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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

EXVANGELICAL:

WHY MILLENNIALS AND GENERATION Z ARE LEAVING THE CONSTRAINTS  
OF WHITE EVANGELICALISM

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

BY  
COLLEEN BATCHELDER

PORTLAND, OREGON

FEBRUARY 2020

Portland Seminary  
George Fox University  
Portland, Oregon

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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DMin Dissertation

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This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

Colleen Batchelder

has been approved by  
the Dissertation Committee on February 20, 2020  
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Global Perspectives

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## GLOSSARY

### Complementarianism

This terminology is used to contrast and compare the generational distinctives within gender roles, gender expectation, co-parenting dynamics, and equality or lack thereof within the workplace or church.

### Conservatism

This terminology denotes “commitment to traditional values and ideas with opposition to change or innovation.”<sup>1</sup> This word is used in contrast to the Millennial and Generation Z ideology and post-Enlightenment perspective.

### Emergent Church Movement

This terminology denotes a specific time within Christian history that was influenced by Rob Bell, Brian McLaren, and Tony Jones. It was in response to cultural changes, namely in rejection to the fundamentalism.

### Evangelicalism

This terminology is used interchangeably with conservative evangelicalism. Both are purposed within the text to denote the mores and cultural traditions of the vast majority of Protestant Christianity within the United States. This differs drastically from Bebbington’s version, because it emphasizes the change that occurred due to the influence of Dwight L. Moody, Jerry Falwell, and Franklin Graham.

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<sup>1</sup> Lexico, s.v. “Conservatism,” accessed January 28, 2020, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/conservatism>.

### *Evangelical*

This expression is an umbrella term that many Millennials and Generation Z use to describe their separation from conservative fundamentalism. This description is to explain generational dissonance; not generational damnation.

### *Fundamentalism*

This terminology is used throughout the text to indicate “a form of religion, especially Protestant Christianity, that upholds belief in the strict, literal interpretation of scripture.”<sup>2</sup> It is also used to denote strict adherence and allegiance to conservative politics, theological perspectives, and social viewpoints.

### *Homophobia*

This terminology is used as a descriptor to characterize conservative evangelicism and their perspective of those within the LGBT+ community. It denotes a fundamentalist perspective. Hence, it is a deliberate and recurring disdain and fear of *otherness* that is birthed from ignorance, arrogance, and conformist standards within many evangelical cultures.

### *Nationalism*

This terminology is used throughout the dissertation to describe one who is solely supportive of their own nation, more specifically, the United States, as the standard to which all nations should conform.

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<sup>2</sup> Lexico, s.v. “Fundamentalism,” accessed January 28, 2020, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/fundamentalism>.

### Redlining

The term, redlining is used within this dissertation is to describe the ongoing segregation and systemic racism within communities, urban environments, and churches. The genesis of the term redlining came from the New Deal. According to Terry Gross, a contributor to NPR, “The federal government developed maps of every metropolitan area in the country and anywhere where African Americans lived or lived nearby were colored red to indicate to appraisers that these neighborhoods were too risky to insure mortgages.”<sup>3</sup> Redlining started after WWII, but the impact still resonates, especially within the white evangelical church.

### Religious Right

This terminology is used to describe “a chiefly Protestant faction in the United States, holding strongly conservative, social and political views, and regarded as an active and influential political group.”<sup>4</sup> The earliest use of this description was “found in The New York Times in the 1970s.”<sup>5</sup>

### Racism

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<sup>3</sup> Terry Gross, “A 'Forgotten History' Of How The U.S. Government Segregated America,” NPR, May 3, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/2017/05/03/526655831/a-forgotten-history-of-how-the-u-s-government-segregated-america>.

<sup>4</sup> Lexico, s.v. “Religious Right,” accessed January 28, 2020, [https://www.lexico.com/definition/religious\\_right](https://www.lexico.com/definition/religious_right).

<sup>5</sup> Lexico, s.v. “Religious Right.”

This terminology is purposed to denote any form of discrimination, bias, or colonization that has been prevalent within conservative evangelical structures. It is also used in relation to superiority, supremacy, and in regard to white evangelical subjugation and segregation of racial and ethnic groups.

### *White Evangelicalism*

This terminology is used to describe a movement characterized by fear of socialists, Muslims, independent women, LGBT people and immigration.<sup>6</sup> In essence, White Evangelicalism is a segment of modern evangelicalism shaped by a cultural agenda defined by whiteness,<sup>7</sup> or in more specific terms, cis male American whiteness.

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<sup>6</sup> Anthea Butler, “White Evangelicals Love Trump and Aren’t Confused about Why. No One Should Be,” NBCUniversal News Group, September 27, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/white-evangelicals-love-trump-aren-t-confused-about-why-no-ncna1046826>.

<sup>7</sup> Raymond Chang, “Open Letter to John Piper on White Evangelicalism and Multiethnic Relations,” The Exchange, October 19, 2017, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2017/october/open-letter-to-john-piper-on-white-evangelicalism-and-multi.html>

## ABSTRACT

This research presents the argument that Millennials and Generation Z are not leaving the church; they are reconstructing their faith and distancing themselves from fundamentalism. When exploring the history of evangelicalism, church history, and generational distinctives, one is given the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of generational dynamics in regard to faith, theology, and praxis.

Chapter 1 explores the various distinctions and biases that encompass each generation. It also provides background for how generational influence shaped the narrative of the church, faith, and purpose.

Chapter 2 tackles the generational shift in ecclesiology and gives readers a glimpse into the torrid past of Christian history. It also highlights some of the major historical events that shaped today's perception of the church.

Chapter 3 explores the dynamics of generational disconnect and looks at the history of conservative evangelicalism and the influencers who shaped the movement. This section also provides a detailed history of Dwight L. Moody's influence on evangelicalism, including his theory of Dispensational Premillennialism.

Chapter 4 explores the parallels between this new form of evangelicalism and the dissonance of Millennials and Generation Z. It also explores how evangelicalism became an entity characterized by sexism, racism, homophobia, and nationalism, instead of the foundational tenets of Christianity.

Chapter 5 builds upon this generational reaction and explores the variety of ways that Millennials and Generation Z differ from Baby Boomers and Generation X. It

specifically looks at the varied generational differences regarding family, leadership, success, theology, and praxis.

Chapter 6 provides pastors and leaders with hope, resources, and formulaic ideologies that are implementable by most pastors and leaders regardless of geographical or denominational context. It also further defines diversity, inclusion, and equality within the context of generational understanding and implementation. Each of these traits are presented in the form of leadership examples.

## CHAPTER 1:

### GENERATIONAL DISSONANCE AND DISTINCTIVES WITHIN THE CHURCH

#### **Introduction**

Joshua Crossman, founder of *Pinetop Foundation*, suggests, “35 million youth raised in families that call themselves Christians will say that they are not by 2050.”<sup>1</sup> Numerous pastors and leaders have tried to shift the tide and change the trajectory of the church, but the current keeps crashing, and the numbers keep climbing. According to Barna, Pew, and Crossman, millions of youth and young adults are leaving the constraints of Christianity, but what if they were wrong?

For years, organizations have tried to fathom the growing exodus within the American Church, but they have failed—significantly. Why? The vast majority of Millennials and Generation Z value racial diversity,<sup>2</sup> cognitive diversity, and inclusion of LGBT+ people.<sup>3</sup> They also believe that gender equality<sup>4</sup> is a normative expectation within the church, the workplace, and within the home. However, when one takes into consideration the varied definitions of church, family, soteriology, culture, and purpose, one will find that Millennials and Generation Z are not leaving the church; they are

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<sup>1</sup> Joshua Crossman, *The Great Opportunity: The American Church in 2050* (Seattle, WA: Pinetops Foundation, 2018), 9.

<sup>2</sup> Larry Busacca, “Millennials: Most Racially Diverse Generation in U.S. History,” NBCNews.com, March 7, 2014, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/millennials-most-racially-diverse-generation-u-s-history-n46361>

<sup>3</sup> Trudy Ring, “STUDY: Millennials Most Likely to Be LGBT or Accepting,” Advocate, April 1, 2017, <https://www.advocate.com/politics/2017/4/01/study-millennials-most-likely-be-lgbt-or-accepting>

<sup>4</sup> Dan Schawbel, “Are Millennials Putting an End to Gender Differences?” Newsweek, November 18, 2017, <https://www.newsweek.com/are-millennials-putting-end-gender-differences-715922>

leaving a subset of the church: conservative evangelicalism—or more precisely, white evangelicalism.

### **The Birth of Exvangelicalism**

Bradley Onishi, a contributor to Religion & Politics, explores this ideology further and gives readers a glimpse into the journey of many young adults who have left the constraints of evangelicalism and become what they call ex evangelicals. Onishi reveals:

There is a new force organizing in opposition to the most powerful religious group in American politics, one that refuses white evangelicalism's claim to morality on the basis of their own experiences. As self-exiles who identify as survivors, not backsliders, #ex evangelicals thus occupy a uniquely subversive position in relation to conservative Christianity, one that the Religious Right has yet to encounter and whose potential is just coming to light.<sup>5</sup>

Ex evangelicism is more than a movement. In many ways, it is a generational turning point. “Ex-evangelicals hold a singular potential for undermining evangelical politics”<sup>6</sup> and they also have the potential for shifting evangelical perspectives. Since 2018, “a cohort of former evangelicals—largely children of the 1980s and 1990s broke into America’s public consciousness.”<sup>7</sup> Ex evangelicals, or Exvies for short, have been making noise and shaking up the evangelical narrative for the past three years; however, their perspective is not solely tied to their age. Many Baby Boomers and Generation Xers are

<sup>5</sup> Bradley Onishi, “The Rise of #Ex evangelical,” Religion & Politics, August 6, 2019, <https://religionandpolitics.org/2019/04/09/the-rise-of-ex evangelical/>

<sup>6</sup> Onishi, “The Rise of #Ex evangelical.”

<sup>7</sup> Chrissy Stroop, “5 Key Moments from the Year of the ‘Ex evangelicals,’” Rewire News, December 26, 2018, <https://rewire.news/religion-dispatches/2018/12/26/5-key-moments-from-the-year-of-the-ex evangelicals/>

standing in the gap and proclaiming their distain towards evangelical mores alongside Millennial and Generation Z frontrunners:

In a recent interview, Tony Campolo, a pastor and founder of the Red Letter Christians movement, said succinctly what others have also said publicly: “We feel uncomfortable calling ourselves evangelicals anymore, because the general public assumes things about us that aren’t true. We are not for capital punishment, we are not pro-war, we don’t hate gays, we’re not anti-feminist.”<sup>8</sup>

Boz Tchividjian, grandson of the late Billy Graham, uttered a similar sentiment. He declared, “I don’t identify myself with that term anymore. Words matter, and ‘evangelical’ isn’t like Baptist or Episcopalian, which can be clearly defined. The minute you use that term to someone, you’re defined by how they interpret it.”<sup>9</sup> Numerous Millennial and Generation Z have left the evangelical church; however, it was not because the narthex lacked creativity. Many, especially within the exvangelical community, they abide outside of the sanctuary because they “are former insiders who can testify to what they see as the traumatizing effects of living under evangelicalism’s patriarchal, heteronormative, and racist norms.”<sup>10</sup> David Kinnaman, president of the Barna Group and best-selling author on the topic of generational statistics, asserts:

Exiles are dissatisfied with a church that is a weekend event, not a movement of God’s people on mission for Christ. They are not disillusioned with tradition; they are frustrated with slick and shallow expressions of religion. In some of our research, we discovered a common theme to be, “I want to be part of a Christian community that is more than a performance one day a week.” Similarly, a frequently expressed sentiment was they “want a more traditional faith, rather than a hip version of Christianity.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Josiah Hesse, “‘Ex evangelicals’: Why More Religious People Are Rejecting the Evangelical Label,” The Guardian, November 3, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/03/evangelical-christians-religion-politics-trump>

<sup>9</sup> Hesse, “‘Ex evangelicals.’”

<sup>10</sup> Onishi, “The Rise of #Ex evangelical.”

<sup>11</sup> David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church—and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 78.

However, exiles are not merely dissatisfied with the lack of action from the church; many are sickened from the abundance of hate within the church. “Blake Chastain, Christopher Stroop, and Emily Joy are three of the most active and visible figures in the #Exvangelical community.”<sup>12</sup> However, many other well-known individuals have left the constraints of evangelicalism and found support in progressive theology and praxis, such as Nadia Bolt-Weber, Sarah Bessey, the late Rachel Held Evans, Michael Gungor, and Mike McHargue,<sup>13</sup> Brandon Robertson, and Andre Henry. All of these individuals have found solace in the sacred walls of Exvangelicalism. However, no one could be more noteworthy than Joshua Harris, author of *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*:

Harris, who served as the senior pastor at the Covenant Life megachurch Gaithersburg, Md., for more than a decade before resigning from his post in 2015 amid controversy over the church’s handling of a child sexual abuse scandal, rose to prominence shortly after the 1997 publication of “I Kissed Dating Goodbye” at age 21. The book was once highly influential to evangelical youth group teaching.<sup>14</sup>

A few years ago, Harris publicly apologized for his views on purity culture<sup>15</sup> and recently revealed that he had experienced a “massive shift in his faith in Jesus.”<sup>16</sup> In July 2019, Joshua Harris revealed that he and his wife, Shannon, were separating after 20 years of

<sup>12</sup> Onishi, “The Rise of #Exvangelical.”

<sup>13</sup> “The Podcast,” The Liturgists, accessed February 28, 2020, <https://theliturgists.com/the-podcast>

<sup>14</sup> Aris Folley, “Ex-Evangelical Pastor Says Supporting Trump Has Been ‘Damaging’ to Church,” The Hill, November 14, 2019, <https://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/news/468844-ex-evangelical-pastor-joshua-harris-says-supporting-trump-has-been-damaging>

<sup>15</sup> Joshua Harris, “Statement on ‘I Kissed Dating Goodbye,’” Joshua Harris, accessed February 29, 2020, <https://joshharris.com/statement/>

<sup>16</sup> Joshua Bote, “He Wrote the Christian Case against Dating. Now He’s Splitting from His Wife and Faith,” USA Today, July 29, 2019, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2019/07/29/joshua-harris-i-kissed-dating-goodbye-i-am-not-christian/1857934001/>

marriage. As shocking as this was, however, it was nothing compared to Harris' next confession. In one breath, he apologized to the LGBT+ community whilst rejecting his own faith—or more precisely, his faith in evangelical values. Harris revealed:

I want to say that I am sorry for the views that I taught in my books and as a pastor regarding sexuality. I regret standing against marriage equality, for not affirming you and your place in the church, and for any ways that my writing and speaking contributed to a culture of exclusion and bigotry. I hope you can forgive me. By all the measurements that I have for defining a Christian, I am not a Christian. Many people tell me that there is a different way to practice faith and I want to remain open to this, but I'm not there now.<sup>17</sup>

In one fell swoop, the perception of Harris shifted. Evangelical pastors and leaders had deemed him the poster boy of purity culture during the late 1990s; after Harris' confession, they branded him as the poster boy of depravity.

*Covenant Life* interim senior pastor Kevin Rogers responded to the exodus of Joshua Harris and wrote, “Several times Paul mentions former Christian leaders ‘swerving from,’ ‘wandering from,’ or ‘making shipwreck’ of their faith. So, while this is sad and confusing, it isn’t new.”<sup>18</sup> Harris was shunned and labeled as an example of apostasy because he made an appeal for grace, an appeal of reconciliation, and an apology to the LGBT+ community. Many pastors labeled Harris as “wandering from the faith” on social media. However, his divergence of belief was not against the constructs of foundational Christianity; it was in reaction to the overlay of conservative evangelicalism—more accurately, white evangelicalism.

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<sup>17</sup> Joshua Harris, “My heart is full of gratitude. I wish you could see all the messages people sent me after the announcement of my divorce. They are expressions of love though they are saddened or even strongly disapprove of the decision...,” Instagram photo, July 26, 2019, <https://www.instagram.com/p/B0ZBrNLH2sl/>

<sup>18</sup> Michael Gryboski, “Joshua Harris’ Former Church Responds to News of Him Leaving Wife, Christianity,” Christian Post, July 29, 2019, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/joshua-harris-former-church-responds-to-news-of-him-leaving-wife-christianity.html>.

## What Generation is Forming the Church?

John Fea, a contributor to *The Atlantic*, proposes that conservative evangelicalism, especially evangelicalism influenced by twentieth-century fundamentalism, is one of the most dichotomous and contradictory perspectives in the Church because it ushers a variety of reactions and interactions. Fea suggests:

Some of the worst aspects of American evangelicalism converged in the Fundamentalist movement of the early 20th century. It was stridently anti-Catholic, and on occasion, worked closely with the Ku Klux Klan to guard the white Protestant character of the country. Fundamentalists, committed to the otherworldly teachings of the Holiness or “Higher Life” movement, chose to separate from the world rather than engage it. They promoted a theology of the “end times” that led them to spend considerable energy trying to identify the appearance of the Antichrist on the global stage. These fear-mongers gained followers, built large congregations, and established national reputations by sounding the alarm of the modernist threat whenever they saw it rearing its ugly head. They took on the role of ecclesiastical strongmen, protecting their congregations from outsiders who threatened to destroy their faith and the Christian identity of the nation.<sup>19</sup>

Today, conservative evangelicalism is more characterized by MAGA hats than the KKK; however, this ideology and evangelical perspective has still caused many to use the term as a weapon of fear. “Ever since Donald Trump emerged as a significant player in American political life, pollsters and pundits have fixated on the overwhelming support he has received from a constituency often called simply ‘evangelicals’—or, if there is a pause for breath, ‘white evangelicals.’”<sup>20</sup> According to the quote above, Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington, and George M. Marsden, suggest that President Trump might be ushering in the next movement of evangelicalism. However, Trump’s values are not

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<sup>19</sup> John Fea, “Evangelical Fear Elected Trump,” *The Atlantic*, June 24, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/06/a-history-of-evangelical-fear/563558/>.

<sup>20</sup> Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington, and George M. Marsden, *Evangelicals: Who They Have Been, Are Now, and Could Be* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019), 2.

necessarily shared by all evangelicals—especially amongst Millennials and Generation Z, many of whom have left the constraints of conservatism. Jeff Brumley, a contributor to the *Baptist News*, echoes this observation and suggests that Millennials and Generation Z are distancing themselves from the evangelical culture because “Evangelicals of color and Millennials, without question, are feeling disenfranchised from their evangelical homes.”<sup>21</sup> Brumley cites a *New York Times* article that reveals:

A “quiet exodus” of blacks from majority-white churches due in large part to the damage to race relations Trump’s presidency is causing. Mansfield said he knows families that canceled Thanksgiving and Christmas get-togethers due to disagreements about the president and his white conservative Christian champions.<sup>22</sup>

According to Brumley, much of the dichotomy within the church is contingent upon the division within politics. However, I would also suggest that the disconnect is strongly tied to generational distinctives that dictate one’s perception of value and one’s execution of belief. In many spheres of the U.S., conservative evangelicalism is held tighter than the Bible, especially amongst those who are white. However, this idolization of conservative culturalism within Christianity is on the decline:

White evangelicals are aging. The study found that 62 percent of them are 50 or older, which is the same for white Catholics. Just under 60 percent of white mainliners are 50 or older. Age—and particularly youth—is a major factor for experts tracking the potential impact of Trump’s support on the future of evangelicalism.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Jeff Brumley, “Support for Trump Could Spell End of the Evangelical Church. But When?” *Baptist News*, March 19, 2018, [https://baptistnews.com/article/support-for-trump-could-spell-end-of-the-evangelical-church-but-when/#.XiN\\_2y2ZNQI](https://baptistnews.com/article/support-for-trump-could-spell-end-of-the-evangelical-church-but-when/#.XiN_2y2ZNQI).

<sup>22</sup> Brumley, “Support for Trump Could Spell End of the Evangelical Church. But When?”

<sup>23</sup> Brumley, “Support for Trump Could Spell End of the Evangelical Church. But When?”

Conservative evangelicalism might be the normative expression of Christianity amongst Baby Boomers and Generation X; however, the majority of younger generations do not embrace this mindset. According to Kate Shellnutt, a contributor for *Christianity Today*:

As evangelicals are more open to and understanding of other faiths, others' views of evangelicals have not improved. In a 2017 Pew report, they were the only faith group whose reputation hadn't warmed up, with fewer than 1 in 3 non-evangelicals viewing evangelicals favorably. In the recent survey, evangelicals were viewed most negatively by the highest scoring respondents of the quiz.<sup>24</sup>

In many ways, these statistics are highly convincing, especially when one looks at the active support of evangelicals, especially white evangelicals, for President Trump in 2016. Anthea Butler, associate professor of Religious Studies and Africana Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, echoes this sentiment and suggests that "modern evangelicals' support for this president cannot be separated from the history of evangelicals' participation in and support for racist structures in America."<sup>25</sup> According to Butler, the majority of conservative evangelicals were looking for a presidential candidate who would not preserve Christian values but perpetuate a white evangelical agenda. John Fea, a contributor to *The Atlantic*, echoes Butler's observations and asserts:

Most evangelicals did not believe more traditional candidates of the Christian right, such as Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, or Ben Carson, could protect them as well as the bombastic big-talking New York real-estate tycoon. As Robert Jeffress, the pastor of the First Baptist Church in Dallas and early Trump supporter put it, "I couldn't care less about a leader's temperament or his tone of his vocabulary. Frankly, I want the meanest, toughest son of a gun I can find. And I think that's

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<sup>24</sup> Kate Shellnutt, "Americans Who Know Religion Best Hold Worse Views of Evangelicals," Christianity Today, July 23, 2019, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2019/july/evangelicals-know-religious-literacy-pew-quiz.html?fbclid=IwAR3pfteNeAayjAzvOPecMNsGgCRXER-DrWHHpLMqIYfOuI7FFRffP1Li304>.

<sup>25</sup> Anthea Butler, "White Evangelicals Love Trump and Aren't Confused about Why. No One Should Be," NBCNews.com, September 27, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/white-evangelicals-love-trump-aren-t-confused-about-why-no-ncna1046826>

the feeling of a lot of evangelicals. They don't want Casper Milquetoast as the leader of the free world.”<sup>26</sup>

According to Pew Research, “Evangelical Protestantism is the nation’s single largest religious group, exceeding the size of the nation’s Catholic (20.8%), mainline Protestant (14.7%) and religiously unaffiliated (22.8%) populations.”<sup>27</sup> However, “Evangelicals are the only religious group in the United States that has not developed a better reputation over the past few years. And Americans have become less likely to know an evangelical—more so than any other faith tradition.”<sup>28</sup> As Pew Research notes, evangelicalism is the only entity within the United States that has dropped in ratings and familiarity. However, how does that explain the high percentage of evangelicals who voted for President Trump in 2016? ‘Evangelicals earned the most favorable ratings from Americans ages 50-64 and 65 and over. The older groups also gave the worst ratings to atheists and Muslims.’<sup>29</sup> Evangelicalism might be an ideology of the past for the majority of Millennials and Generation Z, but according to Pew Research, it is a generational system favored by Baby Boomers and Generation X.

It is evident to most pastors and leaders that there is a generational disconnect within the church. However, this generational dissonance is due to foundational precepts, not superficial ideologies. As stated earlier:

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<sup>26</sup> Fea, “Evangelical Fear Elected Trump.”

<sup>27</sup> David Masci and Gregory A. Smith, “5 Facts About U.S. Evangelical Protestants,” Pew Research, March 1, 2018, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/03/01/5-facts-about-u-s-evangelical-protestants/>

<sup>28</sup> Kate Shellnutt, “Americans Warm up to Every Religious Group Except Evangelicals,” Christianity Today, February 15, 2017, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2017/february/americans-warm-feelings-religious-groups-evangelicals-pew.html>.

<sup>29</sup> Shellnutt, “Americans Warm up to Every Religious Group Except Evangelicals.”

The election of Donald Trump with massive white evangelical backing became a flashpoint and catalyst for the coalescing of individual disaffected former evangelicals into a growing community and movement with certain identifiable features and goals.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, in order for leaders and pastors to understand the perceived exodus within the church, they must see the generational disconnect with evangelical ethics and white evangelical values. For starters, one must be willing to change their tool of measurement. The vast majority of Millennials and Generation Z view Christianity as a vital proponent of “feminism, intersectionality, racial justice, and LGBTQ rights.”<sup>31</sup> However, according to Pew Research:

Millennials continue to be the adult generation most likely to say they favor allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally: Fully 73% say this compared to 56% of Baby Boomers. Concerning immigration, Millennials, view immigration as a strength to the country rather than a burden compared to 56% of Baby Boomers. Since 2012, the share of Millennials who cite discrimination as the main reason blacks can’t get ahead these days has more than doubled (24% in 2012 to 52% in 2017), and a 24-point gap now separates the oldest and youngest generations.<sup>32</sup>

Statistically, there is still a wide gap between generational values and perspectives. However, these span the constructs of politics, theology, sociology, culture, and Christian praxis. Thus, in order for pastors and leaders to appreciate generational distinctives, they must be able to identify generational differences, especially characteristics that inform their own societal and theological interpretation. Therefore, this next section will focus

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<sup>30</sup> Stroop, “5 Key Moments from the Year of the ‘Exvangelicals.’”

<sup>31</sup> Stroop, “5 Key Moments from the Year of the ‘Exvangelicals.’”

<sup>32</sup> Pew Research Center, “The Generation Gap in American Politics,” Pew Research Center, March 1, 2018, <https://www.people-press.org/2018/03/01/4-race-immigration-same-sex-marriage-abortion-global-warming-gun-policy-marijuana-legalization/>.

on the varied generational shifts within theological thought and implementation, starting with the Baby Boomers.

*Baby Boomers: 1946–1964<sup>33</sup> (Ages 56 to 74)*

In the 1970s and early 1980s, Baby Boomers found a connection to the Jesus Movement and forged a community of revival. However, their hubs of worship were not constrained within stained-glass structures but spread out across dunes and cities. Boomers might have redecorated the sanctuary and created a pathway for charismatic ideology, but this generation also forged a movement that centers on expository teaching and literal interpretation:

In 1965, Pastor Chuck Smith began his ministry at Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa with just 25 people. With a sincere concern for the lost, Pastor Chuck made room in his heart and his home for a generation of hippies and surfers, generating a movement of the Holy Spirit that spread from the West Coast to the East Coast.<sup>34</sup>

Chuck Smith might have been welcoming all, but he was also “setting the pattern for the way that whole generation does church,”<sup>35</sup> including the biblical exposition and complementation leadership structure.<sup>36</sup> According to John G. Turner, a contributor to Christianity Today, “In many ways, the ‘Jesus People’ had the same basic beliefs as other

<sup>33</sup> “Generational Breakdown: Info About All of the Generations,” The Center for Generational Kinetics, accessed June 24, 2019, <https://genhq.com/FAQ-info-about-generations/>.

<sup>34</sup> “History of Calvary Chapel,” Calvary Chapel Association, accessed February 29, 2020, <http://calvarycca.org/history/>.

<sup>35</sup> “Founder’s Page,” Calvary Chapel Association, accessed February 29, 2020, <http://calvarycca.org/founders-page/>

<sup>36</sup> “Philosophy of Ministry,” Calvary Chapel Association, accessed February 29, 2020, <http://calvarycca.org/philosophy/#exposition>.

evangelicals, but with an added fervency, literalism, and—in many cases—sweetness.”<sup>37</sup>

They adopted elements of spirituality and practicality, but their theological perspectives did not tarnish the traditionalist view. In many ways, the Jesus Movement became one of the foundational pillars of twentieth-century fundamentalism and conservative evangelicalism.

Larry Eskridge, instructor in history at Wheaton College and a contributor to The Conversation, suggests:

As many became disillusioned with life in Haight-Ashbury, a new set of hippie “Jesus freak” evangelists appeared in the Bay Area, urging people to follow Jesus Christ and forsake drugs and promiscuous sex. Key to this new presence on the streets was Ted Wise, a drug-using sailmaker, who in late 1965 was “saved” after one of his numerous LSD trips.<sup>38</sup>

Ted Wise stayed within the community and sought to reach his generation:

With the assistance of several fellow pastors in the Bay Area, John MacDonald helped Wise and his friends establish a coffeehouse called “The Living Room,” a block north of the intersection of Haight and Ashbury. Over the next year and a half, thousands of runaway youth and hippie characters (including a man named Charles Manson later convicted for mass murders) came into the mission to talk with what MacDonald referred to as the “Street Christians.” Many others came simply to sip soup and coffee and eat donated doughnuts.<sup>39</sup>

It has been over fifty years since its inception. “The Jesus Movement was influential in bringing fresh music to traditional churches as well as the development of Calvary

<sup>37</sup> John G. Turner, “They Got High on Jesus Instead,” Christianity Today, July 11, 2013, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/july-web-only/gods-forever-family-they-got-high-on-jesus-instead.html>.

<sup>38</sup> Larry Eskridge, “‘Jesus People’ – A Movement Born from the ‘Summer of Love,’” The Conversation, September 15, 2017, <http://theconversation.com/jesus-people-a-movement-born-from-the-summer-of-love-82421>.

<sup>39</sup> Eskridge, “‘Jesus People.’”

Chapel and Vineyard churches, but for the most part died out in the 1980s.”<sup>40</sup> However, even though its influence was cut short, “the Jesus People remain one of its lingering ironies. It was because of the Jesus People movement that numerous Baby Boomers remained anchored to conservative evangelical churches well into the 21st century.”<sup>41</sup> Moreover, the Jesus Movement might have died off during the ’80s, but the generational influences by the movement is one of the most prominent within Christian media, church leadership, and political influence:

When George Barna published his 1992 findings in *Today’s Pastors*, the median age of Protestant clergy was 44 years old. One in three pastors was under the age of 40, and one in four was over 55. Just 6 percent were 65 or older. Twenty-five years later, the average age is 54. Only one in seven pastors is under 40, and half are over 55. The percentage of church leaders 65 and older has nearly tripled, meaning there are now more pastors in the oldest age bracket than there are leaders younger than 40.<sup>42</sup>

The Jesus Movement produced a variant of expression within modern-day Christianity. One that perpetuated literalism, conservatism, and traditionalism. In many ways, Baby Boomers branded Christianity as the antithesis of culture and conservative evangelicalism as the answer for autonomy:

As the historian Larry Eskridge has argued, today’s evangelical mega-churches with their rock bands blasting praise music and jeans-wearing pastors “are a direct result of the Jesus People movement.” But aside from the praise anthems and the casual preaching styles that have come to characterize contemporary evangelicalism, the Jesus People also reshaped American politics. They helped to inspire the birth of the religious right.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>40</sup> “Who Were the Jesus Freaks? What Was the Jesus Movement?” Compelling Truth, accessed December 13, 2018, <https://www.compellingtruth.org/Jesus-freak.html>.

<sup>41</sup> Eskridge, “Jesus People.”

<sup>42</sup> “The Aging of America’s Pastors,” Barna Group, March 1, 2017, <https://www.barna.com/research/aging-americas-pastors/>.

<sup>43</sup> Neil J. Young, “The Summer of Love Ended 50 Years Ago. It Reshaped American Conservatism,” Vox, August 31, 2017, <https://www.vox.com/the-big-idea/2017/8/31/16229320/summer-of-love-jesus-people-religious-right-history>.

Baby Boomers vowed to open the doors to the sanctuary so that all could enter in; however, the outcome of the Jesus Movement did not create a welcoming experience, but an idealistic hope for change without the implementation of change:

As Time magazine reported in its 1971 cover article on “The Jesus Revolution,” the Jesus People “act as if divine intervention guides their every movement and can be counted on to solve every problem.” The problems that began to occupy their attention included abortion, feminism, and homosexuality. While they thought of themselves as radicals, the Jesus People had also committed themselves to the most conservative beliefs of evangelical Christianity, particularly regarding gender and sexuality.<sup>44</sup>

Baby Boomers might have paved the way for the religious right, but they were not the only ones influencing the expression of American Christianity. According to Knoema, a statistical research organization, in 2020, there will be 65.13 million<sup>45</sup> people within Generation X. They are ranked third in population size by generation; however, they fall within the average age of senior pastors<sup>46</sup> within the Protestant Church.

#### *Generation X: 1965–1976<sup>47</sup> (Ages 44 to 55)*

During the 1990s and early aughts, Rick Warren replaced Chuck Smith’s generational influence and presented a new form of church focus—The *Purpose Driven Life*. However, Warren’s impact was not without opposition. “With some 30 million copies sold and available in over 50 languages, *The Purpose Driven Life* is the bestselling

<sup>44</sup> Young, “The Summer of Love Ended 50 Years Ago.”

<sup>45</sup> “US Population by Age and Generation in 2020,” Knoema, February 12, 2020, <https://knoema.com/infographics/egyydzc/us-population-by-age-and-generation>.

<sup>46</sup> Kate Shellnutt, “Only 1 in 7 Senior Pastors Is Under 40,” Christianity Today, March 26, 2019, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2017/january/only-1-in-7-senior-pastors-is-under-40-barna.html>

<sup>47</sup> The Center for Generational Kinetics, “Generational Breakdown.”

nonfiction book in history. Instant fame, however, came with a slew of naysayers.”<sup>48</sup>

John Piper, Reformed theologian and pastor, interviewed Warren after “some supporters of Desiring God complained, including R. Albert Mohler and R.C. Sproul. Both of whom suggested that Warren relied more on pragmatism than biblical doctrine.”<sup>49</sup> Piper supported Warren during the interview; however, not everyone felt that *The Purpose Driven Life* reflected conservative theology.

Rick Warren widened the focus of discipleship and challenged the church to understand their relationship with Christ through the tools of self-reflection, self-awareness, and self-discovery. Warren’s unorthodox methodology might have resonated with Generation X; however, his ideology did not shift the conservative theological landscape. For example, Warren’s congregation, “Saddleback Community Church is the largest congregation in the Southern Baptist Convention.”<sup>50</sup> Since 2005, some things have changed, including Saddleback being the largest church in the SBC. However, the church still holds to many conservative values, such as a traditional view on marriage<sup>51</sup> and strict limitations on roles for women.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Lillian Kwon, “Rick Warren Addresses Critics on Doctrine, Purpose Driven Life,” The Christian Post, May 27, 2011, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/john-piper-interviews-rick-warren-on-biblical-doctrine.html>.

<sup>49</sup> Kwon, “Rick Warren Addresses Critics on Doctrine, Purpose Driven Life.”

<sup>50</sup> “Rick Warren Clarifies SBC Ties after ‘Misstatement’ in Interview,” Baptist News Global, August 22, 2005, <https://baptistnews.com/article/rick-warren-clarifies-sbc-ties-after-misstatement-in-interview/#.Xlr7Fi3MxQI>.

<sup>51</sup> Stoyan Zaimov, “Rick Warren on Gay Marriage: ‘Tolerance Does Not Mean Approval,’” The Christian Post, November 27, 2012, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/rick-warren-on-gay-marriage-tolerance-does-not-mean-approval-85653/>.

<sup>52</sup> “Is It Wrong for Men to Listen to Female Speakers?” Desiring God, February 29, 2020, <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/is-it-wrong-for-men-to-listen-to-female-speakers>.

Generation X might have updated the worship set and launched sold-out motivational conferences, but they were not interested in changing the foundational constructs of conservative evangelicalism. If anything, they merely desired to rebrand Christianity with better lighting and more creative stage design.

### *Millennials: 1977–1995<sup>53</sup> (Ages 25 to 43)*

Many consider Millennials an extension of Generation X; however, they are two very distinct generations. For example, the influx of topical-driven teachings came to a strict halt during the late nineties and early aughts. Millennial youth grew up within an environment centered on expository teaching, purity culture, and Christian punk rock music. Rick Warren might have influenced millions of Gen Xers to live out their purpose and introduced the seeker-sensitive model;<sup>54</sup> however, not all pastors and leaders were comfortable with the movement. Therefore, Warren's Purpose Driven Life might have shaped the young adulthood of Generation X, but Joshua Harris' purity driven agenda was the theological preference of many pastors for the Millennial youth:

In 1997, when Joshua Harris was 21 years old, he wrote a Christian book on romance and relationships called 'I Kissed Dating Goodbye.' Its basic premise was that the best way to avoid pre-marital sex was to stop dating altogether. His book went on to sell more than 1.2 million copies and be embraced by churches, families and thousands of single men and women.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> The Center for Generational Kinetics, "Generational Breakdown."

<sup>54</sup> Dorothy Greco, "How the Seeker-Sensitive, Consumer Church Is Failing a Generation," CT Women, August 2013, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/women/2013/august/how-seeker-sensitive-consumer-church-is-failing-generation.html>.

<sup>55</sup> Joshua Harris, "'I Kissed Dating Goodbye' Author: How and Why I've Rethought Dating and Purity Culture," USA Today, November 26, 2018, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/voices/2018/11/23/christianity-kissed-dating-goodbye-relationships-sex-book-column/2071273002/>

Harris was not the only one to influence Millennial Christian culture. As previously stated, many pastors and leaders became leery of seeker-sensitive movements, so they reacted with a stricter view of *sola scriptura*. They also formed coalitions: The Gospel Coalition, Faith and Freedom Coalition, and the Christian Coalition were scattered in their genesis from the late 1980s to 2009. Many Millennials, especially during their youth, were presented with a church culture that valued coalitions more than community, or even conversation.

Anna Dimmel, former pastor and present-day exvangelical, describes her own experience growing up in church. She reveals:

A lot of millennials were told “because the Bible says” so much that we actually grew up and decided to read it for ourselves. We read. We studied. We wrestled. We researched. And we realized that the Bible isn’t as clear as we were taught. We learned that there are many contradictions. That there is context involved. People involved. Stories involved. We learned that the Bible is complex, beautiful and sacred. And that it’s okay to not know or understand all of it.<sup>56</sup>

She goes on to say:

Many of us grew up attending home group, youth group, life groups, etc., whatever you want to call it. We invested time and energy into relationships, hoping to cultivate genuine connection (beyond just the idea that we attend church together). And, some of those relationships stuck. But, many of them didn’t. Many of these communities we found to be unsafe. Where we couldn’t be our true selves without being judged. We couldn’t express differing opinions (on faith, politics, culture) without being quickly told why we were wrong. We couldn’t go through life’s shitty circumstances and just BE MAD. OR BE SAD. OR BE HUMAN. We felt expected to constantly be “okay.”<sup>57</sup>

Dimmel, like many Millennials, grew up in churches that viewed racial diversity and cognitive divergence as threats to conservative ethics. However, more than that,

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<sup>56</sup> Anna Dimmel, “An Open Letter to the Church from a Millennial—This Is Why We Are Leaving,” Anna Dimmel, January 27, 2020, <https://annadimmel.com/2020/01/27/letter-to-the-church-from-millennial-this-is-why-we-are-leaving/>.

<sup>57</sup> Dimmel, “An Open Letter to the Church from a Millennial.”

Millennials watched as the church labeled people as something to fear instead of someone to love. This fear laid the framework for the perfect storm. During the late nineties and early aughts, numerous charismatic preachers gathered crowds with riveting light shows and inspiring sermons. Acquire the Fire and Creation Fest were two of the most pivotal and popular events for youth during the 1990s and early 2000s; however, the majority of the messages had the same focus—draw crowds to the edge of their seat and make them fear the impending flames of hell.

After interviewing many Millennials who grew up in evangelical culture, it became apparent that the majority of them shared the same experience—they were not judged based upon their decision to accept Christ but upon a radical rejection of culture. Youth groups would hold “massive burning” nights, where Millennial teens were expected to burn their books, toss their secular CDs, and place all other forms of cultural paraphernalia into the fire pit as a burnt offering.

Many Millennials followed the cultural expectation—they raised their hands in worship, declared their unyielding support for the religious right, and kept their misgivings hidden within the closet of their silence. They learned to hide their doubts, read the script, and survive the constant scrutiny from pastors and leaders within conservative evangelical culture. However, their silence did not necessarily speak of their loyalty. If anything, it revealed their fear. After all, “Systems built on a fundamentalist framework are not conducive to introspection, questioning, learning, change. When you have a belief system that is built on fundamentalism, it isn’t open to outside criticism, especially by anyone not a member of your tribe and in a position of power.”<sup>58</sup> During

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<sup>58</sup> Forsetti's Justice, “Fundamentalism, Racism, Fear and Propaganda: An Insider Explains Why Rural, Christian White America Will Never Change,” Raw Story, June 28, 2017,

this time, many pastors and leaders enforced a stance of fundamentalism. They told Millennials whom to listen to, how to behave, and what to believe. This type of authoritarianism worked for a while; however, it failed to protect Millennials from one of the worst threats—those within the church.

Numerous pastors and leaders popular during the early 2000s were eventually accused of sexual harassment, verbal assault, and fraud. Mark Driscoll, a famous influencer and ex-lead pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle, Washington, was one of many who was charged with verbal and physical abuse, sexual harassment, misappropriation of funds, and plagiarism.

Rob Smith, a congregant at Mars Hill Church, spoke of the ongoing threats that he had received from Driscoll and surmised, “He was vile, he was vulgar, he threatened me with obscene language, said that he would destroy me, destroy my career and make sure I never ministered again.”<sup>59</sup> Driscoll made the headlines and shook the foundations of Christianity; however, he was not the only pastor who made frontpage news during the mid 2000s.

Harry Thomas,<sup>60</sup> the Founder of Creation Fest, sexually abused young girls who ranged in age from seven to nine. Josh Duggar, oldest child of the Duggar family of 19

<sup>59</sup> Joy Tibbs, “The Rise and Fall of Mark Driscoll,” Premier Christianity, accessed December 13, 2018, <https://www.premierchristianity.com/Past-Issues/2014/December-2014/The-rise-and-fall-of-Mark-Driscoll>.

<sup>60</sup> Stoyan Zaimov, “Creation Festival Co-Founder Sentenced to 18 Years for Child Sex Abuse: I Deserve to Be Cast Into Sea,” Christian Post, July 30, 2018, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/creation-festival-co-founder-sentenced-to-18-years-for-child-sex-abuse-i-deserve-to-be-cast-into-sea.html>.

*Kids and Counting* fame, sexually molested five young girls, including his sisters.<sup>61</sup>

According to the Houston Chronicle, “the Southern Baptist Church has had over 700 victims of sexual abuse in the past 20 years.”<sup>62</sup> The list goes on to include:

Ted Haggard, pastor of New Life church who engaged in sexual activity with a male prostitute and drug use. Countless women from his congregation charged Earl Paulk, founder, and pastor of Chapel Hill Harvester Church of numerous sexual encounters. Joe Barron, a marriage counselor and pastor at Prestonwood Baptist Church, was caught trying to solicit sex online with a minor.<sup>63</sup>

Mark Driscoll might have been forced to take a mandatory sabbatical, but the majority of pastors and leaders still excused his behavior and mistreatment of women. It is important to understand that Millennials grew up in churches that were restricted, isolated, and fearful. However, they also grew up in churches that blamed victims:

John Piper, the former pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis said 50 years of ignoring traditional gender roles is “one of the seeds bearing very bad fruit,” including a recent rash of powerful men exposed for making unwanted sexual advances on women under their authority in Hollywood and politics.<sup>64</sup>

Lori Alexander, better known as The Transformed Wife, echoes Piper’s sentiment and warns women, “A wife has a much greater chance of being abused if she is quarrelsome, contentious, and abusive towards her husband rather than if she is kind, loving, and

<sup>61</sup>Mary Bowerman, “Timeline: Duggar Sex-Abuse Scandal,” USA Today, May 28, 2015, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/people/2015/05/28/timeline-josh-duggar-19-kids-and-counting-tlc-sex-abuse-scandal/28066229/>.

<sup>62</sup> Robert Downen et al., “Abuse of Faith 20 Years, 700 Victims: Southern Baptist Sexual Abuse Spreads as Leaders Resist Reforms,” Houston Chronicle, February 10, 2019, <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/investigations/article/Southern-Baptist-sexual-abuse-spreads-as-leaders-13588038.php>.

<sup>63</sup> Shirea L. Carroll, “10 Sex Scandals That Rocked the Christian Church,” Essence, September 28, 2010, <https://www.essence.com/news/sex-scandals-christian-church-eddie-long/>.

<sup>64</sup> Bob Allen, “John Piper Blames Abuse of Women on ‘Egalitarian Myth,’” Baptist News Global, March 20, 2018, <https://baptistnews.com/article/john-piper-blames-abuse-of-women-on-egalitarian-myth/#.Xls8XS3MxQI>.

submissive.”<sup>65</sup> This type of rhetoric is not new—especially for numerous women who grew up within conservative evangelical culture.

### *The Rise of Progressive Christianity*

These years were tumultuous for young Millennials; however, they were not without hope. Emergent leaders like Rob Bell, Dr. Tony Campolo, Shane Claiborne, and Jennifer Knapp arose amid the chaos. However, their popularity would soon be met with strong opposition—especially from the religious right. Conservative Christians labeled Bell as a false teacher who leads others astray.<sup>66</sup> According to the *Los Angeles Times*:

After intensive questioning and discussion, Prof. Tony Campolo, a provocative speaker popular with young Christian evangelical groups, was asked by Campus Crusade founder-president Bill Bright to withdraw from the program at Youth Congress '85, a gathering set for two months later in Washington.<sup>67</sup>

Randy Rodden, an instructor in the Christian ministry department at Campus Crusade's International School of Theology at Arrowhead Springs, also “charged Campolo with heresy, and said that Tony is advocating some non-evangelical, unorthodox views of historic Christianity.”<sup>68</sup> Repeatedly, Millennials learned not to trust the church. They learned early on that if they questioned, they would be met with closed doors and turned backs.

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<sup>65</sup> Lori Alexander, “Provoking Men to Wrath,” The Transformed Wife, October 28, 2019, <https://thetransformedwife.com/provoking-men-to-wrath/>.

<sup>66</sup> John Blake, “An Outlaw Pastor Shakes up the Bible Belt,” CNN, July 28, 2017, <https://www.cnn.com/2017/07/28/us/rob-bell-bible-belt/index.html>.

<sup>67</sup> John Dart, “Move by Campus Crusade for Christ Stirred Debate: Baptist Professor Absolved of ‘Heresy’ by Evangelical Panel,” Los Angeles Times, December 14, 1985, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1985-12-14-me-486-story.html>.

<sup>68</sup> Dart, “Move by Campus Crusade for Christ Stirred Debate.”

During their teen years and early adulthood, Millennials watched as the doors of the church became barricaded and pastors became unapproachable. They also watched as their childhood churches became hubs of hypocrisy, sexual scandal, infidelity, and abuse.

### *Generation Z: 1996–TBD<sup>69</sup> (Ages – to 24)*

According to Dr. David John Seel, Jr., Generation Z is the first generation that views society, culture, and the church from a Post-Enlightenment perspective. He suggests, “Millennials represent the first post-Enlightenment, postmodern generational cohort.”<sup>70</sup> Therefore, Generation Z differs from their Millennial counterpart because they are the first generation to perceive society, theology, sociology, and politics, from a Post-Enlightenment experience. Hence, they do not view life from a binary lens nor are they solely influenced by their geographical location. Generation Z sees from the perspective of both/and, not either/or because their points of influence stem from their globalized experience via social media. “Nearly 92% of Gen Z has a digital footprint. Arguably as a result of the celebrities and media they follow, Gen Z seeks uniqueness in all walks of life primarily through the brands they do business with, future employers, etc.”<sup>71</sup>

Although they have an affinity toward individuality, as seen above, it has not created a culture devoid of community. Generation Z views differences as being housed together:

They place considerable emphasis on finding their own identities and respecting the identities of others. They defend diversity and equality and want to correct

<sup>69</sup> The Center for Generational Kinetics, “Generational Breakdown.”

<sup>70</sup> David John Seel, Jr., *The New Copernicans: Millennials and the Survival of the Church* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2018), 20.

<sup>71</sup> George Beall, “8 Key Differences between Gen Z and Millennials,” HuffPost, November 6, 2017, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/8-key-differences-between\\_b\\_12814200](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/8-key-differences-between_b_12814200).

injustices based on identity. They turn to peers and the Internet for advice and community, and to their parents for comfort and support. They are pragmatic problem solvers, relying on a range of digital devices, apps, and networks for speed and efficiency. They zero in on what is “relevant” in order to sort through vast quantities of information or multiple options. And they like to work in collaboration with others, with or without a leader.<sup>72</sup>

These characteristics are intrinsic to Generation Z; however, their quest for collaboration does not encourage conformity within their belief structure. Many within this generation value the ability to question, doubt, and wrestle in order to reach the best conclusion, or even for the sole purpose of embracing skepticism. This differs greatly from previous generations, because Generation Z is not focused on formulaic conclusions. They are comfortable with open-ended answers. Perhaps, this is why many within Generation Z are distancing themselves from conservative evangelicalism, where there is no room for uncertainty.

Generation Z is not only leaving the constraints of conservatism; they are adopting and implementing various theological perspectives within their interpretation of their faith and their praxis. For instance, Liberation Theology, Queer Theology, and Feminist Theology are quite popular amongst Generation Z. Perhaps this is because “the majority of Generation Z is non-white, and same-sex marriage is embraced as normative.”<sup>73</sup> However, it also could be because they “are far more open-minded and permissive than their older millennial counterparts when it comes to issues of gender and sexuality.”<sup>74</sup> Generation Z might be breaking the glass ceiling and questioning the

<sup>72</sup> Roberta Katz, “How Gen Z Is Different, According to Social Scientists,” Pacific Standard, April 2, 2019, <https://psmag.com/ideas/how-gen-z-is-different-according-to-social-scientists>

<sup>73</sup> Thom Rainer, “Ten Things You Should Know About Generation Z,” Thom Rainer, May 11, 2016, <https://thomrainer.com/2016/05/ten-things-you-should-know-about-generation-z/>.

<sup>74</sup> Zing Tsjeng, “Teens These Days Are Queer AF, New Study Says,” Vice, March 10, 2016, [https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/kb4dvz/teens-these-days-are-queer-af-new-study-says](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/kb4dvz/teens-these-days-are-queer-af-new-study-says).

boundaries of sexual ethics, but not everyone is embracing their generational influence, especially conservative pastors and leaders who function from a stance of binary belief and behavior. “Millennials and Generation Z are both functional atheists and potential spiritual mystics. Consequently, secularism today cannot be seen as synonymous with unbelief. Rather it is best seen as an open but contesting way of apprehending reality.”<sup>75</sup> This reality might seem dismal; however, if pastors and leaders can create spaces of uncertainty; they will be able to engage Generation Z and their preference of theological fluidity. However, this will require full surrender of bias—especially generational assumption.

### **Identifying Biases**

According to Jennifer Brown, author of *Inclusion: Diversity, the New Workplace, and the Will to Change*: “Millennials and Generation Z consider cognitive diversity—the blending of different ideas, thoughts, opinions, backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives within a team—to be ‘essential for an inclusive culture.’”<sup>76</sup> Diversity, according to Millennials and Generation Z, is not merely a topic of race, age, sexual orientation, or gender identity; it is also related to cognitive heterogeneity. Diversity, according to Generation Z, is globalized, holistic, and all-embracing.

In many ways, this generational understanding of diversity has not only impacted the society; it has permeated present-day theology and presented a new form of worship.

<sup>75</sup> David John Seel Jr., *The New Copernicans*, 112.

<sup>76</sup> Jennifer Brown, *Inclusion: Diversity, The New Workplace, and The Will to Change*, 2nd ed. (Hartford, CT: Publish Your Purpose Press, 2017), 80.

For example, this generational distinctive has led to the formation and support of Black Lives Matter and the March for our Lives movements. These two movements are so successful because Generation Z perceives value from the stance of diversification. Therefore, their perception of worth is not just tied to the unborn—it is found in the voice of the immigrant, the face of the homeless, and within the lives of the LGBT+ community. In my opinion, there is a sacredness of all human life evident within Generation Z compared to previous generations.

During my research, I interviewed numerous Millennials and Generation Zs, and I found one common thread—regardless of their faith affiliation, the majority viewed the term pro-life as encompassing all forms of life. However, many interviewees felt a generational disconnect, especially within the church. They could not fathom how their elder counterparts could rally for the rights of the unborn while simultaneously lambasting the LGBT+ community, ignoring the cries of the immigrant, or making racial slurs from the pulpit. Many within Generation Z have experienced this generational dissonance and have a difficult time understanding why “over 12% of evangelicals continue to believe that racism is mostly a problem of the past, not the present.”<sup>77</sup> Barna research explores this statistic in more depth, revealing:

Evangelicals are more than twice as likely as the general population to “strongly disagree” that people of color are socially disadvantaged because of race (28% compared to 12%). This is also the case for Republicans who are 10 percentage points less likely than the adult average (57% compared to 67%), and 21 percentage points less likely than Democrats (57% compared to 78%), to believe people of color are at a social disadvantage (57%), and more than twice as likely as Democrats to “strongly disagree” that people of color are socially disadvantaged because of race (17% compared to 8%).<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> “Black Lives Matter and Racial Tension in America,” Barna Group, May 5, 2016, <https://www.barna.com/research/black-lives-matter-and-racial-tension-in-america/>.

<sup>78</sup> Barna Group, “Black Lives Matter and Racial Tension in America.”

Consequently, many Millennials and Generation Zs view the church as a hub of apathy, arrogance, closed-mindedness and close-fistedness. Therefore, one of the most significant steps that pastors and leaders can take is acknowledging the reality of the American church. Dr. David John Seel Jr., proposes:

We must acknowledge that our churches are divided, immature, confused about our purpose and identity, in danger of fragmenting our way into nonexistence, all at once bending over backwards and straddling fences, stiff of neck and soft of spine, and otherwise twisted and contorted in compromise. We have financial problems, sexual controversies, pride problems, schism threats, excesses in some forms of spirituality and deficits in others, and all manner of authority issues. And as soon as some of us point the finger at others, they hold up the mirror and show us that we're as much a mess as they are.<sup>79</sup>

He goes onto suggest “it is our ignorance—and perhaps arrogance—turning their doubt into skepticism, their fugitive status toward being prodigals, their antipathy toward atheism. We need to stop pushing them out of the pew.”<sup>80</sup> Thus, in order to retain and attract Millennials and Generation Z, pastors and leaders need to understand their own generational distinctives so these differences are not viewed as a threat.

## **Summary**

Chapter 1 invited readers to understand their own biases toward Millennials and Generation Z by providing them with their own generational timeline. It also provided a glimpse into evangelical culture, including prominent figures within the movement, and provided assurance to pastors and leaders that Millennials and Generation Z are not leaving the church, but a specific subset of the church—conservative evangelicalism.

<sup>79</sup> Brian D. McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity: Ten Questions That Are Transforming the Faith*, reprint ed. (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 166.

<sup>80</sup> McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity*, 29.

Chapter 2 continues to tackle the generational shifts within culture, politics, and theology. It also explores the evolution of ecclesiology and gives readers a glimpse into the torrid past of Christian history.

## CHAPTER 2:

### JESUS WOULD NOT RECOGNIZE *THIS CHURCH*

According to “the Franciscan teacher-philosopher Richard Rohr, ‘Mature people are not either-or thinkers, but they bathe in the ocean of both-and. (Think Gandhi, Anne Frank, Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela, and the like.)’”<sup>1</sup> Dr. David John Seel Jr. echoes this sentiment and explains, “That’s the nature of 3-D spirituality. It’s what the coming generation is looking for—an earthy, dirt-under-the-nails humanness.”<sup>2</sup> Hence, according to Rohr and Seel, Millennials and Generation Z do not consider the church as a stationary construct or a building—they view it as a revolutionary movement. This view of *ekklesia* is not new.

According to Graydon F. Snyder, a New Testament scholar, “There is no literary evidence nor archeological indication that any such home was converted to an extant church building. Nor is there any extant church that certainly was built prior to Constantine.”<sup>3</sup> Ryan S. Dennis, postulated a similar perspective in his dissertation, “The Temple of God and the Early Christian Church”:

The early Christians understood themselves to be the spiritual temple of God, which had a profound impact on how they worshipped and lived in community. It was the people, not a place that constituted the dwelling place of God. Temples played a key role in the worship of Israel and other ancient religions, but the worship of Christianity was different in that it rejected this location-based worship as a direct result of this new temple doctrine.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Seel, *The New Copernicans*, 52.

<sup>2</sup> Seel, *The New Copernicans*, 53.

<sup>3</sup> Graydon F. Snyder, *Ante Pacem: Archaeological Evidence of Church Life before Constantine* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1991), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Ryan S. Dennis, “The Temple of God and the Early Christian Church,” Reformed Theological Seminary, February 2016, [https://rts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Dennis\\_Ryan\\_Thesis\\_20160518.pdf](https://rts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Dennis_Ryan_Thesis_20160518.pdf).

According to Snyder and Dennis, “in the minds of the early Christians, the people—not the architecture—constituted a sacred space. The early Christians understood that they themselves—corporately—were the temple of God and the house of God.”<sup>5</sup> Many scripture verses support this theory, including 1 Corinthians 3:16; Galatians 6:10; Ephesians 2:20-22; Hebrews 3:5-6; 1 Timothy 3:15; and 1 Peter 2:5, 4:7. All of these passages present the ideology of church without structural form.

### Clement 190 AD

Frank Viola and George Barna explore this perspective in their popular book, *Pagan Christianity? Exploring the Roots of Our Church Practices*. They suggest “The first recorded use of the word *ekklesia* to refer to a Christian meeting place was penned around AD 190 by Clement of Alexandria (150-215). The first churches consistently met in homes. Until the year 300, we know of no buildings first built as churches.”<sup>6</sup>

They continue:

Clement was also the first person to use the phrase “go to church”—which would have been a foreign thought to the first-century believers. (You cannot go to something you are!) Throughout the New Testament, *ekklesia* always refers to an assembly of people, not a place. *Ekklesia*, in every one of its 114 appearances in the New Testament, refers to an assembly of people. (The English word *church* is derived from the Greek word *kuriakon*, which means “belonging to the Lord.”) In time, it took on the meaning of “God’s house” and referred to a building.) Even so, Clement’s reference to “going to church” is not a reference to attending a special building for worship. It rather refers to a private home that the second-century Christians used for their meetings. Christians did not erect special buildings for worship until the Constantinian era in the fourth century. Neither did

<sup>5</sup> Frank Viola and George Barna, *Pagan Christianity? Exploring the Roots of Our Church Practices* (Carol Stream, IL: BarnaBooks, 2008), 11.

<sup>6</sup> Viola and Barna, *Pagan Christianity?*, 12.

they have a special priestly caste that was set apart to serve God. Instead, every believer recognized that he or she was a priest unto God.<sup>7</sup>

This perspective is not held by all scholars or historians; however, some Christian leaders find some validity in Barna and Viola's argument concerning the definition of *ekklesia*. Greg Simas, the founder and senior leader of Convergence House of Prayer in SF Bay Area, asserts:

In 1525 AD, William Tyndale translates the New Testament from Greek to English for all common people to read. The translation is known as the “Tyndale Translation.” Now, in his translation of Matthew 16:18, Tyndale rightly translates the Greek word *ekklesia* as “congregation,” as opposed to the word “church,” which had been used for centuries prior.<sup>8</sup>

Tyndale’s translations were “so fundamentally correct and smooth in word flow that more than 90 percent of his wordings appeared in the KJV that was published nearly 100 years later, and more than 75 percent of his wordings appear in the RSV of 1952.”<sup>9</sup>

According to George Barna and Frank Viola:

When Christianity was born, it was the only religion on the planet that had no sacred objects, no scared persons, and no sacred spaces. Although surrounded by Jewish synagogues and pagan temples, the early Christians were the only religious people on earth who did not erect sacred buildings for their worship. The Christian faith was born in homes, out in courtyards, and along roadsides.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Viola and Barna, *Pagan Christianity?*, 12.

<sup>8</sup> Greg Simas, “When ‘Ekklesia’ Becomes ‘Church,’” Greg Simas, January 3, 2020, <https://gregsimas.org/ekklesia-series-ekklesia-becomes-church/>.

<sup>9</sup> “William Tyndale: Did You Know?” Christian History, July 30, 2019, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-16/william-tyndale-did-you-know.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Viola and Barna, *Pagan Christianity?*, 14.

Therefore, they suggest, “nowhere in the New Testament do we find the terms *church* (*ekklesia*), *temple*, or *house of God* to refer to a building.”<sup>11</sup> However, after the reign of Constantine, the church became an entity associated with government and culture.

### **Evolution of Church Construct**

According to Dr. Mark A. Noll, Francis A. McAnaney Professor of History at the University of Notre Dame:

Constantine apparently saw a vision that changed the course of his life as well as the course of the Christian church. In the words of Eusebius of Caesarea, the most important early church historian and later confidant of Constantine, Constantine was praying to the god of his father when he saw with his own eyes the trophy of a cross of light in the heavens, above the sun, and an inscription, CONQUER BY THIS attached to it...Then in his sleep the Christ of God appeared to him with a sign which he had seen in the heavens, and commanded him to make a likeness of that sign which he had seen in the heavens, and use it as a safeguard in all engagements with his enemies. Thereafter, Constantine took as his personal emblem the labarum, or the intertwined first two letters of Christ's name in Greek, Even more momentously, he immediately arranged with his fellow emperor, Licinius, to issue a decree legalizing the Christian faith and making toleration of all peaceful religions the rule of throughout the empire.<sup>12</sup>

Not everyone was convinced of Constantine’s conversion. According to popular theorists Barna and Viola:

All historical evidence indicates that Constantine was an egomaniac. When he built the Church of the Apostles in Constantinople, he included monuments to the twelve apostles. The twelve monuments surrounded a single tomb, which lay at the center. That tomb was reserved for Constantine himself—thus making himself the thirteenth and chief apostle. Thus Constantine not only continued the pagan practice of honoring the dead, he also sought to be included as one of the significant dead.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Viola and Barna, *Pagan Christianity?*, 14.

<sup>12</sup> Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 42.

<sup>13</sup> Viola and Barna, *Pagan Christianity?*, 20.

Their research is supported by *History of Christianity*<sup>14</sup> by Paul Johnson, *Early History of the Christian Church*<sup>15</sup> by Louis Duchesne, and *Ante Pacem: Archaeological Evidence of Church Life Before Constantine*<sup>16</sup> by Graydon F. Snyder.

Constantine not only shaped the structure, the purpose, and the rituals of the early church, but “paganism dominated the Roman Empire until the fourth century, and many of its elements were absorbed by Christians in the first half of the first millennium, particularly during the Constantinian and early post-Constantinian eras (324 to 600).”<sup>17</sup> According to Dr. Bruce Shelley, senior professor of Church History and Historical Theology at *Denver Theological Seminary*, “By the reign of Constantine (312-337), the first Christian emperor, there were churches in every large town in the empire and in places as distant from each other as Britain, Carthage, and Persia.”<sup>18</sup> However, the majority of churches changed and much of the dogma of Christianity was marked by the influence of the government and surrounding faith expressions, namely Paganism and Judaism.

According to Viola and Barna, “worship became professional, dramatic, and ceremonial. All of these features were borrowed from the Greco-Roman culture and carried straight into the Christian church. Fourth-century Christianity was profoundly

<sup>14</sup> Paul Johnson, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995).

<sup>15</sup> Louis Duchesne, *Early History of the Christian Church* (London, 1950).

<sup>16</sup> Snyder, *Ante Pacem: Archaeological Evidence of Church Life before Constantine*.

<sup>17</sup> Viola and Barna, *Pagan Christianity?*, 7.

<sup>18</sup> Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 4th ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 28.

shaped by Greek paganism and Roman imperialism.”<sup>19</sup> However, “Constantine also borrowed from the pagans (not the Jews) the notion of the sacredness of objects and places. Largely due to his influence, relic mongering became common in the church.”<sup>20</sup> Constantine was not the only influencer regarding church design and practices, Plato was also quite influential. According to James F. White, author of *Protestant Worship and Church Architecture: Theological and Historical Considerations*, “The Gothic designers took Plato’s teachings and set them to brick and stone. They created awe-inspiring lighting to elicit a sense of overwhelming splendor and worship.”<sup>21</sup> Each of these structural aspects was created to elicit wonder, reverence, and worship; however, that did not always equate to admiration of Christ:

Most Christians who claim to uphold the integrity of God’s Word have never sought to see if what they do every Sunday has any scriptural backing. How do we know this? Because if they did, it would lead them to some alarming conclusions that would compel them by conscience to abandon forever what they are doing. Strikingly, the contemporary church thought and practice have been influenced far more by postbiblical historical events than by New Testament imperatives and examples. Yet most Christians are not conscious of this influence. Nor are they aware that it has created a slew of cherished, calcified, humanly devised traditions—all of which are routinely passed off to us as “Christian.”<sup>22</sup>

Thus, there is a danger in associating Christianity *exclusively* with the ideology of church, mostly because it equates Christ with a specific structure instead of a soteriological position of faith.

<sup>19</sup> Viola and Barna, *Pagan Christianity?*, 25.

<sup>20</sup> Viola and Barna, *Pagan Christianity?*, 20.

<sup>21</sup> James F. White, *Protestant Worship and Church Architecture: Theological and Historical Considerations* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Pub., 2003), 6.

<sup>22</sup> Viola and Barna, *Pagan Christianity?*, 5.

As startling as it may sound, almost everything that is done in our contemporary churches has no basis in the Bible. As pastors preach from their pulpits about being “biblical” and following the “pure Word of God,” their words betray them. The truth is that precious little that is observed today in contemporary Christianity maps to anything found in the New Testament church.<sup>23</sup>

The structural church has not always been associated with an omnipresent Savior. Thus, “to use the Old Testament as a justification for the church building is not only inaccurate, but it is self-defeating. The old Mosaic economy of sacred priests, sacred buildings, sacred rituals, and sacred objects has been forever destroyed by the cross of Jesus Christ.”<sup>24</sup> Therefore, when one seeks to answer the question, why are Millennials and Generation Z leaving the church? They must ask themselves, what is church and how does my generational perception shape my view?

### **Are They Going to Hell in a Handbasket?**

According to my research, the majority of Millennials and Generation Z are not leaving the confines of Christianity; they are leaving the confines of a specific expression of Christianity—conservative evangelicalism. However, this theory is not supported by everyone, especially pastors and leaders within the conservative camp. Many believe that Millennials and Generation Z are trading in Christianity to follow an ideology of self-

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<sup>23</sup> Viola and Barna, *Pagan Christianity?*, 4.

<sup>24</sup> Viola and Barna, *Pagan Christianity?*, 27.

love, astrology, crystals,<sup>25</sup> spirituality,<sup>26</sup> and Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.<sup>27</sup> In order to dismantle these assumptions, I must address them in detail. Consequently, this section will examine the top three theories surrounding the spirituality of Millennials and Generation Z and will provide counterarguments in order to expose the truth regarding generational dissonance.

### *Astrology, Crystals, and Spirituality*

According to a recent article in the *Los Angeles Times*, Millennials, Generation Z, and even Generation X are leaving the constraints of organized religion in exchange for yoga, Transcendental Meditation, and crystals. Jessica Roy, a contributor to the *LA Times*, suggests:

Today, young people still seek the things that traditional organized religion may have provided for their parents or grandparents: religious beliefs, yes, but also a sense of community, guidance, purpose, and meaning. But it can be hard for young people to find those things in their parents' religions. So they're looking elsewhere. On top of that, a lot of younger people feel alienated by mainstream religion—by attitudes toward LGBTQ people and women, by years of headlines about scandals and coverups, or by the idea that anyone who isn't part of that religion is inherently bad or wrong.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Jessica Roy, “Must Reads: How Millennials Replaced Religion with Astrology and Crystals,” LA Times, July 10, 2019, <https://www.latimes.com/health/la-he-millennials-religion-zodiac-tarot-crystals-astrology-20190710-story.html>.

<sup>26</sup> Caroline Newman, “Why Millennials Are Leaving Religion but Embracing Spirituality,” <https://phys.org/news/2015-12-millennials-religion-embracing-spirituality.html>.

<sup>27</sup> R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism—The New American Religion,” Christian Post, April 18, 2005, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/moralistic-therapeutic-deism-the-new-american-religion.html>.

<sup>28</sup> Roy, “Must Reads: How Millennials Replaced Religion with Astrology and Crystals.”

Jim Burklo, a progressive Christian reverend and senior associate dean of the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life at USC, echoes this observation and suggests:

One of the big draws for younger people about spiritual practices is the ability to pick and choose. Spiritual practices appeal to the commitment-wary: You can get a little into crystals or astrology or tarot, or a lot into it. You can buy a few rose quartzes or light a few candles and if it's meaningful for you, keep it; if not, it's not like you went through a full religious conversion.<sup>29</sup>

Roy and Burklo are not alone in their observations. Many journalists, academics, and spiritual advisors have noted the increase in spirituality, individuality, and the flexibility of choice amongst Millennials and Generation Z compared to their older counterparts.

Madelaine Thomas, a contributor to the Pacific Standard, asserts:

Though Millennials aren't exactly known for being religious—just half-born between 1981 and 1996 believe with certainty that God exists, while only four in 10 say religion is very important in their lives, according to a 2015 Pew study—crystals aren't purely a material trend. According to some experts, younger generations are opting for spiritual practices like crystal healing because it allows them to mix elements from multiple faiths and ancient traditions into an individualized spiritual practice.<sup>30</sup>

According to the above statements, spirituality is central to Millennials and Generation Z; however, this does not necessarily equate to spirituality apart from Christianity. This resurgence of monastic spirituality has resurrected a collaborative expression of worship, liturgy, activism, and introspection. However, it has also forged a strong revival of Christian Humanism. According to Dr. David Grubbs, Assistant Professor of English at *Houston Baptist University*:

A Christian Humanistic today means having not an unreservedly optimistic perspective towards the culture but having one that seeks to find those sparks of goodness, those glimpses of beauty, those echoes of truth, that we see ultimately

<sup>29</sup> Roy, "Must Reads: How Millennials Replaced Religion with Astrology and Crystals."

<sup>30</sup> Madelaine Thomas, "Why Are Young People so into Healing Crystals?" Pacific Standard Magazine, April 6, 2017, <https://psmag.com/news/why-are-young-people-so-into-healing-crystals>.

in God's Word and in the incarnate Son of God himself. As Tolkien said, "Man is disgraced, and he is dethroned, but he still bears about him the tatters of the majesty which was once his own." We can, as Christians, engage with the arts, engage with our culture in this way, and find in it the good, the truth, and the beauty that is our human heritage as those made in God's image.<sup>31</sup>

*Pew Research* echoes Grubb's observation and asserts, "Millennials are increasingly finding contemplative spirituality appealing."<sup>32</sup> Therefore, contrary to popular assumption, Millennials and Generation Z are not leaving their faith in order to attain spirituality; many of them are adopting contemplative prayer, meditation, and elements of spiritual formation to deepen their Christian faith.

### *Spiritual Formation*

Contemplative practices have been a part of the patchwork of Christianity for ages. However, Millennials and Generation Z are embracing this specific tradition because of the majority of them value a more globalized perspective. "In many cases, modern Christian contemplative practices serve as a bridge in East/West dialogue as well as a way home for many Christians who have gone to the East in search of spiritual wisdom."<sup>33</sup> Some of the most influential leaders of this spiritual practice include: Fr. Richard Rohr, the late Dr. Phyllis Tickle, Dr. MaryKate Morse, and the late Dr. Dallas

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<sup>31</sup> David Grubbs, "What Is Christian Humanism?" Seedbed, YouTube video, 5:57, March 9, 2016, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tiP\\_l6i-n6A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tiP_l6i-n6A).

<sup>32</sup> Cathleen Falsani, "For Millennials, Mysticism Shows a Path to Their Home Faiths," <https://religionnews.com>, April 16, 2019, <https://religionnews.com/2019/04/16/for-millennials-mysticism-shows-a-path-to-their-home-faiths/>.

<sup>33</sup> "The Christian Contemplative Tradition," Contemplative Outreach, accessed November 14, 2019, <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/christian-contemplative-tradition>.

Willard. All of them have reshaped generational perception of worship, prayer, and spirituality.

Dr. David John Seel Jr. suggests, “If we create space in which God can act and speak, something surprising will happen.”<sup>34</sup> Thus, “the spiritual journey is best understood not as the results of a theological multiple-choice test, but as a relational adventure: more hitchhiking than a BarcaLounger, more open road than a mental fortress.”<sup>35</sup> Contemplative spirituality resonates with younger generations because they approach life from the perspective of both/and, not either/or. Millennials and Generation Z are not looking to replace their faith; they are looking to understand their faith. In many ways, these generations believe that “If faith is living, a closed fist will kill it.”<sup>36</sup> Contemplative Christianity might be blurring the lines between the sacred and the secular, however, in many ways, it is increasing generational interest in Christianity because it provides Millennials and Generation Z with practical tools, symbols, and rituals that aid their faith, praxis, and perception.

### *Therapeutic Moralistic Deism*

Therapeutic Moralistic Deism can be defined as a simplistic understanding of Christianity and God’s purpose amongst humanity. It is characterized by four essential principles, which include God watching over humanity, God encouraging people to show respect and consideration, God’s purpose bringing happiness to people, and God’s sole

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<sup>34</sup> “His Spirituality,” Henri Nouwen Society, accessed November 26, 2019, <https://henrinouwen.org/about/about-henri/his-spirituality/>.

<sup>35</sup> David John Seel, *The New Copernicans: Millennials and the Survival of the Church* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2018), 50.

<sup>36</sup> Seel, *The New Copernicans*, 50.

measurement of conversion being based upon one's expression of goodness.<sup>37</sup> These tenets stem from the belief that God's presence and purpose are auspicious and autonomous. Thus, the majority of individuals influenced by this mindset were not necessarily Millennials or Generation Z, who were still children at this time, but Generation X and Baby Boomers.

However, Dr. R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, claims that Moralistic Therapeutic Deism was popular during the early aughts in the form of the prosperity gospel and self-help books. He postulates:

The “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism” that these researchers identify as the most fundamental faith posture and belief system of American teenagers appears, in a larger sense, to reflect the culture as a whole. Clearly, this generalized conception of a belief system is what appears to characterize the beliefs of vast millions of Americans, both young and old. Subtle cultural shifts have produced a context in which belief in such an undemanding deity makes sense. Furthermore, this deity does not challenge the most basic self-centered assumptions of our postmodern age. Particularly when it comes to so-called “lifestyle” issues, this God is exceedingly tolerant, and this religion is radically undemanding.<sup>38</sup>

Dr. Mohler suggests that Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is a subtype of relativism because it is giving an excuse to sin; however, he fails to consider that his Southern Baptist denominational views influence his perception of sin. For example, Dr. R. Albert Mohler “is a member of the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, serves as a council member for The Gospel Coalition, and is the co-founder of Together for the Gospel.”<sup>39</sup> All of these organizations stem from a conservative evangelical perspective. Therefore,

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<sup>37</sup> Mohler, “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism—The New American Religion.”

<sup>38</sup> Mohler, “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism—The New American Religion.”

<sup>39</sup> “Albert Mohler,” <https://albertmohler.com>, accessed December 1, 2019, <https://albertmohler.com/about>.

Dr. Mohler's perception of divergence is tied to his own theological perspectives, doctrinal views, and denominational beliefs.

As previously stated, Therapeutic Moralistic Deism is not a characteristic within the Millennial or Generation Z narrative. If anything, it is prominent amongst Baby Boomers and Generation X because the prosperity gospel was popular over 20 years ago. "The prosperity gospel was closely associated with prominent 1980s televangelists Jimmy Swaggart and Jim and Tammy Bakker."<sup>40</sup> Many pastors and leaders during that time perpetuated a gospel of private jets, self-actualization, and autonomous spirituality. This name-it-and-claim-it philosophy within evangelical Christianity became a staple within the American church. Joel Osteen, Benny Hinn, Joyce Meyer, John Hagee, and Dr. Creflo Dollar led the church to an individualized expression of faith that promoted social status, wealth, and success.

Morgan Lee, a contributor to *Christianity Today* suggests that Millennials and Generation Z were not influenced by Therapeutic Moralistic Deism. If anything, Millennials and Generation Z left the constraints of the church because they saw the hypocrisy in the prosperity gospel. Lee asserts:

If you look at other kinds of survey research on Millennials and Generation Z, there is more of a kind of skepticism. These are folks who have grown up with the scandals of the 1980s. Right in their formative growing up years, they're seeing people with sexual and financial scandals, and they're being told watch out for that Prosperity Gospel. More of that generation are saying they're concerned about things like immigration, and poverty, and climate change, and social justice, and using money to benefit the poor not to get lots of houses and jets and so forth.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> "Prosperity Gospel," Christianity Today, accessed January 27, 2020, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/topics/p/prosperity-gospel/>.

<sup>41</sup> Morgan Lee, "Benny Hinn's Prosperity Gospel Message Started Here," Christianity Today, September 13, 2019, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/september-web-only/prosperity-gospel-benny-hinn-health-wealth-j Joel-osteen.html>.

Millennials and Generation Z are questioning the constructs of conservative evangelicalism and adopting faith expressions that differ from their predecessors, but they are not exchanging their Christian faith—they are recontextualizing their faith expression. Thus, there is a strong generational disconnect between one's faith and one's expression of faith, specifically within the vast majority of conservative evangelical churches.

## **Summary**

Chapter two gives readers a glimpse into the genesis of Christian history. It also explores the evolutionary changes that have occurred within church structure, leadership methodology, and cultural influence within modern-day Christianity. This chapter also challenges pastors and leaders to understand the generational change that occurred within the church and re-evaluate their view of *ekklesia* as a congregational community instead of a structural entity. When one is able to see the church through this lens, they will be able to view the generational shift from the stance of curiosity instead of fear.

Chapter two also discussed the ways that Millennials and Generation Z are expressing their faith differently than previous generations and explored some of the main ways that they differ with evangelical culture. Chapter three explores this generational phenomenon in more depth and looks at the historical influences that shaped modern-day evangelicalism—especially white evangelicalism.

**CHAPTER 3:**  
**THE EVOLUTION OF EVANGELICALISM AND ITS IMPACT ON**  
**GENERATIONAL DISSONANCE**

**The Genesis of Evangelicalism**

Conservative white evangelicalism has evolved into the reigning mascot of modern-day Christianity in the United States. If one looks at the constructs of evangelicalism within today's context, one will find that "the gospel message of liberation in Jesus and redemption from our brokenness has been lost to us in the fog of American colonial Christianity."<sup>1</sup> According to Richard Twiss (Taoyate Ob Najin), cofounder of North American Institute for Indigenous Theological Studies, "American ethnocentrism is constructed and fueled by theologically informed nationalism."<sup>2</sup> For example:

Openly displaying the American flag alongside the "Christian flag" on each side of the stage or pulpit is an example of counteractive syncretism. It is blending the ideology of nationhood and Christian religion. It presupposes an idealized national exceptionalism of God's chosenness, blessing and approval of America. The result is a unique identity in Christ and his kingdom. It redirects allegiance to a kind of "Christian patriotism" that demands a deep-seated loyalty, reverence, trust and faith in political, military and economic might. It inspires national pride and the assumptions of Creator's divine favor. Why don't Canadian churches place Canadian flags in their churches? The mixture of Euro-American culture with the gospel—from Plato to Andrew Jackson to Ronald Reagan—is considered permissible and orthodox.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Twiss, *Rescuing the Gospel from the Cowboys: A Native American Expression of the Jesus Way* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2015), 75.

<sup>2</sup> Twiss, *Rescuing the Gospel from the Cowboys*, 37.

<sup>3</sup> Twiss, *Rescuing the Gospel from the Cowboys*, 37.

However, evangelicalism was not always associated with the Republican party, racial injustice, or the foundational tenets of Trump's Presidency. "Evangelicalism represented a strategic shift in Christian energy, direction, assumptions, and associations. Some of that new direction came in response to altered conditions in Europe, some was more directly a response to conditions within the church."<sup>4</sup> However, "In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, 'Evangelicalism' largely described Christians who emphasized a personal relationship with God, the practice of being born again, and a call to spread God's message worldwide."<sup>5</sup> According to Dr. George M. Marsden, instructor of history at Calvin College, Duke University Divinity School and professor emeritus at Notre Dame, evangelicalism can be broken into five tenets:

- 1) the Reformation doctrine of the final authority of Scripture; 2) the real, historical character of God's saving work recorded in Scripture; 3) eternal salvation only through personal trust in Christ; 4) the importance of evangelicalism and missions; and 5) the importance of a spiritually transformed life.<sup>6</sup>

Dr. David W. Bebbington, Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Stirling, Scotland, and expert in British Evangelicalism differed with Marsden's account and suggested that evangelicalism can be characterized by four qualities:

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

<sup>4</sup> Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 228.

<sup>5</sup> Amanda Casanova, "What Does the Term 'Evangelical' Really Mean? Here Are 10 Things to Know," <https://www.christianity.com>, June 15, 2018, <https://www.christianity.com/church/denominations/what-does-the-term-evangelical-really-mean-here-are-10-things-to-know.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington, and George M. Marsden, *Evangelicals: Who They Have Been, Are Now, and Could Be* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019), 6.

be called crucientrism, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Together they form a quadrilateral of priorities that is the basis of evangelicalism.<sup>7</sup>

According to Marsden and Bebbington, evangelicalism was created to unify the church and create a structural identity that defined one's belief and praxis. Essentially, it was a movement unified by a common heritage, influences, problems, tendencies, fellowship, coalitions, and communities, which provided people with a strong sense of belonging.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, "the overriding aim of early evangelicals was to bring home the message of the Bible and to encourage its devotional use rather than to develop a doctrine of scripture."<sup>9</sup> However, these roots of evangelicalism would soon become overshadowed by future influencers within the Christian faith, especially those who viewed Christianity through the lens of Dispensational Premillennialism. It would mark, as William E. Connolly calls it, the birth of The Evangelical-Capitalist Resonance Machine.<sup>10</sup>

### **Evangelical Shift**

Dwight L. Moody and his doctrine of Dispensational Premillennialism strongly influenced the trajectory of evangelical culture. According to Dr. Ben Witherington III, Jean R. Amos Professor of New Testament for Doctoral Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary:

Dwight L. Moody became enamored with this theology and began promulgating it on both sides of the Atlantic, furthered by the founding of the Moody Bible

<sup>7</sup> D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (New York, NY: Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group, 1989), 3.

<sup>8</sup> Noll, Bebbington, and Marsden, *Evangelicals*, 29.

<sup>9</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 14.

<sup>10</sup> William E. Connolly, *Capitalism and Christianity, American Style* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 40.

Institute, and eventually by Moody Press and by radio network. But by far the single most enduring tool for spreading this theology was a reference Bible, put together by one Cyrus I. Scofield and first published in 1909.<sup>11</sup>

Dr. Witherington goes on to observe:

Despite the ever-growing popularity of this theology with laypeople, frightened by one war or another that America was embroiled in, this theology did not have any scholarly grounding or basis. It did not arise out of detailed exegetical study of the biblical text in its original languages, unlike Calvinism and Lutheranism, and Arminianism. Indeed, it was dependent in many ways on the King James translation of the Bible. This was lay theology formed and promulgated by preachers and laypersons.<sup>12</sup>

According to Matthew Avery Sutton, Edward R. Meyer Distinguished Professor of History at Washington State University:

The “apocalyptic” premillennialism developing in late nineteenth-century North America derived from many different ideas and influences. American, Canadians, English, and Irish all shared and debated theologies and beliefs, agreeing on some elements of the premillennial scheme while disagreeing on others. But over time, a series of prophecy conferences combined with the rise of a handful of popular publications helped to begin to define the parameters of what was emerging in the United States as a distinct interdenominational radical Evangelical faith.<sup>13</sup>

Many influencers perpetuated Dispensational Premillennialism; however, Moody’s elevation of and reverence toward this theology transformed the trajectory of American Christianity. In many ways, evangelicalism morphed into a conservative entity with a conformist agenda. It created an “urgent, militant, and a new way of living until Christ’s return.”<sup>14</sup> Spurgeon, Wesley, Moody, and Edwards all shaped the narrative of

<sup>11</sup> Ben Witherington III, *The Problem with Evangelical Theology: Testing the Exegetical Foundations of Calvinism, Dispensationalism, Wesleyanism, and Pentecostalism* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 111.

<sup>12</sup> Witherington, *The Problem with Evangelical Theology*, 111.

<sup>13</sup> Matthew Avery Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017), 22.

<sup>14</sup> Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 109.

evangelicalism. However, after the influence of Moody, evangelicalism became a radical faith—a faith that loved the soul yet damned the body.

Donald M. Lewis and Richard V. Pierard, coauthors of *Global Evangelicalism: Theology, History, and Culture in Relational Perspective*, suggest, “This movement forged an ideology that made preaching and evangelism the priority in missions, declined to have fellowship with those who differed with them doctrinally, and followed a conservative social ethic.”<sup>15</sup> Matthew Avery Sutton, author of *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism*, echoes the above observation and declares:

A Premillennialist’s call to separate from the world appeared in many books and tracts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The faithful made a clear distinction between evangelicalism and reform, and they rejected liberal Protestants’ effort to craft a social gospel that applied faith to contemporary cultural and political problems. Instead, they believed that conversion remained the only hope for humankind.<sup>16</sup>

In many ways, Dispensational Premillennialism created an organizational ideology based on numerical conversions, communal conformity, and intolerance towards the other. In essence, Christianity became a social club that separated the heavenly from the heathen.

### **Revivalism and Rationality**

According to Dr. Bebbington in his book *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*, “Evangelicals did not wait for people to come to their places of worship; Evangelicals went to people.”<sup>17</sup> He goes onto state, “there was a

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<sup>15</sup> Donald M. Lewis and Richard V. Pierard, *Global Evangelicalism: Theology, History, and Culture in Regional Perspective* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014) 54.

<sup>16</sup> Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 34.

<sup>17</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 118.

gradual transition during the century from folksy outbursts of anguished guilt to professionally planned occasions for much more conventional ‘decisions for Christ.’”<sup>18</sup>

However, during the late 1880s, the climate drastically shifted as rationality and humanism challenged the validity of fundamentalism:

The prominence of Evangelicals in society shortly after the middle of the nineteenth century was never again to be repeated. In 1870 most books were on religion, with fiction in fifth place; in 1886, most new books were fiction, with religion behind it in second place. The belief was spreading that the greatest need of humanity was not rescued from its futile ways through salvation, but effort that would apply knowledge for the betterment of the world. The resulting stance has been labeled Meliorism, the belief that, if only skills were exerted, the human race would make rapid progress.<sup>19</sup>

In many ways, Meliorism was prominent during the Enlightenment period because it deemed one’s consciousness stronger than one’s conscience. However, this was not the only change to impact evangelicalism—if anything, it was only the start of many modifications that occurred within culture, community, and the American church.

According to Dr. Matthew Avery Sutton:

Near the turn of the century, some leading theological liberals began to call themselves modernists. Drawing on the modernist movements in art, literature, and culture, they focused on the process of being Christian. They interrogated their faith with the goal of making it relevant to the contemporary world. In so doing, they abandoned notions of an absolute, objective, external, orthodox religion. Instead they emphasized the practice of believing, of asking questions of themselves and their faith and then embarking on an intellectual journey in search of answers to those questions. The process of embracing faith rather than the ends of defining and claiming it became the substance of modernist Protestantism.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 116.

<sup>19</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 141.

<sup>20</sup> Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 13.

According to Sutton and other scholars, “Theological modernism took shape in part through the Social Gospel movement.”<sup>21</sup> However, this shift was not as simplistic as historical timelines suggest, or as favorable to those who differed:

Since Protestant Christianity stood so close to the centers of power in nineteenth-century America, one of the strongest impulses for Protestants was to keep up with whatever changes were going on in the culture. This impulse was a major component in theological liberalism, or modernism, which believed that Christianity should provide leadership for modern culture and intellectual change by reinterpreting Christian traditions to fit with modern ideals. Modernism, although by its nature having many varieties, thus could be very compatible with fervent wartime patriotism. Building a progressive, democratic, worldwide civilization based on the brotherhood of all people under the fatherhood of God was close to the essence of the hopeful vision of liberal Protestants. Premillennialists, on the other hand, taught that hope for humanity was not in building a liberal civilization but in the dramatic return of Jesus to set up a millennial kingdom.<sup>22</sup>

According to Dr. George M. Marsden, author of *Religion and American Culture: A Brief History*, after WWI:

America was moving rapidly away from the Victorian era to the age of the flappers, or young women who defied “lady-like” proprieties. Conservative church leaders deplored the new dances and short dresses, or as one critic put it, the transition from “the bended knee to the bared knee.” Such changes said conservatives, were just a few signs that America was losing its morality. Liberal theology and secularism, they said, were to blame.<sup>23</sup>

America might have been shifting toward a more progressive perspective, but the majority within the church were rallying the troops and leading the army to a new form of evangelical expression: fundamentalism.

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<sup>21</sup> Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 13.

<sup>22</sup> George M. Marsden, *Religion and American Culture: A Brief History* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 167.

<sup>23</sup> Marsden, *Religion and American Culture*, 170.

The term fundamentalism was first used in 1920 to “describe a coalition of militantly conservative Protestants who were trying to preserve the nineteenth-century revivalist Protestant establishment.”<sup>24</sup> However, during the 1920s, Harry Emerson Fosdick,<sup>25</sup> a famous liberal minister and an avid supporter of the protest against fundamentalism, “stepped up to the pulpit of Manhattan’s First Presbyterian Church to deliver what became one of the most famous sermons in American history. The homily titled *Shall the Fundamentalists Win?*”<sup>26</sup> Fosdick declared, “The Fundamentalists are giving us one of the worst exhibitions of bitter intolerance that the churches of this country have ever seen. You cannot fit the Lord Christ in that Fundamentalists’ mold.”<sup>27</sup> His sermons reached millions, and many revered him as “the greatest preacher of this century. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. King frequently drew on themes and passages from Fosdick’s sermons.”<sup>28</sup> According to Stanford University’s Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute:

Fosdick felt that a church that pretends to care for the souls of people but is not interested in the slums that damn them, the city government that corrupts them, the economic order that cripples them, and international relationships that, leading to peace or war, determine the spiritual destiny of innumerable souls would receive divine condemnation.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>25</sup> “Harry Emerson Fosdick Liberalism’s Popularizer,” Christianity Today, accessed December 14, 2019, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/pastorsandpreachers/harry-emerson-fosdick.html>.

<sup>26</sup> Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 79.

<sup>27</sup> Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 80.

<sup>28</sup> Christianity Today, “Harry Emerson Fosdick Liberalism’s Popularizer.”

<sup>29</sup> “About the Social Gospel,” Stanford, accessed December 15, 2019, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/social-gospel>.

Fosdick's lectures and portrayal of the Social Gospel influenced countless pastors and leaders. However, although his riveting orations might have drawn crowds, they did not sway fundamentalist culture. If anything, the militant army of fundamentalists viewed Fosdick's ideologies as a threat to Christianity and blasphemous against the constructs of conservative evangelicalism.

Fosdick's sermons gave many individuals who disagreed with fundamentalism hope; however, at the same time, he gave fundamentalists fuel for the fodder. "Presbyterian William Jennings Bryan sought to expose Fosdick's *utter agnosticism* to the New York Presbytery and the General Assembly and have him dismissed from First Presbyterian."<sup>30</sup> As Sutton observes, "Radical Evangelicals aggressively combated liberal trends and identified the work of liberals like Fosdick as evidence that the last-days religious apostasy predicted in Revelation was upon them."<sup>31</sup> After the 1920s, "the unity of evangelicalism was broken. The movement had always been marked by variety in doctrine, attitude and social composition, but in the years after the First World War it became so sharply divided that some members of one party did not recognize the other as Evangelical—or even, sometimes, as Christian."<sup>32</sup> After the influx of Dispensational Premillennialism and fundamentalism, many Christians started to believe that "the countdown to Armageddon had begun. The twenties provided a bit of a lull between the chaotic years of World War I and the Great Depression, but fundamentalists still felt motivated to do their part to protect the nation from the oncoming tribulation."<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Christianity Today, "Harry Emerson Fosdick Liberalism's Popularizer."

<sup>31</sup> Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 81.

<sup>32</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 181.

<sup>33</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 206.

However, not one could have predicted that in exchange for protection, pastors and laity would be forced to sell their souls.

### **After World War II**

According to Sutton,

World War II marked a critical point in the evolution of American religion. Fundamentalists' lack of patriotism during World War I and their skepticism of the American state during the 1930s limited their social and political power. World War II provided an opportunity for redemption. Over the course of the conflict, the faithful reversed roles with their theologically liberal counterparts. Fundamentalists became the voices of Patriotism and American exceptionalism, while liberals more often criticized American intervention abroad and the violent tactics of total war. For radical evangelicals, this war, more than any other, represented evil's rise to unprecedented heights, which justified their efforts to combat it. They routinely described the conflict as one of Christ versus Antichrist. By the end of the fight fundamentalists had done what just a few years earlier had seemed almost unthinkable—they had baptized Christian fundamentalism in the waters of patriotic Americanism.<sup>34</sup>

Fundamentalists transferred their allegiance when they found the benefits of political power, and “for the rest of the century they positioned themselves as the legitimate guardians of the nation.”<sup>35</sup> This transference of belief was not merely a difference in theological perspective. This shift laid the groundwork for “evangelicals’ post World War II ascension into an integral position in American life.”<sup>36</sup> After 1945, fundamentalism became the reigning dogma within the homes of suburbia. However, it also became the hub of deep-seated racism, sexism, inequality, phobia, and abuse.

<sup>34</sup> Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 266.

<sup>35</sup> Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 266.

<sup>36</sup> Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 266.

## Vacuums, Pearls, and Patriarchy

After World War II, societal expectations placed wives back into the kitchen, men assumed their role at the helm, and redlining<sup>37</sup> became a normative practice within American's *Leave it to Beaver* motif. However, June and Ward were not the only leaders of fundamentalism who perpetuated conservative values and patriarchal expectations:

Embedded in the propaganda of the time was the idea that the nuclear family was what made Americans superior to the Communists. American propaganda showed the horrors of communism in the lives of Russian women. They were shown dressed in gunnysacks, as they toiled in drab factories while their children were placed in cold, anonymous daycare centers. In contrast to the "evils" of communism, an image was promoted of American women, with their feminine hairdos and delicate dresses, tending to the hearth and home as they enjoyed the fruits of capitalism, democracy, and freedom.<sup>38</sup>

Moreover, the contrast between American culture and Russia created a normative acceptance of patriarchal values, fundamental virtues, and family dynamics. The aftermath of WWII produced a 1950's utopia for conservative evangelicals. After all, fundamentalism had become an American lifestyle—one that was characterized by hate, fear, and intolerance. Carol Tucker, a contributor to the University of California, asserts:

The U.S. population achieved its biggest growth in history—from 150 million in 1950 to 180 million in 1960—as newly married young couples begot the baby boom generation. Churches and schools were being greatly expanded to accommodate the growing population, and organized religion was in its heyday. On a typical Sunday morning in the period from 1955-58, almost half of all Americans were attending church—the highest percentage in U.S. history. During the 1950s, nationwide church membership grew at a faster rate than the population, from 57 percent of the U.S. population in 1950 to 63.3 percent in 1960.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," *The Atlantic*, June 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>.

<sup>38</sup> "Mrs. America: Women's Roles in the 1950s," PBS, accessed December 15, 2019, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/pill-mrs-america-womens-roles-1950s/>.

<sup>39</sup> Carol Tucker, "The 1950s – Powerful Years for Religion," University of Southern California, June 16, 1997, <https://news.usc.edu/25835/The-1950s-Powerful-Years-for-Religion/>.

In addition to surging church attendance, fundamentalism became the normative faith expression and expectation:

By the end of the decade, the shift away from high '50s religiosity began amid the double shocks of 1957: the integration of schools in Little Rock and the success of the Soviet satellite Sputnik. As mainstream religious revival waned, Billy Graham's evangelical revival was on the rise. The Cold War and communism were less on people's minds, as a new generation with different cars and rock music was coming into a new world—the 1960s. The '50s were the last decade of religious modernism, while the '60s saw the beginning of a postmodern period. It was a time when religion was powerful in American life—partly because most people believed they needed it and there was seemingly nothing to discredit it.<sup>40</sup>

When one thinks of Baby Boomers, they might picture Woodstock, The Beatles, and Vietnam protests. However, this generation was also the first to experience the 1963 Ban on Prayer and Bible Reading in Public Schools,<sup>41</sup> the Civil Rights Movement,<sup>42</sup> the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965,<sup>43</sup> and desegregation<sup>44</sup> within public schools. Consequently, while fundamentalism might have become the heartbeat of the American church, after the 1960s, it was no longer the realistic expectation of the American culture. Baby Boomers were one of the first generations to view the ideologies of race, gender, and human rights from a differing standpoint than their parents.

<sup>40</sup> Tucker, "The 1950s – Powerful Years for Religion."

<sup>41</sup> Michael D. Waggoner, "When the Court Took on Prayer and the Bible in Public Schools," <https://religionandpolitics.org>, June 25, 2012, <https://religionandpolitics.org/2012/06/25/when-the-court-took-on-prayer-the-bible-and-public-schools/>.

<sup>42</sup> "Civil Rights Movement," JFK Library, accessed December 13, 2019, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/jfk-in-history/civil-rights-movement>.

<sup>43</sup> "U.S. Immigration Since 1965," <https://www.history.com>, March 5, 2010, <https://www.history.com/topics/immigration/us-immigration-since-1965>.

<sup>44</sup> Lesley Kennedy, "What Led to Desegregation Busing—and Did It Work?," <https://www.history.com>, July 9, 2019, <https://www.history.com/news/desegregation-busing-schools>.

Many fundamentalist leaders were fighting to regain influence, including the late Rev. Billy Graham. According to Dr. Marsden:

Graham was part of a larger effort of many fundamentalist Protestants who, having found themselves now as cultural outsiders, were working to become insiders again. Their overriding motive was to convert people to Christ; but to do this, they needed to regain respectability. Graham encouraged conservative scholars, seminaries, and publications to defend the integrity of biblical revelation and oppose liberal Protestant thought, but in an intellectual sophisticated way. He also used his immense popularity to cultivate the friendships of major political leaders and became a regular visitor to the White House through many administrations.<sup>45</sup>

Graham also became an influential voice through the publication *World Aflame*, where he discussed his reaction to the second wave of feminism that was gaining traction<sup>46</sup> within the church and amongst young people. He boldly wrote, “Our homes have suffered and divorce has grown to epidemic proportions. When the morals of society are upset, the family is the first to suffer. The home is the basic unit of our society, and a nation is only as strong as her homes.”<sup>47</sup> According to Sutton:

Graham had long feared that women’s efforts to move into new spheres had hastened the breakdown of culture. Too many women, he lamented in the 1950s, “are wearing the trousers in the family” despite the biblical principle “that the husband is the head of the house.” Nevertheless, Graham believed that God had still given women essential responsibilities to fulfill. “The Bible,” he explained. “teaches that the wife is to make the home as happy as possible... as near like heaven as possible.” In case Graham’s biblical exposition went over the heads of those he hoped to reach, he offered women some practical suggestions for serving their husbands. “You can keep the house clean, and in order, you can prepare his favorite dishes and have the meals on time... Consider, too, that any slovenliness or carelessness in your dress or personal appearance and cleanliness will naturally lessen the admiration and love your husband has for you.” Ruth Graham agreed with her beau, “I just don’t approve of the working wife,” she told a reporter.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup> George M. Marsden, *Religion and American Culture: A Brief History* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 199.

<sup>46</sup> Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 332.

<sup>47</sup> Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 332.

<sup>48</sup> Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 333.

During the 1950s and 1960s, there was a substantial limitation on women regarding their roles, their voice, and their leadership. However, in many ways, this was a normative ideology of the church that spilled over into culture. After all, “the men who crafted postwar evangelicalism believed that while women could contribute to the movement as missionaries and in Christian education, gender roles remained absolute.”<sup>49</sup> However, sexism was not the only entity that defined the 1950s and 1960s.

Many “evangelical leaders expressed criticism of the civil rights movement.”<sup>50</sup> One of the most outspoken leaders, “Dan Gilbert, identified civil rights activists as the ‘rabble-rousers’ that Daniel had prophesied for the end times.”<sup>51</sup> Jerry Falwell Sr. was also a strong opponent of the civil rights movement:

Jerry Falwell supported the South’s autonomy when it came to issues of race. In 1964 President Johnson asked clergy across the nation to support a new civil rights bill. Falwell, like many other socially conservative ministers, did not give the president his endorsement. “It is a terrible violation of human and private property rights,” Falwell claimed. “It should be considered civil wrongs rather than civil rights.” On a seemingly routine Sunday morning the following year, Falwell preached what became one of the most famous (or infamous) sermons of his career in response to the march of Martin Luther King, Jr. in Selma, Alabama. Falwell began by reminding the men and women at Thomas Road Baptist Church that their citizenship resided in heaven, not on earth. “Preachers,” he declared, “are not called to be politicians but to be soul winners...if as much effort could be put into winning people to Jesus Christ across the land as is being exerted in the present civil rights movement, America would be turned upside down for God.”<sup>52</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 333.

<sup>50</sup> Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 335.

<sup>51</sup> Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 335.

<sup>52</sup> Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 336.

After the 1960s, numerous conservative churches closed their minds, closed conversations, and shut their doors. They lambasted the civil rights movement, undergirded feminism, and stood their ground against the hypothetical shifting sands of society. However, luckily, they were not the only voices that took up the microphone.

### **President Jimmy Carter and The Great Political Divide**

Evangelical Ethics, political persuasions, and theological philosophies shifted during the 1970s. According to Randall Balmer, a Huffington Post contributor:

Over Thanksgiving weekend in 1973, a gathering of fifty-five evangelical leaders produced a remarkable document called the Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern. Just as progressive evangelicals in the previous century had decried slavery and the gap between rich and poor, the Chicago Declaration lamented the persistence of racial and economic inequality. Evangelicals in the nineteenth century had been active in the peace movement and agitated for equal rights for women, including voting rights; the Chicago Declaration condemned the nation's militarism and issued a full-throated defense of women's rights.<sup>53</sup>

In many ways, the Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern<sup>54</sup> forged a path for progressive influence within the evangelical construct. However, it also paved the way for presidential hopeful Jimmy Carter to change the face of evangelical culture. Jonathan Merritt controversial journalist and contributor to *The Atlantic* reveals:

In 1976, the term went mainstream when a peanut farmer named Jimmy Carter won the Democratic primary and then the general election. He became the first U.S. President to call himself a “born again” Evangelical Christian. Pundits

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<sup>53</sup> Randall Balmer, “Jimmy Carter and the Evangelical Divide,” HuffPost, August 9, 2014, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/jimmy-carter-evangelical-\\_b\\_5473456](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/jimmy-carter-evangelical-_b_5473456).

<sup>54</sup> “Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern (1973),” <https://www.evangelicalsforsocialaction.org>, November 25, 1973, <https://www.evangelicalsforsocialaction.org/about-esa-2/history/chicago-declaration-evangelical-social-concern/>.

scrambled to understand who Evangelicals were and how many existed. Newsweek ran a cover story declaring 1976 the “year of the Evangelical.”<sup>55</sup>

The inauguration of President Jimmy Carter shaped the next chapter within American evangelicalism. However, “despite his evangelical credentials, Carter’s liberal Democratic politics soon proved unpopular with many white evangelicals.”<sup>56</sup> If anything, “a new movement of white evangelicalism awakened during his presidency, one that was socially conservative and hostile to his agenda and to him personally.”<sup>57</sup> Progressive Christianity was damned.

The “more conservative Evangelicals who diverged from President Carter politically began mobilizing under new organizational banners like the Christian Coalition and the Moral Majority”<sup>58</sup> and the “movement known as the Religious Right, began agitating to deny Carter, their fellow evangelical, a second term.”<sup>59</sup> According to Balmer:

Carter and other progressive evangelicals, drawing on the tradition of nineteenth-century evangelical activism that cared for those on the margins of society, enjoyed a brief resurgence in the mid-1970s. But that surge was short-lived. Politically conservative evangelicals, led by Falwell and coordinated by Weyrich, forged the Religious Right to ensure that Carter, himself an evangelical, would be denied a second term. Evangelical politics has never been the same.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Jonathan Merritt, “Defining ‘Evangelical,’” *The Atlantic*, December 7, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/12/evangelical-christian/418236/>.

<sup>56</sup> George M. Marsden, *Religion and American Culture: A Brief History* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 238.

<sup>57</sup> Clyde Haberman, “Religion and Right-Wing Politics: How Evangelicals Reshaped Elections,” *The New York Times*, October 28, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/28/us/religion-politics-evangelicals.html>

<sup>58</sup> Merritt, “Defining ‘Evangelical.’”

<sup>59</sup> Balmer, “Jimmy Carter and the Evangelical Divide.”

<sup>60</sup> Balmer, “Jimmy Carter and the Evangelical Divide.”

After the Religious Right had silenced Carter, “conservative Christian leaders embraced the spotlight and their newfound legitimacy.”<sup>61</sup> This move toward conservatism not only changed the trajectory of politics; it also changed the definition of American Christianity. “Over time and in the minds of many, *Evangelical* became a catch-all term for politically conservative Christians.”<sup>62</sup> According to William E. Connolly author of *Capitalism and Christianity American Style*, “The radical Christian right *compensates* a series of class resentments and injustices produced by the collision between cowboy capitalism and critical social movements by promising solace in the church and the family.”<sup>63</sup> Clyde Haberman, a contributor to the *New York Times*, asserts, “American evangelicals had long steered clear of politics, but that was no longer so.”<sup>64</sup> That was no longer the case. After the Religious Right directed the trajectory of politics, they also created a stronger divide within the sanctuary; liberty and justice became a privilege for the *few*.

### **Conversion Therapy, Culture, and Conformity**

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the Religious Right shifted the definition of evangelical expectation and created platforms of conversion, conservatism, and conformity. “By the 1980s, gays and lesbians gained wide recognition as a minority group and significant protection against discrimination.”<sup>65</sup> However, the majority of the

<sup>61</sup> Merritt, “Defining ‘Evangelical.’”

<sup>62</sup> Merritt, “Defining ‘Evangelical.’”

<sup>63</sup> William E. Connolly, *Capitalism and Christianity, American Style* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 34.

<sup>64</sup> Haberman, “Religion and Right-Wing Politics.”

<sup>65</sup> Marsden, *Religion and American Culture*, 230.

Religious Right believed they were exempt from antidiscrimination policies. Many conservative pastors and leaders poured money and muscle into promoting the message that homosexuality was a treatable disorder and conversion therapy was the most loving choice.

During the 1980s and 1990s, sexual ethics became a witch hunt, where men and women were placed on a stage, shamed in front of their peers, and lifted as examples of misconduct. Numerous organizations “promised to turn gay men and women straight,”<sup>66</sup> which meant that numerous Gen Xers and Millennials were presented with two options: 1) remain quiet, or 2) be honest and endure the abuse. The idea of acceptance was never an option, especially since the majority of pastors and leaders within the Religious Right believed that homosexuality was a psychological disturbance<sup>67</sup> or spiritual attack.

During my research, I had the opportunity to sit down and interview a survivor of conversion therapy. He shared with me his story and revealed:

When I think about my interactions with Christianity, especially when I came out as transgender and gay, I can only describe evangelicals in one way. They are like an army ready for battle, waiting for someone to give them the order on whom to fight, and more often than not, it is the LGBT+ community or another marginalized group.<sup>68</sup>

The book *Boy Erased* is another account of one man’s journey through conversion therapy. It “tells the true story of Garrard Conley, a 19-year-old boy’s time in a ‘gay

<sup>66</sup> Jonathan Merritt, “How Christians Turned Against Gay Conversion Therapy,” The Atlantic, April 15, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/04/how-christians-turned-against-gay-conversion-therapy/390570/>.

<sup>67</sup> Jamie Scot, “Shock the Gay Away: Secrets of Early Gay Aversion Therapy Revealed (Photos),” HuffPost, December 6, 2017, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/shock-the-gay-away-secrets-of-early-gay-aversion-therapy-revealed\\_b\\_3497435](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/shock-the-gay-away-secrets-of-early-gay-aversion-therapy-revealed_b_3497435).

<sup>68</sup> IRB Interview for research in October 2019.

conversion' program, the indignities and abuse of which he later wrote about."<sup>69</sup> Before conversation therapy was illegal<sup>70</sup> in most states, countless pastors and leaders were encouraged to send hundreds of teens to conversion therapy or at least try to *counsel the gay out of them.*

According to Casey Sanchez, a contributor to *Southern Poverty Law Center*, "Focus on the Family, the largest and wealthiest Christian Right organization in the country, even invited John Smid, director of *Love in Action*, [a conversion therapy organization] to appear several times a year on an ex-gay lecture circuit called Love Won Out."<sup>71</sup> Interestingly enough, in 2016, Smid "revealed that he was gay and that it was impossible to change one's sexual orientation."<sup>72</sup> Smid presented his new theology publicly; however, by then, his words had already influenced conservative evangelicals and their perception of the LGBT+ community. Smid might have changed his perspective, but not all followed suit.

Falwell Sr. was leading the army against the other, and Pat Robertson, Dr. James Dobson, and newcomer Tim LaHaye, author of *The Left Behind* series,<sup>73</sup> were recruiting

<sup>69</sup> Angelica Florio, "Where's the Real 'Jared' from 'boy Erased' in 2018? Garrard Conley Is Sharing His Memories of Conversion Therapy in a New Way," Bustle, November 1, 2018, <https://www.bustle.com/p/wheres-the-real-jared-from-boy-erased-in-2018-garrard-conley-is-sharing-his-memories-of-conversion-therapy-in-a-new-way-12975918>.

<sup>70</sup>, Casey Leins, "States That Have Banned Conversion Therapy," U.S. News, April 11, 2019, <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/articles/2019-04-11/these-states-have-banned-conversion-therapy>.

<sup>71</sup> Casey Sanchez, "Memphis Area Love in Action Offers Residential Program to 'Cure' Homosexuality," January 1, 2003, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2003/memphis-area-love-action-offers-residential-program-'cure'-homosexuality>.

<sup>72</sup> "John Smid, 'Former 'ex-Gay' Leader, Says He Is Gay and Changing Sexual Orientation Is Impossible (Video)," HuffPost, February 2, 2016, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/john-smid-former-ex-gay-minister-sexual-orientation-\\_n\\_1022417](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/john-smid-former-ex-gay-minister-sexual-orientation-_n_1022417).

<sup>73</sup> Wayne Jackson, "The Left Behind Series," Christian Courier, accessed December 26, 2019, <https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/262-left-behind-series-the>.

the troops. In many ways, “LaHaye left a legacy with which modern evangelicals and their critics will long have to wrestle,”<sup>74</sup> specifically concerning purity culture and sexuality. According to Sutton:

While LaHaye has never achieved the widespread renown of Jerry Falwell or Billy Graham, he embodies all of the trends of post-1970s evangelicalism. He may have even had a more substantial impact on the movement than his more famous colleagues. He began his career as a suburban San Diego pastor and built the Scott Memorial Baptist Church into a thriving congregation; he opened a series of Christian day schools and a Bible college; he helped found the Institute for Creation Research; organized the Pre-Trib Research Center; he wrote best-selling self-help and marriage books and even a relatively explicit sex primer that sold in the millions; he wrote a series of books in the 1970s and 1980s that helped shape and inspire the rise of the religious right, including two early books criticizing same-sex relationships.<sup>75</sup>

Millennials in the church had many things to wrestle with during their teen years, and in many ways, their most significant obstacle was not society but the church, especially since the “parent of Evangelicalism was by far and large nineteenth-century and twentieth-century Protestant fundamentalism.”<sup>76</sup> The 1990s Kingdom Come mentality created a dictatorial genocide that removed cognitive dissonance and generational divergence. All forms of difference were viewed as a threat.

## **Summary**

Chapter 3 explores the variants of evangelicalism, starting with the theologies of Bebbington and Marsden. However, it also investigates the evolutionary shifts that changed the trajectory and definition of evangelical culture, including liberalism and

<sup>74</sup> Jackson, “The Left Behind Series.”

<sup>75</sup> Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 366.

<sup>76</sup> Witherington, *The Problem with Evangelical Theology*, 263.

fundamentalism. Thus, evangelicalism was not solely distorted by Jerry Falwell Sr., Pat Robertson, or Tim LaHaye. However, each of them played a part in the redefinition of the evangelical movement, especially concerning sexuality and feminism. Chapter 4 continues in this research and looks at the parallels between modern-day evangelical culture and generational dissonance. It also continues to explore how contemporary evangelicalism became an entity characterized by sexism, racism, homophobia, and nationalism.

## CHAPTER 4:

### SEXISM, RACISM, HOMOPHOBIA, AND NATIONALISM—THE NEW CHURCH

#### **Generational Shift from Conservative Evangelicalism**

According to John S. Dickerson, the senior pastor at Cornerstone Evangelical Free Church in Prescott, Arizona, “You don’t have to talk, work, or study outside evangelical circles for long to realize that we are not possibly that much of the United States population in the 21st century. No matter how you stack it, evangelicals do not account for eight in every ten Americans...the number is less than one in ten.”<sup>1</sup> In many ways, Millennials and Generation Z resonate more with The Gay Christian Network than The Gospel Coalition; however, this shift within faith expression started years ago in the form of the emergent church.

#### **The Emergent Church**

During the mid-aughts, an entire generation shifted the world’s perception of faith and challenged them to shift their perception of Christ. This movement was not led by a specific leader but voiced by a collaborative generation. According to John S. Dickerson, author of *The Great Evangelical Recession: 6 Factors that Will Crash the American Church and How to Prepare*, “Before 2004, only three evangelical leaders publicly challenged the religious right’s agenda: Jim Wallis, of *Sojourners*; Tony Campolo, a well-known Baptist preacher; and Ron Sider, the president of Evangelicals for Social

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<sup>1</sup> 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), 26.

Action.”<sup>2</sup> However, it did not take long until more leaders joined the march against fundamentalism and voiced their theological perspectives—and become the building blocks of the emergent church movement.

The genesis of the emergent church was an amalgamation of diversified perspectives coming together to produce a theological construct that resonated with an entire generation of skeptics, which, in turn, produced an organism that was relevant to a post-Christian and post-Enlightenment society. According to Tony Jones, author of *The New Christians: Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier*:

The emergents are, in some ways, pioneers and, in some ways, expatriates. They do come from somewhere—most often a conventional Christian upbringing—but they are forsaking their homelands and choosing life on the frontier. They tend to be young, urban and educated, but as emergent sensibilities spread around the world, those characteristics are becoming more tenuous as descriptors. In some ways, there’s nothing new here. Since the Gospel writers penned their witness to the faith, theologians have argued about how we talk about God, who Jesus is, and how humans relate to God. And since the earliest Christians transformed their Roman peristyle homes into *domus ecclesiae*, followers of Jesus have found new and innovative ways to orient their lives, collectively and individually. But too often in our history, the innovative theoreticians have sat safely ensconced in their tenured chairs, rarely deigning to speak with the lowly church folk. Meanwhile, innovative church leaders think the theologians and the biblical scholars have lost all touch with reality and instead busy themselves with the latest technical innovations in “how to do church.” If the emergent church has anything rare, or even unique, it’s the nexus of theory and praxis, or innovative theology and innovative practice. These twin impulses of rethinking theology and rethinking church are driving the nascent growth of emergent Christianity. And love it or hate it, it can’t be ignored.<sup>3</sup>

Brian McLaren, Tony Jones, Rob Bell, and countless others forged a movement that attracted Millennials to Christianity because they presented the gospel with an open hand

<sup>2</sup> Frances FitzGerald, “The New Evangelicals,” *The New Yorker*, June 23, 2008, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/06/30/the-new-evangelicals>.

<sup>3</sup> Tony Jones, *The New Christians: Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009), xix.

and open mind. However, they also embraced a type of faith expression that was open-ended. Dr. David John Seel Jr. delves explores this generational distinctive and suggests:

Millennials are aware that lived experience is not easily reduced to black-and-white categories. Lived reality is tainted with an uneasy and ever-changing mix of viewpoints and perspectives. The lines are blurred, the colors mixed, the motives conflicted. Reality is more 3-D than 2-D—more opaque angles than straightforward reasons, more picture than proposition, more poetry than prose. This is not to say that truth does not exist, only that it does not come to us in a manner unmixed with doubt, confusion, and limitations.<sup>4</sup>

In many ways, the emergent church movement captured the attention of Millennials because it welcomed doubt, embraced uncertainty, and made space for inclusion, diversity, and equality. Emergent leaders might have made headlines, but they were also told to go to hell.

It is imperative to understand that during the early 2000s, there was a strong current of fear within the church and a strong antagonism toward education, especially seminary education. In 2004, Barna Research conducted a study centering on generational differences between Generation X pastors and their Baby Boomer counterparts. They discovered, “Generation X pastors did not take the conventional path of ministry education. Less than half of Generation X pastors (46%) had a seminary degree, compared to two-thirds of Boomers (62%).”<sup>5</sup> Thus, many evangelical pulpits were equipped with charismatic preachers in Vans sneakers, distressed jeans, and trucker hats, but who were ill-equipped to face the changing theological landscape of the emergent church movement—especially because it centered outside the boundaries of

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<sup>4</sup> David John Seel, *The New Copernicans: Millennials and the Survival of the Church* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2018), 49.

<sup>5</sup> “A New Generation of Pastors Places Its Stamp on Ministry,” Barna Group, February 17, 2004, <https://www.barna.com/research/a-new-generation-of-pastors-places-its-stamp-on-ministry/>

conservative evangelical thought. However, instead of educating themselves on the issues or looking at scholarly resources, the majority of evangelical pastors and leaders based their opinion on popular conspiracy-driven websites, radio programs, and publications. Some of the most prominent: The Christian Courier, Christians Want to Know, Got Questions, CARM.org, and Stand Up for the Truth.

Wayne Jackson contributed an article to the *Christian Courier* in response to a study by Pew Research. He warns:

These are trying times for the body of Christ. But it is not a time for despair. Instead, courageous men and women must keep the ship of Zion on a straight (and strait) course within the boundaries of divine truth. Truth will prevail in spite of the winds of change—and irrelevant statistics.<sup>6</sup>

Matt Slick, president and founder of the Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry, warns evangelicals about the emergent church and claims that Brian McLaren and Alan Jones are preaching heresies. According to Slick:

Alan Jones, the dean of Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, California... wrote the book *Reimagining Christianity*. This book is nothing more than a heresy-fest authored by someone who has little, if any, understanding of biblical truth. I found in its pages scores of unbiblical, anti-Christian, and plain-ole stupid comments. In fact, the book is so bad that I would doubt the salvation of anyone who would knowingly approve of it. Seriously, it is that bad!<sup>7</sup>

He goes on to state, “Brian McLaren does not support the essentials. He offers us a feel good, relative kind of assessment combined with a reinterpretation of biblical truths all housed in Christian sounding prose. This makes him dangerous.”<sup>8</sup> Numerous evangelical

<sup>6</sup> Wayne Jackson, “The Emerging Church Movement—The New Face of Heresy,” Christian Courier, accessed March 6, 2020, <https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/1473-emerging-church-movement-the-new-face-of-heresy-the>

<sup>7</sup> Matt Slick, “Reimagining Christianity, by Alan Jones,” CARM.org, December 23, 2007, <https://carm.org/reimagining-christianity-alan-jones>

<sup>8</sup> Matt Slick, “Brian McLaren Quotes, ‘Bible’ to ‘Homosexuality,’” CARM.org, December 24, 2007, <https://carm.org/brian-mclaren-quotes-bible-homosexuality>

pastors and leaders viewed themselves as biblical prophets leading the charge against the false teachers of the emergent church movement. However, no one was more vocal than Dr. John MacArthur.

MacArthur joined the onslaught of evangelical apologists and presented his opinion on the emergent church movement during a podcast interview in 2006. He boldly declared, “These people, like the liberals, deny the clear teaching of Scripture. And I’m convinced that the reason they deny it is not because it can’t be understood, not because it’s unclear, but because they don’t like what it clearly says.”<sup>9</sup> MacArthur went on to suggest:

One of the big issues is homosexuality in the Emerging Church. They don’t want to take a position on homosexuality. The Bible is not vague or obscure or oblique about homosexuality. It couldn’t be more clear. A homosexual will not inherit the Kingdom of God...that’s pretty clear. Homosexuality in Romans chapter 1 is a perversion that is manifestly when it happens in a culture, begins to dominate a culture, and evidence of divine wrath and divine judgment. So the Bible is clear. They don’t want that clarity. They want to run from the light. Scripture is light, it is not darkness, but they like the darkness because their deeds are evil. So, I think the motive behind this whole Emerging Church thing, whether it’s a conscious or unconscious motive, is discomfort over what the Bible really says.<sup>10</sup>

Rev. Rutledge E. Etheridge III, professor of Biblical Studies at Geneva College, and numerous others within conservative Christianity echoed the same sentiment. “If the Emerging Church eventually defines Christ’s church, then the church as Christ defined it

<sup>9</sup> Phil Johnson, “What’s So Dangerous About the Emerging Church?” Grace to You, October 19, 2006, <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/GTY107/Whats-So-Dangerous-About-the-Emerging-Church>.

<sup>10</sup> Johnson, “What’s So Dangerous About the Emerging Church?”

will be no more.”<sup>11</sup> However, the emergent church had already changed the narrative for many Millennials—it gave them permission to embrace doubt alongside their faith.

The late Rachel Held Evans was one of the brave sentinels who defined the growing dissonance amongst the Millennial generation. Evans confessed in her book *Searching for Sunday: Loving, Leaving, and Finding the Church*, “Like every generation, we’re looking for Jesus—the same Jesus who can be found in the strange places he’s always been found: in bread, in wine, in baptism, in the Word, in suffering, in community, and among the least of these.”<sup>12</sup> Many Millennials felt as Evans had in the early aughts, especially as they stepped into early adulthood. However, they also realized that their progressive perspectives would not be welcomed within their childhood evangelical churches. They recognized that there was only one choice—deconstructionism.

### **A New Form of Christianity**

Every generation has influenced the trajectory of the church; however, Millennials chose to redefine their faith by deconstructing their evangelical beliefs—and many believed that they needed to lose a lot of their conservative baggage before they trekked the long journey of theological adaptation. Millennials might have removed many aspects of American evangelicalism, but they embraced the ideologies of inclusion, diversity, and equality, including gender equality, LGBT+ inclusion, and racial

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<sup>11</sup> Eric Young, “Emerging Church Movement Threatens Church Foundation, Says Pastor,” Christian Post, January 24, 2009, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/emerging-church-movement-threatens-church-foundation-says-pastor.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Rachel Held Evans, *Searching for Sunday: Loving, Leaving, and Finding the Church* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 2015), xiv.

reconciliation. However, much like with the emerging church movement, Millennials did not construct this new form of faith expression unscathed. Many evangelical leaders have purposed to dismantle progressive Christianity and label it as heretical or unbiblical in its worldview. Barna, even though it claims to be unbiased, has not helped the situation.

### *Do Millennials and Generation Z have a Biblical Worldview?*

According to Barna Research, “The percentage of people with a biblical worldview declines in each generation. Boomers are 10%, Gen X are 7%, Millennials are 6%, and Gen Z are at an all-time low of 4%.”<sup>13</sup> The problem with this assessment is that it fails to use the right measuring tool to gauge generational reality and, in turn, presents false results. One’s biblical worldview cannot be autonomous from one’s denominational values, cultural perspectives, or theological interpretation. This is not to state that one’s biblical worldview is a relativistic perception; however, it is more than a blanket statement of belief. The basis of Christianity is in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but one’s “biblical worldview” is colored by more than one’s interaction with scripture. In many ways, it is colored by self-preservation and personal perspective.

For example, when one looks at the “biblical worldview” of a progressive Christian, they will find elements of social justice, equality, inclusion, and practicality as the basis of their foundational perspectives. This lends itself to a communal perspective and a soteriological theology that perpetuates a stance of personal salvation as well as systemic change, all of which the progressive Christian grounds in Scripture. However, if

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<sup>13</sup> Barna Group, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs, and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2018), 25.

one were to question the Religious Right and ask them their interpretation of a “biblical worldview,” one would be met with a strong stance against the LGBT community, a supportive position toward capitalism, and a skeptical perspective on gender equality. They would also find a strong defense regarding traditional marriage, hyper-masculinity, and antagonism towards interfaith tolerance. These views they also ground in the Bible. The majority of people, when asked to define a biblical worldview, will proclaim a view that elevates themselves and damns others, regardless of their political or denominational affiliation.

Franklin Graham is a classic example of a Religious Right perspective. He recently spoke about his perception of a biblical worldview and stated, “Over and against every competing worldview, the Bible forcefully declares, ‘Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.’”<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, Graham’s idea of being “conformed to this world” is a progressive’s definition of Christianity. For example, according to Deborah Jian Lee, author of *Rescuing Jesus: How People of Color, Women, and Queer Christians are Reclaiming Evangelicalism*:

Progressive evangelicals have been a weak but constant force since the 1970s—but that’s changing. The religious right has lost its hold among millennial Americans: About 23% are religious progressives, twice the portion of those 68 and older (12%), according to the Public Religion Research Institute. White evangelical millennials are also twice as likely as evangelicals over 65 to support same-sex marriage. And their missional attitude toward changing their communities makes them a unique force. America has become more secular, and membership in every branch of U.S. Christianity has dwindled—except evangelicalism. A growing minority of millennial evangelicals … are non-white

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<sup>14</sup> Franklin Graham, “Franklin Graham: A Biblical Worldview in Today’s Culture,” <https://billygraham.org>, March 13, 2018, <https://www.billygraham.ca/stories/franklin-graham-a-biblical-worldview-in-todays-culture/>

and much more likely to support progressive issues including social justice, equal rights, marriage equality, and combatting climate change.<sup>15</sup>

However, according to Graham, “Progressives are just another term for godless.”<sup>16</sup> In many ways, Franklin Graham’s perspective speaks to the fundamental ideology of many white evangelicals, and this is not coincidental. Many fundamentalists have clung onto conservative ethics in order to perpetuate cultural, gender, and racial prejudice, all in the name of Christ. However, instead of masking their bias under white sheets, they preach their philosophy under white steeples. Richard Twiss (Taoyate Ob Najin) echoes this observation and asserts:

It isn’t unusual for influential church leaders to perceive any new movement as a threat to a “genuine” expression of Christian faith. Because these new ideas often originate in the margins of power and end up outside the culturally-formed religious “boxes” of these leaders, their authority as representatives of correct biblical truth is threatened.<sup>17</sup>

Twiss goes onto emphasize:

This has happened in Indigenous communities all over North America and among the Maori of New Zealand, Aborigine of Australia, Hawaiians, Quechua of Peru and around the world. The extensive mission history of the past, not biblical study, has prompted an intense fear of counteractive syncretism—instead of it being considered a part of the normal process of adaptation.<sup>18</sup>

Many Millennials and Generation Z are changing the church and, in many ways, dismantling the discriminatory narratives of conservative evangelicalism. However, in

<sup>15</sup> Deborah Jian Lee, “Why the Young Religious Right Is Leaning Left,” *Time*, October 20, 2015, <https://time.com/4078909/evangelical-millennials/>.

<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Dias, “The Evangelical Fight to Win Back California,” *The New York Times*, March 27, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/27/us/politics/franklin-graham-evangelicals-california.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Twiss, *Rescuing the Gospel from the Cowboys: A Native American Expression of the Jesus Way* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2015), 36.

<sup>18</sup> Twiss, *Rescuing the Gospel from the Cowboys*, 37.

order to see this reality, one must also understand the biases that influence survey methodology—especially amongst evangelical companies. Many research organizations suggest that Christianity has dropped drastically amongst younger generations; however, this is not accurate.

The majority of Millennials and Generation Z do not subscribe to a “white” evangelical narrative; therefore, many of them will not support a conservative evangelical worldview. Thus, in order to understand the changing shifts within generational Christianity, one must be aware of the changing perspectives and ideologies, especially concerning generational perceptions of conservative evangelicalism. Barna might not acknowledge that Millennials and Generation Z have a *biblical worldview*; however, in my opinion, they have a *better worldview*—one that opposes racism, sexism, homophobia, and nationalism.

### *Race and the Evangelical Church*

Johnathan Wilson-Hartgrove, writer, speaker, and activist, poses the question, “Why are Millennials choosing to part ways with the faith of their parents?”<sup>19</sup> Dr. Mark Labberton, President of Fuller Theological Seminary postulates:

The Church is in one of its deepest moments of crisis—not because of some election result or not, but because of what has been exposed to be the poverty of the American Church in its capacity to be able to see and love and serve and engage in ways in which we simply fail to do. And that vocation is the vocation that must be recovered and must be made real in tangible action.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *Reconstructing the Gospel: Finding Freedom from Slaveholder Religion* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2018), 36.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Wehner, “The Deepening Crisis in Evangelical Christianity,” The Atlantic, July 5, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/07/evangelical-christians-face-deepening-crisis/593353/>.

Previous generations might have redecorated the walls of the sanctuary or added smoke machines during worship, but Millennials differ from their predecessors because they refuse to just add to the church. They want to deconstruct—and they want to dismantle some of the strongest pillars that have infiltrated their faith, one of the strongest being racism.

Jemar Tisby, president of *The Witness: A Black Collective* and cohost of *Pass the Mic* podcast, suggests:

In previous eras, racism among Christian believers was much easier to detect and identify. Professing believers openly used racial slurs, participated in beatings and lynchings, fought wars to preserve slavery, or used the Bible to argue for the inherent inferiority of black people. And those who did not openly resist these actions—those who remained silent—were complicit in their acceptance. Since the 1970s, Christian complicity in racism has become more difficult to discern. It is hidden, but that does not mean it no longer exists. As we look more closely at the realm of politics, we see that Christians complicity with racism remains, even as it has taken on subtler forms. Again, we must remember: racism never goes away; it adapts.<sup>21</sup>

One of the more significant forms of racism occurs within the majority of evangelical Protestant churches. According to Lifeway Research, “85% of senior pastors of Protestant churches say every church should strive for racial diversity. However, only 13% of Protestant churches say they have more than one predominant racial or ethnic group in their congregation.”<sup>22</sup> Laura Turner, a contributor to Religion News, suggests that hypocrisy is not merely a characteristic of the church, it is also a significant issue within many Christian nonprofit organizations and conferences. “Back in 2015, the

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<sup>21</sup> Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth About the American Church’s Complicity in Racism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 155.

<sup>22</sup> Bob Smietana, “Research: Racial Diversity at Church More Dream Than Reality,” Lifeway Research, January 17, 2014, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2014/01/17/research-racial-diversity-at-church-more-dream-than-reality/>.

Storyline Conference featured an all-white plenary speaker lineup and breakout speakers who were almost all white as well.”<sup>23</sup> Jonathan Merritt, another contributor for Religion News, conducted a study and looked at the representation of minorities within evangelical events. He discovered, “Out of 775 speakers, only 99 were the minority, which equates to around 13% representation.”<sup>24</sup> Millennials have seen the shift within Christianity and watched in shock and repugnance as their childhood homes of worships became hubs of white supremacy.

Instead of addressing systematic racism within the evangelical church, the majority of pastors and leaders chose to create facades of change. Congregants were entertained by riveting sermons, charismatic worship, and a smattering of diversified presence, but the foundational pillars of evangelicalism continued to be corroded by systemic and structural racism. Jim Wallis, President Barack Obama’s spiritual advisor, and founder and president of the Christian magazine Sojourners, suggests:

The political and economic problems of race are ultimately rooted in a theological problem. Modern white Christians might not own slaves or even all walk to the other side of the street to avoid passing a young black man, but they do benefit from white privilege, … whether they’re aware of it or not. To benefit from oppression is to be responsible for changing it.<sup>25</sup>

Countless evangelical church leaders would rather present a riveting sermon that speaks to the need for inclusion, reconciliation, and equality without having to pay the price for

<sup>23</sup> Laura Turner, “The Storyline Conference and the All-White Speaker Lineup,” Religion News, November 6, 2015, <https://religionnews.com/2015/11/06/the-storyline-conference-and-the-all-white-speaker-lineup/>

<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Merritt, “Are Christian Conferences Racially Exclusive?” Religion News, November 20, 2013, <https://religionnews.com/2013/11/20/christian-conferences-racially-exclusive/>

<sup>25</sup> Melissa Binder, “White Christians Need to Repent for Systemic Racism, Author Says,” OregonLive, February 17, 2016, [https://www.oregonlive.com/faith/2016/02/white\\_christians\\_need\\_to\\_repen.html](https://www.oregonlive.com/faith/2016/02/white_christians_need_to_repen.html)

systematic change. However, this apathetic response is no longer an option—especially when the majority of people who identify as Christians within the world are people of color.

### **White Evangelicalism and Racial Influence**

According to Rev. Dr. Soong-Chan Rah, author and Milton B. Associate Professor of Church Growth and Evangelism at North Park Theological Seminary:

Fifty years ago, if you were asked to describe a typical Christian in the world, you could confidently assert that person to be an upper-middle-class, white male, living in an affluent and comfortable Midwest suburb. If you were to ask the same question today, that answer would more likely be a young Nigerian mother on the outskirts of Logos, a university student in Seoul, South Korea, or a teenage boy in Mexico City. European and North American Christianity continues to decline, while African, Asian, and Latin-American Christianity continue to increase dramatically.<sup>26</sup>

The majority of this shift is dependent on the influx of diversity within the United States, increase in birth rate, and immigration. According to Hansi Lo Wang, contributor for NPR, of “post-millennials, who are currently between the ages of 6 and 21, nearly half—48 percent—are from communities of color.”<sup>27</sup> Pew Research confirms this study and reveals that “one-in-four post-Millennials are Hispanic and nearly half of post-Millennials are racial or ethnic minorities.”<sup>28</sup> It is imperative that one understands the changing landscape of America because it echoes the shift within evangelical culture:

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<sup>26</sup> Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Releasing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009), 13.

<sup>27</sup> Hansi Lo Wang, “Generation Z Is the Most Racially and Ethnically Diverse Yet,” NPR, November 15, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/2018/11/15/668106376/generation-z-is-the-most-racially-and-ethnically-diverse-yet>.

<sup>28</sup> “Nearly Half of Post-Millennials Are Racial or Ethnic Minorities,” Pew Research Center, November 13, 2018, [https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2018/11/15/early-benchmarks-show-post-millennials-on-track-to-be-most-diverse-best-educated-generation-yet/psdt-11-15-18\\_postmillennials-00-00/](https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2018/11/15/early-benchmarks-show-post-millennials-on-track-to-be-most-diverse-best-educated-generation-yet/psdt-11-15-18_postmillennials-00-00/).

As many lament the decline of Christianity in the United States in the early stages of the twenty-first century, very few have recognized that American Christianity may be growing, but in unexpected and surprising ways. The American church needs to face the inevitable and prepare for the next stage of her history—we are looking at a nonwhite majority, multiethnic American Christianity in the immediate future. Unfortunately, despite these drastic demographic changes, American evangelicalism remains enamored with an ecclesiology and a value system that reflect a dated and increasingly irrelevant cultural captivity and are disconnected from both a global and local reality.<sup>29</sup>

According to Soong-Chan Rah, America is captivated with white evangelicalism; however, much of this preference is based upon fear of otherness. The evangelical community is supportive of diversification—as long as it is in the form of tokenism, white saviorism, and colonization. African scholar Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o described his own interaction with and understanding of colonization. He reveals:

The biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism...is the cultural bomb. The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves; for instance, with other peoples' languages rather than their own...Possibilities of triumph or victory are seen as remote, ridiculous dreams. The intended results are despair, despondency and a collective death-wish.<sup>30</sup>

Jerry Falwell, Sr. might have forged a resistance against the civil rights movement during the 1960s; however, he left a remnant of pastors and leaders to perpetuate an ideology of segregation, subjugation, and damnation against the other from countless pulpits within America. In many ways, racism did not die; it merely became a normative, cultural, and even *Christian* dogma.

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<sup>29</sup> Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Releasing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009), 12.

<sup>30</sup> Twiss, *Rescuing the Gospel from the Cowboys*, 80.

The majority of Millennials and Generation Z grew up in a world where diversity was valued; however, they also grew up in churches where white privilege was normative. Many witnessed numerous evangelical pastors perpetuate a stance against the otherness and create barriers of exclusion—all in the name of Jesus. However, some pastors and leaders, raised their eyes to the reality of their surroundings and raised their voice against the evangelical expectations. Dr. Mac Pier and Dr. John M Perkins were two leaders who chose to start the resistance and create space for racial reconciliation.

*Dr. Mac Pier and Dr. John M. Perkins*

Dr. John M. Perkins, founder and president emeritus of the John and Vera Perkins Foundation, and Dr. Mac Pier, founder and CEO of The New York City Leadership Center, both have dismantled the chains of bias and created spaces of impartiality. Perkins and Pier were both interviewed by Barna and asked to provide leadership guidance for other pastors and leaders trying to create programs and ministries in reaction to racial injustice. They revealed:

Don’t think that “the program” is going to do it alone. It’s got to be multifaceted; it’s got to be holistic; it’s got to speak to the pain of the people. The program ought to be there, but we need to pray that God’s presence is there with us too. We get reconciliation mixed up with today’s secular issues, when reconciliation is first God and then to our fellow man. The local church has a call from God to facilitate this reconciliation. The mandate now is for the Church to obey the Great Commission. Now is the time for multicultural churches.<sup>31</sup>

They suggest, “For white Christians to be effective as bridge-builders and contributors in cities, the following things are important. 1) know your city, 2) be present

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<sup>31</sup> Barna Group, *Barna Trends 2018: What’s New and What’s next at the Intersection of Faith and Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017), 114.

in your city, 3) share power, 4) and think young.”<sup>32</sup> These men are just two of the leaders changing the way that they church interacts with systemic change and racial reconciliation. Both have made headlines for the incredible work that they conduct; however, they do not represent the majority within evangelicalism—especially among those who identify as fundamentalist in their theology and political position.

America might be known as the land of opportunity and considered a melting pot for all, but assimilation, gentrification, and discrimination still form the belief and praxis of countless evangelical leaders. However, much of this belief might stem from one’s eschatological stance—specifically one’s position on the apocalyptic theory of Dispensational Premillennialism.

#### *Dispensational Premillennialism, Penal Substitution, and Christus Victor*

It is necessary to understand that there is a strong correlation between one’s perception of social justice and their view of the end times. Some even believe that liberation justice is an antagonistic stance against the gospel of Christ because it questions the sovereignty of God. Eric Mason, author of *Woke Church: An Urgent Call for Christians in America to Confront Racism and Injustice*, explores this conservative ideology further and reveals:

There is some confusion today about the implications of the gospel, and to what degree the gospel includes this mandate of justice. Some Christians believe that to include social liberation and justice in the gospel is to preach a *different gospel*. Others believe that to exclude social liberation and justice as part of the gospel is to deny the gospel.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Barna Group, *Barna Trends 2018*, 114.

<sup>33</sup> Eric Mason, *Woke Church: An Urgent Call for Christians in America to Confront Racism and Injustice* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2018), 44.

Those who adhere to a gospel of personal and systemic change place their truth in the ideology of the Christus Victor theory. To them, Christ's death and resurrection is a statement of structural and personal change. Hence, good overcoming evil:

When Jesus broke religious taboos by fellowshipping with tax collectors, prostitutes and other sinners (e.g., Mt 11:19; Mk 2:15; Lk 5:29-30; 15:1, cf. Lk 7:31-37), and when he forsook religious traditions to lovingly heal and feed people on the Sabbath (Mt 12:1, 10; Lk 13:10-18; 14:1-5; Jn 5:9-10), in the light of Calvary we can understand him to be waging war against the powers and exposing the systemic evil that fuels religious legalism and oppression. He was conquering evil with love. When Jesus boldly crossed racial lines, fellowshipping and speaking highly of Samaritans and Gentiles (e.g. Lk 10:30-37; 17:11-16; Jn 4; Mt 8:5-10; 15:22-28 ), and when he crossed other social barriers—fellowshipping with and touching lepers for example (Mt 8:1-3; Mt 14:3)—he was resisting and exposing the evils of the powers that fuel racism and social marginalization. He was conquering evil with love.<sup>34</sup>

However, those who hold to the Penal Substitution theory view social justice as a potential interruption to God's will. This dichotomous relationship between social justice and self-preservation is nothing new. However, the differing soteriological and atonement perspectives have created strong divisions because each position influences one's perception of social justice. For example, according Dr. Greg Boyd, theologian, preacher, author, and apologist:

The cross wasn't about an angry god who needed to get punches in to be satisfied, but rather about a loving God who was reversing the narrative and sending the story in the direction of restoration and healing. It wasn't a horrific act of divine child abuse, but a beautiful act of reconciliation.<sup>35</sup>

Those who uphold an ideology of Penal Substitution believe that "justice is punishment, not healing and restoration."<sup>36</sup> This explains why the majority of conservative evangelical

<sup>34</sup> Greg Boyd, "The 'Christus Victor' View of the Atonement," <https://reknew.org>, November 29, 2018, <https://reknew.org/2018/11/the-christus-victor-view-of-the-atonement/>.

<sup>35</sup> Boyd, "The 'Christus Victor' View of the Atonement."

<sup>36</sup> Boyd, "The 'Christus Victor' View of the Atonement."

churches focus on isolation-based activities that feed the body and starve the outside community. However, the majority of Millennials and Generation Z support a theological ideology that stands for racial justice, LGBT+ inclusion, and gender equality.

Benjamin Corey, a doctoral candidate at Fuller Theological Seminary and contributor to *Sojourners*, gives readers a glimpse into the Millennial mindset. He asserts:

The justice we seek in society today all gets traced back to how we view the justice of the cross. The fact that our prison system has now become de facto mental institutions for individuals who are ill reveals that we are focused on justice as punishment, not justice as restoration and healing. The fact that we have elderly people in the prison system who look nothing like the act they committed 70 years past—but yet will never see the light of day—tells us that we see justice as punishment meted not as a life changed. In order to fix America’s broken framework in regard to justice, we must recover a holistic understanding of what happened on the cross and no longer reduce and distort it into to a punitive legal action. If we do this, we just might begin to build a culture that is hyper-focused not on punishing people but restoring lives.<sup>37</sup>

He goes on to say:

America’s justice system is broken. Our jails are overflowing, people are receiving life sentences for minor crimes under three-strikes laws, racial disparities leave minority populations disproportionately represented in the incarcerated population, and we’re so obsessed with killing that we’re now using untested concoctions of drugs that recently took a condemned inmate more than 20 minutes to finally die. Our system isn’t working. It might surprise you, however, to understand *how* we arrived at such a broken justice system. We got here because of poor theology.<sup>38</sup>

According to Corey, injustice did not occur out of evolutionary chaos—it arrived because of poor theology. So, how does one change? Brandon Robertson, speaker, advocate, and author, suggests, “We must always be willing to expand our minds to embrace the full

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<sup>37</sup> Benjamin Corey, “How a Poor Theology of the Cross Created America’s Broken Justice System,” *Sojourners*, February 4, 2014, <https://sojo.net/articles/how-poor-theology-cross-created-americas-broken-justice-system>.

<sup>38</sup> Corey, “How a Poor Theology of the Cross Created America’s Broken Justice System.”

diversity of God as revealed in humanity, which also means being willing to rethink and reform our policies, theology, and structures.”<sup>39</sup> One must question their beliefs before they change their behavior. Therefore, self-reflection is the only solvent for systemic change.

### **Evangelicalism and Privilege**

Dr. Randy S. Woodley, distinguished associate professor of faith and culture and director of indigenous and intercultural studies at George Fox University, asserts, “If we think of waging war against other human beings, we should first admit that they are our own distant brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles and grandparents, children and grandchildren.”<sup>40</sup> However, the majority of evangelical culture has not adopted a stance of inclusion or mutuality. If anything, they have embraced an idealized standard of white Christianity. Dr. Soong-Chan Rah expounds on this reality within Western culture and reveals:

Creating the other allowed Western culture to express its power over non-Western cultures. Inferiority is inferred when a culture or people are categorized as *the other*. European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even an underground self. In the same way that Western culture diminishes non-Western culture through the creation of an *otherness*, Western Christianity diminishes non-Western expressions of Christian theology and ecclesiology with the creation of *otherness*. When this sense of *otherness* is created, alienation between the races is created. When *the other* is cast as an exoticized outsider, then it creates a hostile environment for the marginalized person of color.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Brandan Robertson, *True Inclusion: Creating Communities of Radical Embrace* (Saint Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2018), 71.

<sup>40</sup> Randy S. Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2012), 86.

<sup>41</sup> Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Releasing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009), 79.

Dr. Robert P. Jones, CEO and founder of the Public Religion Research Institute, also declares:

The remains of White Christian America can still be seen in town squares of county seats in the South and Midwest. They are also visible in our oldest cities, where Protestant churches with tall steeples were erected centuries ago to keep a watchful eye over the centers of civic and business power. Today, many of these churches still preserve their core functions: conducting weekly worship services, leading Sunday Schools for children, and organizing charitable work for those in need. But even though the physical structures cast shadows as long as they did in the past, their cultural reach has shortened significantly. There are, to be sure, pockets of the country where the spirit of White Christian America still seems alive and well—like midwestern and southern exurbs, where lively megachurches have followed the outmigration of whites from cities, and rural communities, where churches and pastors continue to have vital social roles. But even within these reassuringly insular settings, it's no longer possible to believe that White Christian America sets the tone for the country's culture as a whole. And that realization—both for those inside and outside WCA's domain—marks something genuinely new in America.<sup>42</sup>

During the 1950s, “Free Will Baptist evangelist James ‘Catfish’ Cole’s tent meetings in North Carolina doubled as evangelistic events for [both] Jesus and the Ku Klux Klan.”<sup>43</sup>

Time has progressed; however, it has not changed for many. Racial discrimination continues to spew from the pulpit and influence the pews:

Racial divisions have been part of the American church for as long as it has existed. Many early denominational splits were driven by Christians who supported slavery and justified it with Bible verses. Historians argue that the spread of Christian private schools in the South in the 1960s and ’70s was largely driven by racism. White supremacy is undeniably a part of the history of American Christianity, as is abolition, and support for civil rights. Clashes over race have roiled congregations for as long as they’ve been in America.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Robert P. Jones, *The End of White Christian America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016), 40.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas S. Kidd, *Who Is an Evangelical? The History of a Movement in Crisis* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019), 103.

<sup>44</sup> Emma Green, “How Will the Church Reckon with Charlottesville?” *The Atlantic*, August 13, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/08/will-the-church-reckon-with-charlottesville/536718/>.

Bias has been a part of the framework of the American church for years; however, conservative evangelicals did not solely discriminate against people of color. In many ways, they formed the genesis of bias against all who formed the characteristics of *the other*.

### *Gender and Evangelicalism*

Since the mid-aughts, evangelicalism as a whole has been dying off; however, patriarchy and complementarian theology has had a resurgence, especially amongst denominations that are losing influence. John Piper, Lori Alexander, and Jackie Hill Perry are three of the many influencers perpetuating an ideology of complementarianism, gender subjugation, and role distinction. However, according to Brandon Robertson, author of *True Inclusion: Creating Communities of Radical Embrace*:

If our communities of faith are to be faithful to the teachings of Jesus, we must work to dismantle patriarchy in our communities and culture. We must work to create the alternative kingdom of God in the midst of the “kingdom” of this world, and seek to level the playing field so that all sit as equals around God’s table of grace. Patriarchy is the principle enemy of the Christian, and is the primary threat to the inclusive gospel of Jesus Christ. Everyone who claims to follow Jesus, the renegade rabbi from Nazareth who posed a literal threat to both the political and religious establishment, must follow in his footsteps by flinging open our doors, dismantling our hierarchies, and giving the voiceless back their voices. What does this mean in the context of our churches and individual lives? That, unless one is willing to work for the complete dismantling of patriarchy in our communities of faith and society, one is actually not interested in becoming inclusive at all. Likewise, if a church thinks it can welcome women but ignore racial justice and the LGBT+ community, it is fundamentally misunderstanding the problem and deceiving itself. Color, class, sexuality, and gender are all fundamentally tied together, and, to liberate one group, we must be willing to work for the liberation of all.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Robertson, *True Inclusion*, 61.

According to Robertson, the church is changing. To him, this change is not removing theology from the railroad, but putting it back on the tracks. In many ways, it is challenging the church to develop into an entity that expresses the heartbeat of Christ. Again, as mentioned in previous sections, Brandan Robertson and others are not asking the church to take a relativistic stance—they are inviting the church to embody an empathic perspective. I would say that one of the most significant barriers to Millennial engagement is the lack of gender equality within the sanctuary. However, gender equality differs generationally, especially when the majority of Millennials and Generation Z understand feminism from the fourth wave<sup>46</sup> perspective.

### *#MeToo Movement*

*Vox* conducted a survey of 40 women who ranged in age from their early 20s to late 60s. They discovered that generations drastically differed in their interaction with, response to, and tolerance of sexual misconduct. According to the study:

Older women had a greater tendency to view “sexual misconduct as something they simply had to put up with.” One of the women in her 50s tried to explain this phenomenon. She surmised, “in the ’80s and in the ’90s, harassment was accepted. It wasn’t talked about.” Younger women drastically differed in their response and their reactions. They were more likely to see sexual harassment at work as something they could change—and they described reporting the behavior to authority figures, and sometimes confronting the harassers themselves.<sup>47</sup>

The majority of Millennials and Generation Z have a lower tolerance toward sexual harassment because they grew up in a time that celebrated women’s empowerment. Thus,

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<sup>46</sup> Kira Cochrane, “The Fourth Wave of Feminism: Meet the Rebel Women,” *The Guardian*, December 10, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/10/fourth-wave-feminism-rebel-women>

<sup>47</sup> Anna North, “‘You Just Accepted It’: Why Older Women Kept Silent About Sexual Harassment — and Younger Ones Are Speaking Out,” *Vox*, March 20, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/2018/3/20/17116086/me-too-movement-sexual-harassment-workplace-millennials>.

they understood from an early age that their voice mattered and that they could accomplish anything. Some might call this entitlement. However, this generational belief in self-worth gave them the ability to dismantle biases within the workplace and within the sanctuary.

In 2019, numerous women, of all ages, voiced their distain and disgust against Dr. John MacArthur's abusive behavior toward Beth Moore. However, women were not the only ones who spoke against him. Thousands of men spoke against the vitriol of MacArthur and others. “One woman even posted on social media that John MacArthur’s response to another evangelical was the last straw for her husband—he’s leaving the church altogether.”<sup>48</sup> Numerous men and women might have posted their disgust on social media, but that did not stop conservative evangelical leaders from voicing their own support of MacArthur, Bill Hybels,<sup>49</sup> and even John Crist.<sup>50</sup> For years, conservative evangelicals have extended endless grace to offenders and endless shame upon their victims.

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<sup>48</sup> Jenny Rose Spaudo, “John Macarthur Tells Beth Moore to ‘Go Home,’ Says Bible Doesn’t Support Female Preachers,” Charisma News, October 21, 2019, <https://www.charismanews.com/us/78478-john-macarthur-tells-beth-moore-to-go-home-says-bible-doesn-t-support-female-preachers>.

<sup>49</sup> Jeff Coen, “Claims Against Willow Creek’s Bill Hybels of ‘Sexually Inappropriate’ Conduct Are Credible, New Report Says,” Chicago Tribune, February 28, 2019, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/breaking/ct-met-willow-creek-church-bill-hybels-report-20190228-story.html>.

<sup>50</sup> Caleb Parke, “Christian Comedian John Crist Admits to ‘Destructive and Sinful’ Behavior After Multiple Women Come Forward,” Fox News, November 7, 2019, <https://www.foxnews.com/entertainment/christian-comedian-john-christ-sexual-harassment-cancels-comedy-tour>.

### *LGBT+ and Evangelicalism*

Society and the church are changing at drastic speeds; however, there is still a hierarchical perception of value—especially concerning sexual orientation and gender identity within the church.

Austin Hartke, creator of the YouTube series *Transgender and Christian* and author of *Transforming: The Bible and the Lives of Transgender Christians*, reveals:

The mental and emotional bias that American culture holds against transgender individuals leaks out into real-world actions against trans people, whether that action is turning down a nonbinary applicant for a job or gunning down a transwoman in a bathroom. When our churches support or even organically formulate the idea that transgender people are morally, intellectually, or theologically inferior, we feed right into the hatred that leads to death for an already marginalized group.<sup>51</sup>

The abuse toward the LGBT+ community is not only from conversion-based organizations, like Changed Movement,<sup>52</sup> who proclaim an agenda of sexual orientation deliverance, but also from evangelical influencers, who perpetuate an intolerance toward the other in the name of biblical literalism. In June 2019, Jenn Johnson, president and co-founder of Bethel Music, posted on Instagram and declared:

There seems to be a lot of confusion in the world if you're a boy or a girl. God was not confused when he made you. He made no mistakes. He chose your eye color, he chose your hair color, he chose your skin color, and he chose your gender. And he crafted you with his own hands. And placed you in your mother's womb. Intentionally, no mistakes. No parts questionable.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Austen Hartke, *Transforming: The Bible and the Lives of Transgender Christians* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 18.

<sup>52</sup> “About Changed Movement: #ONCEGAY STORIES,” Changed, accessed March 6, 2020, <https://changedmovement.com/about/>

<sup>53</sup> Jenn Johnson, “Take #Pride in the Fact That He Made You with No Mistake or Confusion,” Instagram post, June 28, 2019, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BzQrCtCHS09/>

Obviously, Jenn Johnson has never heard of individuals who are intersex or transgender—or maybe she has, and she deems them less-than because they are not unquestionably formed by God. Thankfully, not all Christians leaders are propagating a gospel of intolerance toward the LGBT+ community.

Tony Campolo and Shane Claiborne are two of the most vocal and prominent figures going against the grain of evangelical expectation. Their organization, Red Letter Christians, “began in 2007 as a community of Christian authors and speakers who felt strongly that Western Christianity had lost its focus on Jesus.”<sup>54</sup> Brandan Robertson, Colby Martin, Austin Hartke, Dr. David P. Gushee, and Justin Lee have also shaped the conversation and reshaped the theological perception of inclusion, biblical interpretation, and cultural context. In many ways, they have also shifted the ecclesiological expectations of Millennials and Generation Z.

When pastors preach against the gay community, same-sex marriage, or transgender individuals, Millennials and Generation Z view the church’s perspective as outdated and abusive. They also equate the church’s hatred toward the LGBT+ community through the lens of 1 John 3:14-15, which states:

The way we know we’ve been transferred from death to life is that we love our brothers and sisters. Anyone who doesn’t love is as good as dead. Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know very well that eternal life and murder don’t go together.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> “About Red Letter Christians: Our Story,” Red Letter Christians, accessed January 12, 2020, <https://www.redletterchristians.org/our-story/>

<sup>55</sup> 1 John 3:15 (MSG).

Therefore, it is not surprising to see the decrease in attendance on Sunday morning, especially since many Millennials and Generation Z have family members or friends who identify as part of the LGBT+ community.

Many Millennials and Generation Z have chosen to separate their adherence to Christ from their allegiance to the church. However, their choice is not due to a lack of entertainment or tantalizing parables from the pulpit. Many are leaving because they see the dissonance between belief and behavior. This is not simply a generational frustration toward hypocrisy. If anything, it is a decisive separation from discrimination, sexual abuse, gender discrimination, racial injustice, and hatred against the LGBT+ community. In many ways, Millennials and Generation Z have left the church because they have experienced evangelicalism in all of its brutality. Again, as stated previously, these generations are not seeking atheism. The majority of Millennials and Generation Z are searching for a faith expression that is the antithesis of conservative evangelicalism. Christ is still their pursuit; however, the evangelical church is not necessarily where they congregate to live out their faith.

## **Summary**

Chapter four explores the ramifications of racism, sexism, homophobia, and nationalism within the evangelical church. It also examines generational interactions with the emergent church movement and investigates the differences between progressive Christianity and conservative ideology. The majority of Millennials were highly influenced by the emergent church movement; therefore, their perspectives started to drastically differ from their older counterparts. However, this difference was not accepted

as normative within most evangelical movements. If anything, Rob Bell, Brian McLaren, and Tony Jones were labeled as heretics and examples of apostasy.

Millennials and Generation Z witnessed hypocrisy firsthand as conservative evangelicals dismantled the theological perspectives within the emergent church movement, questioned the citizenship of President Obama,<sup>56</sup> and demanded that all Christians boycott<sup>57</sup> Disney's real-life remake of Beauty and the Beast because of a gay character. Chapter five builds upon chapter four and explores the variety of ways that Millennials and Generation Z differ from Baby Boomers and Generation X, including culturally, vocationally, and theologically.

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<sup>56</sup> Herbert Pimcock, "Rick Perry Unsure of Obama's U S. Citizen After Chatting with Trump?" Christian Post, October 24, 2011, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/rick-perry-unsure-of-obamas-u-s-citizen-after-chatting-with-trump-59100/>.

<sup>57</sup> Sara Boboltz, "Evangelist Franklin Graham Calls for Disney Boycott Over Gay Characters," HuffPost, March 4, 2017, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/evangelist-franklin-graham-calls-for-beauty-and-the-beast-boycott\\_n\\_58ba9ee6e4b05cf0f400e0f8](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/evangelist-franklin-graham-calls-for-beauty-and-the-beast-boycott_n_58ba9ee6e4b05cf0f400e0f8).

## CHAPTER 5:

### DISMANTLING THE MYTHS OF GENERATIONAL ASSUMPTION

#### **Millennial Assumptions**

Barna Research reveals, “in 25 years, the median age of a senior pastor has increased from 44 to 54.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, when one looks at the modern-day church, only “1 in 7 pastors are younger than 40.”<sup>2</sup> This is imperative to note, especially when exploring the dynamics of generational dissonance. Since childhood, Millennials and Generation Z have been strongly influenced by Baby Boomers and Generation X. However, this statistic does not hint to the success of Boomers and Generation X. Clearly, the strategies for church growth have not connected with the emerging generations. Which I suggest points to a generational disconnect, especially when “59% of Millennials who grew up in the church have dropped out at one point.”<sup>3</sup> Younger generations have slowly been edging out of the evangelical community for a long time however, the reasons are surprising.

David Kinnaman interviewed many Millennials and Generation Z about their experience with the church, and the same narrative was prevalent amongst the majority of those surveyed. Most had a positive perspective of the church during high school;

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<sup>1</sup> Barna Group, *Barna Trends 2018*, 182.

<sup>2</sup> Leonardo Blair, “Average Age of Pastors Now Much Closer to Retirement: Barna Study,” Christian Post, January 30, 2017, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/average-age-of-pastors-closer-to-retirement-barna-study.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Barna Group, “Americans Divided on the Importance of Church,” Barna Group, March 24, 2014, <https://www.barna.com/research/americans-divided-on-the-importance-of-church/#.V-hxhLVy6FD>.

however, as they aged, and conservative evangelicalism increased, their views drastically shifted. Brandon, a young man in his 30s, revealed:

Twenty years ago, when I was looking at evangelical Christianity from the inside, it seemed like a movement bursting with energy to spread good news to people. Looking at it from the outside today, this message seems to have been lost in exchange for an aggressive political strategy that demonizes segments of society.<sup>4</sup>

Brandon, like many Millennials and Generation Z, disconnected from conservative evangelicalism. In many ways, Millennials and Generation Z are leaving the evangelical community because they no longer connect with the conservative evangelical culture, especially when it is based upon the constructs of monoculturalism, fundamentalism, and oppression. These generational differences are not solely theological or ontological. They also stem from cultural influence, generational perception, and a preference toward globalization:

The world—politically, economically, socially, and technologically—is in flux. But what does this all mean for our future? The Western Union Company (NYSE: WU) has commissioned a first-of-its-kind global study about millennials’ beliefs, hopes, and aspirations for the future and the world that they wish to shape for themselves and others.<sup>5</sup>

According to their research:

Global citizenship is pivotal for creating the world millennials want for the future, as they believe the concept of belonging to one individual country is outdated. Millennials view connection and collaboration as the most critical steps forward to achieving global citizenship.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> David Kinnaman, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity...and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 153.

<sup>5</sup> “Millennials Stand for Globalism and Want to Shape the Future,” Business Wire, November 15, 2017, <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20171115005572/en/Millennials-Stand-Globalism-Shape-Future>

<sup>6</sup> Business Wire, “Millennials Stand for Globalism and Want to Shape the Future.”

Therefore, “Millennials believe the most important trait to eradicate social discrimination is ensuring that there is respect for diversity.”<sup>7</sup> Millennials and Generation Z are most known for their emphasis on racial reconciliation, gender equality, and inclusion within the workplace. These topics are intrinsic to these generations because they grew up with diversification. Thus, globalization is not an ideology for them to attain; it is a lifestyle that is fundamental to their ethical and moral reasoning. This influenced their perceptions of family, adulthood, education, vocation, and in many ways, the church.

### **Intergenerational Households**

Millennials and Generation Z have strong ties to family and parental involvement because, “thanks to increased life spans, at least five generations live side by side.”<sup>8</sup> Hayden Shaw explores this dynamic further in his book, *Generational IQ: Christianity Isn’t Dying, Millennials Aren’t the Problem, and the Future is Bright*. He suggests, “Boomers saw their parents as part of the establishment, while Millennials see their parents as resources to help them get established.”<sup>9</sup> This generational difference not only influences how different generations function within the home, it also impacts how various generations perceive the workplace and the church:

In previous eras, there were only three generations. The oldest generation had the money and made the decisions. The younger generation of adults raised the children and did what the older generation asked them to until their parents died, and then their turn came to be in control. Changes in families and churches came slowly and naturally, with little disruption. Younger generations didn’t push for

<sup>7</sup> Business Wire, “Millennials Stand for Globalism and Want to Shape the Future.”

<sup>8</sup> “Defining Our Six Generations,” Living Facts, accessed January 20, 2020, <https://www.livingfacts.org/en/articles/2019/defining-our-six-generations>.

<sup>9</sup> Haydn Shaw, *Generational IQ: Christianity Isn’t Dying, Millennials Aren’t the Problem, and the Future Is Bright* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2015), 83.

what they wanted; they waited their turn because their parents would likely be gone soon enough. But today, for the first time in history, we have five generations in our families, churches, and communities. *Five*. That's a huge change, and it causes quite a shake-up because every generation is pushing to be heard and understood, to find their own way, to recover what they feel the previous generation fumbled away, and to work out their parents' unfinished business.<sup>10</sup>

Many people mistake intergenerational households as an excuse for perpetual adolescence; however, this assumption is based upon a generational interpretation, not factual data. It also stems from Westernized expectations. In other words, it stems from a standard of measurement that is typical within white culture. However, if one looks at intergenerational households from the stance of cultural diversity, one will one be able to comprehend the varied forms of family functionality—especially those who differ from a Westernized standard of measurement.

According to Paul Taylor, Executive Vice President of the *Pew Research Center*:

The multigenerational household—and age-old living arrangement that began falling out of favor when the federal government began creating social safety-net programs in the twentieth century—has come roaring back. Some 54 million Americans now live in such households, double the number in 1970. The home construction industry amongst others has taken note and are now promoting multigen floorplans that feature self-contained suites for Grandma or Junior. Boomers and their live-in Boomerangers aren't the only new family ensemble driving this new market. It also encompasses hard-pressed middle-age adults moving in with relatively well-off elderly parents. Or it's widows in declining health moving in with an adult child. Or it's the new generation of immigrants, who—like their frugal counterparts from other continents and previous centuries—are living in the same house with their extended families, an arrangement that many of them imported from their home cultures. In some cases, multigenerational households are an emergency accommodation to financial hardships or health setbacks. But there's also a happier explanation: longer lifespans. According to sociologist Peter Uhlenberg, it's more likely today that a 20-year-old has a living grandmother than it was in 1900 for a 20-year-old to have living mother.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Shaw, *Generational IQ*, 13.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Taylor, *The Next America: Boomers, Millennials, and the Looming Generational Showdown* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2015), 47.

Nesterly, a business that is similar to Airbnb, is creating innovative options for intergenerational living. According to Katherine Schwab, deputy editor and contributor to Fast Company:

A 2014 report from the National Low-Income Housing Coalition found that there was not a single state in which a full-time employee earning minimum wage would be able to afford a two-bedroom rental apartment at fair market rent. The problem is particularly bad in big cities.<sup>12</sup>

Multigenerational households developed in the U.S. because of economic recession and decline; however, cost is not the only issue. According to a recent report from the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University:

Over the next twenty years, the population aged 65 and over is expected to grow from 48 million to 79 million. Meanwhile, the number of households headed by someone in that age group will increase by 66 percent to almost 50 million—with the result that by 2035, an astounding one out of three American households will be headed by someone aged 65 and older.<sup>13</sup>

Cohabitating with a variety of generations is popular amongst Millennials and Generation Z because it offers them the ability to retain independence, care for aging parents, and invest in stronger relationships with relatives from a variety of outlooks. This new preference for multigenerational functionality is why nursing homes have seen a drastic decrease. According to AARP, “An analysis of nursing homes by Marcum LLP, a public accounting firm, found that from 2013 to 2017 in the United States, occupancy rates fell

<sup>12</sup> Katharine Schwab, “The Airbnb For Affordable Housing Is Here,” Fast Company, November 21, 2017, <https://www.fastcompany.com/90151804/the-airbnb-for-affordable-housing-is-here>.

<sup>13</sup> “Projections,” Harvard, accessed January 20, 2020, [https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/harvard\\_jchs\\_housing\\_growing\\_population\\_2016.pdf](https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/harvard_jchs_housing_growing_population_2016.pdf).

from 83.1 to 80.2 percent.”<sup>14</sup> These statistics are not simply indicative to generational distinctives within family structures. They are intrinsic to the survival of the church.

If pastors and leaders want to attract and retain Millennials and Generation Z, they must reevaluate their ideology and perception of family, adulthood, and generational function. This requires them to also remove their monocultural biases and understand generational shifts in light of cultural influence. Therefore, in order for one to relate to and retain these generations, one needs to form standards that differ from a white normative mindset. However, this shift within the church is not just in reaction to intergenerational living—it also consists of one’s perception of singleness, marriage, vocation, and the definition of success.

#### *Singleness, Ministry, and Generational Expectations within the Church*

According to Hayden Shaw, “In 1962, the average age of women marrying for the first time was 20 (23 for men). In 1987, that had jumped to 23.6 (25.8 for men). The Great Recession bumped it to 26.1 (28 for men).”<sup>15</sup> The *Observer* echoes these findings and reveals, “in 1960, 72 percent of adults were married; however, among today’s growing single population, 63 percent have never been married.”<sup>16</sup> These numbers

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<sup>14</sup> Kent Allen, “Nursing Home Occupancy Rates Decline,” AARP, February 26, 2019, <https://www.aarp.org/caregiving/home-care/info-2019/nursing-home-occupancy-decline.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Shaw, *Generational IQ*, 159.

<sup>16</sup> Francesca Friday, “More Americans Are Single Than Ever Before—and They’re Healthier, Too,” *Observer*, January 16, 2018, <https://observer.com/2018/01/more-americans-are-single-than-ever-before-and-theyre-healthier-too/>.

continue to decrease at a rapid rate; however, churches continue to build their family-friendly<sup>17</sup> epicenters and child-friendly<sup>18</sup> ministries.

Pastor Mark Almlie, a single minister in his 40s, revisits his own experience as a single minister and shares his experience on Christianity Today:

These churches explicitly were not looking to hire someone single—like Jesus or Paul. I then was surprised to discover that even though the majority of adult Americans are single (52 percent), that only 2 percent of senior pastors in my denomination are single! Something was clearly amiss.<sup>19</sup>

Mark is not alone in his experience. Many singles in ministry feel ostracized, ignored, or viewed as less than their married colleagues simply because they go to bed alone at night. According to Almlie, singles within the church, especially within church leadership, are either tentatively appoint singles in leadership or exclude them altogether.<sup>20</sup> Much of this stems from a faulty interpretation of Genesis 2:18, 1 Timothy 3:1-7, and Titus 1:6-9; however, it also has to do with the false assumption that singles fall into temptation more than their married counterparts. Many pastors, including Mark Driscoll, perpetuated this ideology and antagonism toward singles in leadership. According to Driscoll:

In our day, the temptations and traps for a single male leading in ministry are incredibly difficult—emotionally, sexually, and relationally. Further, since most people are failing to remain chaste and holy in their singleness, most people should put their energies toward the goal of one day being married. I was one of

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<sup>17</sup> James Dobson, “Keys to a Family-Friendly Church,” Christianity Today, July 11, 2007, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2007/july-online-only/060705a.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Ben Freudenburg, “Is Your Church Child-friendly? Find Out Now,” <https://childrensministry.com>, accessed January 21, 2020, <https://childrensministry.com/child-friendly-church/>.

<sup>19</sup> Mark Almlie, “Are We Afraid of Single Pastors?” Christianity Today, January 31, 2011, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2011/january-online-only/are-we-afraid-of-single-pastors.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

these people, which explains why I married at the age of 21, between my junior and senior years of college.<sup>21</sup>

Driscoll was not the only pastor to push singles away from the pulpit. *Ministry Magazine* addresses this same topic in their publication in 1969. They assert, “Most men can do better work when they are happily married, for without a wife they are not whole. A part of them lacks fulfillment...the best plan for most ministers is that they be married.”<sup>22</sup> However, the majority of “single Christians want to be included fully and equally into every aspect and ministry of the church’s life, in the same way as for married couples and families.”<sup>23</sup> Not much has changed within the church since the 1960s. The majority of denominations still favor married men in positions of leadership. However, this partiality toward married men is not necessarily tied to theology. Additionally, regardless of a woman’s title, many denominations expect a pastor’s wife to work for the church without financial remuneration. Therefore, the bias against single pastors has less to do with theological interpretation and more to do with how one values gender.

#### *Why are Millennials and Generation Z Not Getting Married?*

Millennials and Generation Z are delaying marriage until they are much older or even forgoing it altogether. However, they are doing so for many valid reasons:

They are pursuing more education, working entry-level jobs that don’t pay enough to support a family, accumulating large debts, enjoying the freedom of

<sup>21</sup> Mark Driscoll, “Mark Driscoll: Single Pastors?” Charisma Leader, January 9, 2014, <https://ministrytodaymag.com/leadership/personal-character/20636-mark-driscoll-single-pastors>.

<sup>22</sup> “Should Unmarried Men Be Ordained?” Ministry Magazine, December 1969, <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/1969/12/should-unmarried-men-be-ordained>.

<sup>23</sup> “What Single Christians Say Makes a Single Friendly Church,” Single Friendly Church, accessed January 20, 2020, <https://www.singlefriendlychurch.com/a-single-friendly-church/what-single-christians-say-makes-a-single-friendly-church>.

their twenties, trying to decide what to do, and focusing on getting established in their careers. One of the reasons that Millennials have the lowest divorce rate is that they marry later.<sup>24</sup>

Ben Steverman, a contributor to *Bloomberg*, suggests that Millennials are drastically lowering the divorce rate and shifting the narrative when it comes to healthy marriages. He asserts:

New data shows younger couples are approaching relationships very differently from baby boomers, who married young, divorced, remarried and so on. Generation X and especially millennials are being pickier about who they marry, tying the knot at older ages when education, careers and finances are on track. The result is a U.S. divorce rate that dropped 18 percent from 2008 to 2016.<sup>25</sup>

However, while Millennials and Generation Z are plummeting the divorce rates by delaying marriage, Baby Boomers are divorcing well into their 60s and 70s:

From 1990 to 2015, according to Bowling Green's National Center for Family and Marriage Research, the divorce rate doubled for people aged 55 to 64, and even tripled for Americans 65 and older. Cohen's results suggest this trend, called "grey divorce," may have leveled out in the past decade, but boomers are still divorcing at much higher rates than previous generations did at similar ages.<sup>26</sup>

Hayden Shaw probes more in depth into this topic and reveals that the average age of marriage has shifted quite drastically between Baby Boomers and their Millennial children. However, "Millennials, even in a horrible job market, are only getting married two years later than their great-great-grandparents."<sup>27</sup> In essence, "Emerging adults aren't marrying that much later; Baby Boomers got married that much earlier."<sup>28</sup> Many within

<sup>24</sup> Shaw, *Generational IQ*, 160.

<sup>25</sup> Ben Steverman, "Millennials Are Causing the U.S. Divorce Rate to Plummet," *Bloomberg*, September 25, 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-09-25/millennials-are-causing-the-u-s-divorce-rate-to-plummet>.

<sup>26</sup> Steverman, "Millennials Are Causing the U.S. Divorce Rate to Plummet."

<sup>27</sup> Shaw, *Generational IQ*, 159.

<sup>28</sup> Shaw, *Generational IQ*, 159.

the church continue to perpetuate a set standard of marriage; however, in their pursuit to protect the church from sexual promiscuity, they have created a false ideology of sex equaling adulthood.

Many churches presume that the majority of their congregants will follow the traditional markers of adulthood—marriage and then children. Therefore, when they see divergence and see that “culture is changing faster than they can keep up with or respond to—they feel like it’s headed off the rails.”<sup>29</sup> However, an early push toward marriage does not necessarily equate to an equal adoption of morality or ethics.

Perhaps pastors and leaders feel like the culture is going off track because they favor the American Dream more than Christocentrism. However, to assume that marriage is the pinnacle of godliness is to deem singleness as the foundation of godlessness. Neither presumption is based in theological reasoning.

#### *Co-parenting, Equalitarian Households, and Childless Millennials and Generation Z*

Numerous evangelical churches have perpetuated the narrative that one can only attain respect and equality when they have a ring, a 30-year mortgage, and a baby on both hips. However, this is difficult to accomplish, especially when “nearly one-in-five American women ends her childbearing years without having borne a child, compared with one-in-ten in the 1970s.”<sup>30</sup> The trend of remaining childless is a generational distinction; however, it is also a trend occurring within the church.

<sup>29</sup> George Barna and David Kinnaman, *Churchless: Understanding Today's Unchurched and How to Connect with Them: Based on Surveys by Barna Group* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2014), 3.

<sup>30</sup> Gretchen Livingston and D'Vera Cohn, “Childlessness Up Among All Women; Down Among Women with Advanced Degrees,” Pew Research Company, June 25, 2010,

Jean E. Jones, a contributor to Today's Christian Women, reveals, "Among women ages 40–44, the number of voluntarily childless now equals the number who wanted children but couldn't have them."<sup>31</sup> This is happening because of the growing trends of urbanized living, substantial student debt, and economic instability. Many women have chosen to remain childless and others have simply fallen into this grouping because they can barely afford rent—even with their four roommates. The growing trends of urbanized living, substantial student debt, and economic instability also influence many people's decision regarding parenthood:

Demographer Joel Kotkin has coined the term “post-familialism”; others talk about “the new singleism.” It’s a global phenomenon, having taken root not just in the US but in Canada, much of Europe, and the wealthy countries of East Asia. It’s linked to urbanization, secularism, women’s economic empowerment, and higher standards of living.<sup>32</sup>

Comedian Jen Kirkman interjects Kotkin’s observation into her 2013 memoir, *I Can Barely Take Care of Myself: Tales from a Happy Life Without Kids* perfectly. Many people ask her, “‘Who’ll take care of you when you’re old?’ She replies, ‘Servants!’”<sup>33</sup> Many Millennials and Generation Z have the same response as Kirkman; however, not everyone supports a person’s choice to be childless, especially those Christian married couples who decided to remain childfree.

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<https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2010/06/25/childlessness-up-among-all-women-down-among-women-with-advanced-degrees/>.

<sup>31</sup> Jean E. Jones, “Don’t Judge Me Because I’m Childless,” Today’s Christian Woman, January 7, 2014, <https://www.todayschristianwoman.com/articles/2014/january-week-2/dont-judge-me-im-childless.html>.

<sup>32</sup> Paul Taylor, *The Next America: Boomers, Millennials, and the Looming Generational Showdown* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2015), 14.

<sup>33</sup> Taylor, *The Next America*, 14.

According to Jonathan Grant, leader of St. Paul's Symonds Street, an Anglican congregation in Australia:

Intimacy within heterosexual marriage is purposeful or teleological (it can bear new life), normative (it expresses God's intended design for sexual relationships), and comprehensive (the complementary natures and bodies of men and women in marriage are a reflection of God).<sup>34</sup>

Grant goes onto suggest:

Having children is a Godlike act, so that sex carries the intrinsic possibility and responsibility of being fruitful. Even if we use contraception or are unable to have children for other reasons, we are symbolically open to the possibility of children and the responsibility of providing a stable context for them.<sup>35</sup>

Many within conservative evangelicalism continue to perpetuate a quiversful ideology, the same perspective that popularized the Duggars.<sup>36</sup> After all, they are still *Counting On*. However, according to Paul Taylor, executive vice president of Pew Research Center, "Millennials are setting their life compasses on individual fulfillment. They're delaying marriage and childbearing or abandoning it altogether."<sup>37</sup> The evangelical church might believe that children are intrinsic to a Christian marriage, but many are being outvoted and outvoiced by Millennial and Generation Z.

Even those who decide to have children are rewriting the mores of parenthood. The majority of Millennials and Generation Z are advocating for equality within the

<sup>34</sup> Jonathan Grant, *Divine Sex: A Compelling Vision for Christian Relationships in a Hypersexualized Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2015), 177.

<sup>35</sup> Grant, *Divine Sex*, 155.

<sup>36</sup> Nicole Pomarico, "Why Don't the Duggars Use Birth Control? There's More to It Than Their Christian Beliefs," Bustle, September 16, 2014, <https://www.bustle.com/articles/40050-why-dont-the-duggars-use-birth-control-theres-more-to-it-than-their-christian-beliefs>.

<sup>37</sup> Taylor, *The Next America*, 171.

home, within the workforce, and within the church. Therefore, co-parenting is the normative expectation within the majority of Millennial and Generation Z households.

### **Millennials and Vocation**

According to Louie Giglio, author and creator of Passion Conference, Millennials and Generation Z not only thrive on challenge; they see everything through the lens of skepticism. Therefore, when they enter into a church, a workplace, or even a conversation, they look for the holes in one's belief and hope to fill them with the truth. These generations hunger to live out the gospel and are passionate about risking everything for the sake of Christ; however, the majority of Christian organizations do not provide them with opportunities to question—they only invite them to attend and emulate. Giglio goes onto describe the most significant thing that he has learned since launching the Passion Conference:

We're asking people to make a big commitment to following Jesus. I think that's what people want. They want something that's true, something that's real. They don't want to be played; they don't want to be sold anything. They want something that, on the other hand, that's challenging and demanding, something that's worth their life. Something they can walk away from and say, "That's worth me giving my life." Once you put Jesus in that position for them, it's amazing to see the transformation that comes and the purpose and meaning that comes to people's lives.<sup>38</sup>

According to Giglio, the greatest desire of Millennials and Generation Z is the need to be challenged. However, their quest for growth is not merely one-sided. The majority

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<sup>38</sup> Nicola Menzie, "Louie Giglio Q," Christian Post, March 4, 2014, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/louie-giglio-qa-millennials-may-be-leaving-the-church-but-theyre-walking-toward-christ-part-1-115427/>.

believe that leadership is a give-and-take relationship—a place where teachability and leadership go hand in hand, regardless of one's position, title, or age.

Jennifer Brown, an award-winning entrepreneur, dynamic speaker, and author and diversity and inclusion expert, weighs in on this topic. Brown suggests:

Millennials are referred to as generation y, or “generation why” because one of their generational hallmarks is the need to know the reason beyond things that, perhaps, previous generations dared not question. This is a generation of interpersonal communication and transparency; these people came of age with Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. They share a different relationship with knowledge than earlier generations did, with a perspective of “if and when I need it, I’ll find it online.”<sup>39</sup>

Millennials and Generation Z are not as impressed by or tolerant of the concept of blind faith or eisegesis compared to previous generations. They approach Christianity from a stance of humility; however, they also believe that faith compels one’s actions, not just their intellect. “They are a generation prepared to be not merely hearers of doctrine but doers of faith; they want to put their faith into action, not just to talk.”<sup>40</sup> This ideology is not only a generational mantra, but a theological shift.

According to David Kinnaman, author of *You Lost Me: Why Christians Are Leaving the Church*, “Thousands of young Christians are creating new venues for the gospel via new media, the Internet, podcasting, blogging, and tweeting, among many others. There is something imbedded in their DNA that seeks a platform for influence and advocacy.”<sup>41</sup> During the time of Christ, the gospel took on flesh and dwelt among us;<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Jennifer Brown, *Inclusion: Diversity, the New Workplace & the Will to Change* (Hartford, CT: Publish Your Purpose Press, 2016), 83.

<sup>40</sup> Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 12.

<sup>41</sup> Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 42.

<sup>42</sup> John 1:14 (NLT).

and in 2020, the gospel has taken on the hands and feet of countless Millennials and Generation Z. Many of them are purposed to live lives where love dwells amongst the least of these.<sup>43</sup>

Chris Tuff, a partner at the advertising agency 22squared in Atlanta, Georgia, suggests, “Millennials are hardworking and optimistic.”<sup>44</sup> Barna Research concurs with Tuff:

Most of them (80 percent) feel very much at peace with life. A similar proportion believes they live a “simple life,” while at the same time, two-thirds say they are totally committed to getting ahead in life. Four out of five want their life to make a difference in the world, and three-quarters contend they are clear about their life’s meaning and purpose.<sup>45</sup>

Younger generations are not “entitled, avocado-toast-eating, Ping-Pong playing, craft-beer-drinking, Game-of-Thrones-watching, unprepared, pessimistic slackers.”<sup>46</sup> They are men and women who “have a good work ethic and resemble the traditionalists, or *greatest generation*”<sup>47</sup> in regards to their contribution, consistency, and cultural value to organizations. However, the values of Millennial and Generation Z drastically differ from Baby Boomers and Generation X.

<sup>43</sup> Matthew 25:40 (NLT).

<sup>44</sup> Chris Tuff, *The Millennial Whisperer: The Practical, Profit -Focused Playbook for Working with and Motivating the World’s Largest Generation* (New York: Morgan James Publishing, 2019), 11.

<sup>45</sup> George Barna, *Churchless: Understanding Today’s Unchurched and How to Connect with Them* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2014), 42.

<sup>46</sup>Tuff, *The Millennial Whisperer*, 10.

<sup>47</sup> Jennifer Brown, *Inclusion: Diversity, the New Workplace & the Will to Change* (Hartford, CT: Publish Your Purpose Press, 2016), 83.

### *Generational Distinctives within the Workplace*

According to Drs. Joanne Sujansky and Jan Ferri-Reed, authors of the book *Keeping the Millennials*, “Millennials seek a multidimensional life by satisfying themselves through their work and personal lives. They’re responsible and dedicated, but they expect flexible work schedules that will enable them to lead fulfilling lives. They truly work to live rather than live to work.”<sup>48</sup> The Deloitte Millennial Survey interviewed over “10,400 Millennials from 36 countries and discovered that more than 20% are taking on side jobs. 66% say that they expect to work past 65 and 12% say they have no plans to ever retire.”<sup>49</sup> Many within these generations expect to have flexibility within their schedule, opportunities for advancement, and lateral leadership structures. This preference toward work-life balance is influenced by their childhood.

Younger Millennials and Generation Z cannot remember a time without war, terroristic threat, or mass shootings. Since 1999, there have been 11 mass school shootings<sup>50</sup> and “229 U.S. school shootings, not including misfires or instances in which a shooter was stopped before inflicting deaths or injuries.”<sup>51</sup> These events created the foundational mores of Millennial and Generation Z behaviors and beliefs.

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<sup>48</sup> Joanne Genova Sujansky and Jan Ferri-Reed, *Keeping the Millennials: Why Companies Are Losing Billions in Turnover to This Generation—and What to Do About It* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 7.

<sup>49</sup> Tuff, *The Millennial Whisperer*, 11.

<sup>50</sup> Meghan Keneally, “The 11 Mass Deadly School Shootings That Happened Since Columbine,” ABC News, April 19, 2019, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/11-mass-deadly-school-shootings-happened-columbine/story?id=62494128>.

<sup>51</sup> Gabe Turner, “A Timeline of School Shootings Since Columbine,” Security Baron, July 19, 2019, <https://securitybaron.com/blog/a-timeline-of-school-shootings-since-columbine/>.

These societal changes have created a paradigm shift in their perception of family and made their preference for vocational flexibility. For example, many within these generations “don’t want to pay their dues and climb the ladder”<sup>52</sup> of success because they value relationships over personal achievement. Thus, the disconnect between Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z stems from an internal perceptive based upon generational experience. One values cooperate hierarchy and the other values cooperate flexibility. It is imperative for leaders to understand these generational distinctives because it colors every aspect of generational expectation within the workplace and within the church.

Shaw builds on this premise and explores the varied facets of generational dissonance. He suggests:

It’s a real temptation for Xers to build their own worlds with people of their own choosing. It’s safer, and you don’t get burned or disappointed that way. But doing so can keep Xers from truly engaging with others who are different from them. Xers may move jobs until they find a work culture they like. They may hang out online with other people of their generation or who likely share their views. Xers may say they value diversity, and they may serve people who are different from them in their communities, but they probably do so with people very much like themselves. Boomers may church hop to find the next Jesus buzz and avoid the dark night of the soul. But Xers often take that one step further and never really engage with their churches enough to have those positive feelings in the first place. They can’t be disappointed, because they can’t lose what they’ve never had.<sup>53</sup>

Shaw also reveals:

Boomers are used to being heard. The sheer size of their generation made them the center of attention. So they reshaped markets as well as business and political priorities at every stage of their lives. And they reshaped childhood: smaller families meant they were the focus of their parents’ attention and dreams.

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<sup>52</sup> Bruce Tulgan, *Not Everyone Gets a Trophy: How to Manage the Millennials* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2016), 3.

<sup>53</sup> Shaw, *Generational IQ*, 78.

Boomers have reshaped each stage of their adult lives as well. They redefined parenting styles and roles in marriage, reworked everything from the coffee shop to the church (and even put a coffee shop *in* their church). They have stayed active (and Botoxed), hoping to hold on to youth longer. And this huge generation is now reshaping retirement: they plan for retirement, but they don't think to retire. According to one survey, Boomers think old age begins at 79.5—the age of current life expectancy!<sup>54</sup>

Every generation has its strengths and weaknesses; however, Millennials and Generation Z are one of the only ones judged. Countless pastors, leaders, and business executives have made millions by perpetuating the false notion that Millennials and Generation Z are nothing more than entitled *Snowflakes*—a label meant to stigmatize and condemn two entire generations.

Simon Sinek, author, speaker, and generational journalist, “repeats the familiar clichés”<sup>55</sup> and emphatically claims that “many Millennials leave work on the dot at 5 pm every day and refuse to answer work calls or emails over the weekend.”<sup>56</sup> Abi Wilkinson, freelance journalist and a contributor to *The Guardian*, dispels this ideology surrounding younger generations and forms her rebuttal against Sinek:

Would that it were true. It's possible my social circle is just wildly unrepresentative, but among people I know, taking work home to complete in the evening and at weekends is the depressing norm. I've lost count of the number of times plans have been postponed or canceled because someone hasn't managed to make it out of the office in time. Nor is it only millennials in middle-class careers who are subject to this unpaid overtime culture. When I did bar work, managers regularly used to skim our wages by not paying us for time spent cleaning up after closing. Plenty of young people who are paid by the hour report similar experiences and worry about how to raise the issue without having their shifts cut in revenge. And that is a genuine difference in the workplace experiences of

<sup>54</sup> Shaw, *Generational IQ*, 46.

<sup>55</sup> Abi Wilkinson, “Millennials Aren’t Lazy Snowflakes—We Just Don’t Expect to Work for Free,” *The Guardian*, February 9, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/feb/09/millennials-lazy-snowflakes-work-young-people>.

<sup>56</sup> Wilkinson, “Millennials Aren’t Lazy Snowflakes.”

millennials, of course—we’re statistically far more likely to be employed on zero-hours, casual or freelance terms. Sinek’s suggestion that we bounce from job to job because we’re impatient and overly demanding made me chuckle, given that most people I know who change jobs frequently don’t do so out of choice.<sup>57</sup>

Wilkinson goes onto suggest, “Millennials aren’t lazy snowflakes—we just don’t expect to work for free.”<sup>58</sup> Jennifer Brown, author of *Inclusion: Diversity, the New Workplace & the Will to Change*, echoes Wilkinson’s observations and states:

Millennials prize work-life balance significantly more than they value monetary compensation. This group questions “starting at the bottom” and feels the best person for the job is the one who does it best. Seniority has to be justified, and people have to earn respect; it is not a given.<sup>59</sup>

Therefore:

Millennials place a higher value on employee well-being and employee growth and development than do Baby Boomers and Gen X. They also believe that an organization’s treatment of its employees is the most important consideration in determining whether or not a company can be considered a leader. They want to know that they make a difference in other’s lives.<sup>60</sup>

In essence, Millennials and Generation Z are not lacking in work ethic; they are making the workplace more ethical. This includes embracing inclusion, equality, and diversity:

When asked how they define diversity, millennials consider cognitive diversity—the blending of different ideas, thoughts, opinions, backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives within a team—to be essential for an inclusive culture that supports engagement, empowerment, and authenticity.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Wilkinson, “Millennials Aren’t Lazy Snowflakes.”

<sup>58</sup> Wilkinson, “Millennials Aren’t Lazy Snowflakes.”

<sup>59</sup> Brown, *Inclusion*, 83.

<sup>60</sup> Brown, *Inclusion*, 83.

<sup>61</sup> Brown, *Inclusion*, 80.

It is imperative to understand generational distinctives, especially when “Millennials are 35% of the workforce and will be 75% by 2030.”<sup>62</sup> Chris Tuff, author of *The Millennial Whisperer: The Practical, Profit-Focused Playbook for Working with and Motivating the World’s Largest Generation*, suggests:

If we can’t get this Millennial generation right, just wait until we meet the ones behind them. Generation Z will eat us alive unless we’re willing to shift how we do business to better recruit, motivate, and lead Millennials to capitalize on our Millennial workforce. Millennials are shaking up the business world, and they have incredible adaptability. When we learn to bring out their best, they will catapult our companies [churches] to the top. Look at Airbnb, Lift, Facebook, Pinterest, and Groupon—all founded by Millennials—and see how channeling Millennial energy can deliver tremendous success.<sup>63</sup>

In essence, “If leaders at the company can’t work with 75% of the labor force, the future probably isn’t very bright for them.”<sup>64</sup> If churches refuse to change, then they should not be surprised when Millennials and Generation Z exit the sanctuary. Thus, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and churches would be wise to modify their managerial methodology. After all, “smart organizations listen when the different generations help them see where they are losing money because they have mixed up business necessities with generational preferences.”<sup>65</sup> According to Shaw, in order for churches to retain and attract Millennials and Generation Z, they must create spaces of inclusion, ethical leadership, lateral governance, and flexible options for ministry engagement. They must lay down their biases and remove their fidelity to ageist ideology—otherwise, their

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<sup>62</sup> Tuff, *The Millennial Whisperer*, 15.

<sup>63</sup> Tuff, *The Millennial Whisperer*, 15.

<sup>64</sup> Tuff, *The Millennial Whisperer*, 15.

<sup>65</sup> Hayden Shaw, *Sticking Points: How to Get 4 Generations Working Together in the 12 Places They Come Apart* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Pub., Inc., 2013), 35.

disdain toward Generation Z and Millennials will inevitably discredit their ministries and jeopardize their future impact.

### *Ethics, Morality, and Political Divides*

One of the most significant generational distinctions for Millennials and Generation Z is one of loyalty. Both of these generations refuse to be blindly faithful to a person, a church, or a political party. They see their choices through the lens of mutuality.<sup>66</sup> Therefore, in order to gain their attention, one must stop trying to secure their allegiance. Now, this is not to suggest that Millennials and Generation Z are apathetic or immune to authoritative influence; however, they are incredibly particular.

For instance, many pastors are utilizing social media to post selfies, advertise their next book, and even share pictures of themselves in their new kicks—ones that cost anywhere from “\$3,000 to \$5,000 for a pair of *sneakers!*”<sup>67</sup> This trend amongst pastors is so popular that “a 29-year-old man named Tyler started the Instagram account, PreachersNSneakers that spawned from a joke he shared with friends.”<sup>68</sup> According to Buzzfeed News:

The account PreachersNSneakers has now become a place of both celebration and controversy over pastor influencers and their expensive shoes. The Instagram account features pastors and other church leaders who have large followings on social media, screenshots of the shoes they wear, and the shoes’ price tags. “Registered Flex Offenders,” some joke, while others are interpreting the

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<sup>66</sup> Dan Pontefract, “Millennials and Gen Z Have Lost Trust and Loyalty with Business,” Forbes, June 4, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/danpontefract/2018/06/03/millennials-and-gen-z-have-lost-trust-and-loyalty-with-business/#56fc52fa6145>

<sup>67</sup> Brandon Hilgemann, “Preachers and Sneakers: These Pastors Paid How Much for Shoes?” <https://www.propreacher.com>, April 18, 2019, <https://www.propreacher.com/preachers-and-sneakers/>.

<sup>68</sup> Hilgemann, “Preachers and Sneakers.”

account's message very seriously. 'This account is like the 21st-century version of Martin Luther nailing his theses to the church door,' one person commented.<sup>69</sup>

At this time, the account has over 200 thousand followers. Why does this matter? It matters because Millennials and Generation Z make decisions that benefit the collective, not choices of self-preservation.

When President Trump stepped on the scene as a candidate in 2016, many Baby Boomers and Generation X flocked to the polls to support his *evangelical* agenda. However, most Millennials and Generation Z evaluated his policies in light of how they would impact the marginalized, the minority, and the masses. Millennials and Generation Z questioned his ideology of communal ethics more than his position on morality. Trump's ideology has not only influenced Millennials and Generation Z in the polls; but also, in the pews.

The inauguration of President Trump divided generations. Public discord was seen on social media, during family meals, and at Sunday morning services. Once Trump entered the Oval Office, many Millennials and Generation Z were shown the door—simply because they refused to conform to the white conservative evangelical ideologies of the church. After all, "eighty-one percent of white evangelicals voted for Donald Trump."<sup>70</sup> Once the religious right elected him as their new political leader and evangelical figurehead, younger generations were viewed as insubordinate and infidels, especially since the majority of pastors and leaders represented the eighty-one percent.

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<sup>69</sup> Hilgemann, "Preachers and Sneakers."

<sup>70</sup> Katherine Stewart, "Eighty-one Percent of White Evangelicals Voted for Donald Trump. Why?" The Nation, November 17, 2016, <https://www.thenation.com/article/eighty-one-percent-of-white-evangelicals-voted-for-donald-trump-why/>.

Many conservative evangelicals might have desired to Make America Great Again, but in their fervor, they Made America Arrogant Again.

### **President Obama v. President Trump**

According to Polly Mosendz, a contributor to the business publication Bloomberg, during the 2016 election, “Democrats took the millennial vote—just not among whites. Among the younger portion of the millennial generation, 18 to 29-year olds, Trump earned 37 percent of the vote to Clinton’s 55 percent.”<sup>71</sup> Joel Kotkin, a contributor to *Forbes*, also asserts that, in 2012:

President Obama won re-election primarily because he did so well with two key, and expanding, constituencies: Hispanics and members of the Millennial Generation. Throughout the campaign, Democratic pundits predicted that these two groups would be the key difference makers. They were right. According to CNN exit polls, millennials voted for Obama 60% to 36% and accounted for 19% of all voters, up from 17% in 2008.<sup>72</sup>

President Barrack Obama, like President Trump, both define themselves as born-again Christians; however, only one of them has challenged conservative evangelical biases. For example:

Obama’s social policies alienated conservative evangelicals. Though “Pro-life” could be used to describe his views on immigration, healthcare, the death penalty, the fight against poverty, and civil rights for racial and ethnic minorities. And then there was gay marriage. In 2013, the Supreme Court, in the *United States v. Windsor*, declared the defense of Marriage Act unconstitutional and the Obama administration began extending federal rights and benefits to same-sex married couples. By 2015, the court ruled that the United States government would recognize same-sex marriages, the practice was legal in 36 states and Washington,

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<sup>71</sup> Polly Mosendz, “What This Election Taught Us About Millennial Voters,” Bloomberg, November 9, 2016, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-11-09/what-this-election-taught-us-about-millennial-voters>.

<sup>72</sup> Joel Kotkin, “Why Obama Won: Hispanics, Millennials Were the Difference,” Forbes, November 7, 2012, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/joelkotkin/2012/11/07/why-obama-won-hispanics-millenials-were-the-difference-makers/#6f91fac6195a>.

D.C. on the evening after the decision, Obama showed his appreciation by eliminating the White House in rainbow colors.<sup>73</sup>

However, not all reacted with the same exuberance. “Conservative evangelicals cringed. In the hours after the decision, they turned to their blogs, websites, and media outlets and wrote apocalyptic opinion pieces on how to cope in a post-Christian society.”<sup>74</sup>

Evangelicals not only voiced their opinions online; they also voiced their opposition at the polls and the pulpit.

According to John Fea, a contributor to *The Atlantic*, “In 2016, American evangelicals were looking for a strongman to protect them from the progressive forces wreaking havoc on their Christian nation. Donald Trump was the strongman.”<sup>75</sup> Consequently, “81 percent of evangelicals decided to betray their deepest spiritual conviction when they chose to dwell in fear.”<sup>76</sup> Many considered Trump their “savior.”<sup>77</sup> However, they not only saw him as saving the church, but also their race. “A new movement of white evangelicalism awakened during Trump’s presidency.”<sup>78</sup> This exclusionary ideology might have resonated with older generations within America, but it created one of the sharpest generational divides in history and caused one of the most prolific generational departures.

According to Jeff Brumley, a *Baptist News Global* opinion contributor:

<sup>73</sup> Fea, “Evangelical Fear Elected Trump.”

<sup>74</sup> Fea, “Evangelical Fear Elected Trump.”

<sup>75</sup> Fea, “Evangelical Fear Elected Trump.”

<sup>76</sup> Fea, “Evangelical Fear Elected Trump.”

<sup>77</sup> Fea, “Evangelical Fear Elected Trump.”

<sup>78</sup>Haberman, “Religion and Right-Wing Politics.”

Young people take it especially hard when conservative leaders, like Franklin Graham and others, turn a blind eye to Trump's behavior while at the same time preaching sexual purity in their churches. That's where Millennials are feeling the tension. They hear evangelicals say, "boys will be boys" about the president then complain that a sexual revolution and the need to come back to God's standards. The double standard is hard to swallow for young people seeking religious authenticity. They have not abandoned their faith, what they are abandoning is church because they see it as compromised.<sup>79</sup>

Brumley goes onto suggest:

Persistent reports that Trump had sex with porn actress Stormy Daniels is "the last nail" for young people and the white conservative church. Evangelicals have lost all moral authority. And it will also lead to generational condemnation of American Christianity, which is complicit in oppression dating back to the founding of the nation. This current generation wants nothing to do with the hypocrisy of Christianity. American Christianity is rapidly approaching a post-U.S. Christian age.<sup>80</sup>

Pastors and leaders are scrambling to figure out why Millennials and Generation Z are leaving the doors of their sanctuaries; however, many younger generations have seen "a massive change amongst conservative Christians"<sup>81</sup> and watched as "pastors and leaders abandoned their traditional self-understanding as 'value voters' to become 'nostalgia voters'" attracted by Trump's promise to restore their churches and faith to power."<sup>82</sup> Consequently, it is not that Millennials and Generation Z have left their faith; rather, they would suggest that older generations sold their faith for the promise of power—that many of them fell for Faust and gave up their soul.

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<sup>79</sup> Brumley, "Support for Trump Could Spell End of the Evangelical Church. But When?"

<sup>80</sup> Brumley, "Support for Trump Could Spell End of the Evangelical Church. But When?"

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<sup>82</sup> Brumley, "Support for Trump Could Spell End of the Evangelical Church. But When?"

## Myths and Truths About Millennials and Generation Z

The problem with idolizing the good old days is that it leads one to believe that those days were better than the present time—it causes generations to cling onto the comfort of personal preferences instead of mutual benefits. It also causes political figures to make *MAGA*, or *Make American Great Again*, hats and policies that exemplify 1950s America.

Jaimie Notter and Maddie Grant, authors of *When Millennials Take Over*, propose, “Every twenty years or so, a new generation enters the workforce, and the rest of us, quite frankly, freak out about it.”<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, “isn’t this always the case when a new generation joins the workforce?”<sup>84</sup> Most generations “freak out” and cling onto the past—primarily when it benefits them to do so. However, one’s lack of evolution does not secure their standing within a culture or their influence within the church. If anything, when one clings onto the past, they lose the ability to have a voice within the present. Hence, when one fails to understand the weight of the Millennial and Generation Z voice, they fail to resound with the next generation of investors:

The church cannot hope to survive without grappling with reaching Millennials. Currently, they are the largest single grouping of Americans and the most powerful consumer group with purchasing power that will exceed Boomers’ this year—approximately \$1.3 trillion in direct spending. At 23.4 percent of the American population, millennials are 75.4 million strong. Because of this, they have been the subjects of extensive market research. Not only are they economically significant, but culturally and religiously as well.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Jamie Notter and Maddie Grant, *When Millennials Take Over: Preparing for the Ridiculously Optimistic Future of Business* (N.p.: Idea Press Publishing, 2015), 2.

<sup>84</sup> Tulgan, *Not Everyone Gets a Trophy*, 4.

<sup>85</sup> Seel, *The New Copernicans*, 28.

If one desires to influence the next generation, then they must be familiar with their generational myths and truths. This next section will concentration on the main assumptions that encircle Millennials and Generation Z and attempt to dismantle the false narratives that surround these generational myths.

#### *Myth 1: Millennials and Generation Z are Individualistic*

Dr. Jean M. Twenge, Boomer, professor, and author of *Generation Me*, asserts that:

*GenMe* believes that people should follow their dreams and not be held back by societal expectations—not necessarily a selfish viewpoint, but definitely an individualistic one. Taking a job in a new city far from one's family, for example, isn't selfish, but it does put the individual first. The same is true for a girl who wants to join a boys' sports team or a college student who wants to become an actor when his parents want him to be a doctor.<sup>86</sup>

Dr. Twenge's perspective is highly generalized because of her own implicit bias and generational assumption. However, she is not alone in her presumption. Countless publications have claimed that Millennials and Generation Z are more apt to be individualistic—some even go so far as to call them the *Selfie generation*. However, is this trait tied to a generational tendency, or has every generation had elements of individualism?

#### *Truth: Millennials and Generation Z are Interdependent*

Dr. Twenge assumes that it would be individualistic for a woman to take a job far from her family. However, she disregards technology, the failing economy, and the vast

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<sup>86</sup> Jean M. Twenge, *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled—and More Miserable Than Ever Before* (New York: Atria Paperback, 2014), 8.

lack of employment within suburban America. Twenge also assumes that most Millennials are choosing to leave their childhood home; however, many Millennials and Generation Z have chosen to stay in a multigenerational household to provide medical, emotional, and financial support for aging parents. According Emily Badger, a contributor to The Washington Post, “Back in a 2011 Pew survey, about a third of 18 to 34-year-olds living at home said they pay rent there, and three-quarters said they contribute to household expenses.”<sup>87</sup> Millennials and Generation Z are marrying later and living in their childhood home longer, but it is not for the reasons many assume.

According to Jen McGuire, a freelance writer for *Parents*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *Oprah Magazine*:

There’s an accepted narrative among the older people that millennials have it easy. It goes something like this: they don’t want to work hard, they want everything their own way, and they focus too much on wanting to see the world—they’re too idealistic. Plus, all of the avocados! Well, it turns out, older people actually all have it wrong. In fact, a new study has confirmed that millennials are the poorest generation to date.<sup>88</sup>

*Fox Business* echoes McGuire’s observation and asserts:

Millennials continue to struggle with an increasing amount of student debt. Since 2003, outstanding student loan balances have increased by more than 457%. Millennials were only at the head of a total of 28 million U.S. households, despite comprising the largest living population size of nearly 80 million and according to a Pew Research Center analysis of Census Bureau data, millennials made up about 5.3 million of the nearly 17 million U.S. households considered to be living

<sup>87</sup> Emily Badger, “The New Millennial Mystery: Why Young People with Jobs Are Still Living at Home,” Washington Post, July 31, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/07/31/this-new-millennial-mystery-is-terrible-news-for-ikea/>.

<sup>88</sup> Jen McGuire, “This Study Confirms Millennials Are the Poorest Generation to Date,” Romper, September 7, 2017, <https://www.romper.com/p/this-study-confirms-millennials-are-the-poorest-generation-to-date-everyone-nods-in-agreement-2302400>.

below the poverty line in 2016. Comparatively, Generation Xers were at the head of 4.2 million and Baby Boomers led 5 million poor households.<sup>89</sup>

Zoe Rohrich, a contributor to PBS News Hour, asserts, “More young Americans are becoming caregivers to elderly or disabled family members.”<sup>90</sup> She also suggests, “The ‘Leave it to Beaver’ kind of model of mom and dad and two kids are not the way American demography necessarily looks today, even in younger populations.”<sup>91</sup> Why do these statistics differ so much from Dr. Twenge’s assertions? Perhaps it is because her absolutes stem from her opinions. Unless generational understanding is separated from generational bias, one’s interaction with an individual will be colored by one’s generalized presumptions about the whole grouping.

#### *Myth 2: Millennials and Generation Z are Anti-Authority*

According to Sheila Marikar, “Jack MacKenzie, president of Magid Generational Strategies, a company in Los Angeles that analyzes generational trends for corporations, said that what millennials have in common is a lack of trust in authority...”<sup>92</sup> This assumption is quite popular within business circles, especially since many perceive Millennials’ preference of lateral leadership as a stance of hostility. Thus, when Millennials and Generation Z question the practices or ideologies of managerial staff or

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<sup>89</sup> “Millennial Households Are Poorer Than Any Other Generation: Study,” Fox Business, September 7, 2017, <https://www.foxbusiness.com/features/millennial-households-are-poorer-than-any-other-generation-study>.

<sup>90</sup> Zoe Rohrich, “Why More Millennials Are Becoming Caregivers,” PBS, January 16, 2019, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/why-more-millennials-are-becoming-caregivers>.

<sup>91</sup> Rohrich, “Why More Millennials Are Becoming Caregivers.”

<sup>92</sup> Sheila Marikar, “For Millennials, a Generational Divide,” *The New York Times*, December 20, 2013, [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/22/fashion/Millenials-Millennials-Generation-Y.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/22/fashion/Millenials-Millennials-Generation-Y.html?_r=1).

lead pastors, many older generations view their behavior as threatening or problematic—especially since both Millennials and Generation Z are not easily appeased or impressed by hierarchy.

### *Truth: Millennials and Generation Z are Pro-Collaboration*

According to Lynne C. Lancaster and David Stillman, authors of *The M Factor*, “Millennials are showing up on the job with high expectations for fulfillment and success. Unfortunately, the job experience often isn’t what they hoped it would be and they change jobs looking for the right match.”<sup>93</sup> Generation X might have traversed jobs looking for higher pay and benefits; however, Millennials and Generation Z view employment as tied to a higher purpose—one that provides opportunities for self-actualization, community service, and global impact. Millennials and Generation Z might be known as one of the most nomadic when it comes to vocational commitment; however, this generational trend has nothing to do with a *fear of commitment*—if anything, it is centered on the *significance of connection*.

According to Hayden Shaw, “Millennials, growing up under the shadow of school shootings and the terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001, know that no matter how many organic kale salads they eat, life is unpredictable and can end at any moment. As a result, they want to make a difference now.”<sup>94</sup> Unlike their Boomer parents, who placed work above all else, Millennials are seeking employment that enables them to have a well-balanced life.

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<sup>93</sup> Lynne C. Lancaster and David Stillman, *The M-Factor: How the Millennial Generation Is Rocking the Workplace* (New York: HarperBusiness, 2010), 7.

<sup>94</sup> Shaw, *Generational IQ*, 88.

Eric Greenberg and Karl Weber, authors of *Generation We*, suggest that Millennials and Generation Z are not disregarding authority; they are operating with the mindset of shared power for shared benefit. In essence:

Millennials are more likely to follow the rules, and they say family and values are important to them. In the millennial generation, violent crime and drug-related crime are all down. Older generations tend to take their casual and inquisitive nature as defiance. It's not that they want to break rules or cause trouble; they simply want to know the reasoning behind the rules.<sup>95</sup>

Therefore, younger generations are not anti-authority. If anything, they are pro-collaboration—and, in many ways, “symbolize the rising activism, energy, and creativity”<sup>96</sup> needed to create change and rebuild the church. Consequently, one is only able to retain and attract these generations when their mission is communally beneficial, lateral in leadership, and purposefully inclusive.

For example, when one looks at the brands that are generating the most popularity within these age groups, they find that they drastically differ from the older model of leader-based branding. Charity Water<sup>97</sup> and TOMS shoes<sup>98</sup> are two of the most famous brands that are capturing an intergenerational workforce—mainly because they are engaging a Millennial and Generational Z mindset.

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<sup>95</sup> Brad Karsh and Courtney Templin, *Manager 3.0: A Millennials Guide to Rewriting the Rules of Management* (New York: Amacom, 2013), 22.

<sup>96</sup> Eric H. Greenberg and Karl Weber, *Generation We: How Millennial Youth Are Taking Over America and Changing Our World Forever* (Emeryville, CA: Pachatusan, 2008), 117.

<sup>97</sup> Elise Hu, “How Millennials Are Reshaping Charity and Online Giving,” NPR <https://www.npr.org>, October 13, 2014, <https://www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2014/10/13/338295367/how-millennials-are-reshaping-charity-and-online-giving>.

<sup>98</sup> “Why Millennials Love TOMS: Insights from Millennial 20/20 Speakers,” <https://www.ypulse.com>, April 25, 2017, <https://www.ypulse.com/article/2017/04/25/why-millennials-love-toms-insights-from-millennial-20-20-speakers/>

Many presume that younger generations are embracing secularism because “Christian millennials tend to have a lot of cognitive dissonance, having one foot in and one foot out. They are the paradigm straddlers.”<sup>99</sup> Millennials and Generation Z have a dichotomous perspective of the sacred and the secular; however, they embrace this stance of uncertainty because they view society, politics, and theology as complex entities to be uncovered—not simplistic measurements of ecclesiastical dogma.

*Truth: Millennials and Generation Z are Approaching Faith with Humility*

Dr. Charles Taylor, professor of philosophy at McGill University, and Dr. James K.A. Smith, professor of philosophy at Calvin College, explore the parallel contradictions that create the constructs of one’s convictions and concourse in their books *A Secular Age* and *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor*. They believe that there is a duality within one’s theological framework and a fluidity of one’s expression. According to Dr. Taylor, “Secularity is a condition in which our experience of and search for fullness occurs; and this is something we all share, believers and unbelievers alike.”<sup>100</sup> Therefore, secularity is not the antithesis of faith, but the journey that transfers one toward faith. Taylor goes on to suggest:

We all learn to navigate between two standpoints: an “engaged” one in which we live as best we can the reality our standpoint opens us to; and a “disengaged” one in which we are able to see ourselves as occupying one standpoint among a range of possible ones, with which we have in various ways to coexist.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Seel, *The New Copernicans*, 90.

<sup>100</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018), 19.

<sup>101</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 12.

Therefore, the exodus of Millennials and Generation Z is not only connected to generational differences, but theological, ontological, and philosophical foundations. Consequently, those who are exiting the doors of the sanctuary are not looking for a new religion, but a pure version of Christianity that is centered on Christ and not cultural conformity, i.e., conservative evangelicalism. If pastors and leaders continue to present their theological perspectives through the lens of apologetic certainty, they will lose the attention and respect of Millennials and Generation Z, who approach the world from the position of cognitive diversity. Therefore, one must invite these generations to the table—not force-feed them cultural conformity.

*Myth 4: Millennials and Generation Z have Replaced the Gospel with Social Justice*

Many Millennials and Generation Z have left the pews and entered the protest. However, not everyone agrees with this generational pull toward social justice, especially those who deem personal conversion as the only form of communal transformation. Joy Craun, a contributor to Missio Alliance, explored this dynamic in depth and discovered, “church leadership when polled, largely stated they did not think racism was a problem, nor did they consider themselves racist.”<sup>102</sup> Many American conservative evangelicals, especially white evangelicals, do not see the need to address systemic change because they believe that sexism and racism are not issues within the 21st century, not to mention the 21st-century church.

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<sup>102</sup> Joy Craun, “Racism and the Dying American Church,” Missio Alliance, January 17, 2019, <https://www.missioalliance.org/racism-and-the-dying-american-church/>.

*Truth: Millennials and Generation Z view their Faith as Incarnational*

Millennials and Generation Z see social justice as a collaborative expression of an incarnational Christ. Hence, they view justice alongside Jesus. They are not creating a new mindset within the church; they are producing a new mission—one that dismantles white saviorism and racial hierarchy. Millennials and Generation Z are not advocating for a white saviorism or tokenism; rather, they are demanding racial diversity, gender equality, and LGBT+ inclusion behind the pulpit and within the pew. The majority are unwilling to turn a blind eye when a pastor spews a discriminatory remark or when a congregant blames a woman for domestic abuse. Substitutionary tolerance is not embraced as equality within the Millennial and Generation Z mindset.

Eric Mason, pastor of Epiphany Fellowship in Philadelphia, and author of *Woke Church: An Urgent Call for Christians in America to Confront Racism and Injustice*, boldly asserts:

As exiles in this world, we must see ourselves as incarnational missionaries in the world for justice. Shalom is the means for justice to be done. Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matt. 5:9 NIV). Since we are children of God, we must be peacemakers. We can’t be peacemakers and ignore injustice. Ignoring injustice isn’t a sign of being an authentic believer. Particularly, ignoring systemic injustice.<sup>103</sup>

According to Mason, it is impossible to bring peace unless one is willing to identify the problem. John Inazu, Sally D. Danforth Distinguished Professor of Law & Religion and Political Science at Washington University in St. Louis, echoes the same sentiment as Mason. He suggests:

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<sup>103</sup> Eric Mason, *Woke Church: An Urgent Call for Christians in America to Confront Racism and Injustice* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2018), 55.

Thousands of evangelicals of all races labor in the inner city, in multi-ethnic churches and in ministries of reconciliation. But the lack of evangelical engagement on issues of racial justice, particularly from evangelical institutions, leaves the question of whether black lives matter an open one for some.<sup>104</sup>

Millennials and Generation Z are not fighting against presentational superficialities, but foundational precepts. Many of them are fighting for men and women of color to have their God-given rights of equality, value, and protection. However, as mentioned in chapter four, many pastors and leaders have remained silent on the issues of racism, sexism, homophobia, and nationalism. If pastors and leaders want to reach these generations, then they must be willing to enter into the reality of their pain, their purpose, and their passion. They must realize that when black men are gunned down in cold blood, or brutality shouts from another headline, Millennials and Generation Z are looking for the church to react—not in prayer, but action.

According to Robert P. Jones, CEO of Public Religion Research Institute:

For most of the twentieth century, in White Christian America, the terms “Christian” and “Protestant” were virtually synonymous. Questions like “And where do you go to church?” felt appropriate in casual social interactions or even business exchanges. White Christian America was a place where few gave a second thought to saying, “Merry Christmas!” to strangers on the street. It was a world of shared rhythms that punctuated the week: Wednesday spaghetti suppers and prayer meetings, invocations from local pastors under the Friday night lights at high school football games, and Sunday blue laws that shuttered Main Street for the Sabbath.<sup>105</sup>

Myriad pastors and leaders have refused to enter into the warzone of systemic change, especially concerning racial equality. Many find it easier to form another hashtag on

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<sup>104</sup> John Inazu, “Do Black Lives Matter to Evangelicals?” Washington Post, January 6, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2016/01/05/do-black-lives-matter-to-evangelicals/>.

<sup>105</sup> Robert Patrick Jones, *The End of White Christian America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017), 38.

social media or pray for Jesus to return. However, countless men and women experience a living hell right outside their sanctuary. Thus, according to Jones, if pastors and leaders want to keep thousands of Millennials and Generation Z from leaving the doors of their church, then they must stop striving for a White Christian America.<sup>106</sup>

*Myth 5: Millennials and Generation Z are Destroying the Church by Welcoming All*

Franklin Graham was interviewed by Melissa Harris-Perry in April 2014. When pressed with the question about what he thought about President Obama's emphasis on LGBTQ inclusion and equality within America, he replied:

Russian President Vladimir Putin “is right” in the actions he has taken against gay men and lesbians in his country. Isn’t it sad, though, that America’s own morality has fallen so far that on this issue—protecting children from any homosexual agenda or propaganda—Russia’s standard is higher than our own? In my opinion, Putin is right on these issues. Obviously, he may be wrong about many things, but he has taken a stand to protect his nation’s children from the damaging effects of any gay and lesbian agenda. Our president and his attorney general have turned their backs on God and His standards, and many in the Congress are following the administration’s lead. This is shameful.<sup>107</sup>

What is shameful is that Franklin Graham, an evangelical leader, believes that it is justifiable, even *Christian*, to subject men and women to abuse because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Jonathan Capehart, “Franklin Graham’s Detestable Anti-Gay Statements,” Washington Post, April 21, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2014/04/21/franklin-grahams-detestable-anti-gay-statements/>.

*Truth: Millennials and Generation Z are Standing Against Discrimination*

Dmitry Savelua, a contributor to the *Independent*, shares about the brutalization that occurred in Chechnya. He reveals:

Amnesty International reported that 106 people who survived the horrific mass persecution of gay men in Chechnya in March-May 2017 were able to escape Russia. But many more of the hundreds suffered and those who are still being threatened remain in hiding or continue to live in their hometowns.<sup>108</sup>

According to Masha Gessen, a contributor to the *New Yorker*:

Organized groups of young men were entrapping gay men, torturing them on camera, and posting the videos. Actual police—in Chechnya were rounding up and torturing gay men, and that some of these men had apparently been killed, while others were released to their relatives, who were instructed to kill the men themselves. Electrocution, solitary-confinement cells, beatings, dunking in a vat of cold water, and starvation were used.<sup>109</sup>

One of the men who escaped Chechnya talks about his experience and gives a glimpse into the torture he suffered at the hands of the Russian government:

In one chamber, officers dunked prisoners' heads in a vat of ice water; in another, they attached clothespin-like clips wired to a large battery to earlobes or extremities. The cells held men and women, who screamed as they were beaten with fists and batons.<sup>110</sup>

This type of genocidal rhetoric has compelled countless acts of discrimination and torture against those in the LGBT+ community. “Matthew Shepard was abducted, beaten and killed 20 years ago because he was gay. He was beaten 20 times in the head and face with

<sup>108</sup> Dmitry Savelau, “It May Seem Like LGBT Rights Aren’t Important to Putin—But If You Look Closer, You’ll See They’re Central to the Russian Election,” *Independent*, March 14, 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/russia-election-putin-win-anti-lgbt-propaganda-chechnya-persecution-homophobia-a8255186.html>.

<sup>109</sup> Masha Gessen, “The Year Russian LGBT Persecution Defied Belief,” *The New Yorker*, December 29, 2017, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/2017-in-review/the-year-russian-lgbt-persecution-defied-belief>.

<sup>110</sup> Masha Gessen, “The Gay Men Who Fled Chechnya’s Purge,” *The New Yorker*, June 26, 2017, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/07/03/the-gay-men-who-fled-chechnyas-purge>.

the end of the pistol and tied to a fence in Wyoming.”<sup>111</sup> Shephard’s story was merely one of many; however, the same hate that fueled his death is the same hate that resides within countless evangelical churches each Sunday:

Even before the shooting rampage at a gay nightclub in Orlando, Fla., lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people were already the most likely targets of hate crimes in America, according to an analysis of data collected by the Federal Bureau of Investigation.<sup>112</sup>

In 2019, “violent hate crimes in [the] U.S. reach[ed their] highest levels” since 2003.<sup>113</sup>

Sam Levin, a contributor to *The Guardian*, stresses the significance of this:

Noting that the 16-year high has occurred despite an overall decline in crime across the country. In recent years, the spikes in incidents have consistently correlated with political attacks against specific marginalized groups; he said: “The more we have these derisive stereotypes broadcasted into the ether, the more people are going to inhale that toxin.”<sup>114</sup>

Michael Kimpan, a contributor to Red Letter Christians, suggests:

Violence against any person or people group can be boiled down to three simple steps. Step 1) Agree that it is OK to treat some people different than others. Step 2) Agree that violence can be a useful tool to solve some problems. Step 3) Apply that violence to other people you deem lesser than you use whatever criteria you choose. Is that not the path to all forms of violence, really? All acts of violence stem from the dehumanization of another.<sup>115</sup>

<sup>111</sup> Robert Zepeda and Emily Shapiro, “Matthew Shepard: The Legacy of a Gay College Student 20 Years After His Brutal Murder,” ABC News, October 26, 2018, [https://abcnews.go.com/US/matthew-shepard-legacy-gay-college-student-20-years/story?id=58242426&fbclid=IwAR0Qa-usw9gcEuI1euN3Q6OsfwVkjzh\\_XwN3agZBPxekm58oxaAbK2ohzs](https://abcnews.go.com/US/matthew-shepard-legacy-gay-college-student-20-years/story?id=58242426&fbclid=IwAR0Qa-usw9gcEuI1euN3Q6OsfwVkjzh_XwN3agZBPxekm58oxaAbK2ohzs).

<sup>112</sup> Haeyoun Park and Iaryna Mykhyalyshyn, “L.G.B.T. People Are More Likely to Be Targets of Hate Crimes Than Any Other Minority Group,” *The New York Times*, June 16, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/06/16/us/hate-crimes-against-lgbt.html>.

<sup>113</sup> Sam Levin, “Violent Hate Crimes in U.S. Reach Highest Levels in 16 Years, FBI Reports,” *The Guardian*, November 13, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/nov/12/hate-crimes-2018-latino-transgender-fbi>.

<sup>114</sup> Levin, “Violent Hate Crimes in Us Reach Highest Levels in 16 Years, FBI Reports.”

<sup>115</sup> Michael Kimpan, “FBI Report: Hate Crimes Against Gays Outnumber Those Against Religion,” Red Letter Christians, December 19, 2012, <https://www.redletterchristians.org/fbi-report-hate-crimes-against-gays-outnumber-those-against-religion/>.

Kimpan goes onto assert:

If someone fails to celebrate the imago dei in another—fails to see them as a beautiful expression of the Divine even in spite of their differences—then it is not surprising that apathy, ignorance, intolerance and even violent responses would follow.<sup>116</sup>

Based on the above quotes it is safe to conclude that Millennials and Generation Z believe that all are made in the Image of God. Therefore, they believe that all have the freedom and right to enter into the House of God. However, not all denominations view this generational distinction with open arms—many are barricading their doors and demanding their rights with clenched up fists.

#### *Truth: Millennials and Generation Z are Embracing Fourth Wave Feminism*

It is imperative to understand that the definition of feminism is intrinsic to generational interpretation and emphasis. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the various waves of feminism before one can create spaces for Millennials and Generation Z. According to the *Political Studies Association*:

In 1928, the feminist movement gradually turned its attention to women's inequality in wider society. Second-wave feminists coined the phrase “the personal is political” as a means of highlighting the impact of sexism and patriarchy on every aspect of women’s private lives. Feminism in its second wave was about breaking down gender stereotypes, thus emphasizing that feminism was of importance to men as well as to women. Yet second-wave feminists treated women as a homogenous group, without paying attention to the many axes of difference that cleave apart the singular category of “women.”<sup>117</sup>

The first and the second waves of feminism might have created spaces of equality, broke gender stereotypes, and addressed the issues of sexism; however, the third and the fourth

<sup>116</sup> Kimpan, “FBI Report: Hate Crimes Against Gays Outnumber Those Against Religion.”

<sup>117</sup> Ealasaid Munro, “Feminism: A Fourth Wave?” Political Studies Association, September 5, 2013, <https://www.psa.ac.uk/psa/news/feminism-fourth-wave>.

waves would embrace a different emphasis on feminism and welcome the marginalized into the Women's March.

According to British scholar Ealasaid Munro, “Academic investigations of the queer theory have heavily influenced Third-wave feminism. The queer theory posits that gender and sexuality are fluid categories, and do not easily map onto binary understandings of ‘male’ and ‘female.’”<sup>118</sup> This position is popular amongst most feminists today, especially Generation X and Millennials, since it “began in the 1990s and has lived up until the current day.”<sup>119</sup> However, a new wave of feminism is creating another generational distinction, especially amongst Generation Z. Munro suggests:

Many commentators argue that the internet itself has enabled a shift from “third-wave” to “fourth-wave” feminism. What is certain is that the internet has created a “call-out” culture, in which sexism or misogyny can be “called out” and challenged. This culture is indicative of the continuing influence of the third wave, with its focus on micropolitics and challenging sexism and misogyny insofar as they appear in everyday rhetoric, advertising, film, television and literature, the media, and so on.<sup>120</sup>

According to the *Barnard Center for Research on Women*:

Many have called feminist blogs the 21st-century version of consciousness-raising. Today, the online feminist world constitutes both a “communications arm” for the contemporary feminist movement and an inexhaustible force continually radicalizing and challenging its institutionalization. Online feminism has transformed the way advocacy and action function within the feminist movement.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Munro, “Feminism: A Fourth Wave?” Political Studies Association.

<sup>119</sup> April Demarco, “What Is Third Wave Feminist Movement?” <https://vocal.media/viva>, accessed January 24, 2020, <https://vocal.media/viva/what-is-third-wave-feminist-movement>.

<sup>120</sup> Munro, “Feminism: A Fourth Wave?” Political Studies Association.

<sup>121</sup> Courtney E. Martin and Vanessa Valenti, “#FemFuture: Online Revolution,” Barnard, accessed January 24, 2020, <http://bcrw.barnard.edu/wp-content/nfs/reports/NFS8-FemFuture-Online-Revolution-Report.pdf>.

The internet has reformatted the conversation around the topic of feminism. The impact of social media has yet to be determined when it comes to transformative change; however, it is impossible to deny that the communication methodology of Generation Z has forged a voice of equality that goes beyond the march, the ballot box, and the 9-to-5 workday. “One of the key issues for contemporary feminism is intersectionality.”<sup>122</sup>

The late Rachel Held Evans echoes this generational sentiment and preference toward fourth-wave feminism. The majority of evangelical churches continue to push women to remain stagnated within gender-specific narratives. Evans, however, gives her readers a glimpse into the dichotomous relationship between her interests and the church’s perceived expectation:

There were rules in this society, particularly for women, and I still hadn’t learned my lesson about avoiding the topic of eternal damnation at baby showers, showers that were now, inexplicably, under my care. I was better suited for leading a Bible Study or theological discussion, but those things happened at the men’s breakfasts (because, apparently, only men like theology and breakfast foods), so instead I constructed diaper cakes and mixed punch and listened to women exchange gruesome and detailed birth stories before turning to me to sing, “So, when can we expect a baby Evans?”<sup>123</sup>

Evans longed to be the church—the body of Christ that functions in gifting and ability. However, she was silenced and dismissed from the theological conversation simply because of her gender. Sarah Bessey, author of *Jesus Feminist*, shares Evans’ experience and reveals: “As women, we often hear this mandate to be submissive, to be silent, in the

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<sup>122</sup> Munro, “Feminism: A Fourth Wave?” Political Studies Association.

<sup>123</sup> Evans, *Searching for Sunday*, 56.

context of our souls being crushed in big and small ways; and the arch of our interpretations have real, hurtful, and sometimes dangerous implication.”<sup>124</sup>

The fourth wave of feminism is not only a vote against patriarchal oppression—it is a demand for diversified inclusion. Millennials and Generation Z are forging their own mores and norms based upon their familial, cultural, and societal interpretations of scripture. However, many evangelical pastors and leaders are perpetuating a cultural expectation of church hierarchy, strict orthodoxy, and communal conformity. Therefore, Millennials and Generation Z might be embracing the fourth wave of feminism, but the majority of evangelical leaders are continuing to enforce that their congregants *grow up* and adhere to the cultural norms of conservative evangelicalism.

#### *Truth: Millennials and Generation Z Support Feminism and LGBT+ Inclusion*

According to a recent article in *Time Magazine*:

Young evangelicals reject the idea that the “good news,” or the salvation promise, is only granted to those who hold to conservative dictates and 1950s gender roles. For example, at Wheaton College, evangelical Christian evangelist Billy Graham’s alma mater, students have vocally opposed the “community covenant” that states that scripture condemns “homosexual behavior.” Last year, feminist leader Jordan-Ashley Barney and LGBT activist Justin Massey organized a demonstration before a speech on Christianity and sexuality. Students held signs that read “I’m gay and a beloved child of God,” and “We’re all loved by God.” Their message: The “good news” is for everybody. Evangelical millennials are not capitulating to secular culture. If anything, their esteem for the Bible’s authority and Jesus’ teachings reveal a faith that’s as robust as ever—and deeply, profoundly, unquestionably evangelical.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Sarah Bessey, *Jesus Feminist: An Invitation to Revisit the Bible's View of Women* (New York: Howard Books, 2013), 62.

<sup>125</sup> Deborah Jian Lee, “Why the Young Religious Right Is Leaning Left,” *Time*, October 20, 2015, <https://time.com/4078909/evangelical-millennials/>.

Brandan Robertson, LGBT advocate, pastor, and author echoes this sentiment and suggests:

Patriarchy is a system of social order that privileges men as the ideal leaders and power brokers of society. The system of patriarchy, however, is not just oppressive to women. Because they are rife with misogyny, classism, racism, and homophobia, patriarchal cultures and institutions almost always develop a system of oppression that prevents women, an “outside” race, culture, or social class (usually immigrants), and effeminate, castrated, gender nonconforming, or homosexual people from rising through the ranks of privilege and power within the societal system.<sup>126</sup>

Robertson goes on to state:

Patriarchy is a system of “othering” that was developed to ensure that societies run effectively on behalf of the privileged. But that doesn’t make it right or good. In previous periods of human history, this model of society has been taken for granted as the divinely dictated ordering of the world, therefore accepted as truth by privileged people in most societies. But in the post-Enlightenment era, humanity is beginning to wake up to the inherent brokenness of this way of ordering our world, and is fighting for a new and egalitarian model of social order.<sup>127</sup>

Patriarchy is still a strong pillar within conservative evangelicalism and is a normative practice within many modern-day churches. This practice is prevalent regardless of denominational affiliation, progressive leanings, or egalitarian mission statements. For instance, regarding seminary enrollment, “the story of the past twenty years appears to be one of stagnation. In 2017 women are actually a smaller number and a lower percentage of MDiv Students in all ATS schools than they were in 1998.”<sup>128</sup> Also, “in 2017, women made up only 11 percent of seminary presidents and less than 25 percent of seminary

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<sup>126</sup> Robertson, *True Inclusion*, 53.

<sup>127</sup> Robertson, *True Inclusion*, 54.

<sup>128</sup> Samuel Smith, “Number of Clergywomen Has Exponentially Increased Over Last 2 Decades; Study Says,” Christian Post, October 11, 2018, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/number-of-clergywomen-has-exponentially-increased-over-last-2-decades-study-says.html>.

faculty and deans at ATS schools in 2017.”<sup>129</sup> Moreover, according to Brandon Showalter, a contributor for The Christian Post:

Church Clarity is calling out megachurches for their lack of diversity. Only 7 percent of megachurches are led by people of color when racial minorities comprise nearly 40 percent of the general population. Similarly, only 1 of the 100 megachurches listed<sup>130</sup> has a female pastor, who co-pastors with her husband.<sup>131</sup>

Millennials and Generation Z believe:

The practice of Christian hope points us to a life beyond this world, but it also requires us to act in such a way that models God’s coming kingdom. The Kingdom of God is characterized by the love of enemies, the welcoming of strangers, the belief in the human dignity of all people, a humble and self-sacrificial posture toward public life.<sup>132</sup>

However, Barna Research reveals:

Half of the churchgoing teens say, “the church seems to reject much of what science tells us about the world” (49%) and one-third that “the church is overprotective of teenagers” (38%) or “the people at church are hypocritical” (36%). Further, one-quarter claims, “the church is not a safe place to express doubts” (27%) or that the teaching they are exposed to is “rather shallow” (24%).<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Smith, “Number of Clergywomen Has Exponentially Increased Over Last 2 Decades; Study Says.”

<sup>130</sup> “Scoring America’s 100 Largest Churches for Clarity (2018),” Church Clarity, January 31, 2019, <https://www.churchclarity.org/resources/scoring-americas-100-largest-churches-for-clarity-2018>.

<sup>131</sup> Brandon Showalter, “100 Largest US Megachurches Do Not Affirm LGBT Causes, Mostly Led by White Pastors: Report,” Christian Post, January 4, 2018, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/100-largest-us-megachurches-do-not-affirm-lgbt-causes-mostly-led-by-white-pastors-report.html>.

<sup>132</sup> Fea, “Evangelical Fear Elected Trump.”

<sup>133</sup> “Atheism Doubles Among Generation Z,” Barna Group, January 24, 2018, <https://www.barna.com/research/atheism-doubles-among-generation-z/>.

When only “11% of American congregations are led by women”<sup>134</sup> and “none of America’s 100 largest churches are LGBT-affirming,”<sup>135</sup> it is evident why churches are losing two of the largest generations in history—especially when the “majority (57 percent) of millennials agree that religious people are generally less tolerant of others, compared to only 37 percent of Baby Boomers.”<sup>136</sup> Therefore, pastors and leaders need to understand:

A younger cohort of evangelical Protestants is increasingly black and Latino. Ethnicity aside, they resemble other young Americans in not automatically sharing their elders’ hostility to same-sex marriage, abortion or gay and transgender rights. They are more likely to believe that nurturing the newborn is at least as important as protecting the unborn.<sup>137</sup>

Millennials and Generation Z are not looking for a place with better light displays or better coffee shops—they are looking for a place that’s conversational and collaborative. Therefore, in order for the church to reach younger generations, they need to work with them instead of preaching against them. They need to realize that Christianity is developing—developing into an entity that reaches people outside of the sanctuary. However, one must be willing to bridge the gap within the sanctuary. They must exemplify inclusion and embrace diversity.

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<sup>134</sup> David Masci, “The Divide Over Ordaining Women,” Pew Research Center, September 9, 2014, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/09/09/the-divide-over-ordinating-women/>.

<sup>135</sup> Christianna Silva, “America’s Largest Churches Are All Anti-LGBT and Led by Mostly White Men,” Newsweek, January 6, 2018, <https://www.newsweek.com/americas-100-largest-churches-are-anti-lgbt-and-led-white-men-773017>.

<sup>136</sup> Daniel Cox and Amelia Thomson-DeVeaux, “Millennials Are Leaving Religion and Not Coming Back,” FiveThirtyEight, December 12, 2019, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/millennials-are-leaving-religion-and-not-coming-back/>.

<sup>137</sup> Haberman, “Religion and Right-Wing Politics.”

### *Myth 6: Higher Education is Corrupting Millennials and Generation Z*

Countless sermons continue to echo the false diatribe that education somehow leads to skepticism. However, the majority of pastors and professors who perpetuate this vitriol only use it to control the masses and create a conformist mentality. According to Dennis Prager, a contributor to the National Review:

The more university education a person receives, the more likely he is to hold secular and left-wing views. The secular Left argues that this correlation is due to the fact that a college graduate knows more and thinks more clearly and therefore gravitates leftward and toward secularism.<sup>138</sup>

Conversely, according to Connor Friedersdorf's article, "Why College Students are Losing Their Religion":

For many of these students, it turns out that their religious behavior was driven more by desire for community, or social and parental pressure, than by deeply held beliefs. Another reason education correlates with secularism is that secularists are more likely to seek advanced degrees, partly because they're more focused than their religious counterparts on career.<sup>139</sup>

Therefore, education is not the antithesis of faith. For many Millennials and Generation Z, it is the journey they traverse toward faith. The problem is not with education, but the lack of cognitive diversity within the church. Ruth Milkman, author and contributor to the American Sociological Review, reveals:

Millennials are the most highly educated generation in U.S. history. In 2015, 36 percent of the population age 25 to 29 had a four-year college degree or more,

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<sup>138</sup> Dennis Prager, "Why God Isn't Doing Well," National Review, April 5, 2011, <https://www.nationalreview.com/2011/04/why-god-isnt-doing-well-dennis-prager/>.

<sup>139</sup> Conor Friedersdorf, "Why College Students Are Losing Their Religion," The Atlantic, April 6, 2011, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2011/04/why-college-students-are-losing-their-religion/236874/>.

compared to 24 percent in 1976. Young women lead this trend, with even higher levels of educational attainment than their male counterparts.<sup>140</sup>

However, this fact has not led the church to become more inclusive toward those with higher education, but more antagonistic.

#### *Truth: Millennials and Generation Z View Education as an Accompaniment to Faith*

During my field research, I interviewed Millennial and Generation Z participants who worked in some type of leadership within an evangelical church or nonprofit organization. I discovered that participants who had completed graduate school showed more signs of inclusion, globalization, and integration.

One participant revealed, “The church I am in was hesitant to accept my ideas. Since then, they have become more open to them. Also, those in their 20s and 30s are stereotyped regardless of where they are [inside or outside of the church]. It is not very easy to break through.”<sup>141</sup> The majority of participants within the same educational level concurred with one another. However, when I interviewed those who had only completed high school or some college, I found that they were most vocal in their support of the evangelical church. Many within evangelical circles portray Christianity as a crutch for the weak; however, this type of hyperbole does not resonate with highly educated and driven individuals. They cannot relate to a self-deprecating community.

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<sup>140</sup> Ruth Milkman, “A New Political Generation: Millennials and the Post-2008 Wave of Protest,” *American Sociological Review* 82, no. 1 (January 2017): 1-31, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0003122416681031>.

<sup>141</sup> IRB Interview with Millennial and Generation Z church leaders. Survey was conducted online via *Survey Monkey*, and results were provided in November 2019.

Thom and Jess Rainer interviewed a multitude of those in their twenties and thirties and found that education was one of the highest goals that young adults were pursuing. They explain:

When we asked the respondents open-ended questions about what's really important in their lives, they listed education as the third most important, only behind family and friends. This is the generation that scored higher on many of the aptitude tests in the 1990s. These young people are taking advanced placement tests in large numbers. They see education as cool and a college degree as a requisite to advance in life.<sup>142</sup>

However, the majority of leaders within the church differ when it comes to educational attainment and academic rigor. After all, one of the most overused quotes within conservative evangelical circles is “the Lord never calls the qualified; He qualifies the called.”<sup>143</sup> It is possible that this quote is so famous is due to the lack of higher education within most evangelical churches—a topic explored in chapter four.

On average, evangelical Protestants have somewhat lower levels of educational attainment, compared with the U.S. public as a whole. Roughly one-in-five evangelical Protestants (21%) are college graduates, while 35% have some college education (but not a four-year degree), and 43% have a high school education or less. Among those in the overall public, 27% are college graduates, 37% have some college experience, and 41% have a high school diploma or less education.<sup>144</sup>

Many evangelical pastors and leaders have hostile opinions of education because it tips the scales and creates an environment of participation-based leadership and

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<sup>142</sup> Thom S. Rainer and Jess W. Rainer, *The Millennials: Connecting to America's Largest Generation* (Nashville, TN: B & H Pub. Group, 2011), 20.

<sup>143</sup> Brent Rinehart, “What Is Omnipotence and What Does It Mean for Me?” Crosswalk, April 16, 2018, <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/spiritual-life/what-is-omnipotence-and-what-does-it-mean-for-me.html>.

<sup>144</sup> David Masci and Gregory A. Smith, “5 Facts About U.S. Evangelical Protestants,” Pew Research, March 1, 2018, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/03/01/5-facts-about-u-s-evangelical-protestants/>.

individualized perspective. However, according to Dr. Packard, sociologist and author of *Church Refugees*, “Heavily centralized and hierarchical organizations tend to concentrate power and gradually compel all activities inward, stifling innovation, creativity, and opposing ideas. This is not a problem unique to churches or religious organizations; these are problems inherent to all bureaucracies.”<sup>145</sup> Perhaps the reason why people have checked out is that pastors and leaders have rarely allowed them the chance to check in.

The majority of those in pastoral leadership within today’s evangelical church operate from a denominational perspective, which lends itself towards a one-dimensional perception of praxis and theological interpretation. Therefore, instead of operating within a diversified environment, they are limited in their exploration because they function within a cloistered context. They read the same books, hear the same sermons, and develop the same convictions alongside their peers. This type of preparation does not serve to create empathetic ministers, but segregated priests.

According to Dr. Richard F. Lovelace, “the leadership of lay evangelists without formal theological training… led to a progressively shallower spirituality among evangelicals and to a loss of intellectual command”<sup>146</sup> When pastors and leaders segregate themselves from opposing views and remain confined within their perspectives, it is like a Caucasian pastor living in an all-white gated community and serving in a predominantly Black church. Sooner or later, their implicit bias surfaces and influences their leadership ethics. The same is true for those who remain cloistered from opposing

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<sup>145</sup> Josh Packard and Ashleigh Hope, *Church Refugees: Sociologists Reveal Why People Are Done with the Church but Not Their Faith* (Loveland, CO: Group, 2015), 56.

<sup>146</sup> Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Eugene, Or: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 50.

voices within white conservative evangelicalism. Eventually, they base their ministries on assumptions instead of interactions.

### **Summary**

Chapter five explored the generational shifts within society and the church, including the reasons why Millennials and Generation Z view the gospel as personal, cultural, and communal. Chapter six will build on this chapter and look at the generational narratives and leadership methodologies necessary to retain and attract Millennials and Generation Z. It will also provide pastors and leaders with the tools and resources that they need to implement inclusion, diversity, and equality within their own ministries and within their own context.

## CHAPTER 6:

### A NEW TYPE OF CHRISTIANITY

#### **Increasing Skepticism and Church Dynamics**

According to Confucius, “The green reed which bends in the wind is stronger than the mighty oak which breaks in a storm.”<sup>1</sup> The same is true for the church. The evolutionary flux of generational influence upon the church should not tempt pastors and leaders to retreat; it should compel them to question their perspectives and praxis in light of this generational shift. According to Dr. Angela Duckworth, psychologist and author of *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*:

Success doesn’t depend on talent. It depends on intensely focusing on a goal with passion and perseverance. Resilience is a person’s ability to recover quickly from failures and setbacks and adapt to adversity. Having a growth mindset means that you do not accept failure or setback as final. Instead, you believe that challenges can always be overcome because your brain is always able to grow, and adapt, and you are confident in your ability to find alternative solutions and paths if one does not work.<sup>2</sup>

When pastors and leaders chose to remain steadfast in opposition without adapting to generational change, they automatically chose to fail. The church will soon become a memory unless pastors and leaders are intentional about moving forward and inviting Millennials and Generation Z to voice their perspectives from behind the pulpit. This trend of becoming obsolete is quite evident when one looks at the statistics. According to ABC News, “Sixty percent of people age 65 and older report attending religious services

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Pragya Agarwal, “Here Is Why Grit Is So Important for Entrepreneurs,” Forbes, February 19, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/pragyaagarwaleurope/2019/02/17/here-is-why-grit-is-so-important-for-entrepreneurs/#5250a18451dd>

<sup>2</sup> Agarwal, “Here Is Why Grit Is So Important for Entrepreneurs.”

at least once a week; among 18 to 30-year-olds, just 28 percent go that often.”<sup>3</sup> In essence, the majority of those supporting the pastor’s choice of stagnancy are soon facing their own demise. When leaders see a gaping hole within their organization, they are faced with two options. 1) blame those who are missing and take on the stance of victimization, or 2) take a step back, reevaluate, and then work to change the narrative.

Conservative evangelicalism as a whole is a sinking ship, especially since the constructs that support its trajectory no longer function within a post-Enlightenment society. Seel observes this phenomenon in his book *The New Copernicans*. He asserts:

The situation facing the evangelical church parallels that of the *Titanic* on that fateful April evening in 1912. The evangelical church has grown complacent, generally assured of ongoing growth by making comparisons with mainline or Catholic churches, which have experienced far more substantial decrease. Coupled with this is a spiritual hubris that mixes American exceptionalism with an assumed spiritual vitality. However, it is becoming harder and harder to deny that evangelicalism is losing its hold on American culture. But because it has maintained such large market share for so long in the Bible Belt, it is easy to deny potential threats to its demise.<sup>4</sup>

The evangelical church might be losing influence; however, not all forms of Christianity are dying. According to Rev. Dr. Soong-Chan Rah:

As many lament the decline of Christianity in the United States in the early stages of the twenty-first century, very few have recognized that American Christianity may actually be growing, but in unexpected and surprising ways. The American church needs to face the inevitable and prepare for the next stage of her history—we are looking at a nonwhite majority, multiethnic American Christianity in the immediate future. Unfortunately, despite these drastic demographic changes, American evangelicalism remains enamored with an ecclesiology and a value system that reflects a dated and increasingly irrelevant cultural captivity and are disconnected from both a global and local reality.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> “ABC News Church Attendance Who Goes, How Often? Beliefnet Poll,” ABC News, March 1, 2002, <https://abcnews.go.com/images/PollingUnit/875a2ChurchAttendance.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Seel, *The New Copernicans*, xxiii.

<sup>5</sup> Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Releasing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009), 12.

Thus, in the words of Dr. Ben Witherington III, author of *The Problem with Evangelical Theology: Testing the Exegetical Foundations of Calvinism, Dispensationalism, Wesleyanism, and Pentecostalism*:

It will not be enough in the twenty-first century either to stand still and watch the world pass us by, or in reaction to the world go backward into the benighted condition of fundamentalism, which reflects the closing of the American mind, not its enlightenment. It is not good praying fervently that next year will be 1955 all over again. It is not going to happen. Those who do theology while constantly looking longingly into the rearview mirror are going to crash sooner or later. We need to do our theologizing out of faith not fear.<sup>6</sup>

Tom Northup, author and leadership expert, observes, “All organizations are perfectly designed to get the results that they are now getting. If we want different results, we must change the way we do things.”<sup>7</sup> If pastors and leaders want to reach Millennials and Generation Z, then they must enter into their world and engage in their conversation.

John S. Dickerson, senior pastor of Cornerstone Evangelical Free Church, speaker, and journalist, echoes Northup’s observation and asserts, “Whether in ministry or in industry, those who observe and embrace this new, rapid speed of change become survivors and innovators. Those who ignore the change—and the speed of it—become its victims.”<sup>8</sup> According to Dickerson, progress and survival require pastors and leaders to leave the comfort of their sanctuary and bridge the gap between the sacred and the secular. However, it also requires them to reevaluate their perceptions and understand

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<sup>6</sup> Witherington, *The Problem with Evangelical Theology*, 263.

<sup>7</sup> Charlotte Sweeney and Fleur Bothwick, *Inclusive Leadership: The Definitive Guide to Developing and Executing an Impactful Diversity and Inclusion Strategy-Locally and Globally*, 1st ed. (Harlow, England: Pearson Education, 2016), xiv.

<sup>8</sup> 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), 13.

their own biases. If pastors and leaders are brave enough to question themselves, their leadership, and their generational assumptions, then they will begin to move forward—despite the familiarity of stagnancy. Change is not simplistic; however, it is the only way to create space for Millennials and Generation Z.

### **Where Does One Go from Here?**

Johnathan Wilson-Hartgrove, author of *Reconstructing the Gospel: Finding Freedom from Slaveholder Religion*, poses the question, “Why are Millennials choosing to part ways with the faith of their parents?”<sup>9</sup> According to George Barna and David Kinnaman, coauthors of *Churchless*:

Many young adults who formerly attended a Christian church feel that churches are not safe places to wrestle with doubts about beliefs, teachings, or practices of Christianity. Admitting that some aspects of the Christian faith do not make sense to them puts them at risk of alienation from their faith community.<sup>10</sup>

George Barna, author of *Churchless: Understanding Today’s Unchurched and How to Connect with Them* also reveals:

The majority of unchurched individuals have firsthand experience with one or more Christian churches and, based on that sampling, have decided that they can better use their time in other ways. This fact should motivate us to examine how our local church looks in the eyes of the dechurched and consider making appropriate changes—not for the sake of enhancing attendance numbers but to address the possibility that we do not always behave like the church Christ died for.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *Reconstructing the Gospel: Finding Freedom from Slaveholder Religion* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2018), 36.

<sup>10</sup> Barna, *Churchless*, 102.

<sup>11</sup> Barna, *Churchless*, 36.

Many Millennials and Generation Z have deconstructed, recontextualized, and reformatted their understanding of church, faith, and purpose and have “decided, in a very intentional way, that they would be better off leaving the church altogether.”<sup>12</sup> Their generational dissonance is not due to personal preference. Many distanced themselves from the church—more specifically the evangelical church—because of the underlying ideology of racism, sexism, homophobia, and nationalism. As discussed in the previous chapters, Millennials and Generation Z began their nomadic journey away from the sanctuary because they felt that the church was keeping them from God.

Many walked away from the church to find an expression of Christianity that had calloused hands and a compassionate heartbeat. In essence, they were searching for Jesus—a man who ate with sinners, rebuked the religious, and invited derelicts to become disciples. This type of Christianity drastically differs from modern-day evangelicalism—especially white evangelicalism.

### **So, Is the Church Dead or Changing?**

During the 1960s, *Time Magazine* asked one question that would forever churn in the minds of generations: “Is God dead?”<sup>13</sup> Fast forward to modern-day America, and a similar question has become the topic of conversation within academic sectors and around family dinner tables. However, the question being asked is not about God, but the church. Is the church dead or just evolving? According to Vincent Jude Miller, the Gudorf Chair in Catholic Theology and Culture at the University of Dayton:

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<sup>12</sup> Packard and Hope, *Church Refugees*, 16.

<sup>13</sup> Lily Rothman, “Is God Dead? At 50,” *Time*, accessed October 16, 2019, <https://time.com/ismgoddead/>.

Christian communities are marked by the same instabilities that postmodern anthropologists find in other cultures. They too are marked as much by change as by continuity, as much by disagreement as by harmony, and as much by conflict as by order. Above all, however, Christian communities fail to conform to the anthropological ideal of a self-contained, coherent culture. As much as Christian communities may wish to define themselves over against the outside world, the line between the two is enormously difficult to draw.<sup>14</sup>

Therefore:

Christian communities simply do not function as complete cultures. They inevitably borrow much of their worldview, structures, and practices from the culture around them. Even the most geographically isolated sectarian communities borrow their language, dress, gestures, kinship relations, and so on, from other cultures. There is no original, pure form of Christianity. Syncretism and cultural mixture mark it from the beginning.<sup>15</sup>

There is an intersectionality of values, mores, and rituals that branch the divide between church and society. Therefore, the influx of cultural mores does not taint the church, nor does the piety of the church somehow change the surrounding ethos. Ecclesiology, much like sociology and anthropology, is always in evolutionary flux. Consequently, the survival of the church is not dependent on cultural exclusion, but cultural adaptation.

Peter Wehner, a contributor to *The Atlantic* interviewed a variety of Christian leaders, for his article, *The Deepening Crisis in Evangelical Christianity*, including, Dr. Mark Labberton, President of Fuller Theological Seminary. As quoted by Peter Whener, Labberton suggests:

The Church is in one of its deepest moments of crisis—not because of some election result or not, but because of what has been exposed to be the poverty of the American Church in its capacity to be able to see and love and serve and engage in ways in which we simply fail to do. And that vocation is the vocation that must be recovered and must be made real in tangible action.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Vincent Jude Miller, *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 24.

<sup>15</sup> Miller, *Consuming Religion*, 25.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Wehner, “The Deepening Crisis in Evangelical Christianity,” *The Atlantic*, July 5, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/07/evangelical-christians-face-deepening-crisis/593353/>

According to Labberton, the church is facing a pivotal moment in history; however, many pastors and leaders have learned how to adapt to their surroundings and create nonprofits and churches that engage this evolutionary flux within culture. This next section will focus on those organizations that embody and recover the love of Christ. It will explore the varied journeys of numerous pastors and leaders who have looked in the mirror, braved this journey, and chosen to evolve their perspectives. It was not easy for any of them; however, when pastors and leaders realize the incredible outcomes that have occurred because of their choices, it would be foolish to not listen to their advice.

*Churchome, a nondenominational church in Seattle, WA*

Judah and Chelsea Smith, lead pastors of Churchome, “a thriving multi-site church noted for its cultural relevance, commitment to biblical integrity and faith, and love for Jesus,”<sup>17</sup> are attracting Millennial and Generation Z skeptics each Sunday. Their passion for the unchurched and dechurched has shaped their faith expression, leadership methodology, and down-to-earth approach to Christian living.

According to the church’s website, “The big idea behind Churchome community is that every woman, man, boy and girl—every age, every race—would find a home in God. A home where they belong. A community that functions as a family.”<sup>18</sup> This community also includes many celebrities amongst the crowds and individuals who would never enter into a church building to explore the Christian faith. In many ways,

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<sup>17</sup> “Who We Are,” Churchome, accessed March 9, 2020, <https://churchome.org/about>

<sup>18</sup> Churchome, “Who We Are.”

their app “church in your hand was created for a growing number of Millennials and Generation Z who say that they don’t go to a church building for prayer or service.”<sup>19</sup> The goal of Churchome is not conversion—it is conversation built within community. However, the conversation is based upon the language found within the tools that Millennials and Generation Z use, such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube.

*Transformation Church a nondenominational church in Tulsa, OK*

Michael and Natalie Todd are the lead pastors of Transformation Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma.<sup>20</sup> One of the most significant distinctions of Transformation Church is that all forms of leadership are diversified, multicultural, and equal in gender. Another trait that sets them apart is that their church is highly communal and participatory. They do not operate from a mission statement, but a community culture code. According to the website:

This list of core values are irrefutable ordinances for our ministry. They create filters for how our leaders make decisions in order to facilitate and implement the culture. We desire that all of our staff, leaders, and members exhibit these attributes in their daily lives, influencing everything that they do for the glory of God.<sup>21</sup>

As soon as someone walks into Transformation, they know that they belong. This includes those who walk into the sanctuary each Sunday and those who join online.

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<sup>19</sup> Caleb Parke, “Pastor Judah Smith Launches ‘Guided Prayers’ Teased by Justin Bieber,” Fox News, February 13, 2020, <https://www.foxnews.com/faith-values/justin-bieber-judah-smith-prayer-chuchome>

<sup>20</sup> “Transformation Church: About Us,” Transformation Church, accessed March 9, 2020, <https://transformchurch.us/aboutus/>.

<sup>21</sup> Transformation Church, “Transformation Church: About Us.”

Transformation Church offers online small groups<sup>22</sup> so that people from around the world can connect and grow in their walk with Christ.

*Watershed Church is a nondenominational and affirming church in Charlotte, NC*

Watershed is led by an incredible leadership team, men and women who are passionate about being a community engaged in the pursuit of justice and mercy.<sup>23</sup> The genesis of Watershed “was birthed out of two things: deep relationship and justice.”<sup>24</sup> Their church is attracting and retaining Millennials and Generation Z because they are focused on creating outward change locally and globally by building strong relationships. They also resonate with young people because they welcome the LGBT+ community with open arms. According to their website:

We believe God’s love and acceptance is not withheld from anyone due to their sexual identity or expression. Grace allows us to believe in this. In a world where people of various races or sexual identities are often vilified, labeled as evil or shunned, Watershed believes it is essential to create equal and safe opportunities for people of variance in the way they sexually self-identify.<sup>25</sup>

They still uphold the biblical values of monogamy, fidelity, and marriage; however, they have created a Christian space where all people can live like Christ and find community within a church.

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<sup>22</sup> “Belong Groups - TC Nation Online,” Transformation Church, accessed March 9, 2020, <https://transformus.churchcenter.com/groups/belong-groups-tc-nation-online>.

<sup>23</sup> “Our Theology of Justice,” Watershed Charlotte, accessed March 10, 2020, <https://www.watershedcharlotte.com/our-theology-of-justice>.

<sup>24</sup> “Our Story,” Watershed Charlotte, accessed March 10, 2020, <https://www.watershedcharlotte.com/our-story>.

<sup>25</sup> “What We Believe,” Watershed Charlotte, accessed March 10, 2020, <https://www.watershedcharlotte.com/beliefs>.

*New Abbey Church is an interdenominational and affirming church in Pasadena, CA*

New Abbey is very similar to Watershed Church. One of the most significant characteristics about New Abbey is their transparency, especially concerning financial support. According to their website:

The money that you give to New Abbey goes to supporting and sustaining the day to day ministry as well as supporting individuals and families in need, local nonprofits, other churches, micro-loans, international organizations, and the support of local schools and small businesses.<sup>26</sup>

Henry Brinton, Senior Pastor of Fairfax Presbyterian Church in Virginia, suggests, “This generation of consumers is not very interested in brand names, and in similar manner they will not support a church simply because it is part of an established denomination.”<sup>27</sup> Millennials and Generation Z are not interested in financially supporting a building—they want to financially sustain their community. If tithes do not venture outside of the sanctuary, then Millennials and Generation Z will not walk through the doors.

*The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, KS*

Adam Hamilton, lead pastor of the largest Methodist congregation in the United States, with more than 22,000 members.<sup>28</sup> Many mainline denominations are on the decline, but Church of the Resurrection continues to grow and gain the attention of local and global media. According to Michael Gryboski, a contributor to The Christian Post,

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<sup>26</sup> “Generosity,” New Abbey, accessed March 10, 2020, <http://www.newabbey.org/generosity>.

<sup>27</sup> Henry Brinton, “Why Millennials Don’t Put Money in the Church Offering Plate,” HuffPost, March 22, 2015, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/why-millennials-dont-put-\\_b\\_6506728](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/why-millennials-dont-put-_b_6506728).

<sup>28</sup> Katie Moore, “Leawood Church to Remain with United Methodist Church after Denomination Splits,” Kansas City, January 3, 2020, <https://www.kansascity.com/news/local/article238948228.html>

“United Methodist megachurch pastor Adam Hamilton stated at a Texas gathering that Christians can support gay marriage and not be at odds with orthodoxy.”<sup>29</sup> Hamilton has challenged the narrative of the Methodist church and created space for dissonance.

Many Millennials and Generation Z are finding community at Church of the Resurrection because they feel like Hamilton and the leadership staff are listening and learning before implementing. The church recently conducted a message series where they asked Millennials and Generation Z to identify the most critical issues of our time. They covered the topics of mental health, diversity, inclusion, nationalism, and environmentalism.<sup>30</sup> Many Millennials and Generation Z feel like they are known at Church of the Resurrection because Rev. Adam Hamilton makes sure that they are heard.

*National Community Church is an Assembly of God church in Washington, D.C.*

Dr. Mark Batterson, lead pastor of National Community Church, stepped out in faith and created one of the most influential hubs of Christian ministry in the northeast. Batterson’s vision was simple. He wanted to “create a place where the church and community cross paths.”<sup>31</sup> Who would have imagined the impact of that vision? In 2011,

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<sup>29</sup> Michael Gryboski, “Megachurch Pastor Adam Hamilton Says Christians Can Support Gay Marriage and Not Be Heretical,” The Christian Post, July 27, 2018, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/megachurch-pastor-adam-hamilton-says-christians-can-support-gay-marriage-and-not-be-heretical.html>

<sup>30</sup> “What Would Jesus Say?” Leawood, January 2, 2020, <https://cor.org/leawood/sermon-series/what-would-jesus-say-1>.

<sup>31</sup> Mark Batterson, “The National Community Church Tries to Blend Faith, Neighborhood Spirit,” The Washington Post, February 29, 2012, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/the-national-community-church-tries-to-blend-faith-neighborhood-spirit/2012/02/28/gIQAFETiiR\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/the-national-community-church-tries-to-blend-faith-neighborhood-spirit/2012/02/28/gIQAFETiiR_story.html).

he purchased and refurbished the century-old Barracks Row structure<sup>32</sup> and converted it into the Miracle Theater, a space for entertainment, children's programming,<sup>33</sup> and community engagement.

Batterson also purchased an abandoned apartment complex in 2012, and transformed it into The DC Dream Center,<sup>34</sup> a community center that offers a "dance studio, basketball court, art center, computer lab, and recording studio."<sup>35</sup> Many Millennials and Generation Z are engaging with National Community Church because they are a part of a movement that is impacting their community.

*House for All Sinners and Saints is an ELCA and affirming church in Denver, CO*

Rev. Regan Humber and Pastor Troy are the lead pastors of House for All Sinners and Saints; however, their faith expression and theological praxis are anything but orthodox. This is why numerous Millennials and Generation Z flood into their sanctuary. Troy identifies with the pronoun "they"—a pronoun often used by those who do not identify as he or she.<sup>36</sup> The term "They has been named word of the decade for its popularity among the gender-neutral."<sup>37</sup> Troy's revelation that they are gender-nonbinary

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<sup>32</sup> Mark Jenkins, "Century-Old Movie Theater in Capitol Hill to Reopen as the Miracle," The Washington Post, July 2, 2012, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/century-old-movie-theater-in-capitol-hill-to-reopen-as-the-miracle/2012/07/02/gJQA5IFBJW\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/century-old-movie-theater-in-capitol-hill-to-reopen-as-the-miracle/2012/07/02/gJQA5IFBJW_story.html)

<sup>33</sup> Jenkins, "Century-Old Movie Theater in Capitol Hill to Reopen as the Miracle."

<sup>34</sup> Christina Sturdivant, "Mayor Bowser Cuts Ribbon at New Community Center in Southeast," DCist, October 28, 2018, <https://dcist.com/story/17/08/23/dc-dream-center/>

<sup>35</sup> Sturdivant, "Mayor Bowser Cuts Ribbon at New Community Center in Southeast."

<sup>36</sup> James Beal, "'They' Named Word of the Decade for Its Popularity among Gender-Neutral People," The Sun, January 5, 2020, <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/10676733/gender-neutral-pronoun-they-word-decade/>

<sup>37</sup> Beal, "'They' Named Word of the Decade for Its Popularity among Gender-Neutral People."

and Rev. Regan's disclosure of being gay does not faze Millennials or Generation Z. If anything, this form of gender identity and sexual orientation transparency is creating open doors because of open conversations at House for All Sinners and Saints.

*Quest Church is an ECC church in Seattle, WA*

Rev. Gail Song Bantum, lead pastor of Quest Church, is shaking things up and challenging the Evangelical Covenant Church to become a space for all people. Carol Kuruvilla contributed an article to Huffington Post that highlighted fifteen women within the church about their perception of feminism. According to Rev. Song Bantum:

Feminism cannot merely be an idea but a life embodied. For those of us women who have fought to live out our call, in spaces of leadership within the church, we embody feminism daily whether we realize it or not. Any embrace of feminism within the church must be rooted in our deep conviction that we are all created to be free—that it was for freedom that Christ set us free.<sup>38</sup>

Quest Church is reaching Millennials and Generation Z because they are living out diversity—not just speaking about it from the pulpit. Feminism and racial justice are embodied within their theology and praxis.

*LOUD Summit is a Progressive Christian nonprofit in New York, NY*

One of the most significant elements within this dissertation is my own experience. As a Millennial Christian leader, a generational consultant, and a self-professing evangelical; I acknowledge that I approach this topic from a stance of implicit bias. However, this narrative is not solely my own—it is the communal voice of

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<sup>38</sup> Carol Kuruvilla, "15 Christian Women Get Real About the Role of Women in the Church," HuffPost, November 30, 2017, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/15-christian-women-get-real-about-the-role-of-women-in-the-church\\_n\\_56e1dd0ee4b0860f99d84e80](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/15-christian-women-get-real-about-the-role-of-women-in-the-church_n_56e1dd0ee4b0860f99d84e80)

Millennials and Generation Z declaring their disdain for and dissonance with white evangelicalism.

As the founder and executive director of LOUD Summit,<sup>39</sup> a nonprofit that creates places of inclusion, diversity, and equality, I understand the price that many leaders pay to change the narrative of the church for the sake of the culture. LOUD reaches Millennials and Generation Z through a podcast,<sup>40</sup> leadership summits, internships, and workshops that center on the topics of mental health, racial reconciliation, and calling.

Since the inception of LOUD, I have purposed to create an organization where all people would be able to attend, be welcomed, be affirmed, and be valued as part of the *Imago Dei*. It has not been easy, nor has it been supported by many within the white evangelical community. All LOUD events include presentations by incredible speakers; however, I am purposeful when selecting speakers and make sure that diversity, equality, and inclusion are represented in our presenters. Therefore, the majority of LOUD events have a panel of individuals from a variety of gender identities, sexual orientations, denominational affiliations, and racial backgrounds. Due to my strong push for racial diversity and gender equality, the majority of our audience is predominantly people of color. Many white pastors and leaders will not attend LOUD events because I refuse to create an organization of tokenism. LOUD might not be resonating with many white evangelical leaders, but it is reaching hundreds of Millennial and Generation Z skeptics.

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<sup>39</sup> “About LOUD Summit: Bring a Summit or Workshop to Your City,” Loud Summit, accessed March 12, 2020, <https://www.loudsummit.com/loud-summit-about-page/>

<sup>40</sup> “LOUD Conversations,” Stitcher, accessed March 12, 2020, <https://www.stitcher.com/podcast/loud-conversations>

It reaches individuals who have witnessed the brutality of white evangelical culture and gives them reason to hope again—it gives them a place where they belong.

*Missiongathering Christian Church is a Disciples of Christ church in San Diego, CA*

According to the late Rachel Held Evans:

One of my favorite churches in the country—Missiongathering has managed to attract throngs of young people by fostering a community that is diverse, inclusive, biblically literate, spiritually connected, appreciative of both liturgy and contemporary worship, and absolutely bursting at the seams with grace.<sup>41</sup>

Missiongathering is not merely a structural entity—it is a movement that is embodying diversity, inclusion, and progressive Christianity.<sup>42</sup> One of the most popular pastors within the movement is Brandon Robertson, lead pastor of Missiongathering in San Diego, CA. Robertson promises to present a “truly different kind of church that centers on the belief that every person is loved by God and has a purpose.”<sup>43</sup> This gathering is attractive to Millennials and Generation Z because the majority of leadership grew up in conservative evangelicalism but walked away<sup>44</sup> to save their faith.

*Christ Church UMC is a Methodist and affirming church in NYC*

Christ Church in New York City resides on a quiet street on Park Avenue. If one peeks through the doors, they would find a beautiful tapestry of artistic design, marbled

<sup>41</sup> “Missiongathering Christian Church: San Diego, California,” Missiongathering Christian Church, accessed March 11, 2020, <http://www.missiongatheringsd.org/>

<sup>42</sup> “Home New,” Missiongathering, accessed March 11, 2020, <https://missiongathering.com/>.

<sup>43</sup> “New Here?” Missiongathering Christian Church, accessed March 11, 2020, <http://www.missiongatheringsd.org/new-here.html>

<sup>44</sup> Elizabeth Dias, “Young Evangelical Leader Loses Book Deal After Coming Out as Queer,” *Time*, February 21, 2015, <https://time.com/3716350/brandan-roberston-destiny-image/>

halls, and incredible history. However, they would also find a space where every person is welcomed with open arms and open dialogue. Their mission is “to love God above all things and their neighbors as themselves.”<sup>45</sup> This is personified within their teaching, their leadership, and their emphasis. However, their pedagogic style of training is holistic, diversified, and conversational.

The Rev. Dr. Stephen P. Bauman, senior minister, and the Rev. Dr. Violet L.D. Lee, executive program minister,<sup>46</sup> both approach the topics of inclusion, diversity, and equality from the positions of intellectual engagement and practical implementation. Christ Church is distinctive and resonating with many Millennials and Generation Z, especially within New York City, because they have learned to balance the importance of cognitive diversity alongside spiritual formation.

### **Millennial and Generation Z Leaders Who are Leading the Church**

Contrary to popular belief, Millennials and Generation Z are not leaving their faith; they are creating spaces where the gay, the straight, the poor, the wealthy, and those in the middle can engage with one another and encompass the incarnational gospel of Christ. According to my research, eight organizations stand above the rest. They are changing the narrative and challenging the evangelical church’s view on the ideology of diversity, inclusion, and equality.

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<sup>45</sup> “Mission and Values,” Christ Church NYC, accessed March 11, 2020, <https://christchurchnyc.org/about/mission-and-values/>.

<sup>46</sup> “Our Staff,” Christ Church NYC, accessed March 11, 2020, <https://christchurchnyc.org/about/our-staff/>

*Andre Henry*

According to his website, Andre Henry “is an award-winning singer-songwriter contending for the world that ought to be.”<sup>47</sup> However, Henry’s influence goes beyond his musicality. He is one of the most noted voices who addresses the topics of racial justice and social change.<sup>48</sup> His writing has not only raised awareness for racial reconciliation but highlighted the violent ideology of white supremacy within evangelicalism.

*Candice Czubernat*

Candice Czubernat, is a “gay Christian, wife, mother, therapist, writer, speaker, and the founder of The Christian Closet.”<sup>49</sup> Her organization is “the first fully LGBTQ team of counselors and coaches, providing 100% online mental and spiritual health services.”<sup>50</sup> Czubernat is changing the narrative for Christian LGBT+ Millennials and Generation Z because she is addressing the struggles they specifically face within evangelical circles. Younger generations are desperate to find their voice. Czubernat not only equips them with the tools to understand their gender identity and sexual orientation, she empowers to comprehend their God-given identity in Jesus through Christian therapy.

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<sup>47</sup> “Writer: Musician: Troublemaker,” Andre Henry, accessed March 11, 2020, <http://andrehenry.co/>.

<sup>48</sup> “About Andre Henry,” Andre Henry, accessed March 11, 2020, <http://andrehenry.co/about-andre>

<sup>49</sup> “About Candice Czubernat,” The Christian Closet, accessed March 11, 2020, <https://www.thechristiancloset.com/candice-czubernat>

<sup>50</sup> “The Christian Closet,” The Christian Closet, accessed March 11, 2020, <https://www.thechristiancloset.com/>

*Gabriel Paul Jackson*

Gabriel Paul Jackson, founder of United Hive, has started an evangelism movement that has captivated the curiosity of numerous Millennials and Generation Z from around the world. United Hive is a “platform where Christians everywhere can share in seconds what God is doing around them.”<sup>51</sup> In many ways, Gabriel Paul Jackson’s app is reshaping how people share about Christ, fellowship with other believers, and gain the encouragement they need to grow in their faith. Church is still important for many Millennials and Generation Z, but Jackson offers them something more—he gives them the opportunity to participate in worship by downloading one app and becoming part of a community.

*Remedy Network, Inc.*

J. Caleb Perkins, executive director and founder of Remedy Network, Inc., is attracting Millennials and Generation Z and challenging them to engage in conversations about justice in order to implement communities of equality. J. Caleb Perkins left everything to follow Christ and live out his calling. However, his main audience is not found within a church, but outside the doors of the sanctuary.

Perkins “began Remedy Network Inc. after hearing the devastating news of Kalief Browder’s suicide that occurred in the summer of 2015.”<sup>52</sup> Since 2014, Remedy Network, Inc. has hosted numerous workshops around various topics; however, one of

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<sup>51</sup> “Find out What’s Happening in Your Area,” United Hive, accessed March 11, 2020, <https://www.unitedhive.com/index.php>.

<sup>52</sup> “About J. Caleb Perkins,” Remedy Network Inc., accessed March 11, 2020, <http://www.remedynetwork.com/jcalebperkins>

the most popular seminars has centered around criminal justice reform.<sup>53</sup> Some of the most significant concerns of Millennials and Generation Z are police brutality, civil rights, and criminal justice reform.<sup>54</sup> Perkins is reaching Millennials and Generation Z because he is choosing to speak on the topics that are most concerning to them. He is purposed to prove that God cares about what is going on outside the church as much as within the sanctuary.

### *QARA*

Paul Sohn, leadership coach, best-selling author, and founder of QARA, is engaging with a variety of ages and helping them understand their calling. QARA is an extension of Sohn's passion—an online community and resource hub that helps people become the best version of themselves God created them to be.<sup>55</sup> QARA resonates with Millennials and Generation Z because they are built on the constructs of participation, diversity, and cognitive difference. Numerous contributors are invited to share their views and theological perspectives and add to its growing community of writers, authors, and influencers. They share on a variety of topics, including Rachel Held Evans,<sup>56</sup> living

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<sup>53</sup> “Remedy Network, Inc. Events,” Remedy Network Inc., accessed March 11, 2020, <http://www.remedynetwork.com/events>

<sup>54</sup> Nick Bayer, “Poll Shows Millennials Increasingly Worried About Police Brutality, Criminal Justice,” HuffPost, August 16, 2016, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/millennials-police-criminal-justice-poll\\_n\\_57b38ceee4b04ff883994fef](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/millennials-police-criminal-justice-poll_n_57b38ceee4b04ff883994fef)

<sup>55</sup> “Start Here,” QARA, accessed March 11, 2020, <https://qara.org/start-here/>

<sup>56</sup> Colleen Batchelder, “A Tribute to Rachel Held Evans,” QARA, June 5, 2019, <https://qara.org/tribute-to-rachel-held-evans/>

with debt,<sup>57</sup> and even mental health.<sup>58</sup> QARA resonates with Millennials and Generation Z because they invite these generations into conversation—not conversion.

### *Recklessly Alive*

Sam Eaton is a speaker, writer, and founder of Recklessly Alive, an organization built upon Sam’s story—his one moment that changed his life forever. The week following his last suicide attempt in 2011, he asked God to show him how to use all the pain he’s experienced to help other people.<sup>59</sup> However, his story does not end with his brave confession of suicide. His voice has challenged the evangelical church and given a voice to numerous Millennials and Generation Z who are deconstructing evangelicalism.

One of his most popular articles, “12 Reasons Millennials are Over Church,”<sup>60</sup> was shared with numerous publications and received over two million views. Recklessly Alive is connecting with Millennials and Generation Z because it explores the uncertainty of belief, the value of life, and the reality of pain. In many ways, it is resonating with these generations because it is postmodern in its presentation.

<sup>57</sup> Kyle Young, “How I Graduated College with No Debt,” QARA, September 28, 2018, <https://qara.org/how-i-graduated-college-with-no-debt/>

<sup>58</sup> Josiah Kennealy, “Losing Jarrid Wilson: Where Do We Go from Here?” QARA, November 4, 2019, <https://qara.org/losing-jarrid-wilson-where-do-we-go-from-here/>

<sup>59</sup> “Meet Sam Eaton,” Recklessly Alive, accessed March 11, 2020, <http://www.recklesslyalive.com/welcome-friend/>

<sup>60</sup> Sam Eaton, “59 Percent of Millennials Raised in a Church Have Dropped Out—And They’re Trying to Tell Us Why,” Faithit, October 18, 2019, <https://faithit.com/12-reasons-millennials-over-church-sam-eaton/>

### *Parable of the Brown Girl*

Rev. Khristi Lauren Adams, speaker, author, and advocate, is challenging the narrative of race, equality, and justice from behind the pulpit and in her new book, *Parable of the Brown Girl*. Adams' writing highlights the “stories of girls of color are often overlooked, unseen, and ignored rather than valued and heard.”<sup>61</sup> She brings “their stories front and center where they belong.”<sup>62</sup> Millennials and Generation Z are connecting with Adams because she is empowering younger women of color to walk out their purpose and fight for racial and gender equality. Adams is challenging the church and changing the narrative because she is refusing to accept the racist constructs of white evangelicalism.

### **Conclusion**

All of these influencers, pastors, and leaders speak to the heart of this dissertation because they have chosen to walk in the margin and live out a gospel of inclusion, diversity, and equality. They have not dismissed Millennials or Generation Z. They have adopted the ideology that the church is not declining; it is merely evolving. This has changed their whole perception of generational dissonance, theological fundamentals, and, more specifically, white evangelicalism.

Tony Campolo and Shane Claiborne confess, “the evangelicalism of old white men is dead and, as white male evangelists, we have no problem admitting that the future

<sup>61</sup> Khristi Lauren Adams, “Parable of the Brown Girl,” Khristi Lauren Adams, February 28, 2020, <https://khristilaurenadams.com/parable-of-the-brown-girl/>

<sup>62</sup> Khristi Lauren Adams, “Parable of the Brown Girl.”

does not lie with us.”<sup>63</sup> Campolo and Claiborne understand the generational shift within Christianity. They recognize that “despite the terrible things done in the name of Jesus, a Christianity that stays true to his words has survived for 2,000 years. Maybe this is a moment in our history for evangelicals to repent and be ‘born again’ again as Red Letter Christians.”<sup>64</sup> According to my research, Millennials and Generation Z are walking away from white evangelicalism; however, they are not leaving the constructs of Christianity. They are rebirthing a movement that is unorthodox in presentation and creating a gospel that is incarnational in praxis. Pastors and leaders, regardless of denominational affiliations or theological perspectives all have the opportunity to attract and retain Millennials and Generation Z; however, in order to engage with these generations, they must lean into the exodus and understand the generational dissonance young people feel.

Millennials and Generation Z are teaching the world how to be Christian, not just how to attend the church. “They might have very high expectations for moral and spiritual success.”<sup>65</sup> However, rather than being seen as a roadblock, this should compel the church to rise to the occasion and exceed their expectations.

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<sup>63</sup> Tony Campolo and Shane Claiborne, “The Evangelicalism of Old White Men Is Dead,” *The New York Times*, November 29, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/29/opinion/the-evangelicalism-of-old-white-men-is-dead.html>

<sup>64</sup> Campolo and Claiborne, “The Evangelicalism of Old White Men Is Dead.”

<sup>65</sup> Alex Murashko, “Study Analysis: 6 Reasons Why Only 2 in 10 Millennials Believe Church Attendance Is Important,” The Christian Post, March 27, 2014, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/study-analysis-6-reasons-why-only-two-in-10-millennials-believe-church-attendance-is-important.html>.

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