

9-2008

## Where are the Twenty-Year-Olds? Tools for the Church to Connect and Retain a Generation

Lars Rood

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin>

 Part of the [Christianity Commons](#)

---

GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

WHERE ARE THE TWENTY-YEAR-OLDS?  
TOOLS FOR THE CHURCH TO CONNECT AND RETAIN A GENERATION

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY  
LARS ROOD

PORTLAND, OREGON

SEPTEMBER 2008

PORTLAND CENTER LIBRARY  
GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY  
PORTLAND, OR. 97223



This written statement and project was originally submitted to the faculty of George Fox  
Evangelical Seminary, Portland, Oregon, in candidacy for the degree of Doctor of  
Ministry in September 2008.

# **DISSERTATION ACCEPTANCE CERTIFICATE**

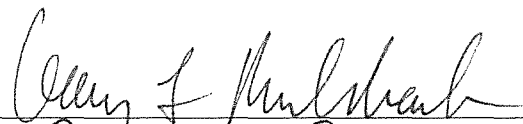
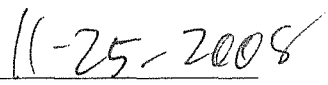
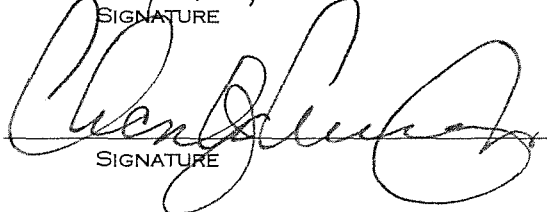
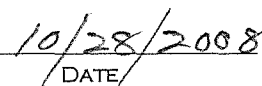
**LARS ROOD**

**DATE: OCTOBER 28, 2008**

**TITLE:**

**WHERE ARE THE TWENTY-YEAR-OLDS?  
TOOLS FOR THE CHURCH  
TO CONNECT AND RETAIN A GENERATION**

***WE THE UNDERSIGNED CERTIFY THAT WE HAVE READ  
THIS PROJECT AND APPROVE IT AS ADEQUATE IN  
SCOPE AND QUALITY TO COMPLETE THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY IN  
LEADERSHIP IN THE EMERGING CULTURE DEGREE***

 SIGNATURE	 DATE
 SIGNATURE	 DATE



**GEORGE FOX  
EVANGELICAL SEMINARY**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people deserve thanks for the ideas that went into this dissertation project. To start, I would like to thank the students who put up with me over the years as their youth pastor. It was through watching them graduate and head off to college that I began to think through all of this. To Kyle, Courtney, Natalie, and Preston—thank you for staying connected to the church and to me. I love watching you grow up.

I've had the privilege of “working with” some amazing twenty-something interns who have struggled through this project with me. Thanks to Jake, Ryan, Katie, Steven, Brandon, Susan, Courtney, and more. You were all on my mind during this dissertation.

I appreciate the friends that have pushed me to think through this stuff. The conversations with you all were incredibly foundational. Thanks to Jeff Tacklind, Phil Cunningham, and Keith Peeler for allowing me to continually bring this stuff up. To Jeff especially, thank you for starting this process with me and for being there every Monday at 6 a.m. I miss having burritos and coffee with you.

I would like to thank my primary advisor, Dr. Gary Railsback, for the great conversations and help putting my ideas down on paper. It was an enjoyable three years.

Thanks to my parents who have always encouraged me in my education. Mom, I loved hearing your voice when I told you it was done. Thank you for always pushing me in school.

And finally, I want to thank my wife, Danielle, for being a huge support through all of this. You know how much work this project was and how much went on in our lives during it. Thank you for your encouragement, support, and love in the midst of it all. Without you I couldn't have done it. I promise to not go back to school.

# CONTENTS

Section	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iii
1. ABSTRACT .....	6
2. THE PROBLEM .....	7
3. OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS .....	10
4. THE THESIS .....	15
<b>Introduction to Culture</b> .....	15
<i>Why the church should interact with Popular Culture</i> .....	19
<i>Because of Christ</i> .....	20
<i>Because we are the message</i> .....	20
<i>Because the church is losing people</i> .....	21
<i>Some classical interactions between Christ and culture</i> .....	21
<i>Twentieth-century interactions between Christ and culture</i> .....	22
<i>Christ against culture</i> .....	23
<i>Christ of culture</i> .....	24
<i>Christ above culture</i> .....	24
<i>Christ and culture in paradox</i> .....	25
<i>Christ the transformer of culture</i> .....	26
<i>What we can learn from Niebuhr</i> .....	27
<i>What churches are doing to interact with culture</i> .....	27
<b>Reflections on Media</b> .....	29
<i>How the church has dealt with this historically</i> .....	30
<i>How media has changed culture</i> .....	31
<i>How media has changed the church</i> .....	32
<i>The message of media used in the church</i> .....	33
<i>Why this study is important</i> .....	34
<b>Understanding the Generation</b> .....	35
<i>Twentieth-century history</i> .....	38
<i>What they are dealing with</i> .....	39
<i>How the church traditionally deals with them</i> .....	42
<i>How the church can be more effective</i> .....	44
<i>Create safety lines</i> .....	45
<i>Know their needs</i> .....	46
<i>Understand their culture</i> .....	46
<i>Recognize their freedom</i> .....	47

<i>Use their tools</i> .....	47
<i>Conclusion</i> .....	47
5. THE PROJECT .....	48
6. PROJECT SPECIFICATIONS .....	49
<b>Goals and Strategies</b> .....	49
<b>Audience</b> .....	49
<b>Project Scope and Content</b> .....	50
<b>Promotion</b> .....	51
<b>Standards of Publication</b> .....	52
<b>Action Plan</b> .....	52
7. POSTSCRIPT .....	54
APPENDIX: MULTIMEDIA COMPONENT .....	56
PROJECT BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	65

## Section 1: Abstract

A generation of young people are losing their connection to the church today. Research by the Barna Group shows that “61% of students who were active in church during their teenage years disengaged during their twenties.”<sup>1</sup> Many churches struggle to adequately connect with and retain the twenty-something generation. This inability to connect stems from changing culture, technology, new worldviews, and a lack of formal training in institutes of higher education. Raised with the Internet, instant messaging, cell phones, and hundreds of television channels, this generation is undoubtedly well informed. Yet many churches no longer speak their language.

I believe that churches need to radically change their ministry to attract and retain young people in their twenties. I believe churches are desperate for tools to reach and hold on to students after they graduate from high school. Many churches see this generation disappearing from the pews and don’t know how to stop them. These churches must discover how to create an “identity” for this generation as an integral group within denominational structures and church bodies.

New ministries have been established, and entire churches have formed for the purpose of reaching this generation. Many of the new, dynamic churches have grown by pulling twenty-somethings away from other churches, including mainline denominations. The flashiest, biggest, most personality-driven churches hold the greatest draw, and this generation tends to gravitate toward those.

---

<sup>1</sup> George Barna, “Most Twentysomethings Put Christianity on the Shelf Following Spiritually Active Teen Years,” *The Barna Update*, September 11, 2006, <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdateNarrow&BarnaUpdateID=245> (accessed September 21, 2006).



Web-based resources such as [www.theooze.com](http://www.theooze.com), [www.ginkworld.net](http://www.ginkworld.net), [www.relevantmagazine.com](http://www.relevantmagazine.com), [www.threads.com](http://www.threads.com), and [www.leadnow.net](http://www.leadnow.net) provide numerous resources for understanding this generation. Additionally, video series such as NOOMA and video sites like [bluefish.tv](http://bluefish.tv) have filled a gap in reaching twenty-somethings by providing churches with teaching ideas relevant to young people.

This dissertation project will create a Web-based resource for churches attempting to reach the twenty-something generation. The Web site's purpose will be to provide a hub of practical information aimed at overhauling, building, or creating ministries that connect and retain these young people. The site will provide a place to connect with church communities that have succeeded, and also with those who struggling. It will be a place to hear from twenty-year-olds themselves and will include their opinions about the church and what needs to change.

## **Section 2: The Problem**

Modern churches struggle to understand how to interact theologically with popular culture. At the same time, most mainline denominational churches have seen a decrease in membership.<sup>2</sup> While the church has remained relatively unchanged in its modern structure, the world has experienced radical innovations and rapid transformation. Herein lies the church's struggle: how to make theology relevant to today's quickly changing and diverse world. Western world technology—such as cable and satellite television, TiVo, e-mail, text messaging, BitTorrent, and the Internet—have all changed the culture by making entertainment and information easily accessible and by

---

<sup>2</sup> Les Parrott and Robin D. Perrin, "The New Denominations," *Christianity Today* 34, no. 2 (March 2001): 29.

creating both real and false communities. Web portals such as facebook.com and myspace.com have created social networks that encourage connection through online relationships. These networks have taken away the role of connecting that the church used to play.

Globalization has transformed the way we interact with the world, and technology has changed the way we interact with culture. Churches need to embrace these new technologies and provide the means for interacting with popular culture. Many churches aren't sure how to implement this change. They try, but often end up doing it poorly. At the root of the problem lies a lack of theological reflection on how Christ and culture *should* interact. In the latter half of the twentieth century, U.S. churches did this so poorly that many just decided to start their own "Christian culture." In the year 2000 this culture generated 747 million dollars of record sales, comprising 7 percent of overall album sales.<sup>3</sup> Though this amount of money may seem staggering, it represents only a drop in the bucket within the entire recording industry. Unfortunately, the Christian recording industry model has even more segregated the church from the predominant twenty-something culture. For the church, the answer is not to start its own culture but rather to learn how to interact with the cultures surrounding it.

The church needs to find a new role in contemporary Western culture. In our post-modern, post-Christian, post-denominational Western world, churches find themselves post-relevant. Many view the church as no longer having a defining voice of morality, truth, or absolutes. It is seen as an antiquated community with irrelevant ideas and practices, existing only for the benefit of its own members. The twenty-something generation has lost faith in the church. They think the church has nothing to offer them

---

<sup>3</sup> Lorraine Ali, "The Glorious Rise of Christian Pop," *Newsweek*, July 16, 2001, 33.

because it is unable to interact with their culture. The situation is dire. Pollster George Barna warns, “I believe that the church in America has no more than five years—perhaps even less—to turn itself around and begin to affect the culture, rather than be affected by it.”<sup>4</sup> This quote was published in 1998, which makes it even more unsettling. The question we must ask, then, is this: are we now affecting culture or is culture affecting us?

People in their twenties no longer see the church as relevant to their culture. They don’t see a connection between the church’s teaching and their daily lives. The majority of twenty-somethings have grown up in a fast-paced, information-loaded society with Internet, e-mail, and cell phones as part of every waking moment. The church is disconnected from the reality of this culture, because many church leaders haven’t been trained to know how to create structure, program, and information to connect with twenty-somethings. The reality is that most pastors are aliens in today’s culture.

Since its inception, the church has defined and redefined ways to contextualize its message and make sense to its community. “Interacting” with culture simply meant identifying how to teach people about Jesus. For example, in the book of Acts, Paul used one of the Athenian’s own statues as an illustration, along with their philosophers and poets, to connect the Gospel message to the prevailing culture.<sup>5</sup>

The church and its surrounding culture have experienced constant change throughout history. As these changes occurred in the church community, the church responded by altering the medium of their message. But although the method of delivery changed, the basic message of truth revealed in Scripture stayed the same.

---

<sup>4</sup> George Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998), 8.

<sup>5</sup> Acts 17:16–31 (New International Version).

### Section 3: Other Proposed Solutions

Solving the problem of connection and retainment of the twenty-something generation has launched many proposed solutions. These solutions have come from two sources: the established church and the twenty-somethings themselves. The established church has attempted to create connection points so that twenty-somethings can fit within existing programs. This model has achieved some success in certain church communities, with church leadership trying to generate solutions from the top down. In the second model, twenty-somethings have created their own ministries. These ministries have also proved successful in some churches and communities. Understanding what has already been attempted may help shed light on additional steps needed to reach this generation. The following six actions have been tried with varying degrees of success:

1. *Forming churches within churches* - Bringing twenty-somethings into established churches gives them an opportunity to create their own community within the framework of an established church. This happened at Willow Creek Community Church with the **Axis**<sup>6</sup> ministry, at College Avenue Baptist Church with **Flood**,<sup>7</sup> at Lake Avenue Congregational Church with the **Warehouse**<sup>8</sup> service, and at Santa Cruz Bible Church with **Graceland**.<sup>9</sup> These types of services usually begin with a vision from young people who want to

---

<sup>6</sup> Axis, "Generation Axis: One God. One Church. One Mission." Willow Creek Community Church, (accessed October 28, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Flood, "Flood Church: Creating Environments Where People Are Transformed by the Living God," Flood Church, <http://www.diveintoflood.com> (accessed October 28, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Warehouse, "Warehouse Church: Inside Out," Lake Avenue Church, <http://www.ourwarehouse.org> (accessed October 28, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Santa Cruz Bible Church, "Graceland," <http://www.santacruz bible.org/graceland> (accessed October 28, 2008).

create a community together. Their leaders have often worked as former youth pastors and have watched students leave the church. Usually their services meet concurrently with regular church services, and they target the twenty-something generation by including elements of their culture. Multi-media usually plays an obvious role in the service. Settings often include dimmed lights, candles, a “club” feel, and music performed by a full band of younger musicians. Preaching topics focus on specific struggles that this generation is going through. It’s significant to note that of the four churches listed here, only the Warehouse service continues as a church within a church in the year 2008. Axis still exists as a ministry but no longer holds services. Flood spun off into its own church four years ago. Graceland disbanded and formed a new community called **Vintage Faith**,<sup>10</sup> which no longer meets as a church within a church but as a full sister church.

2. *Forming new churches* - Forming new church communities also connects with and retains the twenty-something generation. Eddie Gibbs, a missiologist from Fuller Seminary, writes in *ChurchNext* that mainline denominational churches have been “increasingly sidelined.”<sup>11</sup> New churches formed to reach this generation are often seen as the only solution to getting twenty-somethings into church, because mainline denominational churches cannot change fast enough to reach them. Churches such as Mars Hill<sup>12</sup> in Seattle, pastored by

---

<sup>10</sup> Vintage Faith, “Vintage Faith Church in Santa Cruz, California,” Vintage Faith Church, <http://www.vintagechurch.org> (accessed October 28, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> Eddie Gibbs, *ChurchNext: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 19.

<sup>12</sup> Mars Hill, “Mars Hill Church,” Mars Hill Church, <http://www.marshillchurch.org> (accessed October 28, 2008).

Mark Driscoll, specifically target the 18- to 26-year-old generation. Rock Harbor Church<sup>13</sup> in Costa Mesa, California; LifeChurch.TV<sup>14</sup> in Edmond, Oklahoma; and Watermark<sup>15</sup> in Dallas, Texas, also fall into the category of twenty-something churches. These churches are often characterized as fast growing, dynamic, and above all—young.

3. *Providing training and resources* - One of the biggest hurdles churches face in connecting with and retaining twenty-somethings is a lack of resources. Few publishers churn out materials aimed at this generation, and few conferences provide them. However, the situation has begun to change, with conferences such as the Right Now Campaign,<sup>16</sup> the Connect Conferences (sponsored by Threads Media<sup>17</sup>), and the Catalyst Conference<sup>18</sup> specifically targeting those in their twenties. Though the need for published resources continues, writers such as Dan Kimball, Jean Twenge, and Margaret Feinberg have recently released a new crop of relevant books. Web sites have also been created that address this generation with a spiritual emphasis. Youth Ministry has produced great companies such as Youth Specialties,<sup>19</sup> which provides excellent training for youth workers. However, the heads of twenty-something ministries don't have many places to turn. If more established churches

---

<sup>13</sup> Rockharbor Church, "Rockharbor," Rockharbor, <http://www.rockharbor.org> (accessed October 28, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> Lifechurch.tv, "One Church. Multiple Locations." Lifechurch.tv, <http://www.lifechurch.tv> (accessed October 28, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> Watermark, "Watermark Community Church," Watermark Community Church, <http://www.watermark.org> (accessed October 28, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> Rightnow, "The Rightnow Campaign," Rightnow, <http://www.rightnow.org> (accessed October 28, 2008).

<sup>17</sup> Threads, Lifeway Christian Resources, <http://www.threadsmedia.com> (accessed October 28, 2008).

<sup>18</sup> Catalyst Conference, Catalyst, <http://www.catalystconference.com> (accessed October 28, 2008).

<sup>19</sup> Youth Specialties, "All About Youth Ministry," Youth Specialties, <http://youthspecialties.com> (accessed October 28, 2008).

offered denominational-wide internal training, that would help build effective ministry as well.

4. *Refocusing seminaries* - A shift in focus has taken place at Fuller Seminary, where I attended, which emphasizes the importance of equipping graduates to be both culturally aware and biblically literate. This awareness enables both new and older pastors to broaden their grasp of what this generation needs. Hopefully, the trend will grow as more seminaries recognize the necessity of addressing these topics in order to minister to this generation effectively.

While most seminaries offer some form of degree in youth ministry or Christian education, most don't offer instruction that targets the twenty-something generation.

5. *Providing Web-based resources* - In the past ten years, the number of resources available online has skyrocketed, including resources for churches that desire to be culturally relevant. Web sites such as [www.theooze.com](http://www.theooze.com), [www.ginkworld.net](http://www.ginkworld.net), [www.relevantmagazine.com](http://www.relevantmagazine.com), and [www.threadsmedia.com](http://www.threadsmedia.com) are all examples of sites that can inform churches about the beliefs, needs, and wants of the twenty-something generation. Recently Lifechurch.tv took the online world a step further by creating a Web-based service within the online community of Second Life.<sup>20</sup> This service runs concurrently with LifeChurch's other ten simulcast services and is part of their plan to reach a younger generation. I attended a one-hour service there, an enjoyable "first

---

<sup>20</sup> Second Life, "Your World. Your Imagination," Linden Research, Inc., <http://www.secondlife.com> (accessed October 29, 2008).

step” in embracing new technology and forming another connection with the culture of this generation.

6. *Changing existing ministries* - Often churches that have dynamic youth ministries still struggle to connect with and retain students in their twenties. Many youth ministry paradigms just don’t translate well into the twenty-something generation. Youth ministry that creates age-separated programs trains us into thinking that life-stage ministry is the only way to do it. Sometimes those in their twenties seem to still be looking for a specific place to fit in, like the youth ministry they were once a part of, because it seems like everyone else has their own spot. Most churches have “youth facilities,” but few have rooms set aside just for the twenty-year-olds. Changing our mindset of how all age/stage ministries operate would go a long way toward enfolding more people within the walls of the church.

Several of these proposed solutions have brought twenty-somethings back into churches. But although these short-term approaches have proven effective, it’s unclear whether they will continue to solve the problem. Sadly, as the U.S. population increases, membership and attendance in mainline denominational churches is on a huge downswing.

One of the biggest problems in applying these approaches is that twenty-somethings are often isolated from the rest of the church, and they miss the experience of worshipping alongside other believers of different ages. This intergenerational piece is frequently nonexistent. Churches lose out on a dynamic generation of young people who



have much to offer the body of Christ. Still, the twenty-somethings continue to leave the church, simply because they don't know what piece of the body they are anymore.

#### **Section 4: The Thesis**

Established churches want to connect with and retain the twenty-somethings, but they don't know how. Some churches have made solid, effective attempts to reach this generation, but most have not. A disconnect exists between what churches are currently doing and what this generation needs in order to connect with and remain in the church. The truth is, churches are not reaching these young people, and they are leaving.

I believe that in order to connect more effectively with this generation, churches must understand three specific areas. First, churches need to understand how changes in culture affect the way ministry should be done. Next, churches need a greater sense of the role that media plays in the lifestyle of twenty-somethings and how to use it to effectively reach them. Finally, the church must understand the unique issues that those in their twenties are dealing with.

#### **Introduction to Culture**

To begin our study on a firm foundation, we will consider Kathryn Tanner's writings on the subject of culture. According to Tanner, "The word culture is not new; it has quite old linguistic roots in Latin terms having to do originally with the care and tending of crops or animals.... What is relatively new is the association of this idea of different ways of living with the word culture."<sup>21</sup> Tanner notes that the earliest meaning

---

<sup>21</sup> Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), 3.

of culture was to “care for something and conceivably help it to grow to its fullest potential.”<sup>22</sup> As with most definitions, this one began to take on different meanings for different groups of people in specific settings. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, one simple definition of culture was no longer possible. As the world changed, it became apparent that different aspects of culture existed so, in an effort to provide a more comprehensive definition, the word *culture* took on three different aspects, loosely defined as High Culture, Folk Culture, and Popular Culture.

High Culture originated from the idea that people grow and reach their full potential by exposing themselves to the best the world has to offer.<sup>23</sup> This concept applied to the person who was well read, refined, and growing to the fullest. As culture began to encompass education, music, and literature, the concept of High Culture emerged and included that which was the best and most refined. Those things considered refined or requiring skill were placed on a cultural pedestal.

In the sixteenth century, the elite society of France exemplified the distinction between the cultured person and the non-cultured.<sup>24</sup> The church’s interaction with the arts and High Culture in the years just prior to the twentieth century is seen in the beautiful architecture of European churches and their amazing collections of art. In the United States, High Culture translated into expensive pipe organs, stained glass windows, full orchestras, hymnals, and elaborate architecture. Many established U.S. churches still value only those things associated with High Culture. Since most twenty-somethings don’t relate to High Culture, this becomes one of the first dividing points between them

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>23</sup> Bruce David Forbes and Jeffrey H. Mahan, eds., *Religion and Popular Culture in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 3.

<sup>24</sup> Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 6.

and the church. During the Age of Enlightenment in the 1800's, the standard of High Culture began to be associated philosophically with the Modern period of thought, as mankind placed a higher value on what could be achieved through thought, reason, study, and determination. High Culture had its negative side, however, in that it alienated the common people from the church.

Folk Culture makes up the second culture prevalent in today's church and is often defined as something akin to "grandma's casserole."<sup>25</sup> Though not considered refined, this culture is comparable to something the family likes a lot and has always had—something that has been passed down from generation to generation. Like a casserole, Folk Culture usually has distinct meaning only for those within that culture. In the church this culture observes distinct practices, such as a lutefisk dinner for a Lutheran congregation, where the goal of the meal is to rekindle memories of the Norwegian heritage and life back in the "old country." Folk Culture typically has a strong oral tradition, which is passed down through the generations by the retelling of stories. Because twenty-somethings are a mobile group, they may have difficulty relating to Folk Culture. Or, if a particular Folk Culture has meaning for certain members of this generation, it may be difficult for them to find this culture in other locations. Sometimes, too, twenty-somethings step into a church with a Folk Culture that is completely new to them, creating yet another divide that may be difficult to cross. This can occur particularly in second- and third-generation immigrant churches, where young people try to connect with the culture of their parents' homeland while growing up in a country that is vastly different. Because Folk Culture remains so steeped in the past, it doesn't translate well into this generation, and twenty-somethings often don't connect with it.

---

<sup>25</sup> Forbes and Mahan, *Religion and Popular Culture in America*, 2.

Popular Culture comprises the third main distinct culture and is viewed as the “McDonalds hamburger”<sup>26</sup> of culture. This culture is “mass-produced”—most people have tasted it, it’s pretty good, and is easily accessible. Of the three main cultures, Popular Culture is the most available to people and the one that changes and grows most rapidly. The culture is best understood as that which is easily viewed by the most number of people and can connect broadly to them. Often very image based,<sup>27</sup> Popular Culture is best communicated through television, movies, print, and the Internet.

Because Popular Culture goes through quick changes and has mass appeal, it remains the most difficult culture for the church to interact with. Keeping up with this culture to create relevant theological discussions presents a significant challenge. In his book, *Virtual Faith*, Tom Beaudoin writes, “Pop culture provides the matrix that contains much of what counts as ‘meaning’ for our generation.”<sup>28</sup> Beaudoin argues that most people in their twenties became so rooted in Popular Culture during their formative years that it “is” who they are. Separating twenty-somethings from that which is normative to their everyday life can be almost impossible. The church struggles to find ways to interact with Popular Culture and sees it as the culture with the most controversy. Unfortunately, not enough research exists to show effective interface between the church and Popular Culture. Yet because Popular Culture is so ingrained in this generation, understanding it can provide important connection points between twenty-somethings and the church. Many churches neglect this connection or steer away from it, which causes still more division.

---

<sup>26</sup> Forbes and Mahan, 2.

<sup>27</sup> Forbes and Mahan, 6.

<sup>28</sup> Tom Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 22.

### *Why the church should interact with Popular Culture*

In his book, *Songs of Experience*, Martin Jay contends that America is a “culture of experience” and says that because experience is so critical to who we are, we must take it into account when we interact with culture.<sup>29</sup> This empirical way of thinking forces the church to consider experiences that people have and figure out new ways to interface with them. The church must seek to create a meaningful connection between the theology of Christ and the experience of culture that people live in. This puts the church in the position of either coming to grips with Popular Culture or risking the loss of a generation that knows nothing except this culture. William Romanowski notes that Christians must interact with culture because of the first command given in the garden:<sup>30</sup> “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.”<sup>31</sup> This verse implies that God gave Adam and Eve the command to be a part of the world and to “continue the process of creation.”<sup>32</sup> The role of creation goes on for humankind, who now create the culture in which they live. Churches must interact with this culture, because without cultural connection points, sermons lose meaning and much of the church’s teaching seems irrelevant. Paul provides an excellent example of connection points in Acts 17 when he references the Athenian’s poets and philosophers.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, the twenty-something generation looks for the “now what?” element, showing them how to make God real in their lives. They are desperately searching for connection points between their world and the world of the church.

---

<sup>29</sup> Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 261.

<sup>30</sup> William D. Romanowski, *Eyes Wide Open: Looking for God in Popular Culture* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001), 35.

<sup>31</sup> Genesis 1:28.

<sup>32</sup> Romanowski, 26.

<sup>33</sup> Acts 17:16–31.

### *Because of Christ*

The church must interact with culture because Jesus modeled it. When “the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us,”<sup>34</sup> Jesus entered directly into the Jewish culture. He was raised in it. He knew the laws, the Scripture, and the practices of that culture. Jesus had to be aware of how countercultural his actions appeared when he went against its laws and practices. Because of his interaction with culture, the church has a model of how to interact with it. The church must understand a culture’s beliefs and societal norms in order to speak to the people who live there. Just as Jesus used familiar examples and stories of the people when he interacted with them, the church must do the same.

### *Because we are the message*

Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch offer another reason why we need to interact with Popular Culture—because it is who we are. They say, literally, “we are” our message to the world.<sup>35</sup> It is impossible to separate who we are from our understanding of how the gospel should be brought to culture. We have all grown up with a particular cultural background, and because we understand our culture better than those who are not part of it, we are best suited to reach out to those in our culture. In the same way, the church must interact with Popular Culture because they grew up with it, live in it, and understand how to reach the people in it. Too often the church creates its own culture instead of reaching out to the one that’s already there. In order to stay relevant, the church must bring Christ to the culture.

---

<sup>34</sup> John 1:14.

<sup>35</sup> Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 155.

*Because the church is losing people*

Beaudoin paints an interesting picture of the twenty-something generation in *Virtual Faith* and points the finger at the '70s and '80s as a time of huge cultural shift and growth in popular culture.<sup>36</sup> During that time, this generation grew up and popular culture was responsible for shaping who they became. Beaudoin states, “Whereas baby boomers also had an intimate relationship with popular and media culture, GenXers found it at an earlier, more critical age and without the familial supervision of previous generations.”<sup>37</sup>

In order to reach twenty-somethings, the church needs to understand the culture that raised these young adults. The church must be aware of this generation’s need to discover their voice and must find out how to create connection points between twenty-somethings and the Gospel. Because the church has difficulty interacting with this age group, they need to learn how. Despite these significant needs, most churches have limited programs and staff aimed at reaching this generation.

*Some classical interactions between Christ and culture*

The church has always dealt with issues of culture. From the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, his teachings were countercultural to what many leaders of that day believed. He interacted with sinful people and shared food with tax collectors, prostitutes, and common folk. Much of the controversy surrounding Jesus resulted from those he spent time with. His interaction with the culture of his day was unsettling, confusing, and even sinful in the eyes of religious leaders. However, being “fully man,” Jesus was part of the culture. He lived in it and taught in it. He did not separate himself from the culture he

---

<sup>36</sup> Beaudoin, 5.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

grew up in. At the same time, being “fully Christ,” Jesus could not be separated from his divine nature, either. He exemplified what it meant to be in both realms; he was fully God and fully man and connected with both of those kingdoms.

Like Jesus, Paul also interacted greatly with culture. He let the Romans know he was stepping into their culture when he said, “For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.”<sup>38</sup> Paul not only “walked around” in their culture, he lived it. He even reminded the people of his citizenship to make sure they understood how much the culture was a part of him.

#### *Twentieth-century interactions between Christ and culture*

Sixty years ago, H. Richard Niebuhr wrote one of the first theological perspectives of how the church can connect Christ with culture. As part of a series of lectures taught in 1949 at Austin Presbyterian Seminary, Niebuhr’s book, *Christ and Culture*, made a huge impact and served as a steppingstone for future theological reflections on connecting the church and culture.

Niebuhr defines culture as the “artificial, secondary environment which man superimposes on the natural. It comprises language, habits, ideas, beliefs, customs, social organization, inherited artifacts, technical processes, and social values.”<sup>39</sup> In Niebuhr’s view, culture is defined by “human achievement.”<sup>40</sup> He believes that nature becomes culture when humankind interacts with it; for example, “A river is nature, a canal culture;

---

<sup>38</sup> Acts 17:23.

<sup>39</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (San Francisco: Harper, 1956), 32.

<sup>40</sup> Niebuhr, 33.



a raw piece of quartz is nature, an arrowhead culture; a moan is natural, a word cultural. Culture is the work of men's minds and hands."<sup>41</sup> This definition may seem overly simplistic, but it is crucial for churches to start at this basic level to acquire an understanding of culture and define how they need to interact with it. Niebuhr claims there are essentially five different ways that allow for interaction between Christ and culture. These include: Christ against culture, Christ of culture, Christ above culture, Christ and culture in paradox, and Christ the transformer of culture. A discussion of these interactions follows.

#### *Christ against culture.*

The interaction of "Christ against culture" appears at one end of the spectrum, with the view that culture is sinful and something the church should separate itself from. Taking this idea a step further is the perception that the church should actually reject culture and not associate with it. Historically, several groups in the United States have attempted to separate themselves from culture. The best-known examples of this separation are the Mennonites and the Amish, who exclude themselves by choosing to separate themselves from cultural norms, such as using motorized vehicles, and creating rules that restrict interaction with culture. This choice has an obvious problem, which is the failure to reconcile Christ as part of the culture of his day. By rejecting outside culture, proponents of these groups have, in a sense, rejected Christ's example of reaching out to care for the disassociated in society. Christians should be careful to avoid this interaction, because it has brought ridicule upon the church and has been seen as senseless, as in the Southern Baptists' boycott of Disney, which occurred in 1997 after

---

<sup>41</sup> Niebuhr, 33.

The Walt Disney Company provided benefits to gay couples. The boycott never affected Disney's benefit policy, and the humor in this situation lies in the fact that many Southern Baptist churches now support Disney's new Narnia movie.

### *Christ of culture*

This interaction holds a place at the other end of Niebuhr's spectrum, viewing both Christ and culture on the same level and equally prized. With the goal of harmonizing the teachings of Christ and the good of culture, truth is found in both. In this model, Jesus is seen as the "great enlightener, the great teacher, the one who directs all men in culture to the attainment of wisdom, moral perfection, and peace."<sup>42</sup> Historical figures like Thomas Jefferson and John Locke became proponents of this model. The obvious critique of Christ and culture shows that by raising the value of culture so high, Christ's role is downplayed. In fact, Christ's role in this model is minimal, except as affirmer of the greatness of culture created by man. Instead of emphasizing Christ and his divinity, this interaction emphasizes humankind and its achievements.

### *Christ above culture*

Between the two contrasting ends of the interaction spectrum lie three more positions. These additional positions bring connection points between Christ and culture. In "Christ above culture," all that is good is seen as coming from the God, the Creator. This position emphasizes that culture cannot be "all bad" because God created it, and what hasn't been ruined through the fall is still under God's rule.<sup>43</sup> Key to this idea is the

---

<sup>42</sup> Niebuhr, 92.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 127.

realization that the good of culture can only be possible through God's grace. Thomas Aquinas upheld this view and believed that "the attainment of that ultimate happiness is not within the range of human possibilities, but it is freely bestowed on men by God through Jesus Christ."<sup>44</sup> Sometimes this idea is seen in the church when we elevate culture or admire success that may have no spiritual significance. Another example occurs when the church incorporates movies like *The Lord of the Rings* into as many sermons and talks as possible. Although these movies were not produced for use as sermon fodder, many churches in the West have adopted this practice. The "Christ above culture" position would maintain that movies only need a Christian theological explanation in order to become something that God could use. Obvious dangers complicate this view, because it becomes too easy to pick and choose which parts of culture we believe are worth "theologizing" and which parts are not.

### *Christ and culture in paradox*

In this view, the kingdoms of the world and the kingdom of Christ exist next to each other. The world is made up of law while the Christian world is made up of grace. Though the two worlds interact, it is a dualistic connection; in other words, you can interact in both worlds but there isn't much connection between them. Martin Luther represents the best-known historical figure that held this view. Living as a monk, Luther struggled with being both "worldly" and "spiritual," a paradox that greatly challenged his faith. Niebuhr writes, "No human self-culture, in obedience to that law or any other, can avail to extricate man out of his sinful dilemma. Nor are institutions that claim this law as

---

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Benzinger Bros. ed., vol. II, Q. iii, art. ii, Q. v (1947).

their basis—monastic orders or pacifist customs or communistic communities—less subject to the sin of godlessness.”<sup>45</sup> This sounds like a “total depravity” type of argument, focusing on mankind’s great need for God’s saving grace. On the positive side, the “Christ and culture in paradox” view recognizes sin as its starting point and affirms man’s need for divine intervention to be freed from sin. Because its relevancy to culture is hard to grasp, this view is especially difficult to teach in the church. Connecting all things to sin is a difficult starting place for transforming culture, and this view seems better suited for the “Christ against culture” mindset. However, the difference between “Christ against culture” and “Christ and culture in paradox” is that the latter view includes both interaction with culture and transformation from sin through grace.

#### *Christ the transformer of culture*

Similar to “Christ and culture in paradox,” this view takes the position that there is hope for the church and its interaction with culture. Niebuhr says, “He heals the most stubborn and virulent human disease...he forgives the most hidden and proliferous sin, the distrust, lovelessness, and hopelessness of man...and this he does not simply by offering ideas, counsel, and laws; but by living with men in great humility, enduring death for their sakes.”<sup>46</sup> This belief affirms that because of Jesus’ sacrifice, Christians can change culture by interacting with it. Grace allows culture to change, and the goal of the church should be to enable that change. When the church interacts with culture, it does so with the desire to see culture transformed. Regarding this view, Niebuhr displays great optimism about the potential of the church, believing that through Christ the church has

---

<sup>45</sup> Niebuhr, 157.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 191.

the ability to effect cultural change. Though held up as an idealistic standard in most churches, this common view is seldom achieved. Often churches say they want to be a part of culture so that they can be a part of the change. However, they usually don't know which part of culture they want to interact with. David Bruce, who manages the Web site [www.hollywoodjesus.com](http://www.hollywoodjesus.com), encourages his church to interact with popular culture, and his site promotes involvement by "presenting the parallels between individual films and the gospel without passing judgment on a film's objectionable elements."<sup>47</sup> Using this methodology, Bruce finds connection points people can use to interact with the culture and brings in teaching aimed at transforming that culture. For Bruce, the goal remains the same—to see Hollywood transformed.

#### *What we can learn from Niebuhr*

No argument put forth by Niebuhr is wholly effective in reaching out and connecting with culture. Rejecting culture is not a good place to start. Putting culture on the same level as Christ does not prove helpful either. Claiming the good parts of culture and rejecting the negative parts places the church in a judgmental role. Viewing church and culture as completely different realms that exist next to each other doesn't allow for good intersection between the two. Finally, completely transforming the culture is a difficult task, but it is a great place for the church to start in reaching out to people.

#### *What churches are doing to interact with culture*

Many churches and educational institutions have taken on different forms in order to effectively reach out to the twenty-something generation. These forms include

---

<sup>47</sup> Matt Donnelly, "The Movie Missionary," *Christianity Today* 43, no.13 (November 1999): 92.

television, Internet, e-mail, and video projectors. Since the year 2000, the number of churches with Web sites has increased by 23 percent. This example shows how the church has taken a step toward interacting with changing culture by adopting communication that is normative to that culture. Reaching twenty-somethings via the Internet holds great potential. Jody Veenker observes, “Harvest Christian Fellowship has 1,000 weekly online attendees who receive the entire church service on live simultaneous audio and video services on the Internet.”<sup>48</sup> Even seminaries are beginning to catch on and make theological education more accessible. Full seminary degrees in theology, divinity, and Christian education can now be completed online without having to step foot on a physical campus. This accessibility has increased seminary enrollment and made it possible to study at home, without the commute to a new city and institution.<sup>49</sup>

Many churches utilize interactions with popular culture to create a relevant message to young people. Churches like Mars Hill in Seattle and The Flood in San Diego regularly include identifiable cultural markers in their preaching to reach this generation. Mark Driscoll, pastor of Mars Hill, has written a book entitled *The Radical Reformation* in which he offers a list of topics to facilitate the interaction between Christ and culture, specifically in the city of Seattle. Driscoll points out, “In our kingdom culture, we believe that claiming Jesus as Lord means that he rules over everything from our pots and pans to our genitals and car horns.”<sup>50</sup> This bold statement underscores his belief that Christ can have a huge impact when the church decides to become relevant by reaching out to all parts of culture with the Gospel message.

---

<sup>48</sup> Jody Veenker, “Church of the Web,” *Christianity Today* 43, no.7 (June 1999): 26.

<sup>49</sup> Mark H. Senter, “Napster, Moody Bible Institute and Christianity Online,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 26, no. 3 (July 2002): 223.

<sup>50</sup> Mark Driscoll, *The Radical Reformation: Reaching Out without Selling Out* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 187.

## Reflections on Media

Prior to my study for this project, I held the assumption that different forms of media simply served as ways of communicating content. Thus television, radio, magazines, newspapers, the Internet, and phones were all just conduits for some sort of content. In and of themselves, the different forms only reflected the value of the content they contained. As an example, the box of wires and tubes in your living room—your television—has no meaning and little worth without its content. Although it's a billion-dollar industry, television's value comes from the content piped into your home.

As I studied, my view of media began to change. I was introduced to scholars such as Marshall McLuhan, Shane Hipps, and Albert Borgman and began to interact with Andrew Careaga, Leonard Sweet, Josh Jackson, and Chris Ahrens. These people all had different views of culture, media, and the church's interaction with both. They provided the realization that not only is the content of media important, but also that media itself has broad implications that must be understood. In his book, *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture*, Shane Hipps introduces the idea that churches must reconcile with their choice of media and its potential implications. He notes, "The forms of media and technology—regardless of their content—cause profound changes in the church and culture."<sup>51</sup> The authors referenced in this study advocate different views of the traditional interaction between the church and culture. For the most part, they believe that the church needs to be much more aware of its use of media because of the message that a particular media sends across, regardless of its content. Two of the authors, Josh Jackson and Chris

---

<sup>51</sup> Shane Hipps, *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture: How Media Shapes Faith, the Gospel, and Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 23.

Ahrens, have achieved major platforms and have encouraged conversation between church and culture as they head up major print magazines.

*How the church has dealt with this historically*

Throughout its history, the church has employed different forms of media. In the early church (AD 100–500), very few written documents were accessible to common people, and interactions were mostly done through telling stories. Although the church had the Old Testament (at least in part), they had just begun to explore the New Testament letters. The written word brought a much different church experience, and the introduction of this media began to change the church through the middle and late 1500s. Just before the Reformation, a shift occurred to focus faith on Scripture and not on “practices” of the church. Yet, even during the Reformation, changes continued as the Bible became more accessible to common people. As the Bible’s written form became available in common language, the church experienced another major shift. Suddenly, people could study the Bible individually, without needing the church or even a trained pastor or priest. The interplay of dialogue was transformed by the pedagogical outline structure of the written word. This transformation brought less focus on the interaction and more on the content. McLuhan explains, “In writing, the tendency is to isolate an aspect of some matter and to direct steady attention on that aspect. In dialogue, there is an equally natural interplay of multiple aspects of any matter.”<sup>52</sup>

The next major form of media that affected the church was radio. With the introduction of this media, it suddenly became possible for people to “go to church” without leaving home. Churches began broadcasting their services and Bible studies.

---

<sup>52</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *The Essential McLuhan* (New York: Basicbooks, 1995), 90.



Radio programs such as Dr. Charles E. Fuller's Old Fashioned Revival Hour, which began in 1926, introduced many people in the twentieth century to the church. Billy Graham utilized radio to preach to millions during his evangelistic crusades. Reaching a wide audience, the media of radio enabled churches to impact those who would not normally enter their doors. Radio began to shrink the world as it provided news and information from around the world, as well as the formation of a global perspective.

In recent years the church has expanded its presence on both television and the Internet, and many churches broadcast full services using these forms of media. With a fast Internet connection, it is now possible to be part of a church service in real time, without being physically present. It's almost as if you are sitting in the pew but with one major difference—there is no interaction.

#### *How media has changed culture*

Media does more than convey information, it actually shapes culture. The culture I grew up in has changed significantly in my thirty-six years of life. From radio broadcasting to “over the air” television broadcasting to cable and satellites, more and more information continues to be piped directly into our homes. In the last twenty years, the Internet, e-mail, online blogs, movies, instant messaging, texting, cell phones, radio, and new forms of print media have all contributed to an information age with the amazing effect of bringing global events into local societies. The pervasive and immediate media content that would have taken weeks to disseminate in the past is now brought to the whole world almost instantaneously. McLuhan correctly theorized that the

world would eventually become a “global community.”<sup>53</sup> Today, it’s easy to have friends who live on the other side of the planet. In fact, it’s likely that on a daily basis, we interact more with friends from other parts of the world than we do with people who live next door. A new economy has developed on the premise of sharing of information. Schools now teach “media awareness” courses, and much of today’s teaching focuses on how and where to find answers. In fact, it could be argued that knowing how to access information is now as important as reading, writing, and arithmetic. My five-year-old son has a greater connection to the word *Google* than he does to *encyclopedia*. This shift in focus has implications for how the church needs to continually transform in order to reach our current kindergarten culture in fifteen years.

#### *How media has changed the church*

Because today’s media is so tied to the culture, understanding media is something the church must come to terms with. Using Niebuhr as a guide, we find that the church’s stance on cultural interaction shapes its beliefs on media interaction. On one side of the spectrum are groups that want nothing to do with culture, and on the other side are media-savvy churches like LifeChurch.tv that believe culture and media should be embraced. Most churches fall somewhere in between these perspectives; however, they all seem to be playing catch-up in their attempt to truly understand media and how it can be used to reach culture. Unfortunately, many churches jump deep into media culture without a solid understanding of the message that the media is sending to their congregations.

---

<sup>53</sup> McLuhan, *The Essential McLuhan*, 1.

Some churches explore the use of various media in order to reach new people. Churches like Harvest Christian Fellowship and Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa stream their full weekend worship service live via the Internet. While this practice serves many, it also makes it easy for people to stay at home and not interact with other believers.

*The message of media used in the church*

The church needs to be aware of how it uses media. Simply adopting the latest type of media because it's new and hip and will reach people is not a wise rationale. Many churches have conducted lengthy debates over music styles, lighting, and even hymnals. These issues may sound simple but are actually complex because they involve both media and culture. The message that churches send when they change media is important to examine. Serving one of the largest churches in the United States, the leadership team at Willow Creek Community Church decided several years ago that print media was too expensive to publish each week. So they made a huge leap and adopted electronic media. Now "kiosks" throughout the church provide information about different programs and events. Churchgoers can even print out this information. In addition, giant stadium-sized screens are situated on either side of the stage. Screens are, in fact, situated strategically in various locations within the church so that you don't have to look far to interact with the media. Yet even with all the screens, something is missing. There is no longer a bulletin to use for sermon notes, to stick in your Bible, and to reflect on during the week. What message does discontinued print media convey? Before initiating major media changes, churches should ask this question.

Another factor to consider is that adopting certain forms of media may exclude people. Churches that have stopped printing materials exclude those who are not computer literate. The message of new media may be interpreted like this: if you can't type, don't own a computer, and have never been online, you'll be left out. Churches must be careful when selecting new forms of media. They must study the hot and cold characteristics as well as the implications of its use. Many churches have stopped mailing out information to their congregations and now communicate exclusively via e-mail and Web sites. We must come to grips with the reality that these decisions may have serious consequences.

#### *Why this study is important*

The importance of this study hinges on the fact that the church has lost the twenty-something generation and is floundering to catch up with media and culture. This age group comprises approximately 30 percent of our nation's population, or about 81.1 million people.<sup>54</sup> Many of these young people no longer attend church. They haven't gone through the cultural and media shift experienced by their parents. Known as net savvy, this generation thinks of texting or e-mailing before calling. If they do call, it's from a cell phone instead of a traditional home phone, which most of them don't own.

Twenty-somethings comprise a culture of movement and change, global in their thinking, and wide open to new ideas. They also make up our biggest mission field. Though sometimes considered a fragmented group, twenty-somethings place high importance on social networking and communities. Beaudoin offers this description:

---

<sup>54</sup> Andrew Careaga, *eMinistry: Connecting with the Net Generation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2001), 47.

“Nourished on the milk of popular culture, Generation X has developed a keen way of finding meaning in fragmentary and disparate pop culture ‘moments,’ from magazine advertisements to television commercials to styles of footwear, in a series of endless reassociations with popular cultural ephemera.”<sup>55</sup>

How will the church interact with this group? How can it become relevant? Will the church simply create attractive Web sites and invite rock bands to lead worship? Will it continue to change media without considering the message it is sending? Many churches are now asking these questions as they attempt to understand media and study its implications. Churches realize they must change to be relevant; however, change can be difficult, both for those who institute the changes and for those who must accept them.

### **Understanding the Generation**

What criteria mark the achievement of adulthood? This question is paramount in a discussion of twenty-somethings, a generation often defined by negative characteristics that may or may not be true, such as being selfish, in-between, unstable, uncommitted, transient, and lacking direction. The criteria used to define *adulthood* include specific things like graduating from college, getting a job, getting married, and having children. The problem with these attributes is that they focus only on the external and on things that are accomplished. Jeffrey Arnett argues for a better way of evaluating adulthood by “accepting responsibilities for one’s actions, making independent decisions and become financially independent.”<sup>56</sup> These criteria primarily focus on the twenty-something person being independent from a family of origin with the ability to make decisions and accept

---

<sup>55</sup> Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith*, 45.

<sup>56</sup> Jeffrey Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 8.

responsibility. With the exclusion of financial independence, the other areas are difficult to measure.

For most young adults this time can seem nebulous, in that they are no longer adolescents but are not quite full-fledged members of the adult community. Most of them have left a college life filled with endless possibilities and entered a completely different world. While in the midst of making profound life decisions, many struggle to understand their own identity. Their support base of parents and organized institutions no longer holds as much influence. Most have come from structured environments where sole decision-making was out of their hands. They face decisions about jobs, relationships, money, children, sex, values, and religion. They have the ball in their court as well as the freedom to decide what to do with it.

Because this generation is a relatively new group, they are difficult to define. Only since post-World War II has a generation even existed that is defined by the time period between adolescence and full adulthood. In the early twentieth century, those who had graduated from high school—if they even went—were considered adults. Careers began earlier, and marriage and children happened sooner. After young people finished school and transitioned through their early twenties, they entered into full adulthood. Arnett observes that in the last fifty years young adults have changed dramatically. In the 1950s teenagers embraced the transition to adulthood, but now they show reluctance to follow their parents into that stage of life. Arnett says, “Young people of the 1950s were eager to enter adulthood and ‘settle down.’ Perhaps because they grew up during the upheavals of the Great Depression and World War II, achieving the stability of marriage,

home, and children seemed like a great accomplishment to them.”<sup>57</sup> This change in values has many implications for how we minister, because older leaders in most mainline churches only remember the culture they grew up in and their own eagerness for adulthood. Although a shift in thinking has obviously occurred, this shift should not be defined as being good or bad. Stereotyping young adults never proves helpful when trying to create ministries to reach them.

We must be careful of trying to define twenty-somethings too quickly. Often this age period is classified as simply a “transitional” time, implying that they are preparing for real adulthood. This is how many churches perceive this age group. However, we must recognize that it is a distinct life stage, filled with great opportunities and challenges. They need the support of the church almost more than ever as they navigate through difficult decisions and struggles.

While attempting to understand the needs of this generation, the church in the Western world has not yet caught up with them. In most churches, young adult ministry usually takes the form of a singles group or an alternative worship service with different music styles. Most churches choose not to deal with the issues of twenty-somethings and instead focus money and energy toward providing resources for married couples and families with children. The church must be aware that this generation recognizes when they are not valued. And because this valuing does not occur, the twenty-somethings leave. We have relegated this whole generation to a couple of programs and a singles group. Yet the church must address the diverse needs and work hard to promote community, safety, freedom, and help as young adults navigate this difficult time of life.

---

<sup>57</sup> Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 29.

### *Twentieth-century history*

Historically, this generation has gone through a major transition over the last one hundred years. At the beginning of the twentieth century, many people actually got married in their late twenties. After World War II, when the United States experienced a time of economic prosperity, marriage and childbirth began to occur at earlier ages.<sup>58</sup> This period of time, until the '60s, marked the “Father Knows Best” and “Leave it to Beaver” era in Hollywood—a seemingly perfect era with few problems. It’s important to note that many seminary professors and senior pastors grew up during this time. For many people in their twenties back then, the goal was to marry, have children, purchase a home, and become prosperous. Young people seemed to give little attention to questioning their identity or value.

Several things happened in the United States culture that caused still another shift. First, the education process became longer. The ages between eighteen and twenty-two became the “college years,” which were often followed by graduate school. As more and more adolescents went to college, the entire process began taking four, five, or even seven years when a graduate degree followed an undergrad degree. Lastly, young adults began to spend an extended period of time living on their own, away from their family of origin. This time away from home created a brand new life stage when young adults were getting roommates instead of spouses. They were renting instead of buying. A lack of commitments allowed them to move across the country, and even the world, unhindered by burdens that come with the next stage of their lives.

---

<sup>58</sup> Richard A. Settersten Jr., Frank F. Furstenberg Jr., and Ruben G. Rubbaut, eds. *On the Frontier of Adulthood: Theory, Research, and Public Policy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 29.



The upheaval of the U.S. mindset through the 60s added to this age group's struggle. They began to delay marriage, careers, and stability until later, in their twenties. Suddenly, it became socially acceptable to live with someone of the opposite sex. Cohabitation increased in this generation by 62 percent from 1953–1994.<sup>59</sup> This change seemingly gave freedom for the generation to experience married life without actually getting married. Most churches today remain ill-prepared to interact with this change and have few, if any, ministries to provide help for this generation.

#### *What they are dealing with*

Arnett observes that twenty-somethings deal with five main issues, which include “identity exploration, instability, self-focus[ed], feeling in-between and a myriad of possibilities.”<sup>60</sup> These issues are important to understand because many of them shape us in profound ways. **Identity exploration** represents a continuation of the discovery that occurs in adolescence, like trying on different clothes and seeing what fits. Through the experience of being a teenager, college student, and young adult, a twenty-something's identity becomes more solidified. Young adults view identity as an important issue because they are in a period of life when they have the freedom and opportunity to try new things. Churches need to help them with this process by allowing them the freedom to be who they are while accepting the difficulty of this time. When we label young adults, they often feel it is unfair or that it puts them in a box where they feel uncomfortable. Many twenty-somethings react negatively to stereotypes of their generation because their age group is all over the place, so what might define one person

---

<sup>59</sup> Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 107.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

clearly doesn't define others. Churches must provide many different places for young people to explore who they are in the context of ministry. Relegating this generation to a group with all the same ages may not be helpful. An intergenerational ministry piece would be valuable during this period, because twenty-somethings need opportunities to be around those in other life stages and explore who they are in that context.

**Instability** is a hard concept to comprehend. The "unknown" makes it difficult to meet friends, put down roots, and reach lasting decisions. Instability creates a stage when it seems almost fruitless to commit, because you never know when things will change. Twenty-somethings enter the workforce at the bottom, often jaded by what they anticipated their lives would look like and the reality of what they have become. Their jobs often rank lowest on the pay scale, and they struggle to establish themselves in the world.

The church needs to recognize the instability of this group by providing stability. Often churches pay their young adult leader (if they even have one) at the bottom of the pay scale and then wonder why the leader doesn't stay. This generation needs the stabilizing force of longevity in leadership. They need to know that resources exist for them, from financial to emotional. They need the church to be a stable place, and they need to know what to expect when they are there.

The **self-focused** life differs from a selfish life in that twenty-somethings are trying to figure things out, and being self-focused is how they do it. Because this stage of life is so unencumbered, young adults have the opportunity to make decisions that affect only them. It sometimes feels like they don't care about others, but the reality is that they are finally at a place in their lives where they can make their own decisions.

The church can help twenty-somethings who are self focused by providing them with a place of real leadership and involvement in the church. Providing opportunities to be involved on church boards, committees, and sessions can help break them free from being too self focused. It can also provide the church with the opportunity to have young people who are very focused on their own generation as part of the leadership.

Feeling **in-between** is something that society has placed upon this age group. Because Western society seems to put such a high value on being married and having children, it seems that this generation begins to be questioned as soon as they finish formal schooling. They are constantly asked what their next step will be; it's not enough for them to be just working and enjoying life. Societal pressure and other instability issues have twenty-somethings wondering what is next. This issue has convinced some young adults to not get involved in the church. Because many churches have few programs for this generation, there seems to be a hidden message that says once they grow up, have families, and become responsible, the church will have a place for them.

Churches can help in this area by being sensitive to how programs aimed at this generation are publicized and talked about. Often we separate this age group from the rest of the church, not including them in groups like "men's ministry" or "women's ministry." What message do young adults receive when our church has a men's retreat with primarily 40- to 60-year-olds? Churches must figure out how to avoid sending the message that "we will have programs for you once you become a real adult."

Having a **myriad of possibilities** is also a difficult situation for many twenty-somethings. With increased global awareness and the amazing ability to find information, it often seems that life has too many possibilities. The twenty-something stage of life can

be daunting, much like a huge restaurant menu. With so many options, it becomes almost paralyzing to think through them all. Many of these young people spend several years moving from place to place, trying things out to see where they want to be and what they want to do. This instability comes from having too many options, which makes connecting with a community even more difficult.

Churches must realize, too, that twenty-year-olds stay connected with so many friends via social networking sites that they often don't feel the need for real community. The church will have to break into this world and help facilitate moving online relationships and connections into the real world and the church.

#### *How the church traditionally deals with them*

One of the main problems the church has recognized when ministering to twenty-somethings is that this generation doesn't know how to measure success. Most churches base their programs around life stages, which is easy to implement with children, youth, and young marrieds. However, this structure may not be effective with young adults, who often get lumped into singles or college ministries that don't meet their specific needs. And measuring success for twenty-somethings can prove difficult when that measurement is mostly internal. Still another problem is that this generation hasn't existed very long, and since most pastors grew up in a different era, they don't recognize the needs of these young people.

Churches must get past the idea that twenty-somethings are somehow in between more important stages in life. When the church ministers in this way, it conveys the message that our primary responsibility is to assure that young adults get married, have

kids, and get good jobs. This type of ministry devalues the importance of the unique stage of life they are experiencing. In reality, most twenty-somethings are trying to figure things out while they are essentially alone.

Churches need to recognize the significant differences between an 18-year-old college student and a 24-year-old post-college student. These two groups deal with their own distinct issues as they seek to clarify the hows and whys of their beliefs. While the post-high school student is reveling in newfound freedom to make decisions and believe what he or she wants, the 25-year-old student is living with the consequences of those beliefs and freedoms. Bringing these two groups together doesn't necessarily help either group. Those in their mid-twenties may be continuing on with college, while the younger students are just beginning the process and may sense despair when they observe that graduating from college doesn't always prepare them for adulthood. Although these groups deal with some of the same issues, enough disparity exists between their needs to necessitate separate groups.

Often we regard ministries as places where we prepare students for the real world. It's as if we give them all the skills to recognize and negotiate whitewater, and then we throw them into the river, hoping they'll make it to the bottom of the rapids. We may have some safety lines in place but not as prominently placed as they could be. Sometimes we have the attitude that even if young people flip and flounder in the river, they will eventually make it to the bottom. We did, right? Every one of us eventually figured it out. Wouldn't it have been great, though, if we had learned to make decisions without all the floundering? Perhaps with more safety lines in place, students would have a greater sense of comfort and the chance to grow in a safer environment. Sure, they

might learn to kayak with the skills we've given them, but we need to realize that we are no longer their best teachers, because we've lost our ability to "read" the river and may not know how to use the new "equipment."

My idea of ministry is to move past the preparation and instead create a safe landing pad for this generation when they come back and need to fall. We can create this landing place by making it bright and easy to find, having safety equipment all around, and letting young people know it will always be there. When we focus only on preparing twenty-somethings, and they fail, they feel like they can't come back. Yet the truth is, everyone fails—again and again—and that's when having a place where they can be ministered to is most important.

#### *How the church can be more effective*

The church can best minister to this generation by allowing them the freedom to figure things out themselves. Even though twenty-somethings have been in school a long time and can negotiate the college world, the world outside of college presents a different challenge. Many young adults feel despair when they realize that years of schooling don't translate into success. They need places where they can share, be real, and express their doubts, frustrations, and pain. Many have been on an education track for so long that when they hit their mid-twenties, they suddenly realize that some of their goals are unattainable.<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> Alexandra Robbins and Abby Wilner, *Quarterlife Crisis: The Unique Challenges of Life in Your Twenties* (New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 2001), 109.

### *Create safety lines*

College and young adult ministries must offer opportunities for students to lead. We must give students a safe place where they can begin to make decisions that have major impact. These students should learn to lead mission projects, teach Bible studies, and influence decisions within their church group. They should be encouraged to collaborate with other students and work together to create plans, implement them, and quantify results. Older adults should be available to walk them through these processes so that they can be nudged in the right direction when needed. Twenty-somethings need to know they have value in who they are and not just who they can become. Giving them leadership and ownership in the church shows that the church truly values them.

### *Know their needs*

To create an evaluation model that examines the effectiveness of our ministry, we must begin with an awareness of the young adults' primary needs and whether they are being met. This model should focus on how young adults make decisions, apart from getting married and getting jobs. Twenty-somethings need to know that their identity is valuable because of the person God has made them to be and not because they will eventually be a useful member of society. They need to know that it's OK to wrestle with decisions and figure things out. They need to be part of a church that celebrates with them when they make the right decisions and lifts them up when they make the wrong ones.

### *Understand their culture*

Connection and retainment of twenty-somethings in the church is rooted in understanding their culture. If we aren't making inroads into their culture, we often try to get them to step into ours. However, these young adults easily recognize that our culture isn't what they want and doesn't meet their needs. Therefore, the church needs to demonstrate to this generation that we understand their world by not rejecting what they see, read, and listen to just because it doesn't fit into our Christian worldview. We need to examine their culture, interact with it, and question its connections to faith. Often the church doesn't know how to make these connections, but it needs to learn how.

This doesn't mean we should copy the world in what we do. Some churches have grown quickly because they change worship styles or formats of services to draw people in their twenties. Some of these programs do a great job of connecting with twenty-somethings but not retaining them. Getting them into the seats isn't as important as getting them out of the seats to serve.

Churches made up of primarily those in their twenties are missing an important intergenerational piece. In my ministry to youth over the years, I have valued the experience of bringing young adults and college students into my home. In our interactions together, they see how my wife and I raise our children, how we treat each other, and how we make decisions. Without this intergenerational piece in the church, twenty-somethings miss out on a valuable influence.



### *Recognize their freedom*

Unattachment can sometimes be a great thing. This age group has much freedom, and the lack of a spouse, career, mortgage, and children should be something that the church capitalizes on. Twenty-somethings can go on mission projects for longer than a weekend, they can serve, and they can join committees. We can make them feel important by giving them a purpose. Their great ideas and youthful idealism should be celebrated, and their voices should be heard. We need to show these young people that they are valuable and have much to offer at this stage of their lives. Their energy, time, and connection with culture all need to be utilized.

### *Use their tools*

Twenty-somethings use e-mail, texting, Twitter,<sup>62</sup> cell phones, podcasts, streaming video, message boards, YouTube,<sup>63</sup> and iTunes<sup>64</sup> to connect with their world. Much more than tools, these resources have become a part of young people's everyday lives. The church must become fluent in this generation's language and use any and all of their resources to connect with them. When used well, these resources can be very helpful in creating community.

### *Conclusion*

Developing effective ministry to reach the twenty-something generation begins with a study of their culture, their media, and their generation as a whole. Through this project, I've learned that many of my assumptions about this generation were untrue.

---

<sup>62</sup> Twitter, "What Is Twitter?" Twitter, Inc., <http://www.twitter.com> (accessed October 29, 2008).

<sup>63</sup> You Tube, "Broadcast Yourself," You Tube LLC, <http://www.youtube.com> (accessed October 29, 2008).

<sup>64</sup> iPod + iTunes, Apple, Inc., <http://www.apple.com/itunes> (accessed October 29, 2008).

These young adults live in a much different world than the one I lived in fifteen years ago, when I was in my twenties. Fortunately, by using many of the same resources that they use, we can learn more about them and discover how to reach them. As a first step toward understanding their needs, I have utilized the Web to create a portal of resources that gives the church access into their world. This space allows us to examine and interact with their culture, putting the focus on the twenty-somethings and their needs instead of how we can get them into our churches. In this way, we attempt to develop programs from the bottom up, based on culture and needs, instead of from the top down.

### **Section 5: The Project**

My project will be the creation of a Web-based resource portal for churches wishing to better understand the twenty-something generation. The Web site will contain both information and resources for churches to hear the voice of this generation and to find tools they can use to create ministry. The goal of the site is to point to other content and sources on the Web where specific topics are targeted. (A good example of a resource portal is [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com), which is both an information site and a portal to other sites.) Twenty-somethings and church leaders will regularly update the site's content. It will be a place where voices can be heard and ideas generated to address the issues raised by the twenty-something generation.

## **Section 6: Project Specifications**

### **Goals and Strategies**

#### **1. What are the main goals for the project?**

- a. To create a Web portal [www.relevantpew.com](http://www.relevantpew.com) for churches attempting to develop ministry that connects with the twenty-something generation and retains them
- b. To provide a resource that gives leaders an “eye” into the culture of the twenty-something generation
- c. To exist as a portal for helpful information all over the Web

#### **2. How will you test a beta version of the project and assess its success?**

- a. I will create a beta Web page based on the TypePad blog standard.
- b. I will let my pastor friends and staff evaluate the effectiveness of its content.
- c. Based on the feedback and ideas received, the portal will be refined as content is added.

#### **3. How will you measure the success of your project?**

- a. Because this project is very interactive and aimed at being a useful tool, eliciting comments and feedback from users will be crucial.
- b. A study of the unique IP hits, as well as the number of page views, will show how often the portal is accessed.
- c. Comments and feedback from visitors will be an important measure of the project’s success, and I hope to create some interactivity on the site so that this feedback will be monitored.

#### **4. How will you adequately maintain the finished project over the long haul?**

- a. Adding regular updates and posts to the site to keep it fresh and relevant
- b. Holding a brainstorming session every six months to evaluate the site and discuss new content to be added
- c. Bringing more people on board to maintain effectiveness and to help create content

### **Audience**

#### **5. Who is the primary audience/user of your completed project?**

- a. Primary audience is leaders of twenty-something ministries in churches who are looking for resources and tools to start or modify their ministries.
- b. Secondary audience is other church leaders looking to better understand the twenty-something generation.
- c. Tertiary audience will be the twenty-something generation themselves as they add content and provide information so that they might be better understood.

- 6. What do you want the audience/user to do/think/experience after encountering your project?**
  - a. To realize that the twenty-something generation can be effectively reached by simply spending more time learning about them
  - b. To use this portal as a jumping-off point for ministry. Though not a definitive place to learn everything about ministering to this generation, the site will contain basic how-to information and, more importantly, links to other sites that provide more depth. Ideally, this portal will create the desire to learn and to find more info on a particular subject.
- 7. What task might your audience/user be trying to accomplish when utilizing your project?**
  - a. Seeking to learn more about the twenty-something generation
  - b. Creating more effective ministry for that age group
  - c. Finding others who are either struggling or ministering effectively to that group.
  - d. Searching for tools and resources they can use to be more effective

### **Project Scope and Content**

- 8. Define the scope of your project. What will be the technical and content parameters for your project?**
  - a. The scope is limited to providing a Web portal site with information about the twenty-something generation and how the church can create effective ministry to reach and retain them.
  - b. Technically, it is a Web-based resource similar to the style of [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com), in that content will be provided by many different authors and also combined with resources like [www.theooze.com](http://www.theooze.com). The site will provide information and also point to other sites where more detailed information can be accessed.
  - c. Content is aimed specifically at understanding the twenty-something generation, including their unique cultural challenges and the media that influences them.
- 9. How will the content of your project be organized?**
  - a. As a Web portal, the site will be set up to display content and also point to other locations on the Web with related relevant content.
  - b. Buttons will be included on the Web portal to link the user to outside resources.
    - i. The Twenty-Something Generation: Who Are They?
    - ii. Their Culture: What Parts Translate across Cultures
    - iii. Their Media: Music, Movies, Print, Web
    - iv. Their Beliefs
    - v. Their Stories: What They Are and How They Have Been Involved with the Church
    - vi. Media Resources: How Do We Interact with Their Media?

- vii. Their Technology: What They Use and How
- viii. Churches in the Journey: Who Has Been Doing It Well?
- ix. Blog/Podcast Information

**10. What special technical or functional requirements are needed?**

- a. Web design work
- b. Ability to stream media
- c. Ability to find appropriate links and update regularly
- d. Need for qualified writers to add content

**11. Budget**

- a. What is the budget for the project?
  - i. This is still to be determined. The main budget items are design, hosting, and bandwidth. I hope to design the site for less than \$5,000 but will start with that number. Fortunately, I can incorporate this project into my ministry work/job, so funding is less of an issue.
  - ii. After completion of the portal, the expense of adding and updating content should be minimal.
- b. What hardware and software is required for the project?
  - i. A fast computer with Web access and the ability to create and update content
  - ii. Web-design software as well as video/audio/visual editing equipment
- c. Outsourcing fees
  - i. My goal is to pull in some favors for the Web design. Two friends in the Web-design industry have volunteered to help create and design the site.
  - ii. If their time is limited, I will use the \$5,000 to help with the design.
- d. Ongoing personnel/administrative support
  - i. This will come out of my current ministry context. I will update much of the content myself.
  - ii. I will also rely on the 12 twenty-somethings I work with to help with the creating and updating.

**Promotion**

**12. How will you market your project to your intended audience/user?**

- a. Youth Specialties – I hope to be offered space to teach seminars at three yearly youth ministry conferences. These conferences reach more than 10,000 people. Although most of the attendees are youth workers, they all have students who grow up and need to stay connected with the church.

- b. Church connections - I am part of a strategic network of churches in California and am growing one in Texas. Both networks will receive information about the project.
- c. Web based - Friends, coworkers, and networks will add links on their sites to drive traffic to my site.

## **Standards of Publication**

### **13. What are the standards of publication particular to the chosen media genre?**

- a. Standards of publication on a Web portal are created by finding other sites/works/publications that support the particular insights provided by my work. In a Wikipedia-type resource, the authors must not only create content but also provide links and outside resources that both support and disagree with the work. Web-based standards often collaborate so that when content is added, it reflects community approval and provides validity.
- b. Secondly, standards of Web design are plain to see. With many poorly designed Web sites out there, it is fairly easy to tell when one has been well designed by the number of clicks and click-throughs off the home page.

### **14. What specific standards do you use for your project, and what is your rationale for these choices?**

- a. The usefulness of a Web site is determined by the number of its unique visitors and where those visitors go. A simple standard for the site is based on activity. If the site proves useful, people will use it. If not, they won't.
- b. Additionally, comparisons between this type of Web portal and other useful portals are easy to make. Sites such as [www.googlenews.com](http://www.googlenews.com), [www.ginkworld.net](http://www.ginkworld.net), and again [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org) all serve as great portals that drive people to additional content. For my Web site to be effective, people must be driven to content.

## **Action Plan**

### **15. Identify the various components of the multimedia project.**

- a. Content for specific articles
- b. Home page design which simplifies finding content
- c. Links to other Web-based resources
- d. See section 9b

### **16. Identify the technical skills required to complete the project.**

- a. Web design
- b. Locating information
- c. Writing web content
- d. Managing a team of people
- e. Awareness of upcoming trends and technologies

- f. Identify the specific skills required to develop the multimedia project within the chosen medium.
  - i. Web design or collaboration
  - ii. Content design and strategic organization of the site
  - iii. Ability to update and create new content
  - iv. HTML skills
- g. Offer an assessment of the student's present skill set.
  - i. Poor on Web design
  - ii. Good on collaboration
  - iii. Medium on design and organization of a Web site
  - iv. Good on ability to create and update content
  - v. Very limited on HTML and coding skills

### **17. Develop a timeline**

- a. Outline when and how you will acquire the necessary skills (if applicable) to cover any deficiencies.
- b. After completing the written portion of this project, I will begin learning to design and create Web-based projects.
  - 1. July 2007: Begin working with a team of people to brainstorm ideas for the site and examine information structure.
  - 2. November–December 2007: Begin formalizing framework for sections of the site.
  - 3. January 2008: Begin working with Web developer/designer/coder to build foundation for the site as well as aesthetics.
  - 4. February–May 2008: Continue working with developer on design and coding of the site.
  - 5. March–June 2008: Begin lining up contributors, authors, and editors for content creation.
  - 6. May–July 2008: Work out bugs of site and tweak final design. Begin posting content.
  - 7. August–September 2008: Continue posting content on final site design and find more contributors.
  - 8. September 2008: Submit site to search engines. Begin networking process with other bloggers and sites to gain visibility for RelevantPew.com. Continue adding content.
- c. Set deadlines for completion of various components of the multimedia project; see 1–8 above.

## **Section 7: Postscript**

Finishing the written portion of this project proved rewarding, but receiving approval on the web resources was an even greater accomplishment. In my case, this project had a two-fold level of difficulty. The first level consisted of creating content that could be used by churches for ministry to the twenty-something generation. Content creation does not follow a structured, simple writing plan and must be placed in a logical order to be useful. Additionally, because I'm not a Web designer or particularly gifted in any art form, the design phase of the Web site presented a challenge. I can tell when something looks good, but creating that good-looking design is not one of my gifts. Fortunately, a number of great designers gave input for the Web site, and the final project provides a useful tool that looks great.

Like many Doctor of Ministry students, I had originally set out to do something very different from this final project. I had planned to study popular culture but realized during the first semester that although that topic intrigued me, I wasn't sure how to follow through with it on a practical level. I still believe that the study of popular culture is valuable, however, and have decided to include it as a piece in this overall project.

Creating a resource for ministry fits with who I am and what I'm passionate about. As a career youth pastor, I have been saddened to see students who are involved in church during their teenage years simply quit coming in their twenties. I've watched as many of the students that I've poured much of my life into have become less and less interested in a relationship with God. Or, I've seen them switch churches because another church has a better young adults ministry. This project combines my knowledge of



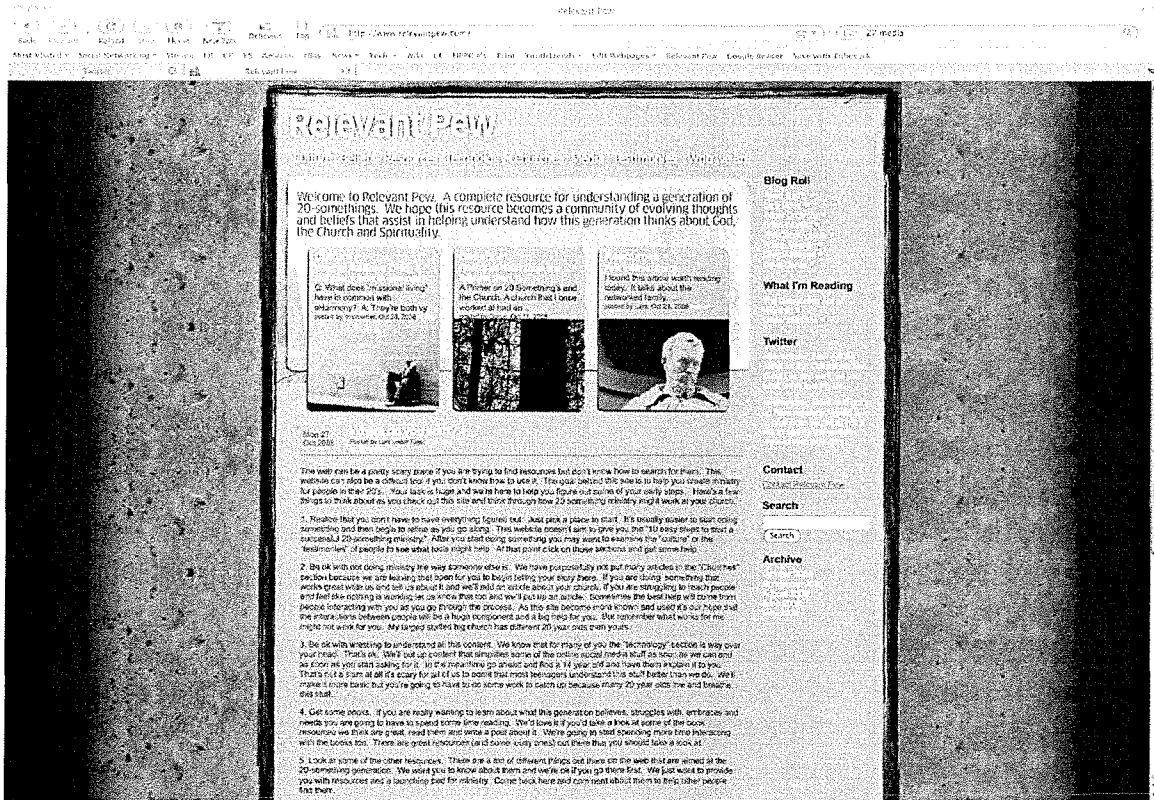
information and technology with my love for students and the desire to help them stay connected to the church. My hope is that as a result of this project, I will see that happen.

Lastly, I pray that this site creation, the networking, the connection process, and the Web site content will continue as a sustainable project. Designing [www.relevantpew.com](http://www.relevantpew.com) has been an amazing opportunity and I look forward to continuing to add content and seeing the tool used in ministry. The goal behind this project has never been just to graduate. I see the project as a stepping-stone to the creation of a community that ultimately enables churches to reach a generation. This goal cannot be reached in a short time but must be sustained over the years. In order for [www.relevantpew.com](http://www.relevantpew.com) to be successful, it will need regular updates with multiple authors and contributors who are passionate about reaching this generation. The onus now rests on me to ensure that this project continues beyond the dissertation as a useful tool.

## APPENDIX

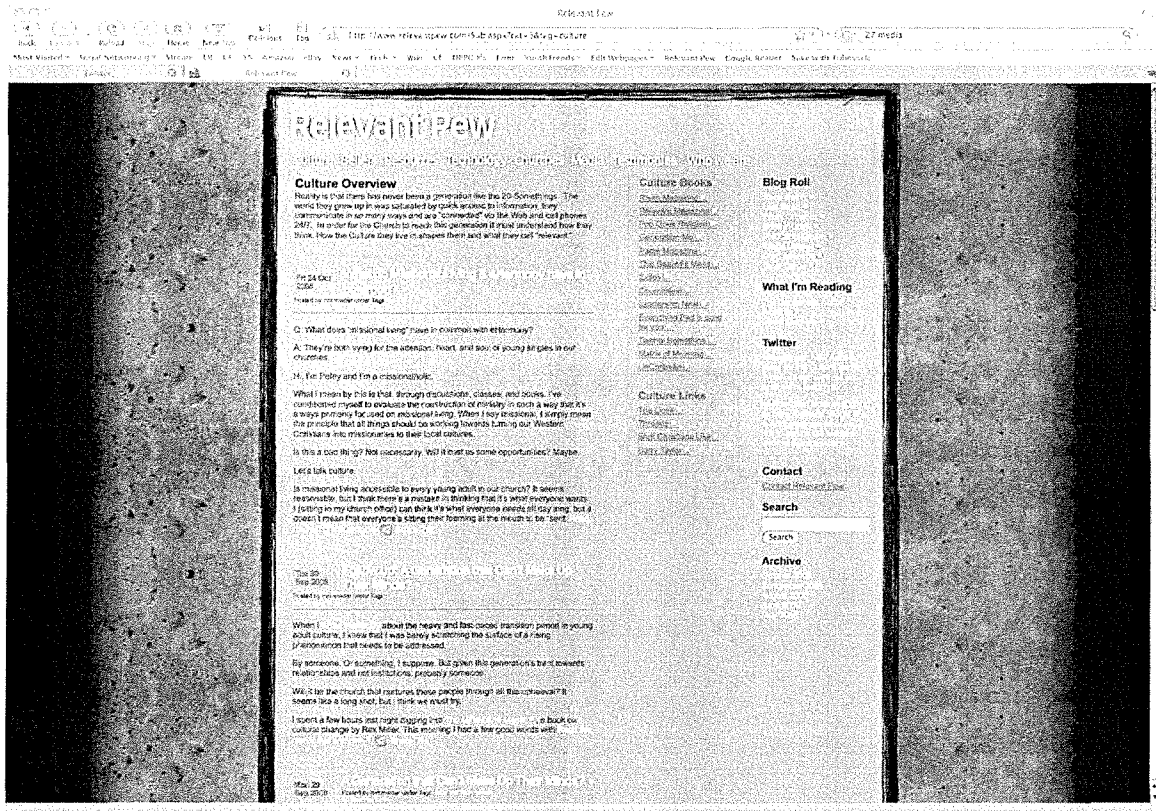
The following pages show screen grabs from the [www.relevantpew.com](http://www.relevantpew.com) Web site.

Beneath each screen grab I have placed the “overview” statement that appears at the top of each page on the site.



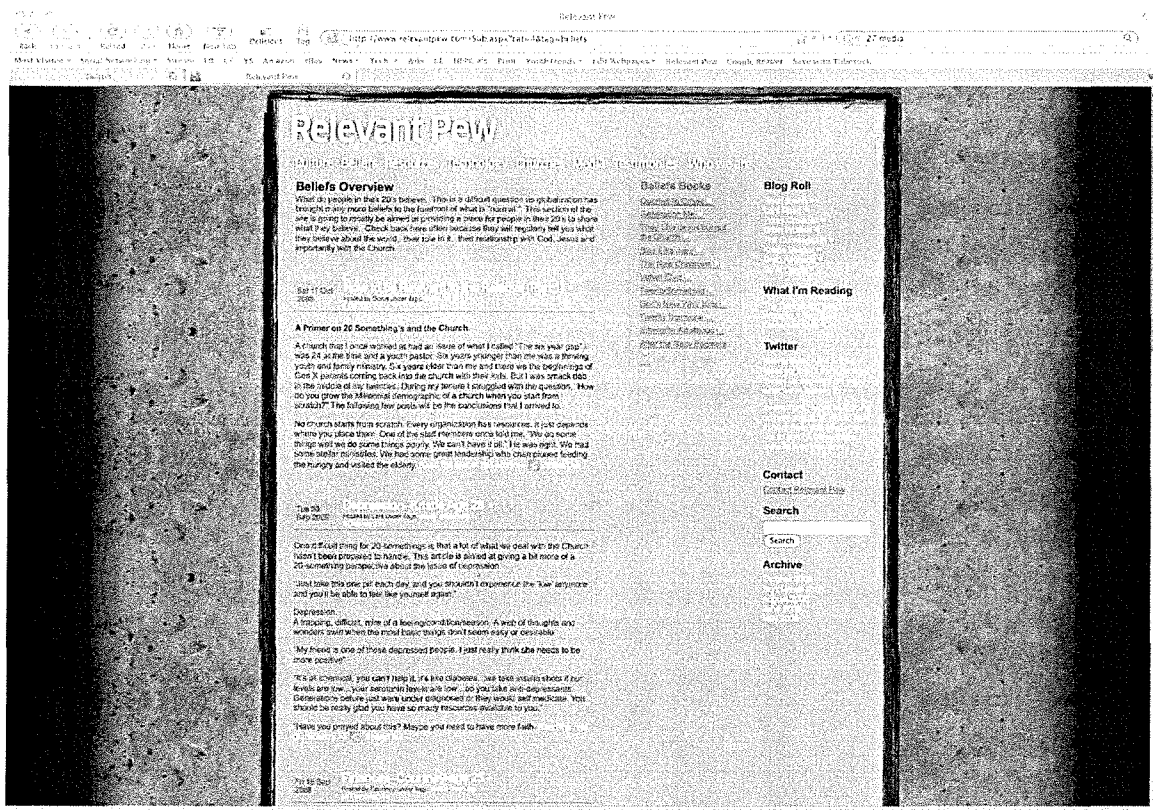
RelevantPew Main Page

Welcome to RelevantPew, a complete resource for understanding a generation of 20-somethings. We hope this resource becomes a community of evolving thoughts and beliefs that will assist you in understanding how this generation thinks about God, the church, and spirituality.



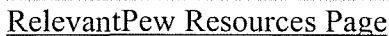
## RelevantPew Culture Page

The reality is that there has never been a generation like the 20-somethings. The world they grew up in was saturated by quick access to information. They communicate in so many ways and are “connected” via the Web and cell phones 24/7. In order for the church to reach this generation, it must understand how they think, how the culture shapes them, and what they consider to be “relevant.”

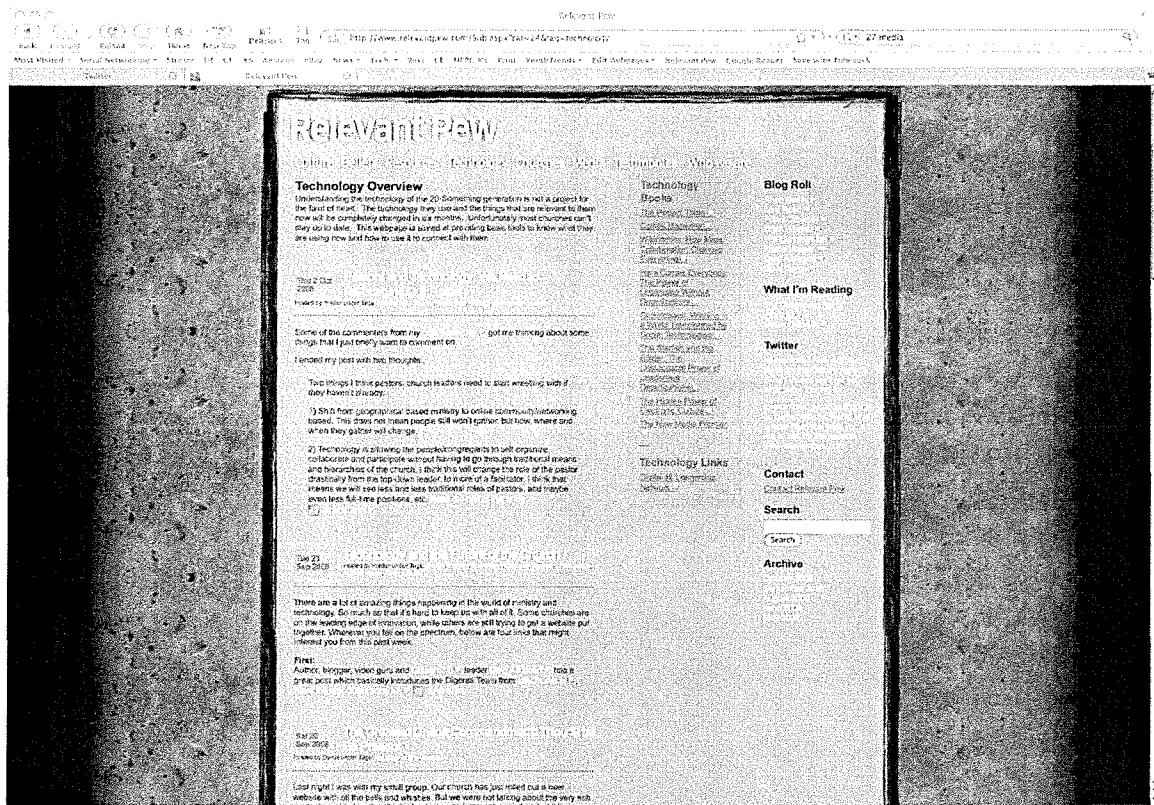


## RelevantPew Beliefs Page

What do people in their 20s believe? This is a difficult question, as globalization has brought many beliefs to the forefront of what is “normal.” This section of the site provides a place for people in their 20s to share what they believe. Check back here often to find out what they believe about the world; their role in it; and their relationship with God, Jesus, and the church.



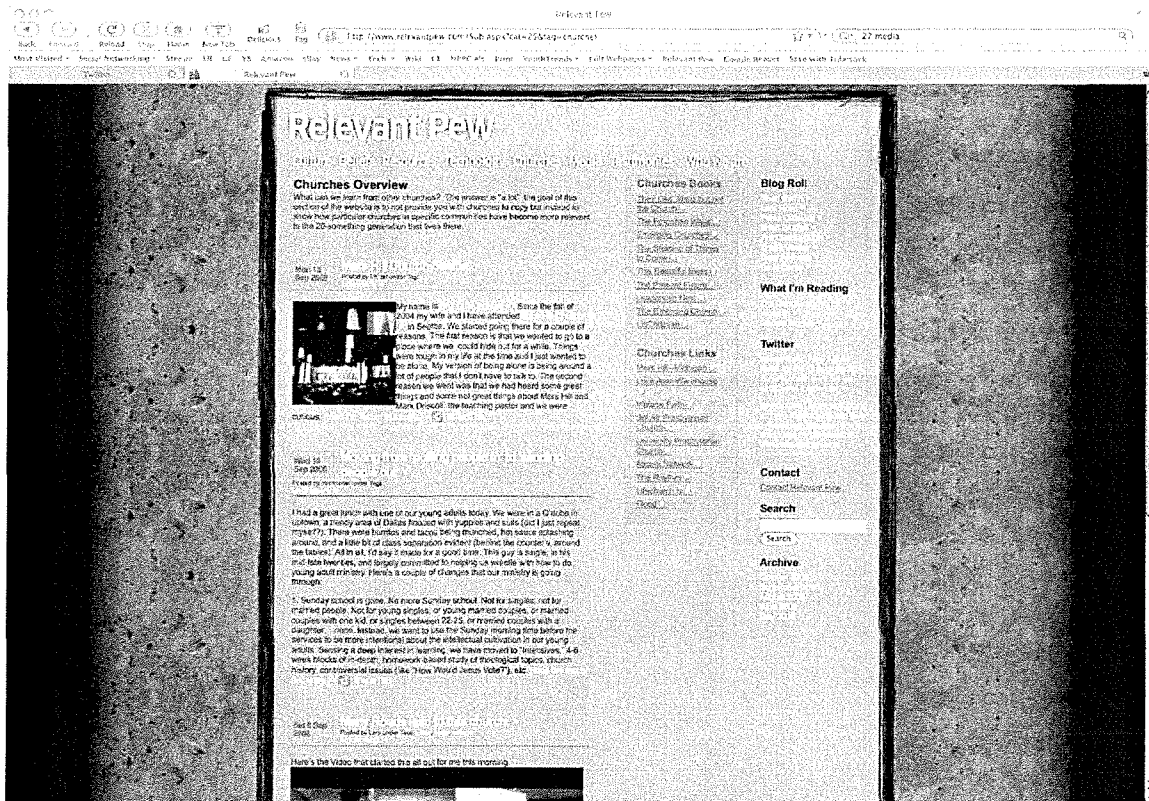
59



## RelevantPew Technology Page

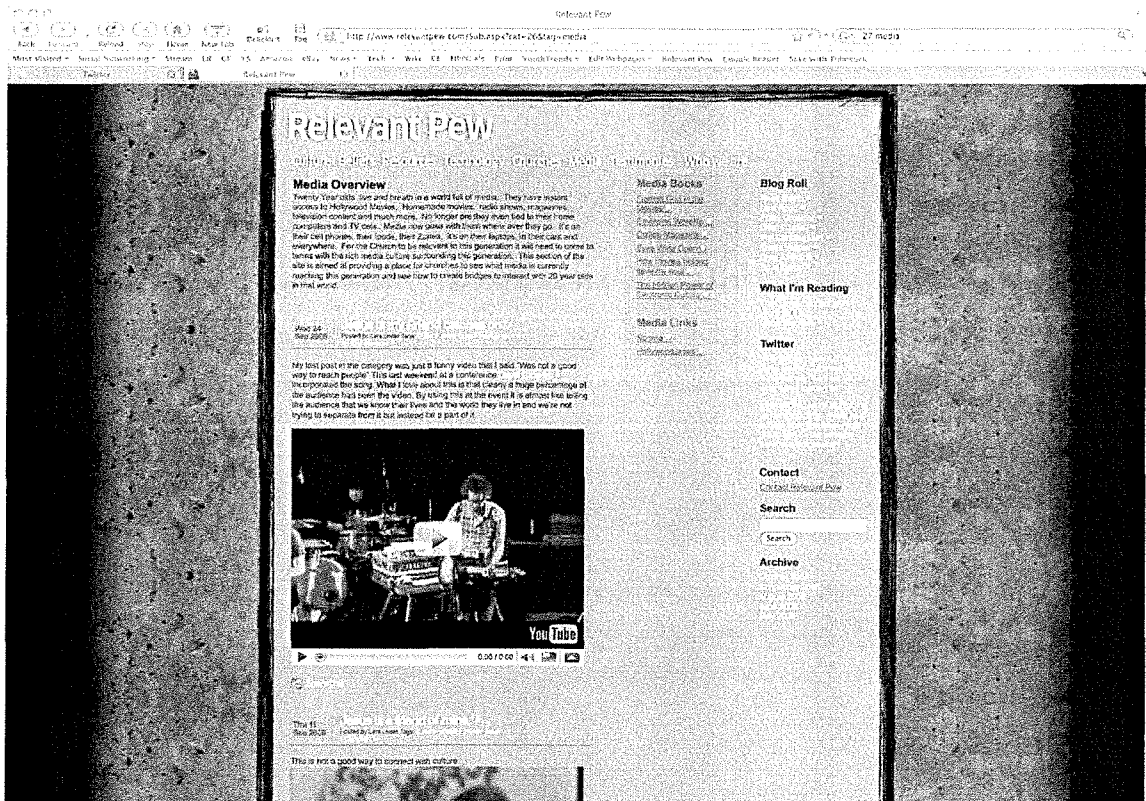
Understanding the technology of the 20-something generation is not for the faint of heart. Their technology and the things that are relevant now could change completely in the next six months. Unfortunately, most churches can't stay up to date. This section provides basic tools to understand what 20-somethings are using and how to connect with them.





## RelevantPew Churches Page

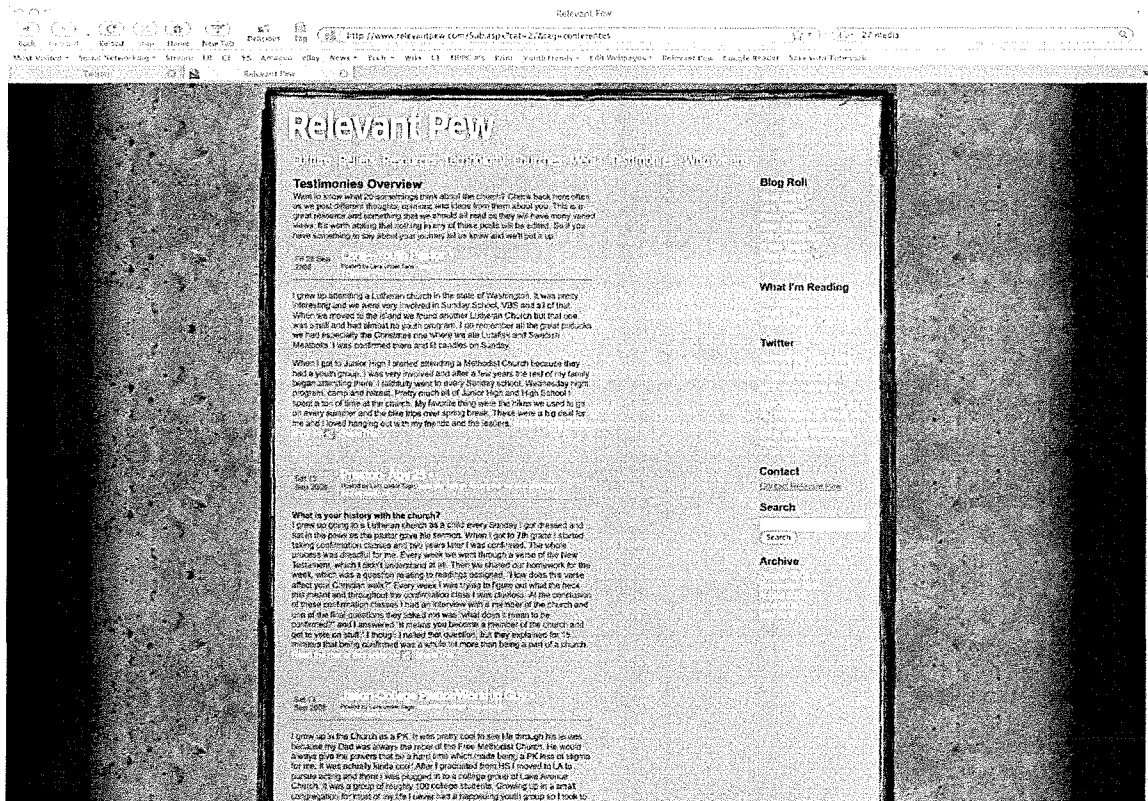
What can we learn from other churches? A lot. This section shows how particular churches in specific communities have become relevant to the 20-somethings that live there.



## RelevantPew Media Page

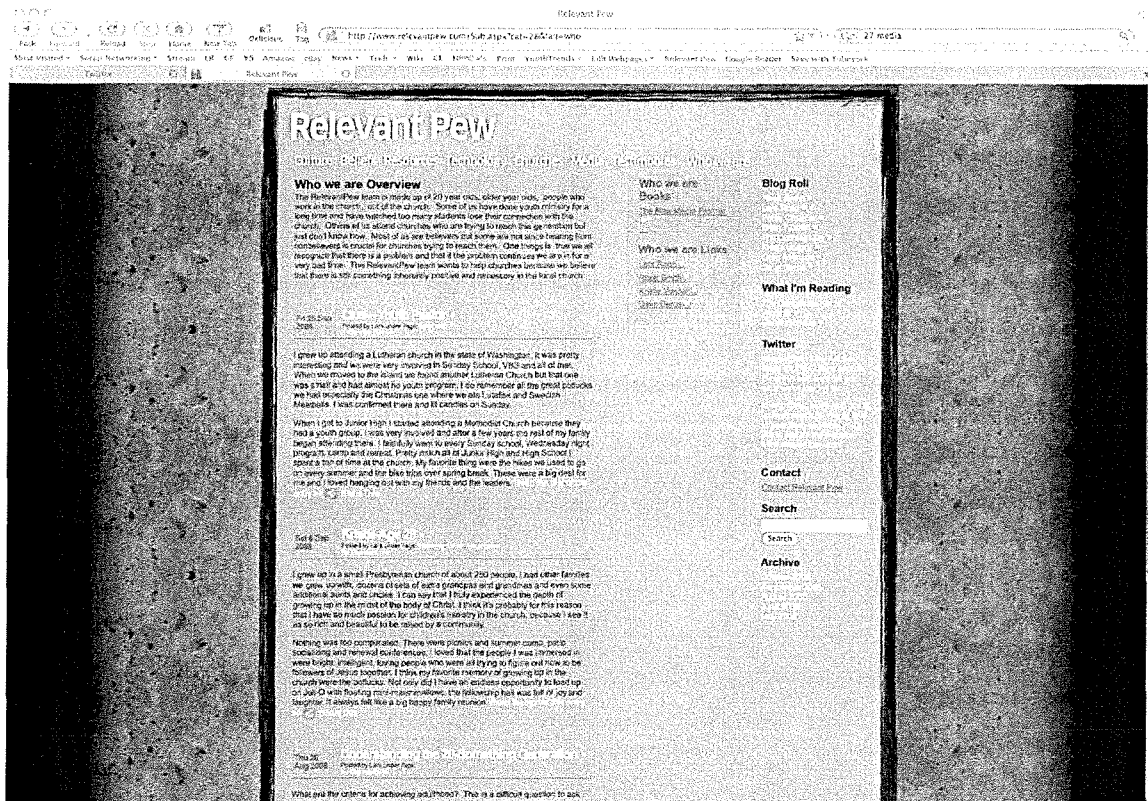
Twenty-year-olds live and breathe in a world of media. They have instant access to Hollywood movies, homemade movies, radio shows, magazines, television content, and much more. No longer are they tied to their TVs and home computers; media now goes wherever they go—on their cell phones, their iPods, and their Zunes. They have access to online content everywhere they are. For the church to be relevant to 20-somethings, it must come to terms with the rich media culture surrounding these young people. This section of the site helps churches to see what media is currently reaching 20-somethings, how create bridges, and how to interact with this generation.





## RelevantPew Testimonies Page

Want to know what 20-somethings think about the church? Check back here often as we post different thoughts, opinions, and ideas. This resource offers a variety of views that we should all read, and it's worth stating that nothing in these posts will be edited. So if you have something to say about your journey and you want to share it with others, let us know and we'll post it.



## RelevantPew Who We Are Page

The RelevantPew team is made up of 20-year-olds, older-year-olds, and people who work in the church and out of the church. Some have done youth ministry for a long time and have watched too many students lose their connection with the church. Others attend churches that are trying to reach this generation but just don't know how. Most of us are believers but some are not. We think hearing from nonbelievers is crucial for the church. The RelevantPew team wants to help churches, because we believe that there is still something positive and necessary in the local church.

## PROJECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ali, Lorraine. "The Glorious Rise of Christian Pop." *Newsweek*, July 16, 2001.
- Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica*. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Benzinger Bros. ed. vol. II, Q. iii, art. ii., Q. v, 1947.
- Arnett, Jeffrey. *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Austin, Michael. *Explorations in Art, Theology, and Imagination*. London: Equinox, 2005.
- Baldwin, Christina. *Storycatcher: Making Sense of Our Lives through the Power and Practice of Story*. Novato: New World Library, 2005.
- Barna, George. "Rapid Increase in Alternative Forms of the Church Are Changing the Religious Landscape." *The Barna Update* (October 24, 2005). <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdateNarrow&BarnaUpdateID=202> (accessed September 21, 2006).
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Revolution: Finding Vibrant Faith Beyond the Walls of the Sanctuary*. Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 2005.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Technology Use Is Growing Rapidly in Churches," *The Barna Update* (September 13, 2005). <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=199> (accessed September 21, 2006).
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Second Coming of the Church*. Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Most Twentysomethings Put Christianity on the Shelf Following Spiritually Active Teen Years." *The Barna Update* (September 11, 2006). <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=245> (accessed September 21, 2006).
- Barsotti, Catherine, and Robert Johnston. *Finding God in the Movies: 33 Films of Reel Faith*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004.
- Beal, Timothy K. *Roadside Religion: In Search of the Sacred, the Strange, and the Substance of Faith*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2005.
- Beaudoin, Tom. *Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X*. 1st ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998.
- Bell, Rob. *Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005.

- Boer, Roland. *Knockin' on Heaven's Door: The Bible and Popular Culture*. London: Routledge, 1999.
- Borgmann, Albert. *Power Failure: Christianity in the Culture of Technology*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003.
- Boss, Shira J. "Taking Pop Culture Seriously." *Christian Science Monitor* (December 1999): 15.
- Brown, Delwin, Sheila Greeve Davaney, and Kathryn Tanner, eds. *Converging on Culture: Theologians in Dialogue with Cultural Analysis and Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Burke, John. *No Perfect People Allowed: Creating a Come-As-You-Are Culture in the Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005.
- Careaga, Andrew. *eMinistry: Connecting with the Net Generation*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2001.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Hooked on the Net: How to Say "Goodnight" When the Party Never Ends*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2002.
- Chidester, David. *Authentic Fakes: Religion and American Popular Culture*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005.
- Chouinard, Yvon. *Let My People Go Surfing: The Education of a Reluctant Businessman*. New York: Penguin, 2005.
- Clapp, Rodney. *Border Crossings: Christian Trespasses on Popular Culture and Public Affairs*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2000.
- Clark, Chap. *Hurt: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004.
- Clayton, Philip, and Arthur Peacocke, eds. *In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being: Panentheistic Reflections on God's Presence in a Scientific World*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004.
- Cole, Neil. *Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005.
- Conder, Tim. *The Church in Transition: The Journey of Existing Churches into the Emerging Culture*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005.
- Corliss, Richard. "The Gospel According to Spider Man." *Time*, August 16, 2004.

- Creel, Colin. *Perspectives: A Spiritual Life Guide for Twentysomethings*. Orlando: Relevant, 2005.
- Dark, David. *Everyday Apocalypse: The Sacred Revealed in Radiohead, the Simpsons, and Other Pop Culture Icons*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002.
- Dawkins, Richard. *The God Delusion*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006.
- Dean, William D. *The American Spiritual Culture: And the Invention of Jazz, Football, and the Movies*. New York: Continuum, 2002.
- Detweiler, Craig, and Barry Taylor. *A Matrix of Meanings: Finding God in Pop Culture*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003.
- Donnelly, Matt. "The Movie Missionary." *Christianity Today* 43, no. 13 (November 1999): 92.
- Driscoll, Mark. *The Radical Reformation: Reaching Out without Selling Out*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004.
- Dunham, Craig, and Doug Serven. *Twenty Someone: Finding Yourself in a Decade of Transition*. Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 2003.
- Feinberg, Margaret. *Twenty Something: Surviving and Thriving in the Real World*. Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2004.
- Feldmeir, Mark R. *Testimony to the Exiles: Sermons for GenXers and Other Postmoderns*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2003.
- Fishwick, Marshall William. *Great Awakenings: Popular Religion and Popular Culture*. New York: Haworth Press, 1995.
- Forbes, Bruce David, and Jeffrey H. Mahan, eds. *Religion and Popular Culture in America*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.
- Frost, Michael, and Alan Hirsch. *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003.
- Gates, David, David Jefferson, and Anne Underwood. "The Pop Prophets." *Newsweek*, May 24, 2004.
- Gempf, Conrad. *Mealtime Habits of the Messiah*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005.
- Gibbs, Eddie. *ChurchNext: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *LeadershipNext: Changing Leaders in a Changing Culture*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005.
- \_\_\_\_\_, and Ryan Bolger. *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005.
- Goldstein, Richard. "Cartoon Wars." *The Nation*, February 21, 2005.
- Grenz, Stanley J. *A Primer on Postmodernism*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "What Does Hollywood Have to Do with Wheaton? The Place of (Pop) Culture in Theological Reflection." *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 43, no. 2 (June 2000): 303–314.
- \_\_\_\_\_, and John R. Franke. *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*. 1st ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.
- Grossman, Cathy Lynn. "Faithful Build a Second Life for Religion Online." *USA Today*, April 3, 2007. [http://www.usatoday.com/tech/gaming/2007-04-01-second-life-religion\\_n.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/tech/gaming/2007-04-01-second-life-religion_n.htm) (accessed March 1, 2007).
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Christian Market Aims for the Young and Happenin'." *USA Today*, June 23, 2004.
- Hancock, Jim. *Raising Adults*. Colorado Springs: Pinon Press, 1999.
- Hewitt, Hugh. *Blog: Understanding the Information Reformation That's Changing Your World*. Nashville: Nelson Business, 2005.
- Higgins, Gareth. *How Movies Helped Save My Soul: Finding Spiritual Fingerprints in Culturally Significant Films*. Orlando: Relevant, 2003.
- Hipps, Shane. *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture: How Media Shapes Faith, the Gospel, and Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005.
- James, Steven. *Story: Recapture the Mystery*. Grand Rapids: Revell, 2006.
- Jay, Martin. *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.
- Jenkins, Philip. *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Johnson, Steven. *Emergence: The Connected Lives of Ants, Brains, Cities, and Software*. New York: Scribner, 2001.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *Everything Bad Is Good for You*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2005.
- Kallestad, Walt. *Entertainment Evangelism: Taking the Church Public*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996.
- Kim, Rebecca. *God's New Whiz Kids: Korean American Evangelicals on Campus*. New York: New York University Press, 2006.
- Kimball, Dan. *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Emerging Worship: Creating Worship Gatherings for New Generations*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004.
- Kotler, Steven. *West of Jesus: Surfing, Science and the Origins of Belief*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2006.
- Kozlovic, Anton. "Superman as Christ-Figure: The American Pop Culture Movie Messiah." *Journal of Religion and Film* 6, no. 1 (April 2002). <http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/superman.htm> (accessed March 1, 2007).
- Kurzweil, Ray. *The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology*. New York: Viking, 2005.
- Levy, Steven. *The Perfect Thing: How the iPod Shuffles Commerce, Culture and Coolness*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006.
- Lewis, Alan. *Between Cross & Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.
- Long, Jimmy. *Emerging Hope: A Strategy for Reaching Postmodern Generations*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004.
- Lowes, Carol, and Krysia P. Lear. "Reaching 20-Somethings." Christianity.ca, Canada's Christian Community Online (2007). <http://www.christianity.ca/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?pid=4487> (accessed March 1, 2008).
- Lynch, Gordon. *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.
- Marquand, Robert. "Preaching Gospel Via Pop Culture." *Christian Science Monitor*, August 22, 1997.
- Mattingly, Terry. *Pop Goes Religion: Faith in Popular Culture*. Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2005.

- Mazur, Eric Michael, and Kate McCarthy, eds. *God in the Details: American Religion in Popular Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2001.
- McLaren, Brian. *A New Kind of Christian*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Story We Find Ourselves In: Further Adventures of a New Kind of Christian*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003.
- McLaren, Brian, and Tony Campolo. *Adventures in Missing the Point: How the Culture-Controlled Church Neutered the Gospel*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003.
- McLuhan, Eric, and Frank Zingrone, eds. *Essential McLuhan*. Antigonish: Basic Books, 1995.
- McLuhan, Marshall. *The Essential McLuhan*. New York: Basicbooks, 1995.
- McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man: Critical Edition*. Edited by W. Terrence Gordon. Corte Madera: Gingko, 2003.
- McManus, Erwin. *An Unstoppable Force: Daring to Become the Church God Had in Mind*. Orange: Group Publishing, 2001.
- Miller, Donald. *Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Searching For God Knows What*. Nashville: Nelson Books, 2004.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Through Painted Deserts: Light, God and Beauty on the Open Road*. Nashville: Nelson Books, 2005.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *To Own a Dragon: Reflections on Growing Up Without a Father*. Colorado Springs: Nav Press, 2006.
- Mouw, Richard J. *Consulting the Faithful: What Christian Intellectuals Can Learn from Popular Religion*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994.
- Mueller, Walt. *Understanding Today's Youth Culture*. Rev. & expanded ed. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture: Bridging Teen Worldviews and Christian Truth*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006.
- Myers, Kenneth A. *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes: Christians & Popular Culture*. Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1989.
- Niebuhr, H. Richard. *Christ and Culture*. 1st ed. New York: Harper, 1956.



- O'Donnell, Paul, and Amy Eskind. "God and the Music Biz." *Newsweek*, May 30, 1994.
- O'Keefe, Mark. "Foul Words Permeate Pop Culture Lexicon, Eliciting a Backlash." *Christian Century*, 6 April 2004.
- Ostwalt, Conrad. *Secular Steeples: Popular Culture and the Religious Imagination*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003.
- Parrot, Les, and Robin D. Perrin. "The New Denominations." *Christianity Today* 34, no. 2 (March 2001): 29–33.
- Polanyi, Michael. *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.
- Prescott, Theodore, ed. *Broken Beauty*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.
- Robbins, Alexandra, and Abby Wilner. *Quarterlife Crisis: The Unique Challenges of Life in Your Twenties*. New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 2001.
- Robinson, Martin, and Dwight Smith. *Invading Secular Space: Strategies for Tomorrow's Church*. London: Monarch Books, 2003.
- Rolheiser, Ronald. *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality*. New York: Doubleday, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Pop Culture Wars: Religion & the Role of Entertainment in American Life*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996.
- Romanowski, William D. *Eyes Wide Open: Looking for God in Popular Culture*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001.
- Royalty, R. M. "Ancient Christianity in Cyberspace: A Digital Media Lab for Students." *Teaching Theology and Religion* 5, no.1 (February 2002): 42–48.
- Russinger, Greg, and Alex Field, eds. *Practitioners: Voices Within the Emerging Church*. Ventura: Regal Books, 2005.
- Sample, Tex. *The Spectacle of Worship in a Wired World: Electronic Culture and the Gathered People of God*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998.
- Sandler, Lauren. *Righteous: Dispatches from the Evangelical Youth Movement*. New York: Viking, 2006.
- Schultze, Quentin J. *Dancing in the Dark: Youth, Popular Culture, and the Electronic Media*. Edited by Roy M. Anker. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990.

- Senter, Mark H. "Napster, Moody Bible Institute and Christianity Online." *Evangelical Review of Theology* 26, no. 3 (July 2002): 223.
- Settersten, Richard A., Jr., Frank F. Furstenberg Jr., and Ruben G. Rumbaut, eds. *On the Frontier of Adulthood: Theory, Research, and Public Policy*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- Shaw, Luci. *The Crime of Living Cautiously: Hearing God's Call to Adventure*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005.
- Shortt, Rupert., ed. *God's Advocates: Christian Thinkers in Conversation*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005.
- Smith, Christian, and Melinda Lundquist Denton. *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Smith, Chuck, Jr. *There is a Season*. Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2005.
- Stackhouse, John G., Jr. "In the World, but...." *Christianity Today* 46, no. 5 (April 2002).
- Stockman, Steve. *Walk On: The Spiritual Journey of U2*. Lake Mary: Relevant Books, 2003.
- Sutton, Kenneth. "Going to Church in Second Life." *Unitarian Universalists*, 2007. [www.uu.world.org/life/articles/16206.shtml](http://www.uu.world.org/life/articles/16206.shtml) (accessed May 9, 2007).
- Sweet, Leonard I. *AquaChurch: Essential Leadership Arts for Piloting Your Church in Today's Fluid Culture*. Loveland: Group Publishing, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *SoulTsunami: Sink or Swim in New Millennium Culture*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Post-Modern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century World*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Carpe Mañana: Is Your Church Ready to Seize Tomorrow?* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001.
- Tanner, Kathryn. *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997.
- Taylor, Steve. *The Out of Bounds Church? Learning to Create a Community of Faith in a Culture of Change*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005.
- Tilly, Charles. *Why? What Happens When People Give Reasons...and Why*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006.

- Vanhoozer, K. J. *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Veenker, Jody. "Church of the Web." *Christianity Today* 43, no.7 (June 1999): 26.
- Webber, Robert E. *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002.
- Wright, N. T. *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense*. San Francisco: Harper, 2006.
- Yaconelli, Mike, ed. *Stories of Emergence: Moving from Absolute to Authentic*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003.
- Yong, Amos. *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.