fires burn had no choice but to think their primary mission was to focus on souls rather than compassion. After all, many did not believe that the twentieth century would end before seeing the coming of their Lord. The Assemblies of God as well as other Pentecostal movements would be inevitably shaped by this understanding.

³⁸ McGee, *Called and Empowered*, 207.

³⁹ Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 14.

Evolution of Compassion in the Assemblies of God

Due to many liberal mainline denominations introducing the idea of a social gospel, and to the belief by many Pentecostals that such an approach watered down the Gospel, the focus for most Pentecostal denominations, including the Assemblies of God, was evangelism. Darren Rogers points out:

In America, evangelicals and Pentecostals often responded to the social gospel movement by re-asserting biblical truths. Some tried to reform older denominations from within; others formed new, purer churches. Some backed away from social action, concerned that an emphasis on good works could distract from what they believed was the more important duty to preach the Word.⁴⁰

Despite this focus on evangelism, there were many within the Assemblies of God movement who still acknowledged the need to provide care and compassion to those in need of it the most. In a 1919 article in the Assemblies of God's *Pentecostal Evangel*, the plea for compassion was on full display. Writing about the famine, starvation, and influenza epidemic that had ravaged India, missionary Albert Norton wrote an impassioned plea. Norton stated:

Much prayer should be made to our heavenly Father, in Christ's name, that He will incline all missionaries, mission boards and committees and all Christian workers to do what they can to save their brothers and sisters in India from dying of starvation, or from the kindred train of evils following famine. A Christianity that coldly sits down, and goes on its routine of formal work and allows its fellowmen to starve, or to be obliged to go through all the hard sufferings and exposure connected with famine, without effort to help them, might as well quit its preaching.⁴¹

Norton would continue his appeal, one very similar to the comments of Cyprian and Eusebius, when he wrote:

⁴⁰ Darrin J. Rodgers, "This Week in AG History – February 22, 1919," *Assemblies of God*, last modified February 23, 2017, accessed October 30, 2017, <https://penews.org/Features/This-Week-in-AG-History--February-22-1919>.

⁴¹ S.H.Frodsham quoting a report from Albert Norton, "Plague and Famine Raging in India," *Pentecostal Evangel*, no. 276 and 277 (February 22, 1919), accessed December 2, 2017, http://ifphc.org/pdf/PentecostalEvangel/1913-1919/1919/1919_02_22.pdf#Page4.

All monies sent to us for famine relief, we will conscientiously use for helping, first of all, Indian Christians, who will suffer seriously from the famine, unless they are helped. And afterwards, we shall seek to save our neighbors, whether Hindu or of other race, from the dire effects of famine, remembering our Lord's command to 'do good unto all men, especially to the household of faith.'⁴²

The *Pentecostal Evangel* allowed Norton's and India's story to cover its entire front page in the February 22, 1919 edition. Furthermore, associate editor Stanley H. Frodsham followed Norton's stern appeal with a justification for saving India's starving poor. Using Proverbs 19:17 and 24:11-12, he stated that Scripture required it. Additionally, he noted that Methodists from the southern conference were asked to sacrifice food and meat and therefore Pentecostals should do the same. Finally, Frodsham stated that the church's very existence was dependent upon such compassion and charity.⁴³

Two years later, a similar incident occurred. In 1921, a devastating famine hit the mainland of China. Assemblies of God leaders were concerned about announcing the famine in China in fear that funds would be diverted from their missionaries spreading the Gospel to the ravaged areas in China. In a stroke of boldness, they decided to trust God. J. Roswell Flowers, the treasurer of the Assemblies of God, reported:

The burden of the starving people of China has settled down upon our people, and the response to the need has been splendid...At the time the news was received concerning the famine, we hesitated to tell the story of the need for the reason that hearts would be touched and there was a likelihood of our donors diverting offerings for the missionaries to famine needs and then neglecting the missionaries. The famine need was so great, however, we took this risk with such good results as you have seen.⁴⁴

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ J. Roswell Flowers, "The Famine in China," *Pentecostal Evangel*, no.388-389, (April 16, 1921): 12, accessed December 2, 2017, http://ifphc.org/DigitalPublications/USA/Assemblies%20of%20God%20USA/Pentecostal%20Evangel/Unregistered/1921/FPHC/1921_04_16.pdf.

Compassion certainly played a part in the spiritual activities of early missionaries and pioneers of the Assemblies of God movement, as many historians will note. However, prior to 2009, the Assemblies of God missional statement listed evangelism, worship of God, and discipleship as their reasons for existing. For the 2009 General Council, a portion of the resolution reads as follows:

The Assemblies of God shall represent, as nearly as possible, the body of Christ as described in the New Testament. It shall recognize the principles inherent in the Body as also inherent in this Fellowship, particularly the principles of unity, cooperation, and equality. It recognizes that these principles will enable it to achieve its priority reason for being as an agency of God for evangelizing the world, as a corporate body in which man may worship God, and as a channel of God's purpose to build a body of saints being perfected in the image of His Son, and to be a people who demonstrate God's love and compassion for all the world.⁴⁵

However, the new missional statement by the Assemblies of God does not tell the full story. The day before the resolution passed, it was first defeated. General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God George Wood describes his agonizing decision to push for compassion being added to the missional statement following the resolution's defeat:

That night I could not sleep. Here we are, a compassionate Movement telling the world we are not compassionate, I thought. This does not add up. This does not make sense.

I determined in the early morning hours of Friday, August 7, that I was going to yield the chair during the next business session, go to the floor, and appeal to the delegates to reconsider Thursday's action and adopt the resolution. One of the most satisfying moments in my life came when the delegates did just that.

Some feared that adding compassion as a reason for being would dilute our Fellowship's historic resolve to do "the greatest evangelism that the world has ever seen." Others worried that adding compassion would lead us down the slippery slope to the "Social Gospel" our fathers and mothers in the faith explicitly rejected. These are understandable concerns. I do not want to be part of any Christian movement that discounts evangelism or disregards orthodoxy in favor of mere social or political action. But I do not fear that adding compassion to our reasons for being will do either. Instead, I worry that discounting or disregarding compassion will result in a less-than-biblical form

⁴⁵ General Council of the Assembly of God Minutes, Orlando Florida, August 2009.

of ministry. Compassion played a crucial role in the ministries of Christ and the New Testament church. Should it not play a crucial role in our ministries as well?⁴⁶

The role of compassion within the Assemblies of God cannot be overstated when it comes to engaging Millennials. After all, in order to engage someone with the Gospel, it must engage the whole person. It cannot engage with mere knowledge; it must also connect with the heart of a person. Alan Hirsch rightly points out that “[i]n the Biblical worldview, in order to truly know something (yada in Hebrew), one cannot merely observe it but it must come into contact with it. There must be mutuality and personal involvement.”⁴⁷ In his religious classic, Jonathan Edwards writes this regarding connecting to the heart:

I am bold in saying this, but I believe that no one is ever changed, either by doctrine, by hearing the word, or by preaching or teaching of another, unless the religious affections are moved by these things....In a word, there is never any great achievement by the things of religion without a heart deeply affected by those things....True religion is placed in the affections.⁴⁸

If this is the case, then the Assemblies of God’s pivot toward compassion within its missional purpose is a vital piece in engaging a generation’s heart that is bent more toward social justice and compassion.

In a discussion regarding David Bosch’s twelve common historical positions of the church, Missiologist Michael Frost simplifies the argument. Out of Bosch’s findings, Frost highlights six. The first position in the church was to see social involvement as a

⁴⁶ George O. Wood, “Why We Practice Compassion,” Dr. George O. Wood General Superintendent Blog, August 2009, accessed December 2, 2017, <http://georgeowood.com/why-we-practice-compassion/>.

⁴⁷ Alan Hirsch and Debra Hirsch, *Untamed: Reactivating a Missional Form of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010), 64.

⁴⁸ Jonathan Edwards, *On the Religious Affections* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1961), 11.

betrayal of missions. This means that the only purpose of mission is to spread the Gospel through evangelism. The second stage or position is that the church sees social action as good, but it essentially distracts from the mission of evangelism. In this stage, social activism is discouraged. In the third position, the church considers social action important as long as it is ultimately confronting people with the Gospel. In the fourth and fifth stages, social action is of increasing importance, but evangelism remains in a primary position. The sixth stage is, according to Frost, truly missional. Both social action and evangelism are important; therefore, they should not be prioritized. For Frost, a truly missional church will be both an announcement of the kingdom of God and a demonstration of God's reign. In other words, when justice or social action is needed, it should be pursued regardless of evangelistic efforts. It is done because as Christians it is our role to bring restoration in the world.⁴⁹ Frost points out that the Assemblies of God, like most evangelical organizations, has historically been in the first two positions or stages.⁵⁰ However, as the Assemblies of God moved toward making compassion a priority, they were sending a signal that they were moving into a more missional approach. An example of this new push for compassion is seen in an Assemblies of God ministry, Convoy of Hope.

This robust compassion ministry of the Assemblies of God was founded in 1994 by the Donaldson family. Its origins can be traced back to assistance received by the family following a tragic car accident that killed the patriarch of the family, Harold

⁴⁹ Michael Frost, *The Road to Missional: Journey to the Center of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 27.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Donaldson, in 1969. Today, Convoy of Hope has served over 80 million people and operates on this principle: “Convoy of Hope is a faith-based, nonprofit organization with a driving passion to feed the world through children’s feeding initiatives, community outreaches and disaster response.” The organization provides free groceries, haircuts, and job placement, and it responds with disaster relief around the world.⁵¹ Convoy of Hope is an example of Christian compassion and charity within the Assemblies of God ministries that links well with the Millennial generation’s embrace of social justice, activism, and compassion.

The Missional Assemblies of God Church

If Millennials believe that they can make a difference in the world through activism, and they expect organizations that they support to do the same, then it stands to reason that a missional approach to church is crucial to engage this generation. Again based off of Frost, a missional church will integrate both the proclamation of the kingdom of God and the demonstration of the reign of God. It is an integrational approach where neither part is placed above the other. Based off of research, a missional approach may be the only thing that keeps the church from drifting into extinction. Millennials are interested in a church that will make a difference in both their local community and around the world. It must be a “both-and” proposition and not an “either/or” proposition. In other words, the model for the Assemblies of God must involve engagement in local activism and social justice as well as missions around the

⁵¹ “Our Mission,” Convoy of Hope, last modified 2015, accessed November 13, 2017, <https://www.convoyofhope.org/about/>.

world. Missions is a part of the culture of the Assemblies of God. It is what the denomination feels they are empowered to do and be.

If this is the case, we must spend a little more time exploring the missional church. Alan Hirsch writes extensively about the missional church and defines the missional church as one that does not just *do* missions as another program, but one that *is* missions. He states, “The missional church, then, is a sent church. It is a going church, a movement of God through people, sent to bring healing to a broken world.” Conversely, as Hirsch points out, “The existing church, which is invariably static, rooted in one place, institutionalized, needs to recover its sent-ness in order to become the missional church.”⁵² In Hirsch’s view, a church that is static will not fare well in the new century. It must be noted that being missional is not a new concept of evangelization; if it were, this would mean it is simply an activity or program of the church. To think that being missional equates to mere evangelizing is to neuter the term. Frost believes that the church cannot think of the missional mandate as being one that is attractional. Rather, the church must understand what they are called to do and whom they are called to. For Frost, this is at the heart of being missional.⁵³ Theologian Leonard Sweet agrees with Hirsch’s and Frost’s concept of church in the twenty-first century. He states:

Mission is not an activity of the church but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God, Jesus is a missionary Messiah, and Spirit is a missionary spirit. Missions is a family business. God doesn’t so much have a singular plan for your life as God has made you for mission and has a design whereby you can accomplish who you were born to be.⁵⁴

⁵² Hirsch and Frost, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 34.

⁵³ Frost, *The Road to Missional*, 24.

⁵⁴ Leonard Sweet, *So Beautiful: Divine Design for Life and the Church* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009), 55.

Sweet's argument is that we do not need more people who go on mission trips, which is missions' activity, so much as we need mission people who identify with the heartbeat of God.⁵⁵ All three theologians and missiologists would agree—churches that are not missional will become ancient cathedrals in the new landscape.

If Hirsch, Frost, and Sweet are right, and it seems that they are given the data we have on Millennials, then what does future engagement look like for the church? First, it must be stated that the Assemblies of God sits in a prime position to engage Millennials, primarily because of its missional history and infrastructure. However, the danger is that a missional approach becomes just an activity in the Assemblies of God in North America that is done by a select few missionaries, or it is seen as a way to evangelize to merely put more people in the seats of the church. Church leaders must push hard to ensure that the only missionary activity done by a local church is not simply funding projects and missionaries or doing outreach to gain an audience. It must not be primarily self-interested in mere membership of the local body, which is something Frost believes has occurred to the Western evangelical church. He states: "My concern is that we should allow church membership be the outcome of Christian mission, not the goal. . . . Whenever we assume church attendance is the chief end of mission, we will find ourselves reducing evangelism to recruitment and mission, to salesmanship with all its attendant abuses."⁵⁶ A missional approach will integrate evangelism and social action. It will marry the message of Christ's reign with the mission in a beautifully seamless fashion. This is not something new, as it was actually the practice of the early church.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 59.

⁵⁶ Frost, *The Road to Missional*, 65.

The shift that should take place for the Assembly of God churches does not involve new models, but rather, they are ancient. The early church would gather together for equipping. The purpose of the church in the ancient world was solely to be an enterprise that moved people into mission. In his theological treatise on the church, the apostle Paul states:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.⁵⁷

Paul is letting his readers know that the officers of the church are there to mature believers. Further, a mature believer is equipped for ministry or mission. After all, the church is at its best when it is an equipping center for mission. Therefore, instead of creating attractional environments, pastors must create environments within their church communities in which the church willingly engages local contexts on a regular basis. In short, they must *be* missions and create avenues and pipelines for local believers to engage in their community.

A church that is missions must be a church that makes reconciliation primary. As the apostle Paul states clearly in Second Corinthians:

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Ephesians 4:11-14 (ESV).

⁵⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:18–20 (ESV).

While many within the church would rightly identify this message as dealing with spreading the Gospel, author Gabe Lyons has a unique take. Lyons sees that Christians of the future, the ones who will be led by Millennials and attract Millennials, will put a primary importance on bringing restoration within the world, compared to what he calls Separatist Christians that, for him, strive to gather in holy huddles. Juxtaposed with Separatist Christians, this new breed of Christian will fix problems in the world that extend beyond spiritual concepts. Lyons writes that these Christians will bring restoration in art, politics, local communities, schools, and many other areas. To him, the concept of restoration is similar to reconciliation. He sums up his thoughts:

I've seen this restoration way of thinking and living define a new generation of Christians in our world. They simply cannot help themselves; they are intoxicated with the idea that God's love extends to all people. They believe this kind of love is expressed best in tangible, physical acts of goodness. They show up. In fact, showing up is their defining practice. These Christians don't run from areas that might typically offend Separatist Christians—they run to them. They seek out brokenness and offer hope....The next Christians stand up for what they deem to be good, true and beautiful. They have a deep respect for God's creation and strive to bring out that divine potential when most would write them off.⁵⁹

Hirsch, Sweet, and Lyons all indicate that, by not living its mission out, the church is viewed as hypocritical by a generation that overwhelmingly engages in social causes.

The Assembly of God missionary movement that sprung from the Azusa revival has led to nearly 68 million adherents worldwide. For one hundred years, the Assemblies of God has been a pioneer in connecting the local church to missions globally. Now more than ever, Assembly of God churches must recognize the historical missional framework as a springboard to connect to Millennials. However, Assembly of God churches must move from missions being an activity of the church to missions being the church's core if

⁵⁹ Gabe Lyons, *The Next Christians: Seven Ways You Can Live the Gospel and Restore the World* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2012), loc. 969, Kindle.

this is to be effective. They must not only embrace a global missions concept, but they must also strive to bring reconciliation and restoration locally. Millennials desperately want the church to live out the way of Jesus in a missional context in every area of culture.

Conclusion to the Chapter

As noted in this chapter, the Assemblies of God was formed with a missional purpose in the early twentieth century. It is this missional emphasis that has allowed it to explode to nearly sixty-eight million adherents worldwide. This missional mandate was birthed through the experiences of early revivals. These early pioneers really believed that the outpouring of the Spirit that was being experienced on Azusa Street and in Hot Springs was to empower them to evangelize the world before the end of the age, which they believed was imminent—an idea that was quite prevalent at the turn of the century. Because of this new religious fervor, the Assemblies of God built and sustained a powerful missions organization that reached every region of the world. As the Assemblies of God has evolved, it has wisely seen the need to make compassion a primary emphasis of the movement.

This evolution will serve the organization well within the twenty-first century because Millennials see things like compassion, social justice, and community transformation as core values. The activist spirit that is carried by many Millennials is a key to engaging them. While they are interested in gaining knowledge about God and experiencing a transcendent God, they also want these activities connected to activism within the community and the world. Therefore, the Assemblies of God, with their arsenal of missions and compassion, should be able to connect with Millennials as well as

or better than any other church organization. This engagement will only be successful if Assembly of God churches re-focus the charismatic experience towards missions, much like the early pioneers of the movement.

CHAPTER 7:
FINAL CONCLUSIONS REGARDING THE CHURCH'S ENGAGEMENT
WITH MILLENNIALS

Millennials must be understood in light of their generation's size and the impact they are having and will have on society and, in particular, the church. They cannot be ignored as a generation or passed off as young kids who will grow out of a phase. They are already putting their stamp on the world as they see it; after all, many Millennials are well into their adulthood. From politics to culture, this vast generation is already having an enormous impact on the world and will for the foreseeable future. As we have seen, the way Millennials view faith and the practice of faith is radically different from previous generations and will pose some challenges in the evangelical world.

As this research has explored, Millennials are leaving the church at an alarming rate. They seem dramatically at odds with the traditional approach the evangelical church has employed. Whether concerning specific doctrines, such as the church's teaching on homosexuality, or the church's allegiance to the politically-aligned idea of Christendom, Millennials are making their voices heard in part by not attending church. For many scholars, this crisis must be corrected or the church may be in danger of losing a generation.

This loss will not occur because the Millennials are disinterested in spirituality. Rather, they see the church as having very little to offer their lives and society as a whole. As stated in this research, Millennials are leaving the church for a variety of reasons, but primarily, they state that they can find and experience God elsewhere, which is a major indictment on Christian pulpits in America. Many within the generation believe that the

church has traded its distinctiveness for a political platform that often seems divisive and hypocritical. This belief has driven Millennials away quickly even though many grew up connected to a Christian church. As we have shown, this problem did not occur overnight, but it has been a process that has its roots in the mid-twentieth century.

Even though the evangelical and pentecostal churches have struggled to connect with Millennials, this research aims to show hope regarding Millennials' engagement. It is this research's view that the historic understanding of the Spirit of God is a key to engaging this generation. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit in both the Old and New Testament is a doctrine of mission. This research points out that, along with the experience of the Holy Spirit, the ultimate aim of the church's movement was toward a mission. The Old Testament, New Testament, Lucan theology, and Pauline theology explain this connection clearly, and an understanding of the early-twentieth-century Pentecostal movement associated with the Azusa revival all indicate that a move or experience of the Spirit is always associated with a move toward missions. It is true that other Christian organizations have done missions well, particularly compassionate missions. The Pentecostal movement and its missions have been a unique movement within the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

There is a large amount of evidence that Millennials are conscious of the world in which they live. They certainly believe they can change the world around them and will engage in activism to see change effected. Therefore, the Assemblies of God must learn to marry its experience of the Holy Spirit to a compassionate mission—one that does not just fund projects around the world but inspires its people to locally engage in their culture. As this research has pointed out, churches must learn how to be about the

mission of God within their local communities and around the world by giving parishioners opportunities to live a missional life. In other words, the purpose of the church must be missional and not simply about membership. As stated, God is a missionary God, therefore his people should be a missionary people. Leonard Sweet states it succinctly: “God is a God of motion, of movement, of mission. Or, as it is popular nowadays to say, ‘two-thirds of the word God is go’...God doesn’t just have an agenda for you to do; God has a mission for you to live.”¹ It is this research’s view that this approach is accomplished best in the Assemblies of God by refocusing the charismatic experience away from self and toward mission. When that is done, it has the potential to re-engage Millennials.

To put a more practical spin on the initial research, there are three concepts that Assembly of God pastors and possibly other pentecostal pastors can employ. As stated in the research, Millennials have a thirst for connecting to the transcendent. The experiences that have been found in the New Testament and on Azusa should not be abandoned in favor of more modernistic approaches, which have at times robbed congregations of the Spirit’s move and life. Whether it be through Spirit-led ecstatic experiences, sacraments, or a reciting of creeds, this generation has a need to connect to the transcendent God through ancient and often abandoned practices. As stated by Smith and Denton, many within the pews are not exploring the deep mysteries of God, and it is this research’s opinion that delving beyond surface-level religion must be a priority as Millennials quest for a transcendent connection. While Assembly of God ministers are certainly familiar with tongues and spiritual gifts, the ancient connections to creeds and sacraments need to

¹ Sweet, *So Beautiful*, 55.

be explored further to determine how they can appeal to an exiting generation. Without a fuller embrace of both sacraments and creeds, there are missing pieces in pastors' methods, keeping elusive a transcendence that Millennials desperately want to connect to within the church.

Secondly, in this modern era, many Assembly of God churches have leaned heavily upon events to draw outsiders. While many pastors and leaders have been very sincere about their approach, it is this research's opinion that events on their own will no longer be a drawing card. Along with connecting to the divine, Millennials have a deep desire for development within the context of a Christian community. This is partially what Casper ter Kuile is referring to when he explains:

In a move that confused a lot of my friends and family, I have found countless examples of other millennials creating new forms of community that often fulfill the same functions that a traditional religious group would have.

And they come in all shapes and sizes. It might be a regular meal with strangers to share honestly one's experience after losing a loved one, like the organization The Dinner Party. Within a few years, The Dinner Party has spread to 116 cities across the U.S. hosted by volunteers who create sacred spaces for their guests. It might be lifting weights and climbing ropes five mornings a week like at CrossFit. And if you have a friend involved in CrossFit, you will know how evangelical that community is. Or it might be experiencing healing and forgiveness through movement and meditation at Afro Flow Yoga.

Each of these communities and others like them shape participants' world views, ethics and behaviors. And in a culture where many are hungry for connection, these communities offer the experience of being part of something bigger than themselves, what some theologians might describe as experiencing the divine.

Now, you may dismiss these communities as simple entertainment, but we're convinced that this is the new face of religious life in America. Just as you would expect in a religious congregation, people in these communities build friendships and drive one another to the hospital when they need a ride.

They help each other raise money to fight cancer. And some are even getting involved in struggles for more affordable housing. While a few thousand churches close every year, many fewer open. So, as you drive through your town and notice an empty house of worship, pay attention next time you see a community workspace, a climbing

gym or a micro-brewery. They may just be the new center of soulful community that you have been looking for.²

While this research's focus has not been on development within the church, there does seem to be a longing for deep, meaningful, and mentoring relationships in Millennials.

While Millennials have much to offer the church, they also have much to receive.

Oftentimes, energy and resources are used to fill the pews instead of developing those within the pews. This distinction is something that should be explored more broadly by many pastors in the charismatic world.

Finally, as stated, Millennials need to be connected to mission both from a global perspective and a local one. They are seeking transformational communities; therefore, a church must make every effort to connect them in that pursuit. They must see a church that takes decisive action in modern issues of human dignity, racial reconciliation, immigration, equal pay, and even climate change. While these issues may seem secondary at best to many pastors, they are absolutely a critical value for Millennials. In the context of mission, oftentimes they look at how the church responds to their personal missional values.

With that in mind, it is crucial for every church leader to consider his or her approach within the growing social media landscape. As pastors and church leaders do their best to engage this budding generation, they often speak a different language on social media than that used by young adults. Without violating core doctrines, pastors must be aware that often issues that do not matter to them do matter to Millennials, and

² Judy Woodruff, "Millennials Haven't Forgotten About Spirituality, They're Just Looking for New Venues," PBS News Hour Transcript, last modified March 7, 2017, accessed December 1, 2017, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/millennials-havent-forgotten-spirituality-theyre-just-looking-new-venues>.

vice versa. With social media being the church's front door, a communication plan that considers Millennial values would do the church well in beginning to connect the Millennials to the mission of the local church.

Much has been said about this large generation. Even though many believe that the connection to Millennials is fading, this researcher is optimistic. It seems that the pentecostal heritage that has been given to us is a key to not only engage Millennials but potentially usher in a revival with this generation. There are many negative opinions regarding the church's engagement with Millennials, and it is true that connecting to a generation that seems so at odds with the church will not be easy. A conscious effort must be undertaken to engage Millennials through an experience of the Spirit that leads to mission.

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