

12-1-2015

The Prophetic Hope of Emerging Adulthood: Emerging Together toward an Abundant Life

Adam David Pallay
George Fox University

This research is a product of the Doctor of Ministry (DMin) program at George Fox University. [Find out more](#) about the program.

Recommended Citation

Pallay, Adam David, "The Prophetic Hope of Emerging Adulthood: Emerging Together toward an Abundant Life" (2015). *Doctor of Ministry*. Paper 116.
<http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/116>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctor of Ministry by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact arolf@georgefox.edu.

GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

THE PROPHETIC HOPE OF EMERGING ADULthood:
EMERGING TOGETHER TOWARD AN ABUNDANT LIFE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF MINISTRY LEADERSHIP IN THE EMERGING CULTURE
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

DEPARTMENT OF SEMIOTICS AND FUTURE STUDIES

BY
ADAM DAVID PALLAY

NEWBERG, OREGON

DECEMBER 2015

George Fox Evangelical Seminary
George Fox University
Portland, Oregon

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

Jody Glenn Ray

has been approved by
the Dissertation Committee on October 5, 2015
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Semiotics and Future Studies.

Dissertation Committee:

Primary Advisor: Roger Nam, PhD

Secondary Advisor: Dottie Escobedo-Frank, DMin

Lead Mentor: Leonard I. Sweet, PhD

Copyright © 2015 by Adam David Pallay
All rights reserved.

To my loving family

We are all of us adolescents, painfully growing and groping our way toward something like true adulthood, and maybe the greatest value we have both to teach and to learn as we go is the capacity to be amazed at the unending power that can be generated by the meeting and trading of lives, which is a power to heal us and bless us and in the end maybe even transform us into truly human beings at last.

— Frederick Buechner

Contents

PREFACE	viii
CHAPTER 1: EMERGING ADULTHOOD	1
The Emerging Adult	2
Misconceptions Surrounding Emerging Adulthood	7
The Boomer Effect.....	10
Ethos: Faith, Hope, and Love	14
“Faithing” as Ethos	16
Shipwrecked Faith	18
New Markers for Adulthood.....	21
Religious Practice and Stability	24
Mentoring Relationships.....	30
Differences Among the Generations.....	33
Hope: Imagining the Good Life Together	39
It Can’t Be a Thing	42
Emerging Together	44
CHAPTER 2: THE EMERGING ADULT APOCALYPSE: LOST AGENCY, FORGOTTEN HOPE	46
Speak Sin, Speak Metaphor	47
Augustinian Metaphors.....	49
The Violence of Prophecy	51
The Art of Prophecy.....	52
Apocalypse.....	54
The Prophetic Posture and the Semiotic Response.....	55
Maladjusted Wisdom	61
Future Prophets	63
CHAPTER 3: EMERGING ADULTS AND ART: A COMPLEX HOPE	64
General Revelation.....	69
Agency in Art Objects	71
Inspiring Emerging Adults: The Burning Bush.....	74
Five Points: Posture, Relationship, Sensation, Inspiration, and Hope.....	76
An EPIC Telling	79
Fight Club: A Modern Example of the EPIC Prophetic	84

Emerging Prophetic	87
CHAPTER 4: PILGRIMAGE	89
Where to Start	89
What is Pilgrimage?	91
From Moses to Ruth: What is Experienced along the Way	95
Emerging Adulthood as Pilgrimage	97
Finding a Home Takes Time: The Boon is the Story	98
A New Narrative: Home and Identity	100
Finding Home Away From Home	102
CHAPTER 5: THE STORY OF RUTH AND EMERGING ADULthood	104
Postures of Worship: The Text and the Individual	105
Fear and Worship	107
Themes in Ruth	112
Hope: Past, Present, and Future	115
Providence	118
Hesed and Counter Text	123
Identity	130
Multigenerational Communities	135
Emerging Adults: Part of the Story	139
Chapter 6: Conclusion: Practical Applications for Research	141
New Metaphors: From Reformation to Reframation	143
Craft Community	145
The Absurdity of Christianity	147
A Complex Hope	151
Proceed with Hope	154
BIBLIOGRAPHY	157

PREFACE

My motivation for writing this dissertation is both personal and academic. As a person that sits at the end of his Emerging Adulthood, I find the study of Millennials to be a valuable exercise in my own person journey. My studies have illuminated important parts of my story that have previously gone unnoticed and continuously grant me new understandings into the way I relate to the world. As a subject unto itself, I have noticed a rise of interest on the subject of Millennials as of late in the United States. It seems that the people looking at Millennials are just as confused as many Millennials are on what it means to live well into one's Emerging Adulthood. My hope for this project is that my research might be a benefit to the other emerging adults that are trying to create meaning out of their experiences as well as inspire the different generations to come together and begin to discuss what it means to create an abundant life together.

I would like to thank my advisor Dr. Deborah Loyd for all the support and wisdom she offered me throughout my writing process. I would also like to thank Dr. Leonard Sweet and the staff at George Fox University for introducing me to the world of semiotics and offering provocative questions that inspired my research. Lastly, I would like to thank all the members of my cohort that walked with me through this academic journey and helped me refine my writing as well as my faith.

CHAPTER 1:

EMERGING ADULTHOOD

But you, children of space, you restless in rest, you shall not be trapped
nor tamed.
Your house shall be not an anchor but a mast.

—Kahlil Gibran. *The Prophet*

The transition from adolescence into full-fledged adulthood is more fluid than clearly defined. The markers that previous generations used to signify adulthood no longer provide stability the way they once did. Where it was once considered the norm for one to get an education, get married, get a career, buy a home and start raising a family before one reached thirty, it has now become more common for people to start pushing these events further along in their life.¹ This creates a new set of obstacles for reaching adulthood that have never been seen before, and the traditional wisdom that once guided past generations into adulthood needs to be rethought if one is going to engage these obstacles with success. In this chapter, I will explore the rise and evolution of Emerging Adulthood within the culture of the United States - focusing specifically on the role of faith in the lives of emerging adults. I will demonstrate how people within this demographic engage their environment, explore how an emerging adult creates meaning, and, lastly, I will discuss the impact of mentoring relationships on emerging adults and the hope that is produced through these relationships.

¹ Jeffrey Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 3, Kindle.

The Emerging Adult

Emerging Adulthood is a theory that was first coined by Jeffrey Arnett in 2000.² Arnett's theory asserts that there is a new stage of development appearing between Adolescence and Young Adulthood within the industrialized nations of the world.³ Since its conception, Emerging Adulthood has continued to be talked about in one of three less than helpful ways. First, Emerging Adulthood is often described as an extended period of adolescence; however, this view has proven to be unhelpful because, unlike the life of most teenagers, emerging adults are less dependent upon their parents for basic needs, and institutions do not largely construct their lives.⁴ Second, Emerging Adulthood is often thought of as the beginning of adulthood; however, this view also proves to be unhelpful because the markers traditionally used to mark adulthood are often absent in the lives of emerging adults. Third, Emerging Adulthood is often framed within the context of generational shifts. Simply labeled as Millennials, the young people of today are left to find their meaning and significance within the categories of past generations. This one-to-one comparison between the generations is ultimately unhelpful because the categories and markers that signified success within past generations are no longer relevant and/or readily available to this current generation. Within this generational framework, Millennials are often viewed as failures in their ability to live up to the standards that past generations used to mark their successful entrance into adulthood;

² Jeffrey Arnett, "Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from the Late Teens through the Twenties," *American Psychologist*, 55, 469-480.

³ Jeffrey Arnett, *Emerging Adults in America: Coming of Age in the 21st Century* (Washington: American Psychological Association, 2006), 3.

⁴ Christian Smith, *Souls in Transition: The Religious & Spiritual Live of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), Kindle.

however, if one changes the framework in which one looks at current young adults, as Jeffrey Arnett suggests, a better understanding of this generation emerges.

In order to gain an accurate understanding of the emerging adult experience, it is necessary to view Emerging Adulthood as its own unique stage of human development that carries its own distinctive characteristics, tendencies, and experiences.⁵ To help better illustrate this point, I will refer to the eight stages of human development as given by developmental psychologist Erik Erikson. The stages of development are as follows: Infancy, Early Childhood, Play-Age, School-Age, Adolescence, Young Adulthood, Adulthood and Maturity, and what scholars like Arnett are arguing is that Emerging Adulthood represents a ninth stage within Erikson's model. In this model, Emerging Adulthood would fall between Adolescence and Young Adulthood, and, similar to Adolescence, Emerging Adulthood represents a transitional time for individuals between the larger categories of Childhood and Adulthood. In other words, because of factors like extended life expectancy and shifts in cultural markers for adulthood, scholars argue that there is a new stage appearing between adolescence and young adulthood; thus, the Millennial generation is not failing to transition into adulthood. Millennials are in a new stage of development that has never existed before; therefore, their problem is not that they are failing to live up to the standards of past generations, it is that there is no past example for them to look to for guidance. Millennials represent the first generation of emerging adults; however, they do not represent the last.

Emerging Adulthood is considered the most heterogeneous stage of human development. In fact, if one were to argue for one unique feature that marks Emerging

⁵ Ibid.

Adulthood, it would be the unique experience of each emerging adult.⁶ This makes identifying universal themes within Emerging Adulthood extremely difficult, but by comparing the experience of Emerging Adulthood to other stages of development, Arnett was able to identify five features that are more common within Emerging Adulthood than in other stages of development: it is a time of identity exploration, instability, self-focus, possibility, and feeling in-between.⁷ It is, in fact, the instability of Emerging Adulthood that makes it both a unique stage of development and difficult to pin down. Fortunately, the defining features of Emerging Adulthood are not limited to individual experience – one can also look to the unique social factors that frame this stage of development.

From a purely sociological standpoint, Emerging Adulthood is more easily definable. In his book, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual lives of Emerging Adults*, Christian Smith lays out four macro social changes that have given Emerging Adulthood its unique space within human development. Smith argues that the dramatic growth in higher education, the propensity for people to delay marriage, the change in the American and global economy, and parents willingness to extend financial support to their children have all helped shape this new phase of development called Emerging Adulthood.⁸ The process of getting an education, a career, and a family are less structured today than they were for previous generations, and this has created a stage marked by a

⁶ Jeffrey Arnett, *Emerging Adults in America: Coming of Age in the 21st Century* (Washington: American Psychological Association, 2006), 15.

⁷ Jeffrey Arnett, “Emerging Adulthood: What Is It, and What Is It Good For?” *Society for Research in Child Development* 1, no. 2 (2007), 69.

⁸ Richard Settersten and Barbara Ray, *Not Quite Adults: Why 20-Somethings are Choosing a Slower Path to Adulthood and Why It's Good for Everyone* (New York: Bantam Books, 2010), Kindle.

freedom that has never been seen before.⁹ The results of these social changes include: people not joining the workforce until their thirties, people having a gap of around ten years between high school graduation and marriage, lifelong careers being replaced with careers that have less security, i.e., people being required to change jobs frequently, acquire the skills necessary for those new jobs, and independent financial security being put on hold as parents are willing to help foot the bill.¹⁰ Emerging Adulthood means not taking on lengthy commitments that would confine one to particular location and not having to make concrete plans for the future. It is about experimenting with new ideas and traveling to far-off places in search of a transformative experience. Emerging Adulthood means having limited accountability and a plethora of options. Smith writes, “Emerging adults can be unsure, can change their minds, can give things a shot, and can try something else if it doesn’t work out. Again, this reality is driven by personal choices but also by social-structural forces that make those choices seem sensible for many emerging adults.”¹¹ In other words, this cultural landscape offers emerging adults an almost unrestricted freedom when it comes to making major life decisions, and even when a decision has been made, it offers them the freedom to change with little consequence for their actions. Change is the most consistent theme for the emerging adult.

Change is part of the plan for emerging adults; however, sometimes there can be too much freedom – too much change. Smith’s research indicates that most emerging

⁹ Jeffrey Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 2, Kindle.

¹⁰ Christian Smith, *Souls in Transition: The Religious & Spiritual Live of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), Kindle.

¹¹ Ibid.

adults are close to being overwhelmed with all of the skills, tasks, responsibilities, systems, and procedures they have to learn in order to keep their options open.¹² Regardless of how they felt about high school, emerging adults realize that at the very least it provided predictable structure for their lives, and there is comfort in predictability; however, after high school, the majority of that predictability disappears, and the list of new things to learn to keep up in a world of limitless possibilities can feel overwhelming.¹³ During my years as an emerging adult, I have struggled with feeling overwhelmed, and my work with emerging adults in the Church has made me believe that this feeling is not limited to my own experience. I have found that feeling overwhelmed often prompts two actions. First, it can prompt a young adult to try harder. As the young adult attempts to hold all the possibilities society has to offer, they do their best to upgrade their capacity to hold all of them. The danger in taking this route is that it is impossible for any one person to hold all of society, and eventually the emerging adult is crushed under all the possibilities that they can no longer support and feels burned out on life. Second, it can prompt a failure to launch. Not knowing what to do with all the possibilities, some emerging adults chose to stay put by not picking any of them. Sure, certain social pressures will make most emerging adults get a job of some kind, but that has more to do with survival than it does with a future of their choosing. The danger in taking this route is that merely surviving often leads to depression. Never-ending survival robs emerging adults of their zest for life – it robs them of their dreams.

¹² Christian Smith, *Souls in Transition: The Religious & Spiritual Live of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), Kindle.

¹³ Ibid.

These two responses may start in different places, but they end in the same place – a hopeless place; however, I have found that young people who have had a strong community around them often have the ability to hold a broken hope and eventually dream again.¹⁴ When something in their life begins to break down, they have people around them that have gone through something similar and can help them construct a new dream. A healthy community also offers young adults room to make mistakes. Without the support of a strong community, mistakes can be extremely detrimental to the progress one wishes to make in their life; however, if one is a part of a strong community, the community can help support individuals so they might not become overwhelmed by the repercussions of their mistakes. Having a community that can create a safe place to experiment and fail is a precious gift for emerging adults, but, for the young people without the gift of community, they are left to care for themselves – their prayer being that they find something before they get completely overwhelmed and all hope is lost.

Misconceptions Surrounding Emerging Adulthood

The rise of the Emerging Adulthood stage has been met with both praise and criticism. Some argue that emerging adults are merely living out an extended adolescence by delaying the inevitable process of becoming an adult. However, sociologists such as Jeffrey Arnett and Christian Smith are beginning to argue that Emerging Adulthood is not an extension of adolescence but an altogether new phase of life; therefore, it should not be viewed in terms of “good” or “bad,” but as another stage of development worthy of study. The amount of time emerging adults spend focused on themselves, combined with their pushing back of traditional adult roles into one’s late 20’s and 30’s, have many older

¹⁴ Internship at Mars Hill Bible Church (Sept. 2011 – April 2012).

people believing that emerging adults are just worse off than previous generations.¹⁵ In her book, *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans are More Confident, Assertive, and Entitled –And More Miserable than Ever Before*, Jean Twenge argues that the Baby Boomers are profoundly different than the generations that followed them.¹⁶ She argues that young adults' delayed entrance into adult roles is a sign of selfishness, that identity exploration during young adulthood is a sign of suffering, and that young adults have an unrealistic view of what they can achieve in their life.¹⁷ Unfortunately, Twenge fails to take into account the social changes that influenced human development after the Boomer generation; thus, she fails to see the rise of Emerging Adulthood as being anything other than arrested Adolescence.

One of the primary reasons many people are putting off getting married and starting a career is because more and more people are going to college. Instead of starting a family and a career after high school, they chose to continue their education. It makes sense that the average age for marriage rose four years since the 70's; thus, waiting longer to get married should not be thought of as being selfish as much as practical.¹⁸ Twenge works from the assumption that identity exploration during one's twenties is a sign of suffering. Identity issues have traditionally been thought of as happening primarily during one's adolescence; therefore, if one is working on identity issues after

¹⁵ Jeffrey Arnett, "Oh Grow Up! Generational Grumbling and the New Life Stage of Emerging Adulthood," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 5, no. 1 (2010): 89.

¹⁶ Jean Twenge, *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, and Entitled –And More Miserable than Ever Before* (New York: Free Press, 2006), Kindle.

¹⁷ Jeffrey Arnett, "Oh Grow Up! Generational Grumbling and the New Life Stage of Emerging Adulthood," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 5, no. 1 (2010): 90.

¹⁸ Ibid.

adolescence, they are suffering through a period of arrested development.¹⁹ However, if one is working under the assumption that Emerging Adulthood is a stage of development, a stage that is marked by identity exploration, this idea of suffering becomes moot.

Lastly, Twenge argues that, today, young people have an unrealistic view of their future.²⁰ Once again Twenge's argument fails to take into account Emerging Adulthood as a stage of development; thus, she misinterprets the data. It is true that emerging adults have high hopes for their future, but viewing this as a negative attribute because it has traditionally been associated with Adolescence is a mistake.²¹ Emerging Adulthood is a time where one can dream big and test ideas as one gradually moves into adult roles. Emerging Adulthood is not an extended Adolescence, but a new stage of development that exists after Adolescence. In short, Twenge does not offer any critiques that could not be said about other generations. Every generation is going to have examples of people that fit her description of young adults. For example, one could argue that it was the selfishness of the Boomer generation that created the economic collapses of our time, that the Boomers are suffering because they are stuck in their old way of thinking, or that Boomers have unrealistic goals for the future because they continue to pursue an American dream that is both unattainable for most people and unsustainable for society. In fact, from this line of thinking, one could even make the argument that emerging adults are simply imitating the Boomers. In any case, to say that any single generation is characterized by selfishness, suffering, and impracticality is a bit of a reach, to say the

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Jean Twenge, *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, and Entitled—And More Miserable than Ever Before* (New York: Free Press, 2006), Kindle.

²¹ Jeffrey Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 4, Kindle.

least. Emerging adults carry the same hope as the generations that preceded them – hope of an abundant life; however, they are dealing with shifts in culture that demand new expressions of life. Therefore, in order to avoid simple characterizations of entire generations and get a clear picture of emerging adults in America, one must first explore the cultural shifts that are responsible for producing this new stage of human development.

The Boomer Effect

Emerging adults may represent a new demographic in the population; however, the dream of current emerging adults was formed over time by the social-structural forces that preceded them. Sociologist Robert Wuthnow argues that the societal structures that formed the ethos of Emerging Adulthood first appeared in the 1960s, and the freedom that marks Emerging Adulthood can be traced back to the shift from freedom of conscience to freedom of choice that occurred during this decade.²² Conscience refers to the internalized standard that speaks to right and wrong, and freedom of conscience indicates an absence of an external authoritative figure to govern that internal process. This can be viewed from an individualistic perspective; however, Wuthnow is speaking more to how communities embody this standard, as small communities sharing a common ethic, e.g., laws, beliefs, and doctrines. Freedom of conscience in this case involves a lack of outside influence over the communal ethic that the group holds to be true. Individual actions can rise from within the community; however, they must never

²² Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California, 1998), 60.

rise up and overpower the shared ethos of the community.²³ Before the 1960s, freedom of conscience was the ethos that governed most Americans' actions; however, with the 1960s came a shift from freedom of conscience to freedom of choice. The security of living in a community of like-minded folks was traded for a free market of concepts and images.²⁴ In this case, Wuthnow writes, "True freedom comes from liberating oneself from the repressive 'superego' of the community and from developing one's own moral imagination through a process of experimentation."²⁵ Thus, the primary decision moves away from the idea of right and wrong and toward the idea of entering and exiting different communities. Simplicity is traded for complexity, and, rather than being defined as a standard, "good" and "bad" refer to the individual's ability to locate possibilities within this complexity and adapt accordingly.²⁶

In his book *Liquid Times*, Zygmunt Bauman discusses two drawbacks that are the result of people living out this new kind of freedom. Firstly, Bauman argues that we are in a liquid phase of modernity where the social structures that help define society are created and dissolved so quickly that they are unable to serve as guides for human action and life-long decisions.²⁷ Secondly, Bauman argues that the collapse of long-term thinking leads to the splitting of individual lives into a series of disconnected, short-lived experiences that can in no way be applied to a concept like development. Bauman writes:

²³ Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007), 17, Kindle.

²⁴ Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California, 1998), 83.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007), 1.

A life so fragmented stimulates ‘lateral’ rather than ‘vertical’ orientations. Each next step needs to be a response to a different set of opportunities and a different distribution of odds, and so it calls for a different set of skills and a different arrangement of assets. Past successes do not necessarily increase the probability of future victories, let alone guarantee them; while means successfully tested in the past need to be constantly inspected and revised since they may prove useless or downright counterproductive once circumstances change. A swift and thorough forgetting of outdated information and fast aging habits can be more important for the next success than the memorization of past moves and the building of strategies on a foundation laid by previous learning.²⁸

In other words, an Emerging Adult is required to live entirely in the moment if they want to succeed in this liquid culture. One does not build off of past experiences as much as one acquires skills to better their odds of successfully engaging future opportunities. Past experiences and future hopes take a back seat to whatever is currently going on in a person’s life. Bauman uses the term *Hunter* to describe this mindset. Whereas previous generations cared about maintaining the natural balance of things (*Gamekeeper* mindset) or bringing order to the world (*Gardner* mindset), the Hunter cares only about their next kill and maximizing their impact on the present.²⁹ A previous kill cannot satisfy the current desire to kill, and no thought goes into sustainability, as a Hunter has the freedom to move to the next hunting ground.³⁰ The only fear is being left behind, i.e., not having the skills to participate in the hunt; therefore, every action is geared toward maintaining one’s status as *Hunter*, because the only alternative is becoming the hunted.³¹

The Baby Boomers were the first generation to get a glimpse of this newly defined freedom; however, it was their children that would be the first generation to be

²⁸ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007), 3.

²⁹ Ibid., 99.

³⁰ Ibid., 100.

³¹ Ibid., 104.

completely formed within this new ethos and become the first emerging adults.

Inevitably, this shift in ethos created a shift in cultural practices. No longer was it the norm to submit oneself to previously established markers of adulthood after adolescence: career job, get married and start a family. Instead, it became the norm for people moving beyond adolescences to experience a new period, a nomadic period.³² Essentially, the 1960s gave the individual the choice to leave societal structures in their quest for personal development. Unfortunately, this new kind of freedom would prove to be profoundly unstable. Without anything to limit the choices of the individual, the structures that hold society together began to break down as nothing was being put in place of the fallen structures. The Boomers were critiquing the ethos of the 1950s; however, they failed to put a new social structure in its place. And unless society is to become merely an individualistic endeavor, a new direction is needed that speaks to the common good. A new dream is needed to give people a vision of what “the good life” looks like for their society.³³

Constructing a new dream is a tricky balancing act. It is impossible to have society without some kind of shared structure; however, too much structure, or structure that does not value the complexity of our culture, stifles many visions of the good life in favor of a vision that only benefits a few. A return is needed. Not a return to the 1950s, but a return to the idea of shared community that includes a reimagining of what the good life looks like for our society today. This process of reimagining the good life includes, but is not limited to, emerging adults. In order for this process to truly produce an ethos that

³² David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church...And Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), Kindle.

³³ Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007), 18, Kindle.

is good for the community as a whole, it is vital that all age groups be involved. This is the context in which emerging adults find themselves today, and this is our mission as a society.

Ethos: Faith, Hope, and Love

Everyone has a dream that inspires his or her actions; unfortunately, the dream of Bauman's Hunter has little to do with the common good. In a world that is mostly populated by Hunters, any dream that emerges does not last very long before a new one is put in its place.³⁴ The ethos of the 1950s presumed that a utopian society was attainable through human effort. The world just needed an overhaul to address the needs of humanity – the world needed *Gardeners* to bring order to the chaos; however, the replacement of Gardeners for Hunters brought with it a replacement of the common good for the individual's good. In his book *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Culture formation*, James Smith describes this movement as the "CNN-ization of time."³⁵ Smith argues that society's obsession with the present moment yields very few benefits for society as a whole. It is an orientation that lacks hope and merely makes note of events as they happen.³⁶ Therefore, the question for our society remains: How can the individuals in our society come back to an ethos that values the common good without completely crushing the dream of the individuals? I argue that the Christian tradition offers the individual a dream that speaks to the present-ism that is rampant in our current society.

³⁴ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007), 101.

³⁵ James Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 2009), 159.

³⁶ Ibid.

In and of itself, caring for the present is not entirely bad; however, when the present becomes one's sole concern, problems begin to emerge. I argue that Christian practices can balance the dream of the Hunter by resisting the urge to engage in actions that are limited to the present moment. Nowhere is this better exemplified than in the liturgical calendar. By their very nature, liturgical rhythms have a deep orientation that includes engaging the past, present, and future – what James Smith refers to as “higher times.”³⁷ For example, every year during Advent the Christian is invited to engage in the process of waiting that moves one's desire toward a future shalom. Christian Smith writes, “Advent shakes us out of the presentist complacency that we can be lulled into. Instead, we are called and formed to be a people of expectancy – looking for the coming (again) of the Messiah.”³⁸ Also, the rhythms of the liturgical calendar stretch the Christian into the past, as they continually revisit and celebrate the important moments therein; thus, the Christian is someone who lives between their remembering and their hoping. In the Eucharist this between-ness is embodied as a person partakes in remembrance of Christ, and at the same time, looks expectantly to Christ's return.³⁹ In this way, the Christian dream is fundamentally different than the dream of the Hunter; however, these dreams are not mutually exclusive. As a whole, Christianity was not immune to the cultural changes that happened during the 1960s; consequently, there exists current faith communities that carry both the dream of the Hunter and the label of Christian. This switch in dreams has a profound effect on how people create meaning (Faith), the dreams they create from that meaning (Hope), and the actions they take in

³⁷ Ibid., 158.

³⁸ Ibid., 157.

³⁹ Ibid., 158.

obtaining those dreams (Love). Sustainability is not just a concept that is applicable to the environment. If the Church wants to survive and be a blessing to the world, it must act in a way that is sustainable.

“Faithing” as Ethos

In her book, *Big Questions, Worthy Dream: Mentoring Emerging Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith*, Sharon Parks refers to this current age of complexity as “cusp time.”⁴⁰ For the emerging adult, this age entails the constant task of composing and recomposing one’s faith, hope and love. Parks describes this process as “faithing.”⁴¹ By doing some linguistical gymnastics, Parks moves faith from being a stationary noun to an action verb. *Faith*, the noun, is the result of the process of making meaning – a worthy faith being one that can stand up to both common sense and lived experience.⁴² In this way, Parks argues that faith is not limited to the religious world. Faith refers to the human phenomenon of meaning making; therefore, it is a generic process that everyone participates in whether they are conscious of it or not.⁴³ *Faith* is created through the process of meaning making and determines the actions one takes toward the future.⁴⁴ *Faithing*, the verb, refers to the over-arching process that includes faith, but also incorporates desire (hope) and action (love). Parks writes, “‘Faithing,’ then, is putting one’s heart upon that which one trust as true. It is a bedrock trust that the

⁴⁰ Sharon Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams* (San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass, 2000), 8.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

pattern one sees is real...it is the ongoing composing of the heart's true resting place."⁴⁵

Faithing becomes the process through which one makes meaning, creates dreams that go along with that meaning, and moves toward that dream.

In his book *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, James Smith offers a great summary of the *faithing* process. He writes:

Human persons are intentional creatures whose fundamental way of 'intending' the world is love or desire. This love or desire – which is unconscious or noncognitive – is always aimed at some vision of the good life, some particular articulation of the kingdom. What primes us to be so oriented – and act accordingly – is a set of habits or dispositions that are formed in us through affective, bodily means, especially bodily practices, routines, or rituals that grab hold of our hearts through our imagination, which is closely linked to our bodily senses.⁴⁶

It is clear from Parks and Smith's arguments that *faithing* is more than just a cognitive process that helps an individual create meaning. *Faithing* is a process that includes one's actions and desires, as well as their cognitive ability to create meaning. The actions of an individual do not always match up with their ethics; however, within that action there lies a belief, whether it is acknowledged or not, that reflect the individual's ultimate understanding. Humans act in ways that are congruent with their deepest beliefs about the world – even if those actions do not match one's cognitive ethic.⁴⁷ So now that I have described the social structures that have formed the ethos of our time, I will now bring my focus to the *faithing* of emerging adults in our current society. I will focus on three specific areas of Emerging Adulthood: meaning making (faith), the dreams of "the good life" (hope), and the actions of emerging adults toward that "good life" (love). Scholars

⁴⁵ Sharon Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams* (San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass, 2000), 24.

⁴⁶ James Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 2009), 63.

⁴⁷ Sharon Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams* (San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass, 2000), 14.

and popular authors have already said a great deal about the negative effects of the dominant ethos of our time; therefore, instead of rehashing those argument, the following pages will be dedicated to proposing new ways of *faithing* that emerging adults can use to create meaning, dream good dreams, and move toward those dreams in a way that is beneficial to both the individual and the community as a whole.

Shipwrecked Faith

Due to the constant movement from experience to experience, the faith of emerging adults is in a constant state of flux; unfortunately these transitions are not always smooth. What happens when a person does not have the skills to make meaning of their new situation? In *Souls in Transition: The Religious & Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*, Christian Smith offers an excellent description of this reality. He writes, “The features marking this stage are intense identity exploration, instability, a focus on self, a feeling in limbo or in transition or in between, and a sense of possibilities, opportunities, and unparalleled hope. These, of course, are often accompanied by large doses of transience, confusion, anxiety, self-obsession, melodrama, conflict, disappointment, and sometimes emotional devastation.”⁴⁸ Some people have the luck or means (financial and/or emotional) to skate through this period of their life without any serious problems; however, many emerging adults suffer wounds that will stick with them for the rest of their life.⁴⁹ Sharon Parks refers to the collapse or betrayal of one’s faith as a

⁴⁸ Christian Smith, *Souls in Transition: The Religious & Spiritual Live of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), Kindle.

⁴⁹ Christian Smith, *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 227, Kindle.

“shipwreck.”⁵⁰ This metaphorical shipwreck can occur with the loss of a job, the ending of a relationship, the start of a new relationship, or anything else that might have a huge effect on one’s life. These shipwrecks deteriorate the faith one uses to navigate the world – it is a disorientating process that leaves one scrambling for significance, delight, and purpose.⁵¹

But the shipwreck is not the end of the experience. Change is expected in Emerging Adulthood, i.e., shipwrecks are expected; therefore, the emerging adult is not so much concerned about avoiding all shipwrecks as they are about having the skills to survive the next shipwreck and then move in a different direction.⁵² If one survives a shipwreck, there is gladness and amazement waiting on the other side. Hopefully the shipwreck will be grieved and mourned, but there is also an appreciation for having gone through the experience and coming out on the other side with the realization that life continues to unfold with meaning – there is a new knowing that has been awarded for having gone through the experience.⁵³ One would not wish to experience the tragedy again, yet, at the same time, one would not want to go back to the old way of knowing. Embracing this complex process of meaning making is both beautiful and terrifying for emerging adults; however, it is also a process that produces wisdom for having gone through it.⁵⁴ Granted, no matter what dream one chooses, shipwrecks are going to be inevitable – such is life; however, there must be a way to limit the amount and/or severity

⁵⁰ Sharon Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams* (San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass, 2000), 26.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

of the experiences. I would argue that markers for Emerging Adulthood could serve as a way to limit the amount of shipwrecks as well as create a space for shipwrecks to be worked through in a healthy way.

Markers are important for emerging adults because they signify attainable hope. In a fluid society, where we move from one thing to the next, markers are concrete practices on which a young adult can build a foundation and let their hopes rest. Markers let emerging adults know that they do not hope in vain. If the accomplishing of one's hopes and dreams are never marked, broken dreams are always the last word. Markers break the cycle of broken dreams by proclaiming that the journey to where one has hoped to go has come to an end. For example, past generations in the U.S. have used marriage as a marker for their adulthood, but marriage also signifies the end of a journey – the journey of dating. For many people, dating has served as a practice used to reach their hope of marriage. A person can date several people before they find the one they marry – each one of those relationships ending in a breakup, but when two people marry, they mark the time with a ceremony and vows. Two people come together and say the search is over. Their hope of finding the right person to share their life with has come true! The journey through dating might have been difficult, but it was not in vain. Marriage signifies the end of one hope, and the beginning of a new one. The problem for emerging adults today is that the traditional markers for adulthood are being pushed further and further down the road and nothing new is being put in their place. There are still emerging adults that use traditional markers for adulthood at the onset of Emerging Adulthood; however, a large majority of young adults today are in need of new markers to ignite their dreams.

New Markers for Adulthood

One of the marks of Emerging Adulthood is the absence and/or delay of many of the markers previous generations used to identify adulthood. Markers for adulthood are rites of passage that a community collectively agrees upon to mark life transitions, and therein lay the problem. At a time when a cultural ethos takes a back seat to the individual's choices, markers that speak to a shared ethos begin to disappear. Previous generations used marriage, a career job, and starting a family to signify their adulthood – all of which ideally happened in one's early twenties.⁵⁵ Forged by the wisdom and experience of past generations, these markers act as a path one can follow through the unpredictable landscape of life; however, the majority of the current Millennial generation does not encounter these markers until their late twenties/early thirties – leaving one to wander the wilderness until one happens upon a marker of old. Certainly there are markers like getting a driver's license, graduating from school, moving out of one's parents' house, or reaching the legal ages for smoking, drinking and voting that serve as culturally established markers for adulthood; however, the legally established age for these markers are not all uniform so it is difficult to tie a clear sense of expectation to these markers.⁵⁶ Yes, markers like getting married, starting a family, and getting a career seriously limit one's options in life, something that an emerging adult will avoid; however, these markers also offer the individual stability in a complex world; a set path in the face of unlimited options.⁵⁷ Markers serve as guides that help one avoid

⁵⁵ Sharon Parks, *The Critical Years: Young Adults & the Search for Meaning, Faith & Commitment* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1986), 4.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Jeffrey Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 7, Kindle.

unnecessary shipwrecks as one navigates through life; unfortunately, multiple marriages and careers are becoming more and more common, and marriage is beginning to lose its stability and adopt the ethos of the time. In the following chapters, I will explore how new markers like the liturgical calendar can help emerging adults navigate their lives.

In light of these cultural changes, what markers can current emerging adults use to help bring some stability to their lives in the midst of a whirlwind of constant change? What practices can help emerging adults construct meaning in their lives? In this next section, I will explore two practices that can aid an emerging adult in creating meaning in our society: religious practice and mentoring relationships. I have already discussed how Christianity speaks against the presentism of our society by stretching the individual into the past and future. Practices like following the liturgical calendar and partaking in the Eucharist posture the participant against the overwhelming complexity of our time and offers an anchor in chaotic waters. Unfortunately, religious practice is often associated with the markers that emerging adults are postponing. Christian Smith writes, “Religious faith and practice generally associate with settled lives and tend to be disrupted by social, institutional, and geographical transitions. This connection between religious and other kinds of disruptions is a broad sociological fact.”⁵⁸ To further complicate the situation, Smith argues that many of the markers used for adulthood can be viewed as religious practices, e.g., marriage; therefore, instead of creating space for emerging adults, many churches choose to push their emerging adults to get married as quickly as they can. The idea behind this approach is that if emerging adults can just get married, and begin the process of having a family, they will begin to have stability in their lives, and this should

⁵⁸ Christian Smith, *Souls in Transition: The Religious & Spiritual Live of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), Kindle.

translate into more participation in the church community/religious practice. However, this approach involves a denial of the Emerging Adulthood phase, as it is viewed as something to get out of as quickly as possible. In this way, Emerging Adulthood for many Christians is a form of purgatory. It is a time that one inevitably has to go through, but one cannot get out until they get married. They are stuck in this undesirable state until their future spouse liberates them.

A great example of this approach being employed in a church setting is found in a blog post entitled “Marriage and the Single Girl: Eight lessons on how to steward singleness that Marci Turner wishes she would have known in her pre-marriage days.” In this post, Marci Turner offers eight lessons the female readers of this Mars Hill Church (Seattle) sponsored blog should practice if they find themselves unmarried. She begins her post by describing the situation of the modern young adult – the average age of people getting married is advancing. She states that the average marrying age for women has moved from twenty-one to twenty-six, and this has created a time of independence that has never been seen before.⁵⁹ Turner has a good grasp on the challenges often associated with Emerging Adulthood; unfortunately, her lessons on what young women should do with this time offers no hope to people looking to find meaning during this transient time.

Turner encourages women to fill up their free time by reading the Bible, praying, going on mission trips, bringing one’s thoughts in obedience to Christ, serving, being accountable (discipleship), learning to be under authority, repenting, practicing

⁵⁹ Marci Turner, “Marriage and the Single Girl: Eight Lessons on How to Steward Singleness that Marci Turner Wishes She Would Have Known in Her Pre-Marriage Days,” *Invest Your Gifts Blog*, March 15, 2015, accessed August 6, 2015, <http://investyourgifts.com/marriage-and-the-single-girl/>.

homemaking and living with other people.⁶⁰ One can make an argument that these practices are directed only toward women; however, I argue that the primary idea that governs these practices speaks to all emerging adults. Lying beneath the surface of these practices is the idea that one's life cannot develop until one is married. Turner acknowledges that young adults have more freedom than previous generations; however, instead of offering a way to live into that freedom as an emerging adult, she offers ways to practice for a future where one will finally obtain a married life. Turner views Emerging Adulthood as an extended adolescence, and by doing so, transforms singleness during one's twenties into a purgatory that only comes to an end when one gets married. In other words, the practices she offers are nothing more than time-fillers on the road to adulthood. She leaves emerging adults with no practices for finding meaning inside their current context and, subsequently, leads emerging adults into a time that is defined by isolation and regret. If emerging adults are going to create meaning out of their experience, new practices must emerge that mark this time as a significant, and I believe the Church has a responsibility to its emerging adults to offer practices that speak to that significance.

Religious Practice and Stability

In the mind of emerging adults, religious practice is often associated with being settled and stable; therefore, it would make sense to find that emerging adults would have little interest in pursuing a new religious practice. Religion is thrust into the future for an emerging adult, as it is viewed as being a potential obstacle that can hinder an emerging adult from keeping their options open and diminishes their ability to change with the

⁶⁰ Ibid.

times. In other words, practicing religion usually means giving up some options and committing to a specific community.⁶¹ For an emerging adult, this does not look like a good option; however, Smith's research has indicated that if religious practices are put in place before one reaches Emerging Adulthood, there is a good chance that these practices will continue on into Emerging Adulthood.⁶² This runs counter to the popular belief that Millennials are leaving the Church through a mass exodus. A quick Google search for "Millennials are leaving the Church" will produce a plethora of opinions - ranging from news sources like CNN, religious research companies like Pew Research Center, and popular Christian bloggers like Rachel Held Evans - on why people believe Millennials are leaving the Church, and I would agree that there are many Millennials leaving the Church; however, I would argue that young people leaving the Church is not a new concept that is unique to the Millennial generation. Millennials are just the first group of people that have to live out their discontents in a digital age.

Millennials are the first generation to have their relationship with the Church completely compiled and accessible through the Internet. The sheer amount of information available to the general public about Millennials is astounding. In this way, there is really no comparison for the generations that preceded Millennials; however, this should not be an indication that the young people from previous generations were any less disenchanted with the established religious practices of their day or that their social divergence was any less profound. Like the printing press, the Internet revolutionized the way people create, interact with and retain information. If the Boomer generation had

⁶¹ Christian Smith, *Souls in Transition: The Religious & Spiritual Live of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), Kindle.

⁶² Ibid.

grown up with the Internet, I have no doubt that there would be just as much information out there on how the young people are leaving the Church and becoming Hippies as there is about Millennials losing their faith. Questioning the status quo is a rite of passage for every generation. Without this questioning, no meaning change would ever take place; therefore, one should not let the vast amount of information available about Millennials and Church persuade one to believe that the current generation is any more anti-Church than the previous generations. The question one should be asking is: What are the changes for which the current generation is lobbying? This is where the true differences lie.

The Boomer generation had a profound effect on the American church – both good and bad. It may now seem normal for electric guitars and a drum kit to be included in a worship service; however, that was not the case for Boomers. Boomers wanted a worship experience that reflected their culture, and, as what seems to be the norm for all younger generations, many of the leaders from the older generations fought these changes; however, as the older generations slowly began losing their influence and leadership within the Church, the Boomers began implementing their changes on a large scale. Now, one would be hard-pressed to find a church that does not offer at least one “contemporary service” that makes use of a guitar. All this to say, just as it is inevitable that new generations will seek new expressions of faith that resonate with their experience, it is also inevitable that changes occur within Christian practices. New generations begin to step into leadership and bring their own unique flair into Christian practices; therefore, in a way, it is futile to take a position that denies change because, by doing so, one is trying to avoid the inevitable. Millennials do not have the leadership

positions or resources to implement their changes into the structure of churches yet, but that day is slowly approaching. It is still up to the Boomers whether or not they will welcome a few changes for the sake of the younger generations, or if they will become the oppressive force they themselves fought against that slowly fades into the background.

Like I mentioned above, not all emerging adults experience a decrease in religious practice. In fact, there are some pretty stable themes that run through emerging adults in relation to religion, and it has everything to do with the religious experiences that formed one early in life.⁶³ Smith's research indicates that more than half of the people who were highly religious before the Emerging Adulthood stage continued to practice their faith at a high level, and the people who were highly non-religious in their youth remained non-religious as they moved toward adulthood.⁶⁴ The research indicates that Emerging Adulthood does not mark the end of religious practice as much as it marks a time at which it becomes more difficult for stable practices to take root in one's life. Smith writes:

Religious outcomes in emerging adulthood are not random happenstances about which all bets are off after age 18...the lives of many teenagers who are transitioning into the emerging adult years reflect a lot more religious stability and continuity than is commonly realized. Everything simply does not change. The past continues to shape the future. This is important to know, because it means that religious commitments, practices, and investments made during childhood and the teenage years matter – they make a difference.⁶⁵

⁶³ Christian Smith, *Souls in Transition: The Religious & Spiritual Live of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), Kindle.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

In other words, Emerging Adulthood serves not as the negation of stability, but merely a point at which it becomes exceedingly more difficult for both stable practices to be born and for the dreams of Emerging Adulthood to be maintained. Therefore, the conclusion that one draws from the research on emerging adult and religion is not of change but of continuity.⁶⁶ It reflects the wisdom that is found in the book of Proverbs: “Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray.”⁶⁷ It is not impossible for emerging adults to take on stable practices, as certain circumstances (shipwrecks) often compel people to move toward something that will give their life some stability, but the research has clearly shown that emerging adults find stability, religious or otherwise, in the practices they have already acquired. Therefore, it is clear that teaching stable practices to younger generations serves to bring stability to people within the Emerging Adulthood demographic.

Lastly, considering what is known about Millennials and generational shifts within the Church, it is important to realize the power of harmful experiences within a church setting. If a Millennial comes to the realization that their church experience is harmful to them and/or humanity and decides to leave, it may appear that this person is giving up on their faith as a whole. Like I mentioned above, it is extremely difficult for a new practice to take root in the life of an emerging adult; therefore, if one exits the church tradition from which they were raised during Emerging Adulthood, it becomes unlikely that this person will chose to pick up a new faith practice. It is more likely that this emerging adult will push their religious practice into the future and return to it when

⁶⁶ Christian Smith, *Souls in Transition: The Religious & Spiritual Live of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), Kindle.

⁶⁷ Prov. 22:6 (NRSV).

they were ready for stability, e.g., when they want to get married or start having kids. This is why David Kinnaman's book, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity...and Why it Matters*, is so important to the Millennial conversation. The names of the chapters in Kinnaman's book ("Hypocritical," "Antihomosexual," "Judgmental," etc.) serve as a list of why Millennials are leaving the Church. This demographic represents the "Nones" population that seems to keep growing. Rather than taking on a new religious practice to replace the old one, emerging adults would rather enjoy the freedom that is afforded by not joining another institution.

This is one of the reasons why the relationship between different generations is so important to the emerging adult and Millennial conversation. Without each other, the church just becomes a reflection of the generation that holds the power, and, if those in power continue to devalue the contributions of any demographic, there is no real reason for that generation to stick around. Boomers will eventually die, and the next generations will step in and employ the desired changes; however, I do not believe this is a beneficial strategy for anyone involved. If the Church wants to see an expression of faith that truly brings about an abundant life for everyone in the community, the generations are going to need each other. If change is going to be beneficial for everyone, the Millennials are going to need the stability and resources of the Boomers, and the Boomers are going to need to draw from the wisdom of a generation that speaks the language of the current culture. Neither of which is possible if Millennials feel like their voices are not being heard and decide to leave.

Mentoring Relationships

One of the most striking social features of Emerging Adulthood is how isolated many emerging adults are from older adults.⁶⁸ Emerging adults pretty much stick to hanging out with their own demographic. Adults usually have functional roles within the lives of emerging adults. For example, they can be the emerging adult's boss or professor; however, these are often performance-orientated relationships that disappear after the work hours are over.⁶⁹ Thus, emerging adults are essentially left to their own devices when it comes to making their way toward adulthood. Smith writes, "Most emerging adults live this crucial decade of life surrounded mostly by their peers – people of the same age and in the same boat – who have no more experience, insight, wisdom, perspective, or balance than they do. It is sociologically a very odd way to help young people come of age, to learn how to be responsible, capable, mature adults."⁷⁰ In other words, this creates a situation where the blind lead the blind. Some emerging adults often have no one, other than their peers, to help them navigate the treacherous waters of adulthood. Instead of relying on the experience of people on the other side of Emerging Adulthood, they rely on the people who are dealing with the same issues, at the same time. Now it is not bad that emerging adults find significant relationships within their own demographic; however, when all of their significant relationships are with other emerging adults, it comes at a real cost to their ability to navigate their life.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Christian Smith, *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 234, Kindle.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

To paraphrase Christian Smith, Emerging Adulthood is the point where people begin to move from just “being a life” to “having a life,” and how a young adult is invited to explore this newfound reality will have a huge effect on the adult they will become.⁷² The mentoring relationship is such a powerful form of community because it fosters the potential of the emerging adult and points the way to worthy dreams of self and world.⁷³ Older generations may not have been formed in the same way or hold the same ethos; however, they do have experience in navigating the shipwrecks of life that occur as one moves toward their dreams. The wisdom one gains from these experiences is a valuable resource that emerging adults can benefit from. A positive mentoring environment has the ability to inspire young adults toward a future that is worthy of their efforts and dreams; however, a lack of guidance can lead emerging adults down a more confusing path. Parks writes, “Young adulthood is the birthplace of adult vision...within a distracted, indifferent, or exploiting culture, however, young adulthood may be squandered on dreams too small to match the potential of the young adult, or it simply may be cast adrift in the unexamined currents of mere circumstance.”⁷⁴ The mentoring relationship creates a stable environment where emerging adults can be seen for who they are as well as who they are becoming. Mentors offer guidance that speaks to the vulnerabilities and strengths of their mentee, and company for the long road to adulthood, but the mentoring relationship is nothing new. Christian Smith argues that this process, which he refers to as “socialization,” is historically the way knowledge and practices

⁷² Sharon Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams* (San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass, 2000), 6.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

have always been passed down.⁷⁵ He writes, “New members of any society are always inducted into the group by elder members who form them in different ways to become active participants of various sorts. This is done through role modeling, teaching, and other means of inculcating and internalizing basic beliefs, values, desires, and practices.”⁷⁶ Ideally, this is how the next generations learn about their world, and this is how younger generations receive images of the good life as well as the common good; therefore, when considering how religious beliefs and practices are maintained throughout Emerging Adulthood, the evidence suggests that the mentoring environment offers the stability and socialization that is required for these beliefs and practices to weather the storm and stress of Emerging Adulthood and continue on to adulthood. Of course, not all the beliefs and practices one obtains from the previous generation are going to find expression in contemporary society. Like I mentioned above, change is inevitable; however, if Millennials deny the goodness that is available from previous generations, they will deny themselves the stepping-stones that can bring them out of a shipwreck and into the future.

Considering the vital role that the mentoring relationship plays in the faith of the emerging adult, I feel it is necessary for something to be said about the character of the mentor. Whether they believe it or not, adults are always socializing youth around faith, and it is in this relationship that young folks will determine how big of a part faith will have in their lives. It would be easy to simply blame the younger generations for their failures in achieving the current standard for adulthood; however, after examining the

⁷⁵ Christian Smith, *Souls in Transition: The Religious & Spiritual Life of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), Kindle.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

research of Smith and Parks, it becomes necessary for additional questions to be asked: “What have adults been teaching the younger generations?” and “How have adults failed in socializing the next generation?” If the degree to which one believes and practices faith is dependent upon the degree to which faith has been socialized from one’s youth, all of the responsibility should not be placed on a young individual that has yet to reach physical and emotional maturity. The responsibility needs to be shared in a way that reflects the mentoring relationship. Emerging adults need to take responsibility for their life, and adults need to take responsibility for the things they have instilled in the younger generation; therefore, the process of socialization is not about shifting blame from one generation to another; it is a process that binds the hopes and dreams of the generations together. Within the mentoring relationship, Parks writes, “the dreams that are made available, embraced, and nurtured, and the promises that are made, broken, and kept, will shape our common future.”⁷⁷ Therefore, it is from this posture of shared hope, a posture that sees the future of the child intrinsically linked to the future of the adult, that I will explore the hope of Emerging Adulthood.

Differences Among the Generations

Before I move on to describing the hope of the Millennial generation, I first need to speak about the hope of the other generations and how they relate to each other. The hopes of the generations are linked; however, they are expressed differently. What makes this so important is that, for the first in the history of the world, humanity is reaching a point where life expectancy is allowing more and more generations to be functioning in society simultaneously; therefore, there is going to be some translation work that is

⁷⁷ Sharon Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams* (San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass, 2000), 6.

necessary so that the generations can understand each other. In an interview that appeared on the Vineyard USA website, James Choung offers a great starting point for understanding the different approaches to hope that are embodied by the different generations. He argues that there are four generational trends that continuously cycle through history.⁷⁸ The first generation is concerned with what is true. The second generation is concerned with what is authentic. The third generation is concerned with what is good, and the last generation is concerned about what is beautiful.⁷⁹ These concerns serve as the primary lens through which each generation engages the world, but this is not to say that someone with a primary lens of truth does not seek to know what is authentic, good, and beautiful – it just means their native tongue is truth. The truth is the world needs all of these questions to be asked if we are going to find an abundant life. In other words, the goal is not to find the right question, but to find the right balance of all the questions. Within this paradigm, Choung argues that the Boomer generation is concerned with what is true, Generation-X is concerned with what is authentic, Millennials are concerned with what is good, and the iGeneration is concerned with what is beautiful. I would agree with Choung’s assessment of the generations; however, I believe more clarity is needed if one is going to begin to talk about the relationship between the generations.

In *Simply Christian*, N.T. Wright argues that there are four “echoes” that inspire and draw people to God: Longing for Justice, Hunger for Relationship, Quest for

⁷⁸ Choung, James, “What the Father is Doing: Generations, Diversity, and Hope; A Conversation with James Choung,” Vineyard USA, 2012, accessed August 6, 2015, <http://www.vineyardusa.org/site/articles/james-choung>.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Spirituality, and Delight in Beauty.⁸⁰ These echoes serve as “the voice of Jesus, calling us to follow him into God’s new world – the world in which the hints, signposts, and echoes of the present world turn into the reality of the next one.”⁸¹ I argue that these echoes of revelation speak directly to the postures in each generation in Choung’s argument. The Boomer generation – a generation concerned with what is true – has within it a longing for clear and consistent justice.⁸² Primarily concerned with authenticity, Generation-X is drawn to God by a hunger for relationship.⁸³ Already on a quest for goodness, Millennials are inspired to seek out a spirituality that reflects that desired goodness, and, lastly, the iGeneration is defined by their desire to experience beauty.⁸⁴ In short, incorporating Wright’s “echoes of a voice from beyond” into the generational trends of Choung adds greater depth to the experience of each generation as well as insight into what it means to be in a healthy place within one’s own ethos.

Without balance, each generational trend and matching echo can quickly get out of control. The relationship between the Boomers and Generation-X is a good example of what happens when this balance is not met. The Boomer generation, with their concern for truth and justice, can be a great force for good in the world; however, bad things can start to happen if one allows this ethos to completely take control of one’s imagination. The ends begin to justify the means, and difference becomes something that needs to be eradicated instead of celebrated. It should not be surprising that the Fundamentalist

⁸⁰ NT Wright, *Simply Christian* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), Kindle.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

church movement was brought about by a generation that placed a high value on truth, and it should also not be a surprise that the generation that followed created the Emergent Movement as a response to Fundamentalism. The drawbacks of the Fundamentalist movement can already be felt within American Christianity; however, the Boomer generation is not the only generation trying to be heard in the argument that is relationship between the generations in America. Like I mentioned above, Generation-X, with their concern for authenticity and relationship, resonated with the Emergent movement; however, similar to the Fundamentalist movement, it produced mixed results. At its best, the Emergent Movement produced a very kind and understanding culture. They were able to respond to the wounds that were dished out by the previous generation of fundamentalists; however, unhealthy expression of this posture proved to destroy the very authentic relationships that were created. Unhealthy boundaries make relationships difficult, and one can quickly move toward narcissism if they do not believe people are worth their authentic time. Needless to say, a healthy balance was not found between the Boomers and Generation-X, and if something does not change, the Millennials and iGeneration will meet the same fate.

Millennials and the iGeneration have had fewer years to build an expression of faith that resonates with their way of believing; however, I do believe there are glimpses of what this will look like. Millennials, being concerned with finding goodness, love to incorporate the words “social justice” into their faith practices. This is a movement of young people that are looking to express their faith by helping the “least of these.”⁸⁵ The positive aspects of this movement are obvious; however, even though the drawbacks of this movement have yet to completely materialize, one can imagine what these

⁸⁵ Matt. 25:40 (NRSV).

drawbacks will look like. I imagine the negative aspects of this movement will be reminiscent of the struggles associated with Emerging Adulthood. An unhealthy expression will probably produce severe disconnection, as one's life would be consumed with navigating and surviving the present moment. The iGeneration, on the other hand, has had even less time than Millennials to distinguish itself; however, if they are truly a generation that is inspired by beauty, I imagine their presence would inject some much needed artistry into the Church. The drawbacks would probably include a posture that devalued objective criticism and, thus, create a reaction within the next generation to value truth, i.e., start the next cycle of generational trends. Whatever the future may hold, it is clear that each of these trends offers one a glimpse of the divine; however, without a proper balance, that glimpse of the divine can quickly turn into a glimpse of something far more hellish. In short, if people, whatever their generation, continue to take sides and exalt their own perspective over others, we should not expect to experience anything other than a reactionary existence.

Connecting the ideas of Choung to Wright helps add depth to the generations; however, it also allows one to see a natural progression. I find it interesting that unhealthy versions of people that are concerned with truth and justice require healthy versions of people that are concerned with authenticity and relationship to help them level out. In other words, when one generation experiences the shortcomings of the generation that preceded them, they are inspired to act in a way that makes it impossible to repeat those mistakes. Unfortunately, they end up having their own shortcomings, and a new generation emerges to address those issues. The interesting thing about the American culture today is that life expectancy is getting to a place where all these

generations are alive at the same time. This is both a blessing and a puzzle that has yet to be solved. In other words, humanity can either allow the generation that has all the resources to control the others, or we can begin to move toward a posture that sees the flaws and benefits of each generation and allows that knowledge to bring balance. The generations need a lingua franca that speaks of truth, authenticity, goodness and beauty if an abundant life is going to be experienced by anyone.

Lastly, I believe that the images found in William Blake's book *The Four Zoas* do an excellent job of offering a metaphor for humanities current place in history in relation to the generational trends. As the story goes, the first human (Albion) was divided into four parts after the fall: Tharmas, Luvah, Urthona, and Urizen. Tharmas represents instinct and power, Luvah represents emotion and passion, Urthona represents the imagination, inspiration and wisdom, and Urizen represents the intellect and reason. Known as the "God of Reason," Urizen was the entity in Blake's narrative that attempted to take control of creation as well as the other three parts of humanity. In other words, Blake was using this narrative to argue that reason had risen to such prominence in society that it had taken a toll on the other parts of the human being. This is both telling of the time in which Blake was writing – The Enlightenment – and applicable to the current state of generational trends in America. The generation that values truth and justice currently has the power, and, if they are not careful, they can stifle the other parts of their humanity that would make them whole.

Blake uses the character of Urizen in many different stories; however, there are certain themes that remain consistent within this character. Essentially, Urizen is the one in charge of organizing the universe and creating the rules that look to bring humanity

under control. Urizen is the bringer of the law and uniformity. When it comes to the outcomes that are produced from Urizen's actions, they are comparable to contemporary narratives about artificial intelligence. For example, the movie *iRobot* is the story of what happens when robots - originally designed to help humanity - come to the conclusion that humanity is too dangerous to be left to their own devices, so they intervene and take complete control. Humanity, of course, revolts and takes back their freedom. The moral of the story is clear - there is more to life than the safety that is offered from pure logic and reason; therefore, the goal is not for any one generation, echo or piece of humanity to take control of the rest. The goal is to find a balance so that humanity can become whole and enter into an abundant life. Hope is experienced at its fullest when all these pieces come together. In short, the generations need each other if they are going to have a hope that is worthwhile, and Blake's tale is a testament to that fact.

Hope: Imagining the Good Life Together

The hope of Emerging Adulthood is a stable home in the midst of instability and moves toward images of the common good for all of humanity. This hope begins with the faith that is shared within a community. Parks writes, "It is the combination of the emerging developmental stance of the young adult with the challenge and encouragement of the mentor that ignites the transforming power of the young adult era. A mentoring community can confirm the faith that there will be a new home."⁸⁶ Parks is using home as a loose term that refers both to a physical location as well as a stable way of making meaning; therefore, the idea of home for the emerging adult can be seen as both venturing

⁸⁶ Sharon Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams* (San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass, 2000), 93.

and dwelling.⁸⁷ This expansion of the idea of home is necessary because we live at a time that has a global commons. One's relational and economical capacities are no longer limited to one's immediate space; however, the practices that form one's ability to make meaning of and engage the global commons in a beneficial way are formed in smaller settings, e.g., mentoring relationships. It is the hope of the mentor that the formation that happens in the early experiences of childhood continue as the emerging adult moves into a larger, more complex world. In other words, the hope is that emerging adults, having been given the tools and instruction to create a home (meaning) of their current circumstance, will be able to make a home in the world as they move into the complexities of adulthood.

In his book *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups*, Joseph Myers identifies four social spaces that make up the world in which people make meaning: Public, Social, Personal, and Intimate Space.⁸⁸ Personal and Intimate Space have the greatest influence on the formation of the individual and, therefore, play a vital role in determining how one interacts in the Public and Social Spaces. Personal space is the realm of the mentor. This is the space where the truths about one's faith and hopes are explored and formed; however, the ultimate goal is not to be limited to any particular space, but to take the tools acquired in the smaller spaces and move outward. Myers writes, "All belonging is significant. Healthy community – the goal humankind has sought since the beginning – is achieved when we hold harmonious

⁸⁷ Ibid., 52.

⁸⁸ Joseph Myers, *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 143.

connections within all four spaces.”⁸⁹ If the emerging adult is to actualize their hope of having a stable home, it is of vital importance that they are in personal relationship with people who have already actualized that hope. The faith that has been instilled in the emerging adult is going to be the thing that transforms their future hope.

Just like their faith, the actualization of emerging adult’s hope is formed in relationship. The first part of this hope is to find a home in an unpredictable world. The primary purpose of this home is to protect the hopes and dreams of the emerging adult.⁹⁰ The mentoring relationship provides a safe space for young people to discover both who they are and their place in the universe. The mentoring relationship can also be a safety net that gives emerging adults the freedom to experiment with new opportunities that may not pan out. Parks writes, “[Mentoring relationships] convey the promise of a sociality within which big questions may be asked and worthy Dreams may be formed. Mentoring environments are communities of imagination that distinctively serve young adult meaning-making and the formation of vocation and faith.”⁹¹ This relationship gifts the imagination of the emerging adult with images of transformation; therefore, the second part of this hope always moves toward a dream of the good life.⁹²

Images of the good life are the content of the mentoring relationship and the message of religious practice. Identifying universal and context specific ideas of this dream is a large discussion that requires more space than this paper allows; however, the

⁸⁹ Ibid., 51.

⁹⁰ Sharon Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams* (San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass, 2000), 157.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Sharon Parks, “Social Vision and Moral Courage: Mentoring a New Generation,” *Cross Currents* 40, no. 3 (1990): 60.

dream that inspires productions of the good life is fully expressed in the idea of vocation.⁹³ Parks writes, “Vocation arises from a deepening understanding of both self and world, which gives rise to moments of power when self and purpose become aligned with eternity.”⁹⁴ In other words, when emerging adults are given the tools they need to make meaning of themselves and the world, powerful things can happen; therefore, focusing one’s meaning, purpose, and aspirations is the core task of the emerging adult; a task accomplished in relationship. The primary purpose of the mentoring relationship is not for emerging adults to follow blindly behind the dreams of adults. The mentoring relationship involves people of different generations dreaming and imagining images of the good life together. Adults have the experience and security that is lacking in the younger generation, and the youth has the freedom that is required to create change in the status quo. Images of the good life are produced when the limitations and strengths of both sides are held together. A worthy dream is a dream that honors the potential of the emerging adult as well as the experience of the adult.

It Can’t Be a Thing

The idea of mentors helping emerging adults sounds great, but my experience indicates that actually getting emerging adults to participate in such a thing is more than difficult. For someone who already feels overwhelmed with life, adding yet another social obligation is not going to be easy. Programming new things for young adults to join is not the answer; unfortunately, this is the method many churches are using to minister to their young adults, and the results are mostly underwhelming. Churches

⁹³ Sharon Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams* (San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass, 2000), 148.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

decide mentoring relationships are a good idea, so they create a program for mentoring relationships. Inevitably, very few people show up and even fewer stick around for an extended period of time. In other words, for a mentoring relationship to work, it can't be a thing. It can't be yet another activity that is added onto the rest of their lives that doesn't resonate with the rest of their experience. Making an impact on the lives of emerging adults involves stepping into their lives, not creating something outside of it. In this way, the mentoring relationship is a two-way street. A mentor cannot simply demand that an emerging adult enter into their world, the mentor must be willing to enter into the world of the emerging adult. The relationship can't be limited to a scheduled hour every week. Like any good relationship, it requires all the people involved to give of themselves.

It is clear from my research that mentors can help bring stability to the chaotic world of emerging adults, and my experience in the Church has shown me that pastors who offer straight forward teaching and concrete practices often have a strong young adult population in their church; however, I have also noticed that the stabilizing force that is offered by these pastors is often limited to the Sunday service. Young adults who have made space for church in their lives are drawn to these congregations because of the structure. Their lives might be chaotic outside the church walls, but for at least a few hours on Sunday, they can feel like they have things under control. However, if the goal is to help emerging adults gain stability in their day-to-day lives, the pastor (mentor) must be willing to be a presence in their day-to-day. Too often pastors rely on programming to interact with their congregants outside of Sunday. This can look like Bible studies, support groups, or service opportunities; however, I believe that most young adults would

get more from having a beer and genuine conversation with their mentor than having to volunteer for another thing. In short, the stabilizing force for emerging adults is a good relationship that involves more than just Sunday mornings and Bible studies that reinforce the hierarchical nature of the relationship. Sometimes they require a barstool.

Emerging Together

Emerging Adulthood is an age marked by identity exploration, self-absorption, instability, transition, and possibility; however, it is clear from the research that there are also stabilizing forces that follow one into this stage as well. The beliefs and practices that formed emerging adults in their younger stages of development had a good chance of continuing on into their adulthood; therefore, Emerging Adulthood should not be seen as a stage that negates one's dreams but as a stage that merely continues one's normal way of making meaning. Mentoring relationships have a profound effect on the formation of young people, as they give emerging adults guidance, a safe place to explore their identity, help in making meaning of the world, and the ability to create dreams that are worthy of their vocation. And just like the faith that is formed in the early years of development, the hopes and dreams of emerging adults are produced in relationship. Together, with the wisdom of past experiences and the unbridled imagination of youth, adults and emerging adults can look to the future and dream visions that are truly good. In his book *Secrets in the Dark*, Frederick Buechner writes:

We are all of us adolescents, painfully growing and groping our way toward something like true adulthood, and maybe the greatest value we have both to teach and to learn as we go is the capacity to be amazed at the unending power that can be generated by the meeting and trading of lives, which is a power to heal

us and bless us and in the end maybe even transform us into truly human beings at last.⁹⁵

In other words, on the journey toward adulthood, the different generations need each other. It is a relationship that not only produces new sets of adults, but images of a transformed life that speaks to our shared humanity. This journey of development speaks to our relationship with each other as well as humanity's relationship with God. In his book *The Church Unfinished: Ecclesiology Through The Centuries*, Bernard Prusak writes, "The Church must celebrate what is valuable in human development because it is inseparably built upon it... Humanity's search for meaning was a question implanted by God, opening humans to their answer: the hidden presence of that self-giving God who wants to be found in the midst of our freedom."⁹⁶ Prusak is arguing that for the Church to create a meaningful expression of God, it must develop alongside humanity, and I could not agree more. When new stages of development emerge, new expressions of faith are needed to address the challenges found therein. For emerging adults, the Church has the possibility of being a traveling partner that offers wisdom in a chaotic time. The Church can offer a universal community that can hold the dreams of its people and offer a place of rest when the seas get too dangerous. For the Church, young adults have the possibility of being a voice that calls the Church to new expressions of faith. Together, the Church and emerging adults can offer all of humanity a meaningful glimpse of God and imagine a practice that resonates with the most holy images of the good life.

⁹⁵ Frederick Buechner, *Secrets in the Dark: A Life in Sermons* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2006), 220.

⁹⁶ Bernard Prusak, *The Church Unfinished: Ecclesiology through the Centuries* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), Kindle.

CHAPTER 2:
THE EMERGING ADULT APOCALYPSE: LOST AGENCY, FORGOTTEN HOPE

Your soul is oftentimes a battlefield, upon which your reason and your judgment wage war against your passion and your appetite.

Would that I could be the peacemaker in your soul, that I might turn the discord and the rivalry of your elements into oneness and melody.

But how shall I, unless you yourselves be also the peacemakers, nay, the lovers of all your elements?

— Kahlil Gibran. *The Prophet*

The Emerging Adult Apocalypse is upon us, and the end is anything but nigh. It can be seen on our television screens and out our windows. All over the world, vast numbers of young people are beginning to swarm, and their groans of dissatisfaction are near deafening. The Church has not gone untouched by this outbreak, as many people continue to wonder why the relationship between the Church and the Millennials is so tenuous. The reasons for this ailing relationship are ample and complex; however, it is my belief that the dissatisfaction many Millennials feel toward the Church is born out of a dissatisfaction with the metaphors that the Church uses to create its identity – metaphors that no longer resonate with the Millennial experience. In this chapter, I will explore how the lack of new metaphors surrounding the idea of sin have stripped Christians of their agency and, as a result, robbed them of their ability to hope for themselves. Lastly, I will explore how a semiotic understanding of the biblical traditions of prophecy and apocalypse can speak hope to a hopeless situation/demographic and, thus, help emerging adults hope again. This chapter is about transition within the

Christian ethos, but, more importantly, it is about reclaiming a posture of hope that will allow emerging adults to move into what Jesus describes as an abundant life.

Speak Sin, Speak Metaphor

Metaphors are the building blocks humanity uses to understand their world.¹ They are impossible to avoid and have the power to affect the understanding of an individual as well as an entire people group. This process of meaning making is ongoing and fluid. As new ideas present themselves, one's overall understanding begins to shift, and if one were to trace the progression of these ideas throughout history, one would subsequently trace the metaphors that were employed to construct their meaning.² Metaphors are at the heart of understanding, and, when one considers the vast majority of Christianity, it is clear that metaphors around *sin* lie at the center of Christian belief.³ What we believe about *sin* influences the way we understand the creation narrative ("the fall"), Jesus' death (atonement) and the last things (eschatology). Sin influences our entire understanding of God and God's relationship to humanity; thus, the metaphors we use to understand *sin* are the foundational building blocks we use to construct our faith.

When one attempts to engage the idea of sin, one must first understand that the metaphors being used, and their current understandings, came from somewhere. The current metaphors concerning sin, and the understandings that follow, can be traced back to Augustine (5th Century C.E.); however, it is important to note that Augustine's understanding of sin is not the beginning. There is a plethora of other metaphors that

¹ James Geary, *I is an Other: The Secret Life of Metaphor and How It Shapes the Way We See the World* (New York: HarperCollins, 2012), Kindle.

² Gary Anderson, *Sin: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), Kindle.

³ Tatha Wiley, *Original Sin: Origins, Developments, Contemporary Meanings* (New York: Paulist Press, 2002), Kindle.

predate Augustinian understanding and bear witness to the different ways Jews and Christians have thought about *sin* throughout the centuries. A good example of this can be seen in the difference between the metaphors used during the First Temple Period and the Second Temple Period. In the texts written during the First Temple Period, sin was thought of as a burden, and in the texts written during and after the Second Temple Period, sin was thought of as a debt.⁴ The reason for this transition had nothing to do with theology and everything to do with linguistics. By the end of their Babylonian exile, the Jewish people were bilingual in Hebrew and Aramaic, and the mixing of these languages had a profound effect on their metaphors for sin. In his book *Sin: A History*, Gary Anderson states, “Because Jews during the exile and afterward were bilingual in Hebrew and Aramaic, the vocabulary of Aramaic had a marked influence on the development of Hebrew. One of the linguistic items that came on board was the construal of sin as a debt, a metaphor implied in the Aramaic tongue, but not in the Hebrew.”⁵ It is clear from Anderson’s research that the diversity of metaphors found within the text is not simply an aesthetic change.⁶ Each metaphor for sin is tied to a unique time and place within the history of the Jewish and Christian faiths and represents a different way of creating meaning.⁷ Culture informs metaphor and understanding, and, as the followers of YHWH began to mesh with different cultures, it was only natural that their metaphors for sin began to change as well.

⁴ Gary Anderson, *Sin: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), Kindle.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

It is not my intention to give a survey of all the metaphors that have been used to understand sin and, from those options, figure out which metaphor is the correct metaphor under which every Christian should be working. My only intention in looking to the past is to show that there has been diversity in metaphors, and these metaphors were intrinsically linked to the culture that produced them. By showing that diversity existed, I give credence to the idea that it is well within our faith tradition to change biblical metaphors so they may better reflect our unique time and place. In this way, I am challenging the idea that the metaphors Christians use to construct their faith should be derived solely from the past, and just because a metaphor for sin does not appear in the Bible does not mean contemporary Christians should not use it. The authors of scripture used metaphors that were understandable to their audience, and, as the faith continued to encounter new cultures, they continued to produce new language to construct metaphors that brought meaning into these new contexts. I believe the contemporary Christian community has the responsibility to continue this tradition. We live in a culture that is very different than the cultures that produced the scriptures. Many of the biblical metaphors do not translate well into our time or, worse yet, translate into something that is offensive. Therefore, it is vital for the Church to create new metaphors that reflect the language of the culture we inhabit because, if emerging adults are expected to maintain their faith, they must be given something that is in their language – something they can understand.

Augustinian Metaphors

Like I mentioned earlier, the metaphors that were first solidified (theologically) by Augustine in the fifth century are the same metaphors many contemporary Christians

use to construct their idea of sin. Augustine viewed sin as a debt that entered the world when Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit and that debt was continually inherited from generation to generation (original sin).⁸ He believed this inherited debt manifested itself as disordered desire (*concupiscence*) which, when brought to its logical conclusion (predestination), claimed that it was impossible for humanity to freely choose God's will over their own "broken" desires.⁹ Combine this with the belief that God is omniscient and omnipotent and troubling questions about the nature of God begin to pop up. Within this framework, God not only comes off as petty and sadistic, but humanity loses their agency to chose goodness and/or God.¹⁰ This is a frightening reality because, without agency, humanity loses its ability to hope for itself; thus, all of its hopes are tied to the desires of God. For many folks, I am sure the idea of having all of one's hopes tied to God is a good thing, but, when one consider that he or she would be at the whims of a god that created the world only to punish it, demands unnecessary human sacrifices and does not care enough about creation to save it in the end, this posture cannot be considered anything but undesirable. It is clear that new metaphors for *sin* are needed if Christians are going to regain their agency and learn to hope again. The chapter does not have the space to dive into what those new metaphors may be now, but the forthcoming chapters will look how modern aesthetic may be used to create metaphors about sin and God that better suit the current time period.

⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin Books, 1961), 249.

⁹ Tatha Wiley, *Original Sin: Origins, Developments, Contemporary Meanings* (New York: Paulist Press, 2002), Kindle.

¹⁰ Paula Fredriksen, *Sin: The Early History of an Idea* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), Kindle.

The Violence of Prophecy

Emerging Adulthood is a stage of life that is supposed to be marked by a climate of exceptional hope.¹¹ It is a time in life when one begins to look to their future and hope for things not yet experienced. Unfortunately, young Christians are being formed under a narrative that teaches them they have no agency; therefore, they are robbed of their ability to hope for themselves. I wish it were as simple as telling a person to pick up their agency and just hope for something good, but the work of regaining one's agency is an arduous process, and often a violent one. This violence is metaphysical, as it requires that familiar, and often cherished, metaphors be unveiled for the hopeless pits they are. It is a process called apocalypse – a deconstruction of understanding. It is a process that requires a guide to help point the way, and the prophet is the perfect person for the job.

Within scripture, no one challenges false ideas about God better than the prophet. Through poetic metaphors and lavish storytelling, prophets expose the false hopes of their culture and, at the same time, inspire God's people to hope for an abundant life. In this way, I believe the prophetic texts can serve as a good model for helping emerging adults regain their agency. Prophets had the courage to stand up to popular opinion, the agency to name the problems that they saw and the hope to believe that what they were doing would produce an abundant life for their people. My hope is not that emerging adults will use prophecy to try and predict their future, but that the posture of the prophets will inspire young people to address the metaphors that are causing them harm in the present so they may hope to move toward a more abundant life in the near future.

¹¹ Christian Smith, *Souls in Transition: The Religious & Spiritual Live of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), Kindle.

The Art of Prophecy

Within the biblical text, it is apparent that the diversity found in the personalities to whom God speaks is equal to the diversity found in the manner in which God speaks. One of the most common ways God communicates to a larger people group is through the prophet; however, within the experiences of the prophets, God engages with an ecstatic miscellany that includes burning bushes that defy consumption (Moses), visions of cosmic battles (John of Patmos), and audible voices in the night (Samuel). The manifestation of things such as hearing voices from invisible entities or having visions of things that oppose the very laws of nature could easily describe a psychotic episode, but it is remarkable just how quick the psychotic becomes divinely inspired when the title of *prophet* is added to the one experiencing said episode. This either-or-mentality, that would say the experience is either from God or a psychotic break, is a worldview that I will reject in my examination of the prophets and move towards a more Hebraic and semiotic understanding of prophecy.

One of the ways God communicates to prophets is through apocalyptic visions. Apocalyptic visions fall under two main categories: prophecy and apocalypse and, unfortunately, there exists a common misunderstanding of the categories in which these visions have their roots. When it comes to apocalypse, I will argue that the narratives situated within the genre are more the result of a poetic imagination firmly founded in the apocalyptic tradition than they are of a direct, image-for-image vision from God, and the experience of the prophet is actually a relational position to God that allows the prophet to see, hear, touch and taste the world with a divine perspective. The genre of prophecy is the more general of the two categories. The common understanding of prophecy, one that I wish to resist, is the view that has prophecy as a declaration concerning the absolute,

unchangeable future. Even though prophecy does include predictions concerning the future, an unchangeable prediction is not the primary goal of prophecy. Prophecy has more to do with what God is doing in the present – “a declaration of God’s perspective on the present life of God’s people.”¹² Even though a prophet will speak of future events, the predictions are usually limited to the imminent future. Prophecy is a word from God that enters into the situation of God’s people and gives guidance and encouragement, or acts as a call to repentance and recommitment. God speaks a word to Israel and Judah through the prophet; affirming their strengths, diagnosing their weaknesses, calling them to faithful action, threatening judgment on the wayward and promising favor for the remorseful and faithful. The prophets paint a picture of reality and give an interpretation of the situation in order to motivate the Lord’s people to faithful action; therefore, to hold a view of prophecy as an unchangeable future largely ignores the purpose of prophecy, which is not necessarily to give a hard and fast statement about an unchangeable fate.

Supporting my argument is the story of Jonah. Similar to the other prophetic texts, the story begins with someone getting a word from the Lord. Jonah is told to go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it because of its wickedness against God. When Jonah arrives in Nineveh, after a bit of a detour, he proclaims the destruction of the city: “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.”¹³ Accompanied with a worldview that sees prophecy as an unchangeable future, this prophetic declaration would mean that the destruction of Nineveh was inevitable. However, the result of the story contradicts this definition of prophecy, and we find the people of Nineveh repenting and being

¹² David DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods and Ministry Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 887.

¹³ Jon. 3:4 (NIV).

spared. The story of Jonah serves as an example of the true intention of prophecy – to inspire people to turn to God – as well as an example of how culturally informed images and narratives can be used to affect the way an entire people group creates meaning and moves into action. Stories that included giant creatures from the ocean (Leviathan) were not unusual in ancient times. In fact, such creatures are even alluded to in the creation narratives in Genesis, and, similar to Genesis, the author of Jonah uses these aquatic creatures in a way that shows God’s dominion over them. In other words, the authors of these narratives, in an attempt to one-up the other religions of the time, shows that even the great Leviathan (a metaphor for chaos) is subject to the will of God. This use of metaphor and narrative is essentially semiotic in nature, as the author uses them to help Israel construct meaning as well as find their identity in YHWH – the God that speaks into chaos and produces an abundant life.

Apocalypse

The genre of prophecy is important, but it takes a back seat to the major genre of these visions – apocalypse. The word *apocalypse* means an “unveiling” or “lifting off of a veil.”¹⁴ The problem with this genre is that, besides sections of *Ezekiel*, *Daniel* and the book of *Revelation*, there is no basis for comparison in the Protestant Bible. The unfamiliarity with this genre makes it easy for someone to misread these narratives; however, by finding the shared characteristics of such works one can start to understand the context in which apocalypse literature is written. After taking a close look at these texts, a number of similarities start to become apparent. According to DeSilva:

¹⁴ David DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods and Ministry Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 887.

The basic features common to this literature include the portraying of revelation as coming through visions or appearances of some divine or angelic mediator and through conversations with such figures; ‘otherworldly journeys,’ allowing the reader to see into the invisible regions that surround the everyday world and the beings that inhabit them (such as the seven spheres, the throne of God, the Abyss and their occupants); narrations of the ‘history’ that brackets normal history (such as creation and primeval events or judgment and consummation).¹⁵

The purpose of apocalypse literature is to bring a different perspective to humanity’s situation – God’s perspective. When put into the larger context of the spiritual realm, the happenings of this world take on new meaning. People find hope and comfort in knowing that they might suffer here on earth for staying faithful, but in the end, and in the spiritual, there will be justice. By putting one’s everyday life next to the spiritual realm the author tries to motivate the audience into faithful action. The function of this genre is to allow the recipients to examine their behavior in light of an eschatological perspective on the human experience.

The Prophetic Posture and the Semiotic Response

As for the moments when God imparts his word, there are contradicting views between scholars on the actual experience of the prophet. The prophets spend very little time describing how the divine word of God came to them. In fact, a version of the simple phrase, “The word of the Lord came to me...” appears sixty-two times in the Old Testament in reference to prophetic encounters. All other detail is absent in regards to how this happens or why this happens to that specific person. The first Christian worldview that tried to explain the prophetic experience was developed by Philo of Alexandria, and remains the dominant Christian view of the day. Philo believed there is

¹⁵ Ibid., 888.

“no prophecy without ecstasy.”¹⁶ Like being hit with a bolt of lightning, the prophet is overtaken by the power of God and left in a helpless state in which their body was completely out of their control and their mind was left to make sense of the images that were being given. This understanding of prophecy sees the prophet as an object. The prophet’s body is merely an instrument used by God to get his message to humanity. The very consciousness of the prophet is hijacked in order to protect the holiness of the message. In other words, similar to Augustine’s metaphors for sin, this understanding of prophecy creates an environment that eliminates human agency from the equation – a caveat I am not willing to concede in my understanding of the prophetic.

Unfortunately, Philo’s exegesis was heavily influenced by a Hellenistic worldview and not the traditional, rabbinic worldview from which this genre has its roots. The majority of Rabbis believed that the absence of ecstasy distinguished Hebrew prophets from the prophets of pagan gods.¹⁷ In the prophetic texts of the Bible, one sees humanity as an active participant in the encounter. The prophet stands in dialogue with the heavenly beings; therefore, it is a relational view of the prophet and the divine that is more congruent with the Hebraic tradition. This Hebraic understanding of the prophetic genre compliments my previous objection to a fate-centered understanding and moves the primary focus of the narrative further away from the fate-centered view of the word and toward an inspection of the relational dynamics going on between the two parties involved – the prophet and divine beings. This relational understanding of prophet and prophecy sees humanity in a subject-subject relationship to the divine instead of an

¹⁶ Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 429.

¹⁷ Ibid., 433.

object-subject relationship. In other words, Prophecy is not something that happens to someone - it is something with which one participates.

In *Jeremiah* we find the basic definition of a prophet – the bearer of the word of God; however, it is my argument that the experience of receiving prophecy is not the perceiving recognizable images and sounds (as object) but of experiencing creation as God experiences creation – unveiled (as subject).¹⁸ Old Testament scholars Heschel and Brueggemann borrow directly from Martin Buber’s philosophies in his book *I and Thou* to describe the relationship dynamic between the prophet and God. Heschel borrows Buber’s idea of the *Eternal Thou* moving toward mankind to describe the prophetic experience. Heschel states, “[The prophet] always speaks of an appearance, God as turned toward man. Prophetic inspiration as a pure act may be defined as anthropotropism, as a turning of God toward man, a turning in a direction of man.”¹⁹ In other words, it is in the experience of being “turned towards” that the prophet experiences the word and is thereby transformed by the *Eternal Thou*. However, Heschel would not say that prophecy is a movement by God alone. He also borrows the idea that one needs to position oneself before the *Eternal Thou* as well – this is not a one-way street.²⁰

While Heschel speaks on how one might position oneself to experience the other, Brueggemann speaks of the exchange between the two subjects. He references Buber in his acknowledgement of an “ontology of the between in which subjective agents have an encounter marked by an intense immediacy.”²¹ Buber describes this moment of intensity

¹⁸ Josh. 18:18 (NIV).

¹⁹ Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1962), 563.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 555.

²¹ Walter Brueggemann, *An Unsettling God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009), 6.

as an entering into a pure relationship where man is fully present before God. Everything is included in this relationship because entering into a pure relationship does not involve ignoring anything but seeing everything as a *You*.²² The role of the prophet is not to renounce the world but place it upon its proper ground before God. So how does one view the text if the actual visions in the Old Testament are no longer viewed as the exact, fate-driven, images and words of God? A closer look at the original Hebrew text begins to shed light on a better, more Hebraic understanding.

A common Hebrew word used for “vision” in the Old Testament narrative is *מראה*. What is remarkable about this word is that also means “mirror.” The same word that describes “a revelation from God” is also the word that describes something that “makes a reflection for self-care;” therefore, it is my argument that the prophetic experience is a balance of these definitions.²³ I argued that prophecy is a relational position with God, and by experiencing (and being experienced by) the *Eternal Thou*, the prophet is transformed by the reflection of the divine and mirrors that back into the community. I will describe this event as a “mirroring of the infinite” – a moment where God “unveils” all reality so that one may see it as God does. It is in this position of experiencing the infinite that I believe one finds the true prophetic experience. And it is my argument that the actual words of the apocalyptic visions that occur in the text are not the exact visions and words imparted by God, but of one who has experienced and been transformed by the presence of the *Eternal Thou*. In his book *The Marriage of Heaven*

²² Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York, NY: Scribners, 1970), 127.

²³ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 691.

and Hell, William Blake describes this understanding of prophecy through a dialogue with the Prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel. He writes:

The Prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel dined with me, and I asked them how they dared so roundly to assert that God spoke to them; and where they did not think at the time that they would be misunderstood, & so be the cause of imposition. Isaiah answer'd: 'I saw no God, nor heard any, in a finite organical perception; but my senses discover'd the infinite in everything, and as I was then perswaded, & remain confirm'd, that the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God, I cared not for consequences, but wrote.'²⁴

It is clear from this dialogue that Blake was arguing for a Hebraic understanding of prophecy that valued the agency of humanity. Similar to Blake, Heschel describes this form of prophetic inspiration as “simply a enlightened form of true conviction, of religious enthusiasm in the purer and deeper sense.”²⁵ Therefore, I argue that the apocalyptic visions presented in the text are actually prophetically inspired works of poetry, rather than a transcription of an actual cosmic event, and still retain their place as the inspired word of God. The text is the poetic device used by the prophet to inspire humanity towards a holy perspective. Brueggemann states, “But serious readers of this text of human imagination regularly are recruited, in the process of being addressed, to the conviction that what is surely daring artistic human imagination is, at the same time, an act of divine revelation.”²⁶ Thus, I assert that prophecy consists of a revelation from God as well as a construction of man. In other words, the work of the prophet is the work of a semiotician. Both the prophet and the semiotician are in the business of creating images, metaphors and/or narratives that are intended to help people create meaning and

²⁴ William Blake, “A Memorable Fancy,” in *The Portable Blake*, ed. Alfred Kazin (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 1976), 256.

²⁵ Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1962), 481.

²⁶ Walter Brueggemann, *An Unsettling God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009), 17.

form their identity. The goal of the prophets in scripture was to help their community create meaning of their world and find their identity through the lens of YHWH.

Skeptics of my reasoning argue that I have robbed the prophetic of its power. In other words, “The theory that regards the prophetic act as an act of poetic creation eliminates the concept of superhuman inspiration in order to establish it as an act of human spontaneity.”²⁷ However, I would disagree with their assertion, as it is not congruent with the Hebraic traditions that produced the texts. This view holds onto the idea that supernatural inspiration and human agency are mutually exclusive ideas; however, as I have explained, it is only because of this supernatural inspiration that enables the prophet to speak into society with poetic agency. These are not mutually exclusive terms. They are, in fact, dependent upon each other. The “unveiled” apocalyptic worldview that inspires holy action is the vital substance of prophecy, and it involves both divine inspiration and poetic imagination. Abraham Heschel writes, “this then is the ultimate category of prophetic theology; involvement, attentiveness, concern. Prophetic religion may be defined, not as what man does with his ultimate concern, but rather what man does with God’s concern.”²⁸ This is also the role of the Christian semiotician – to create metaphors and narratives that reflect the desires of God onto God’s community.

In comparison to the more traditional view of prophecy, my position on the prophetic experience will also lead to different conclusions when it comes to discussing the “how,” “who,” and “when” God reveals God’s self and what that says about God’s character. Like I mentioned before, the traditional view of prophecy includes a subject-

²⁷ Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1962), 494.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 619.

object view and paints the experience as an episode of night paralysis. This indicates a very one-sided experience. God designates people to be the object through which God communicates, and the person is without a choice when it comes to when or what God communicates. However, as I have discussed, I believe the fact that God is in dialogue with the prophet experiencing the message indicates a more subject-subject interaction. Also, my argument is not nearly as discriminate as the traditional view. I agree with Heschel in his assertion that God speaks prophecy to everyone, and it is the ones who listen and reflect those messages that we call prophets.²⁹ The preemptive work of the prophets is in properly positioning themselves to experience an encounter with the divine. The work that follows is semiotic, as the prophet creates metaphors and narratives that mirror the Divine Presence onto the community.

Maladjusted Wisdom

My final thoughts on prophecy will be devoted to the action of turning toward God and its relevance to the modern Christian. Little is mentioned about how the word comes to the prophet, but there are clues that speak about the position of the prophet. Like John the Baptist in the wilderness, the prophet is someone on the outskirts of society, and, however weird it may seem to envision someone living in the wilderness, eating wild honey and locust and wearing wild animal skins, I believe this to be a major result of the “turning toward God” I described above. Heschel writes, “The prophet is a person who suffers from a profound maladjustment to the spirit of society, with its conventional lies, with its concessions to man’s weakness.”³⁰ In short, once the

²⁹ Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1962), 535.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 521-22.

corruption of society has been unveiled, the prophet is implored to the solitude of the wilderness and encourages others to do the same – away from the temptations that can keep one from turning toward the divine. Our culture does not see too many people moving into the wilderness and eating locusts; however, even though a physical movement away from the corruption is sometimes necessary, I believe that the movement of the heart towards holiness is what the prophet is looking to inspire, and this is a movement in which all Christians can participate. Martin Buber explains that the experience for each person is going to be all together unique and requires no prerequisites. He writes, “Only the acceptance of the presence is required...as we have nothing but a *You* on our lips when we enter the encounter, it is with this on our lips that we are released from it into the world.”³¹ Within this framework, the prophet is the one whom speaks (mirrors) that *You* onto the rest of creation. I would argue that the questions surrounding the “how,” “who” and “when” God communicates miss the point. God is always trying to communicate God’s vision to humanity, and it is not a matter of whether God is communicating, but whether humanity is in a position to hear. The prophet is the faithful listener – a visionary that was imparted the divine gift of poetry, one sent into the world to lead men to the beauty of the truth. The prophets are the semioticians who can imagine great apocalyptic visions to inspire movement towards the divine; however, the idea of turning towards God is demanded of all of creation. William Blake wrote, “He

³¹ Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York, NY: Scribners, 1970), 159.

who sees the infinite in all things, sees God.”³² I believe it should be the goal of every Christian to seek out that vision.

Future Prophets

When something was going wrong in the community, prophets were the ones that called things back into order. They were the ones that brought metaphors to the madness and inspired the community to action. In more ways than one, the Church is in desperate need of prophets if it hopes to reach the emerging adult population. In a sea of unhelpful metaphors, the Church has essentially stranded emerging adults without agency or hope for their faith. If emerging adults are going to stay in the Church, they need to believe that they have agency in their faith and have hope that their faith is a good thing. I have argued that the prophetic texts are a useful tool in helping emerging adults regain their agency and ability to hope; however, that is just the first step. Gaining one's agency and ability to hope is one thing, but finding something worthwhile to hope for is something completely different. Contemporary prophets are needed to help change the metaphors of our faith. The metaphors that inform the Christian faith today create a picture of God that is vindictive and violent. These metaphors make it seem like God does not care about the earth or the creatures that inhabit it. The Church needs a voice that will call out the hopelessness of the current metaphors and offer new metaphors that speak well to our context and produce an abundant life. The church needs semioticians that can faithfully construct new metaphors that both speak to a changing culture and the desires that God has for God's community.

³² William Blake, “A Memorable Fancy,” in *The Portable Blake*, ed. Alfred Kazin (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 1976), 257.

CHAPTER 3:
EMERGING ADULTS AND ART: A COMPLEX HOPE

And beauty is not a need but an ecstasy.
It is not a mouth thirsting nor an empty hand stretched forth,
But rather a heart enflamed and a soul enchanted.

— Kahlil Gibran. *The Prophet*

Before one can begin creating new metaphors for emerging adults, one must first familiarize oneself with the context in which emerging adults live. In the first chapter, I briefly spoke about the shift in ethos that began in the American culture during the 1960's. As the hope of the American Dream started to fade into obscurity, young adults began to look for new narratives that could hold their hope. It would be easy to blame the decline of the American Dream on ideological differences or the emergence of Postmodernity; however, it is not the beginning of Postmodernity that one needs to look at to grasp what is going on within Emerging Adults – it is the beginning of Modernity. It is a common misconception to view Postmodernity as the antithesis of Modernity. For example, Modern thought is often described as being objective, whereas Postmodern thought is often described as being subjective. This over-simplified understanding of the relationship between Postmodern and Modern might have some use if objectivity was the primary characteristic of Modernity and subjectivity the primary characteristic of Postmodernity; however, after considering the emergence of Modernity, it becomes clear that individualism, not objectivity, is the primary lens one should use when looking at the relationship between Modernity and Postmodernity.

The emergence of Modernity marked the beginning of the end for systems of power that ruled over the choices of the individual.¹ Choice replaced duty, monarchies were replaced with democracies, and Church authority began to be replaced with theologians in matters of theology and faithful living. Eventually, all the social systems of power would come into question, and it is at this moment that Postmodernity replaced Modernity. In his forward to Gilles Lipovetsky's *Hypermodern Times*, Sébastien Charles writes:

Postmodernity represents the precise historical moment at which all the institutional brakes holding back individual emancipation disintegrated and vanished, thereby giving rise to the expression of individual desires, self-fulfillment and self-esteem. The great socializing structures have lost their authority, the great ideologies are no longer productive, historical projects no longer inspire people, the social field is no longer anything other than an extension of the private sphere.²

Therefore, instead of viewing Modernity and Postmodernity as opposing philosophies, it is more accurate to view Postmodernity as the natural progression from Modernity when considering cultural shifts in ethos.

Along with a rise in individualism, Modernity brought with it a shift in hope. Before the dawn of Modernity, the hope, and general ideas of wellbeing, of humanity rested in the past. Charles writes, "With the advent of modernity, there was a major break: it was not that the present was put back at the heart of everyone's preoccupations, but that the order of temporality was reversed, and the future, not the past, was made the place happiness to come and the end of suffering."³ The idea of one's hope being placed

¹ Sébastien Charles, "Paradoxical Individualism: An Introduction to the Thought of Gilles Lipovetsky," in *Hypermodern Times* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2005), 1-2.

² Ibid., 8-9.

³ Ibid., 1-2.

in the past is clearly seen in pre-Modern texts such as the Bible. A quick word search in a digital copy of the NIV will produce 231 results for *remember* and nineteen results for *remember covenant*. For example, the author of Deuteronomy writes, “But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.”⁴ It is clear from this text (and many others) that the hope of pre-Modern practitioners of Judaism and Christianity rested in their ability to remember the past works of God.⁵

The dawn of Modernity, and subsequent rise of individualism through Postmodernity, allowed humanity to free itself from abusive social structures that lorded over individual choices. This shift in philosophy not only had a profound effect on an individual’s ability to engage their environment; it also moved the hope of society from the past to the future.⁶ Humanity turned its eyes away from where they came from and began to look to where they could go. Unfortunately, very similar to the story of Babel, it did not take very long for humanity to realize that the direction they were going as a society was not beneficial. There are many examples of this in modern American history. Manifest Destiny was once a narrative that held the hopes and dreams of Americans looking to create an abundant life. It was the narrative that inspired individuals to act on their hopes and dreams. This narrative represents an example of people trying to construct new social structures to govern individuals at a time when individual choice is held at a premium. Charles writes:

⁴ Deut. 8:18 (NIV).

⁵ Gen. 9:15-16, Exod. 2:24, Exod. 6:5, Lev. 26:42, Lev. 26:45, 1 Chron. 16:15, Neh. 13:29, Ps. 103:18, Ps. 106:45, Ps. 111:5, Jeremiah 3:16, Jer. 14:21, Ezek. 16:60-61, Lk. 1:72; Eph. 2:12.

⁶ Sébastien Charles, “Paradoxical Individualism: An Introduction to the Thought of Gilles Lipovetsky,” in *Hypermodern Times* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2005), 10.

Society is better analyzed and explained by the idea of seduction... There are no longer any models prescribed by social groups, but forms of behavior chosen and endorsed by individuals; no longer any norms imposed without discussion, but a desire to seduce which equally affects the public domain and private domain. Hence... a 'cool' individual, flexible, intensely hedonistic and libertarian at one and the same time.⁷

In other words, the unquestioned narratives of institutions were replaced with the narratives of individuals - it was now up to the individual to inspire people into joining their narrative. Unfortunately, similar to the narratives of pre-Modern institutions, the hopes and dreams of Modernity and Postmodernity have proven to be lacking in goodness and only available to the privileged few.⁸ Therefore, it is only logical that, in the midst of seeing the tragedies that were the result of placing one's hope in the past and future, young people today choose to place their hope in the present. Young people have concluded that the ethos of the Modern/Postmodern era is not beneficial, and they are choosing to take a different path - Hypermodernity.

Hypermodernity is a response to the failure of the Modern hope. Charles writes, "We are no longer living through the era of great and bloody collective tragedies; but tragedy is still experienced, albeit in a more individual way, and the stresses and strains of life are increasing, while the future has never before appeared so threatening. Hypermodernity is the reign neither of absolute happiness nor of total nihilism."⁹ To put it another way, a hypermodern individual tries to hold the tension between individual and collective goodness and is aware of the dangers of blindly placing one's hope in the past and future. Unfortunately, placing one's hope in the present is not without its drawbacks.

⁷ Sébastien Charles, "Paradoxical Individualism: An Introduction to the Thought of Gilles Lipovetsky," in *Hypermodern Times* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2005), 10.

⁸ Ibid., 25.

⁹ Ibid.

An individual that places all their hope in the present lives an unstable existence.¹⁰ A hope that is fixed in the past or future at least has the ability to stay true to form - producing fundamental followers that work toward maintaining that exact hope. However, a hope that is limited to the present - a Hypermodern hope – requires the opposite posture. It requires one to live life “without deep-rooted attachment, and with a personality and tastes that are always fluctuating.”¹¹ Where it was once an individual’s job to follow a prescribed path that would eventually lead to an abundant life, it is now an individual’s job to constantly adapt to the present so they can live an abundant life.

It is clear from my research that none of the philosophies and/or narratives that have been used produced an abundant life by themselves. In fact, it seems that the more one limits their hope to the past, present or future, the more difficult it becomes to live an abundant life. Therefore, it is not my intention to champion a Hypermodern philosophy that places all of humanity’s hope in the present. My goal is to address the unique problems that arise for emerging adults in a Hypermodern context. Emerging adults are not merely looking for new markers for adulthood. They are looking for a new narrative that can inspire them to action and hold their hopes and dreams. Speaking about Hypermodern individuals, Charles writes, “It is because he is so constituted that he needs an ethics that is presented as spectacle – for this alone is able to move him and impel him to act.”¹² In other words, in the absence of a set past or future, experiences, i.e., spectacles, are required to inspire people into action; therefore, it is my argument that

¹⁰ Sébastien Charles, “Paradoxical Individualism: An Introduction to the Thought of Gilles Lipovetsky,” in *Hypermodern Times* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2005), 23.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

general revelation of the Godhead can be this “spectacle” that inspires emerging adults to both take action as well as enter a narrative that speaks to a full hope that can bring about an abundant life.

General Revelation

In order to get a complete view of general revelation, it is necessary to speak of its relationship to special revelation. Historically, general revelation has been defined through the lens of Christology as an encounter with the divine that happens outside the confines of the Church, its holy texts, and without direct reference to the person of Jesus.¹³ In *God’s Wider Presence: Reconsidering General Revelation*, Robert Johnston writes, “Typically, such general revelation has been defined as what can be known of God by all people at all times and in all places, if they would but look and listen. This knowledge (and it is knowledge, not divine encounter) is based on what can be inferred about God based on his creation and/or what can be intuited about God based on his creation of humankind in the *Imago Dei*.”¹⁴ On the other hand, special revelation is a term used to identify information about God that has been given to God’s people and has not been corrupted by humanity. For many people, scripture would fall into this category, as it is thought to be infallible and inerrant. In short, the main difference between general and special revelation is that special revelation requires a miracle – it requires that something happen beyond the reach and influence of humanity.

Unfortunately, this view of special revelation is problematic for two reasons. First, this understanding of revelation does not take into account the instances in scripture

¹³ Robert Johnston, *God’s Wider Presence: Reconsidering General Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), Kindle.

¹⁴ Ibid.

that clearly show God revealing God's self to people outside the community of believers. King Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 24), Balaam (Numbers 22) and Pharaoh (Genesis 12) are just a few examples of God revealing his power to people who would be considered outside the covenant community of God.¹⁵ Second, this view assumes that humanity has been so corrupted by sin that, even if God were to reveal God's self to humanity, humanity would distort the revelation to a point where it could no longer be viewed as perfect.¹⁶ In the previous chapter, I spoke about the problems that arise when one holds this view of original sin; therefore, there is no need for me to revisit that here. Adherents of this view of special revelation include such theologians as Karl Barth, Gerrit Berkouwer and N.T. Wright; however, it is clear that limiting God's revelation to the past (scripture) and the community of believers neither reflects the human experience nor scripture. I would agree with Johnston who argues that revelation is best viewed through the lens of Pneumatology. He writes: "We need to avoid [reducing] God's wider revelatory Presence to little more than the 'footprint' of God's past activity or subsume general revelation under salvation theology."¹⁷ In short, it is necessary that one have a hermeneutic that includes the Spirit revealing God in the present "through creation, conscience, and culture," because it is not through Christ that one experiences God in the present, it is through an encounter with the Holy Spirit that one experiences God and gets a glimpse of the divine.¹⁸ There is nothing in scripture to suggest that God limits

¹⁵ Robert Johnston, *God's Wider Presence: Reconsidering General Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), Kindle.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

revelation to humanity. The onus is always on humanity to be in a position to experience revelation. This is the posture of the prophet. This is the posture from which semioticians will be inspired to create metaphors and narratives that can hold the hope of emerging adults.

Agency in Art Objects

There are two main reasons why a revised understanding of general revelation is necessary if one is concerned with the development of spirituality within Emerging Adulthood. First, a Pneumatologically based understanding of revelation can hold the idea of God speaking through beauty. This is important because, as said by Pope John Paul II, “it will be beauty that will prove to be the church’s connection with its youth.”¹⁹ Second, according to a poll taken by Barna Group, currently twenty percent of Americans use forms of art and culture as their primary source for experiencing and expressing their spirituality, and by the year 2025, it is projected that the same amount of people will look to the arts for their spiritual formation as people who look to the Church.²⁰ I have already argued for a view of revelation that allows God to speak through creation. The next step is to explore how one might encounter the divine through art because, as stated by Johnston, “Why there is painting or poetry or music at all is precisely because through them we are at times ushered into the Presence of something ‘More.’”²¹

¹⁹ Pope John Paul II in Richard Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), 19.

²⁰ Robert Johnston, *God’s Wider Presence: Reconsidering General Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), Kindle.

²¹ Ibid.

The first issue that needs to be resolved is the idea of an art object holding the agency of God. In his work *Art And Agency: An Anthropological Theory*, Alfred Gell describes how it is possible for art objects to hold the agency of humans. My argument is that if humanity can express agency through art, God must be able to do the same, and what the Spirit expresses through an art object (revelation) is intended to inspire humanity to action. The danger in taking such a position on revelation is that the object could be viewed as God rather than an object through which God speaks. This is the concern of Barth, Berkouwer and Wright – that humanity, in their broken existence, would not be able to distinguish between God and God’s messenger; therefore, in order to address these concerns, more nuance is needed in my arguments concerning art objects and their ability to hold agency.

In his description of art objects, Gell describes two different kinds of social agents: primary and secondary agents.²² Within this argument, humans and God would be considered primary agents, as they carry autonomy. Art objects, on the other hand, are considered secondary agents because they only express the agency of primary agents within the context of social relationships.²³ In theological terms, this would create the necessary divide between God (primary agent) and an art object (secondary agent). Gell uses the relationship between a soldier and a landmine to describe the relationship between a primary and secondary agent. The soldier does not have to be present in order for the landmine to express agency (explode) upon another agent; however, by exploding,

²² Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), Kindle.

²³ Ibid.

the mine gives one a glimpse of the characteristics and intent of the primary agent.²⁴ The one experiencing the mine can deduce that the one who placed the mine there intended to do harm through the mine, and, in the same way art objects can hold the agency of humans, they can hold the agency of the divine.

This also creates the necessary divide between God and scripture. Whereas Barth, Berkouwer and Wright have concerns about objects holding the agency of the Godhead, they seem unconcerned with this approach applying to the scriptures. This is a dangerous approach because it offers a solution without actually addressing the concerns around idolatry. Naming one object that can retain the agency of the Godhead does not eliminate the possibility of an object becoming godlike. It merely limits the possibilities of what can become an idol. Even if one limits the special revelation of God to the text, one must still face the reality that the text can become an idol. If one is going to approach the idea of the Trinity as a theological imperative, the scripture cannot be God – it must be less than God; therefore, without an understanding of revelation that allows the agency of God to be contained within a created object, it is impossible to both hold a high view of scripture and for scripture to not be God. I realize that arguing for an understanding of scripture that views it as an art object is a book unto itself; however, I believe that we are already experiencing the fruit of what happens when one places the scriptures on the same level as God, and it is not ripe. I will address this idea further in the coming chapter on generational trends.

²⁴ Ibid.

Inspiring Emerging Adults: The Burning Bush

Considering the stories humanity has of God engaging humanity through secondary agents, Gell's example immediately reminded me of the burning bush in Exodus. The story of Moses and the burning bush brings up five important points regarding revelation. First, experiencing God's revelation requires that one have a specific posture before God, i.e., Moses was required to remove his sandals. Second, God's revelation to Moses calls him into a relationship, as he is invited to encounter God.²⁵ Third, God's revelation to Moses was within the realm of human perception. God allowed Moses to feel the warmth of the burning bush, see his skin fill with leprosy, and watch his staff turn into a snake.²⁶ Fourth, God's revelation inspired Moses to action, as Moses trades in the identity of a shepherd for the identity of a revolutionary.²⁷ Fifth, the revelation experienced by Moses speaks to a hope that includes Moses' past, present, and future. For example, in Exodus, the author writes:

Then he said, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.' At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God. The Lord said, 'I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the land of the Egyptians and bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey.'²⁸

In other words, God approaches Moses in a way that allows him to find confidence that he is following the God of his ancestors (past), comfort that God has heard the cries of the Israelite slaves (present), and a desire to move toward a more abundant life (future).

²⁵ Ex. 3:6 (NRSV).

²⁶ Ex. 3:2, 4:1-7 (NRSV).

²⁷ Ex. 3-13 (NRSV).

²⁸ Ex. 3:6-8 (NRSV).

Before the moment Moses encountered the burning bush, he was a shepherd – wandering the wilderness and tending his flock; however, after encountering the Divine Presence, Moses becomes the liberator of an oppressed people group. I do not believe that this is a coincidence; therefore, it is my argument that the story of Moses experiencing the Divine Presence through a burning bush can be used as a model for contemporary emerging adults that are looking to construct meaning and a hope that touches on their past, present and future.

Emerging adults are like Moses before his encounter with the burning bush. They are wandering around the wilderness, completely consumed by their present. They may not be watching herds of sheep, but their posture is the same. Unfortunately, it is unrealistic to believe that a burning bush will present itself to every emerging adult; therefore, my argument will revolve around the idea of God revealing God's self through art objects, but, before I begin, a theology of aesthetic is needed. In *Theological Aesthetics: God In Imagination, Beauty, and Art*, Richard Viladesau concisely defines a theology of aesthetic as “a form of theology that depends on the aesthetic realm for its language, content, method, and theory: the conjunction of theology with the practice of imaginative and/or beautiful discourse.”²⁹ The combination of aesthetic and theology produces a type of theology that shapes a community through narrative and image – the lingua franca of the semiotician.³⁰ As expressed in the works of Barth, Berkouwer and Wright, the danger of holding a theology of aesthetic alongside a theology of revelation that allows art objects to hold the agency of God is that the art object might become an

²⁹ Richard Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), 19.

³⁰ Ibid., 20.

idol – looked upon as God rather than as an object God speaks through; however, the danger of holding onto a theology that limits God to scripture and the traditions of the Church invites a complementary danger. As stated by Johnston, it can drive one to “not trusting oneself to recognize the divine in the quotidian [and] lead to the unintended consequence of sloth.”³¹ Both positions hold inherent dangers; however, since it is clear from my research concerning emerging adults that stagnation, or sloth, is often a defining characteristic and/or hurdle for this demographic, it makes sense to make use of a theology that would speak to that problem.

Five Points: Posture, Relationship, Sensation, Inspiration, and Hope

The posture one takes in the presence of art is the first point that needs to be considered when building a theology of aesthetic. In *Refractions: A Journey of Faith, Art, and Culture*, Makoto Fujimura describes a time he went to go see the Fra Angelico exhibit at the Met. He writes, “After a few seconds of pondering the saturated surface, I had to close my eyes. I realized this was too much to behold all at once.”³² Fujimura, like Moses, had to hide his face in the presence of such beauty. In that moment, Fujimura caught an overwhelming glimpse of the Divine Presence, and he realized he was standing on holy ground.³³ Therefore, the first step to experiencing the Divine Presence in art is to enter the space with a posture that recognizes the Divine Presence.

³¹ Robert Johnston, *God's Wider Presence: Reconsidering General Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), Kindle.

³² Makoto Fujimura, *Refractions: A Journey of Faith, Art, and Culture* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2009), 141.

³³ *Ibid.*, 142.

The second point that needs to be addressed is the idea of entering into a relationship with God through a piece of art (secondary agent). Gerard van der Leeuw stated, “art by its nature reveals ‘the other.’”³⁴ Therefore, right from the beginning, it is clear that there is a subject/subject interaction that occurs when one experiences a piece of art – the agency of the viewer interacts with the agency being held in the art object.³⁵ Using Martin Buber’s language from *I and Thou*, revelation occurs when “YOUR presence calls ME into an open-ended relationship.”³⁶ This is what I described as the posture of the prophet in my earlier chapter. From this prophetic posture, something of the Divine is revealed to humanity.³⁷ And just like God using the burning bush to draw Moses into a relationship with God, God is able to use art to draw someone into a relationship.

The third point that must be addressed is the idea that humanity needs God’s revelation to occur within the realm of human sensation. The reasons for this are clear, as no amount of revelation would be beneficial for humanity if it could not be perceived; therefore, art objects do not represent an answer to a question about revelation as much as they serve as an example of ways in which God’s revelation can be perceived by humanity.³⁸ Braiterman writes, “For their part, art and aesthetic form open religion further out into the world of sense and sensation...From this point of departure, the shape

³⁴ Richard Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), 19.

³⁵ Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), Kindle.

³⁶ Zachary Braiterman, *The Shape of Revelation: Aesthetics and Modern Jewish Thought* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), XXVii.

³⁷ Jonathan Brant, *Paul Tillich and the Possibility of Revelation through Film* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 69.

³⁸ Richard Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), 54.

of revelation and its ethos ride upon ‘the science of perception.’”³⁹ In short, Revelation is limited to the boundaries of human perception, and art serves as a vehicle through which God can reveal God’s self.

The fourth point speaks to the inspiring power of revelation, and represents the moment in which semiotics comes into the picture, as it is the place from which new metaphors and narratives are born in light of the revelatory experience. Viladesau argue that there are two characteristics of an encounter with God – “it is simultaneously awesome and desirable.”⁴⁰ In fact, it is so awesome and desirable that it invites reverence and inspires one to take action.⁴¹ Within the story of Moses, God is the agent that creates an awesome object and experience – the burning bush; however, it is important to note that it was not the burning bush that inspired Moses to take action, but the Divine Presence that was revealed through the burning bush. In other words, it may be possible for a semiotician to enchant the audience with an artful creation; however, it is always the Divine Presence that transforms and inspires the audience to action.

Lastly, the fifth point states that it is vital that revelation speaks to the past, present, and future hope of the one receiving said revelation. I imagine Moses’ response to the revelation of God would have gone differently if God had not self-identified as the God of his forefathers, spoke to the present suffering of the Israelites, and promised to lead the Israelites to an abundant future. Moses was presented with a narrative that spoke to the goodness of God in the past, present and future, and, as a result, he was launched

³⁹ Zachary Braiterman, *The Shape of Revelation: Aesthetics and Modern Jewish Thought* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), XXX.

⁴⁰ Richard Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), 36.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 124.

into a life that would prove to be filled with abundance. This is my hope for emerging adults in present day America – that they would find the abundant life that Jesus promises, and I believe art objects can be vehicles that God uses to reveal what that abundant life looks like for emerging adults today.

An EPIC Telling

The next issue that needs to be addressed is the creation of objects by humans that hold the agency of the divine. Where the story of Moses serves as a good example of what an object needs to contain in order to effectively inspire a complex hope within an individual, the reality is that the burning bush was an object created by God. Now, I do not want to argue that God could not speak to someone in a similar fashion if God chose such a route; however, I do want to argue that it is more common, by far, for people to experience the Divine Presence through an object that was constructed through natural means rather than a miraculous event that transcends the natural order of things. In a way, Christians already have a category for this possibility, as scripture is believed to be both a product of humanity and a place where one can experience the Divine Presence. Written by men and women, the scriptures have been a continual source of divine inspiration throughout history. Unfortunately, it is too often the case that one side of the equation gets voided. Mixing humanity with the divine can make people feel uncomfortable; however, if the incarnation teaches us anything, it should be that the combination of humanity and the divine inevitably makes people feel pretty uncomfortable. Fortunately, the incarnation also teaches us that it is by humanity interacting and infusing with the divine that one can get a glimpse of the abundant life for which we are all desperately searching. Without this interaction being a primary component of the Christian faith,

Jesus would not have been necessary, and the Christian faith would become nothing more than a series of ethical propositions in a book that have very little cultural relevance for contemporary America. Humanity needs more than just a book that talks about God or a god that is too big to be known. Humanity needs the incarnation if it wants to experience the divine.

In his book *Giving Blood: A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching*, Dr. Len Sweet offers the reader suggestions for creating sermons that ignite the imagination and inspire communities to holy action in our current digital age. His suggestions may be for preparing a sermon; however, I believe Dr. Sweet's suggestions for creating an EPIC sermon can also serve as a larger template that one can use to create art objects that gives humanity a glimpse of the Divine Presence. A sermon's general intention is to tell people about God; however, there is no reason that this telling cannot be done in a way that is both artistic and culturally significant. EPIC is an acronym used by Dr. Sweet that stands for Experiential, Participatory, Image-Rich and Connective.⁴² In the third chapter of his book, Dr. Sweet explains the structure and benefits of an EPIC sermon. He writes, "EPIC stands for the four hallmarks of the interface that works in a digital culture. Preaching in an EPIC style is the mix of craft and craftiness, practice and creativity, tradition and innovation required to create an atmosphere of receptivity and play. It squares the power of a narraphoric message with hands-on participation and story sharing."⁴³ Similar to my depiction of Moses' experience with the burning bush, Dr. Sweet argues that there are certain characteristics within a created object, like a sermon, that makes the experience of

⁴² Leonard Sweet, *Giving Blood: A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 43, Kindle.

⁴³ Ibid.

that object accessible as well as transformative for the intended audience. Other than the posture one has going into the experience, which he talks about at length in the second part of the book, EPIC is very similar to the categories of Relationship, Sensation, Inspiration, and Hope that I spoke about in the story of Moses and the burning bush; therefore, as a way to bring more clarity to my arguments on how a human might construct something that brings one into an experience with the Divine Presence, I will draw from Dr. Sweets work on EPIC.

Like I mentioned earlier, the story of Moses and the burning bush offers one a great example of how an EPIC event can inspire one toward an abundant life; however, this example is also unhelpful as it is not relatable to the average human experience. In the story, it was a divine agent that created the burning bush event; therefore, the audience did not have to experience the Divine Presence through the lens of a human created object or experience. In other words, the Divine Presence was both the artist and the inspiration for Moses – an important fact that leaves the reader with little doubt that God was behind the encounter. This is a wonderful story, but, unfortunately, it is not a story in which many people can relate; therefore, it is my argument that a more common and, thus, more helpful interaction would see God as the inspiration and a person as the artist.

To construct an interaction such as this, it is beneficial to briefly return to the posture of the prophet. As I previously mentioned, before a prophet creates or says anything, a prophet must have the proper posture before God. God is always in a position that is turned toward humanity; therefore, it is up to humanity to turn toward God for an encounter to take place. Nowhere else is this concept better encapsulated than in the

Hebrew word *hee-nay-nee*. Translated “here am I,” this word represents a response to the Divine Presence - a turning toward God. In the case of the prophet, when they turn toward God and experience that inspiration, they create things that mirror the desires of God. Whether it is through a sermon or a painting, the Divine Presence is experienced in a way that both inspires and transforms the community; however, even though the Divine Presence is the agent that inspires and transforms, it seems that the aesthetical structure of that mirroring is largely at the discretion of the prophet. In other words, the space that exists between the prophet’s encounter with the Divine Presence and the object they were inspired to create is the creative sweet spot where semioticians can construct EPIC metaphors and narratives that point the way to the Divine Presence, or, as Bruce Lee puts it in *Enter the Dragon*, “It is like a finger pointing a way to the moon. Don’t concentrate on the finger, or you will miss all that heavenly glory.”⁴⁴ Semioticians can create objects that point to the Divine Presence; however, they must also be careful not to distract the audience from the Presence to which they are pointing.

Before I go any further, it is important to note that it is not my intention to declare that God no longer interacts with humanity in a miraculous way or that God is limited in God’s ability to use things that are not up to a certain aesthetical standard. If God wanted to speak to someone today through a burning bush or a horrendous piece of art, there is no reason to believe that God could not do such a thing; however, I would argue that those examples are not the norm, as they represent miraculous encounters. On the surface, it might look like I am arguing that there is little to no value in the story of the burning bush for contemporary Christians, but, on the contrary, I believe there is a large

⁴⁴ *Enter the Dragon*, directed by Robert Clouse (Warner Brothers, 1973), Blu-ray (Warner Home Video, 2013).

amount of wisdom to be gleaned from this story. One just needs to look in the right place. Instead of looking at the miracles as a sign of what happens whenever someone turns toward God, one should view this as an example of what happens when someone reflects what was given to them by God back onto their community. God was EPIC in the interaction with Moses, and Moses mirrored that EPIC-ness onto the Egyptians and Israelites. Most likely, the average person is never going to turn a staff into a snake or turn an entire body of water into blood; however, the average person does hold the same choice that Moses had when he heard the voice of God calling him from within the burning bush – to reflect or not to reflect. Therefore, I argue that just as Moses reflected the EPIC nature of God onto his community, we too should be reflectors of that EPIC nature in our communities. This reflection is not going to look the same for everyone. People have different talents and resources; however, the posture that produces such reflections is one in the same.

The tools for creating an EPIC experience are numerous and continually expand as technology progresses, and the Divine Presence can use all of them to be known. Thankfully, it is not humanity's responsibility to be and/or create the Divine Presence; humanity is called to do the work that allows the Divine Presence to be seen more clearly. It is probably not going to look like a staff transforming into a snake, but it should not be any less EPIC. God is always speaking and initiating; however, like Isaiah, humanity must turn to the voice and say, "Here am I; send me!"⁴⁵ The artist turns to God and responds by producing something that reflects that interaction. That response can be the form of an object or event that gives people a glimpse of the world as God sees it. "Here am I" speaks to the intent of the piece. Sure, God can use anything God wishes for

⁴⁵ Isa. 6:8 (NRSV).

God's purposes; however, when it comes to wanting to be a part of what God is doing in creation, there is a path to follow. If one wants to give someone a glimpse of the Divine Presence through his or her work, it requires that one turns to God and reflects that encounter onto one's work. What that object will look like is up to the artist; however, it is clear that it should be EPIC. In short, the prophetic provides the structure – whether it is through painting or verse, and God provides the Presence that transforms. This is the relationship between the prophet and God, EPIC and Presence.

Fight Club: A Modern Example of the EPIC Prophetic

A great example of an EPIC piece of art that speaks to the hope of the Millennial generation is the movie *Fight Club*. Straddling the line between insanity and prophetic, this narrative has all the telltale signs of a prophetic experience. The Narrator, played by Edward Norton, experiences words and visions that come from outside the ordinary channels of communication. He begins to see and interact with a person that is not of this earth – Tyler Durden, and this experience begins to change the way the Narrator perceives and interacts with the world. Tyler, played by Brad Pitt, describes himself as the ideal version of Norton's character. He states, "All the ways you wish you could be, that's me. I look like you wanna look, I fuck like you wanna fuck, I am smart, capable, and most importantly, I am free in all the ways that you are not."⁴⁶ In other words, similar to the prophet, Tyler sees and interacts with the world in a way that transcends the socially acceptable narratives. He even lives in a rundown house on the outskirts of society; however, the most important characteristic that is shared between the narrator and prophets is that they both challenge the cultural narratives that rule over society and

⁴⁶ *Fight Club*, directed by David Fincher (Fox 2000 Picture), Blu-ray (20th Century Fox, 2009).

unveil them as hopeless pits of despair. Unfortunately, and similar to the prophet texts from the Christian tradition, there are communities within Christianity that are offering bad interpretations of this piece of art and, thus, are offering theologies and practices that miss the point of the text as well as the message of Jesus. In short, as a bad reading of the book of Revelation produced the ideas behind the “End Times,” a bad viewing of *Fight Club* has produced Fight Church.

In a documentary entitled *Fight Church*, one is given a glimpse into the world of Christian communities that believe creating fight clubs within the walls of their churches is a beneficial way to communicate and be formed in the gospel. Within this documentary, one finds local pastors fighting each other on Saturday and then preaching in their respective churches on Sunday, children being formed in a narrative that champions violence, and Christians cheering on their favorite pastoral gladiator. In this way, the creators of these practices entirely miss the prophetic message of the film and affirm the very cultural narratives the film is challenging. Yes, the movie *Fight Club* is about people that fight, and, if this was the extent of the movie, these fight churches would be right on point; however, this does not reflect the main idea of *Fight Club*. In *Fight Club*, fighting is used as a way to help reorient a person’s vision of society – it is a metaphor for the process of deconstruction; however, within these church communities, fighting is viewed as a literal manifestation of the Spirit and used as a way to violently reinforce the Christian message. In what can only be described as a violent twist of the gospel, the message of Jesus – that calls one to love one’s enemy, turn the other cheek and believe if one lives by the sword, one dies by the sword – is manipulated in a way that turns one’s violent urges away from one’s enemy and onto one’s own communities.

By turning this violence inward, these communities are participating in a paradox that forms people in violence on Saturday and preaches against the violence of the world on Sunday. In other words, in an attempt to be relevant to the violent culture in which they find themselves, these communities have given up the core metaphors and narratives of Jesus. They forget that one's ability to love others is intrinsically linked to our ability to love oneself, or, as it says in Matthew 22:39, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."⁴⁷ I do not know if this inward violence is the result of Augustine's influence on Christianity - that would have humanity believe it is inherently "fallen," but I do know that the results of this type of inward violence and hatred is in no way healthy, beneficial or reflective of the message of Jesus.

If the main point of *Fight Club* was fighting, I imagine the final scene of the movie would have felt more like *Kickboxer* than *The Usual Suspects*; therefore, instead of finding the most epic physical fight of the movie, one simply finds Edward Norton's character in a room that looks over the entire city. This birds-eye view of the city is a beautiful image of the prophet's view of the world. He has taken himself out of the hustle and bustle of the city in order to see the world as it is, and, after a final engagement with Tyler Durden, Norton's character looks out upon his city as if for the first time. He has the taste of metal from the gun that just went off in his mouth, he smells the smoke from the gun powder, he hears the rumble of the explosions going off throughout the city, and he feels the touch of the hand of his companion as they both watch the temples of debt come tumbling down. It is all very EPIC, and, like any EPIC movie, the audience is drawn into the experience of the character and, for a second, it almost feels like you are there with Norton's character contemplating the journey that has brought you there. So as

⁴⁷ Matt 22:39 (NRSV).

the Narrator takes the hand of his companion, looks out onto the destruction that he has created, and “Where Is My Mind” by The Pixies slowly fades in, the audience is drawn into an experience that both challenges and transforms. In this moment, the audience is asked to sit in an odd tension. It is clear that Norton’s character is sorry for how this destruction has come to pass; however, it is also clear that the result was completely necessary. He may not have agreed with the way in which Tyler brought down these oppressive structures, but, at the same time, he is not condemning the fall of these structures. For a Millennial, this is a very powerful image, and, just like the metaphors in the book of Revelation were intended to challenge the narratives of power within the Roman Empire and inspire Christians to holy action, the metaphors in *Fight Club* are intended to both call out modern narratives that kill hope and inspire people to take a different path. The purpose of these prophetic metaphors is not to mimic the actions found therein. The purpose is to allow these pieces of art to give humanity the ability to see the world from a higher perspective. Millennials are not in need of a fight club that will form them in violence and self-hatred. Millennials are in need of metaphors and narratives that unveil the systems of power that rob them of their agency and hope.

Emerging Prophetic

It is clear that emerging adults are not without hope as much as their hope is stuck in the present. I have argued that art objects can be a beneficial place for individuals to experience revelation from God; therefore, they can also be a place that can inspire emerging adults to take action in creating an abundant life. Overall, this is a general statement, as the idea of an abundant life is going to look different for each individual; however, even though the results will look different, the hardships emerging adults are

facing today are similar. In *Paul Tillich and the Possibility of Revelation through Film*, Jonathan Brant writes, “The experience of revelation through art brings limited but important healing. The Spiritual Presence empowers the individual, bringing faith to overcome essential anxiety and existential despair, and love to overcome estrangement and broken and damaged relationship.”⁴⁸ Therefore, my arguments were not intended to be a prescription for how every emerging adult needs to live. My goal was to offer a posture that emerging adults could enter into that would address their specific needs and inspire them toward an abundant life – whatever that might look like. This posture is inherently prophetic and semiotic, as it begins with a turning toward God and ends with a reflection of that divine encounter.

⁴⁸ Jonathan Brant, *Paul Tillich and the Possibility of Revelation through Film* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 73.

CHAPTER 4:

PILGRIMAGE

Your hearts know in silence the secrets of the days and the nights.
But your ears thirst for the sound of your heart's knowledge.
You would know in words that which you have always known in thought.
You would touch with your fingers the naked body of your dreams.

— Kahlil Gibran. *The Prophet*

Where the first three chapters served to provide better definition for the milieu of Emerging Adults in America, the fourth chapter will be both an extension of the ideas I developed in the third chapter around prophetic aesthetic and an exploration of the connections between pilgrimage and Emerging Adulthood. The goal of this chapter is twofold. First, I will delve into the world of pilgrimage and look to identify key characteristics that make a pilgrimage a transformative experience for pilgrims. My research will not be limited to Christian pilgrimage, as I will draw from a number of traditions to give better depth to my research. Second, I will compare the journey of pilgrims to the journey of emerging adults. By finding common ground between the processes of pilgrimage and Emerging Adulthood, I hope to uncover wisdom that emerging adults can use to create meaning from their experience and, from that meaning, figure out what it means to live into a life full of hope and abundance.

Where to Start

The practice of pilgrimage can be traced back thousands of years and spans a plethora of traditions. The benefit of this rich history is that there is an abundance of resources one can use to research pilgrimage. The drawback of such a storied history is

that it is neither possible nor beneficial to construct an overarching structure that neatly fits all pilgrimages. Even though pilgrimage is something that can be undertaken by a group of people, the experience and structure of each pilgrimage is inevitably dependent upon the unique context of the journey and the inner world of the individuals who are embarking upon this adventure. Some anthropologists, like Victor and Edith Turner, believe that, even though all pilgrimages do not look the same, they share common characteristics that tie them together – *communitas* and *liminality*.¹ Yet other authors, like John Eade and Michael Sallnow, disagree and believe that there is too much complexity within the broad subject of pilgrimage to ascribe universal themes.² As I build my arguments, I will draw from the work of those on both sides of the fence; however, what distinguishes my work from the work of anthropologists like the Turners, Eade and Sallnow is that my goal is not only to study pilgrimage, but to use it as a metaphor for Emerging Adulthood. Where the anthropologist's work stops at examining pilgrimages, my goal is to take things a step further. I will borrow the wisdom that I gain from researching different types of pilgrimage and bring it into the world of Emerging Adulthood. My hope is that the wisdom gained from the study of pilgrimage can better help emerging adults find meaning, hope and abundance.

When it comes to the study of pilgrimage, one thing quickly becomes apparent. It is clear that the work of Victor and Edith Turner is the place to start. In *Image and Pilgrimage*, The Turners argued that there are two universal experiences associated with pilgrimage: *communitas* and *liminality*. *Communitas* represents the great leveling of

¹ Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), Kindle.

² John Eade and Michael Sallnow, *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2013), 15.

social status that occurs on pilgrimage, and liminality represents the transition one goes through when one steps out of their day-to-day life and begins their pilgrimage. The Turners believed that when people go on a pilgrimage they shed the labels of society that create unequal power dynamics and, by bonding over their shared liminal experience, are brought to a place of complete egalitarianism.³ Even though this anti-structural experience is found in many pilgrimages, it is clear from the work of other anthropologists that these are in no way universal characteristics of all pilgrimages; however, it is also clear that, even though there are many scholarly arguments against the ideas of the Turners, their work continues to both serve as a starting point within the study of pilgrimage and inspire contemporary works in the field.⁴ All that being said, I will be using the ideas of *communitas* and liminality in my construction of an Emerging Adulthood pilgrimage, as I believe these themes are present within the experience of emerging adults; however, *communitas* and liminality represent just two themes I will draw from within the greater tradition of pilgrimage.

What is Pilgrimage?

In *Contesting the Sacred*, Eade and Sallnow describe pilgrimage as a product of religious imagination.⁵ They write, “[Pilgrimage] is a cultural expression that is imagined, defined, and articulated within cultural practices.”⁶ In other words, pilgrimage

³ Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), Kindle.

⁴ Ellen Badone and Sharon Roseman, *Intersecting Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage and Tourism* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 2, Kindle.

⁵ John Eade and Michael Sallnow, *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2013), 78.

⁶ Ibid., 120.

can be many different things to many different people. For some, pilgrimage is a physical journey to a place that they believe has been visited by the divine, and for others, pilgrimage is an inward journey to the center of the soul.⁷ Within some contexts, pilgrimages are obligatory and serve as a kind of rite of passage for specific populations; however, more modern forms of pilgrimage are mostly voluntary and serve a multitude of purposes for those on the journey.⁸ If one is from the Orthodox Christian tradition, pilgrimage follows the liturgical calendar and is a movement of the community; however, if one is Catholic or Protestant, pilgrimage is more individualized and serves to be inspirational for those individuals choosing to go.⁹ A pilgrimage has the potential to be the greatest and most influential experience of one's life. It can be an arduous journey where one looks to serve penance for past sins as a way to receive healing or earn salvation, or it can simply serve as a release from the obligations of the quotidian.¹⁰ Sometimes pilgrimage is not tied to a specific site or object but, rather, an idea. For example, in *Intersecting Journeys*, Ellen Badone and Sharon Roseman describe the pilgrimage of going to a Star Trek convention. The location of Star Trek conventions are not limited to a specific place; however, the people that make the pilgrimage to a Star Trek convention are connected by the core ideas of the creator of Star Trek – Gene Roddenberry. The IDIC ethic of Star Trek serves as the “root paradigm” – the ethos that

⁷ Simon Coleman and John Eade, *Reframing Pilgrimage: Cultures in Motion* (New York: Routledge, 2005), Kindle.

⁸ Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), Kindle.

⁹ John Eade and Michael Sallnow, *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2013), 46.

¹⁰ Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), Kindle.

is behind all images at a pilgrimage site – for the pilgrimage and gives structure to the happenings therein.¹¹

It is clear that the diversity found within the structure of pilgrimage is almost infinite, and there is no reason to believe that the diversity will not continue to grow with culture. For example, in *Pilgrimage: The Sacred Art*, Dr. Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook talks about the emergence of virtual pilgrimages. With computers, one can create and interact with a virtual “mythscape” and connect with fellow digital pilgrims.¹² However, even with all the abundant diversity and constant emergence of new pilgrimages, there are three stages that regularly appear within many of the structured pilgrimages. Joseph Campbell and Arnold van Gennep identify these stages as: separation, transition and incorporation.¹³ Separation is the first action of the pilgrim, as it is the process of removing oneself from one’s past structures and entering a liminal phase. The transition stage is also referred to as an invitation - as in an invitation to experience something new. Lastly, the stage of incorporation represents the return home from one’s journey. I found these stages extremely helpful when it comes to constructing a narrative for emerging adults; therefore, as I bring Emerging Adulthood into the conversation with pilgrimage, I will use these three stages as important markers for emerging adults as they make their journey into adulthood.

My final thoughts on the structure of pilgrimage will be dedicated to exploring the difference between a pilgrim and a tourist. Many of the authors I have read believe that

¹¹ Ellen Badone and Sharon Roseman, *Intersecting Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage and Tourism* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 165, Kindle.

¹² Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook, *Pilgrimage – The Sacred Art: Journey to the Center of the Heart* (Vermont: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2013), Kindle.

¹³ Ibid.

there are many similarities between a pilgrim and a tourist. Victor Turner writes, “A pilgrim is half a tourist, and a tourist is half a pilgrim. Both seek sacred *communitas*.”¹⁴ I agree that there are many overlapping characteristics between pilgrimage and tourism; however, I also believe there are many important differences that will play a major role when I incorporate Emerging Adulthood into the conversation. The most important distinction is in the third stage of pilgrimage – the return home. The question that needs to be asked when distinguishing between a tourist and a pilgrim is: Does one return home changed? Turner writes, “Pilgrimage is a hard journey that gives one a new perspective on life...upon return, it also has the tendency to renew the old social structures.”¹⁵ In other words, pilgrimage is something that prompts change in the individual and, through that individual, the environment to which the pilgrim is returning. Tourism, on the other hand, is something that resembles a vacation more than a pilgrimage. It may share the first two stages of pilgrimage; however, the journey is viewed more as a break from the day-to-day for the sake of having a break. One may return home refreshed; however, they return to encounter the same world they left behind without thought of change. This is not to say that someone that is on vacation is limited to the label of tourist. It is not completely out of the ordinary for one’s plans of a nice leisurely vacation to get interrupted by an unexpected life-changing experience that prompts one to make changes in their personal life upon returning home. In this way, pilgrimage is a journey that can be both intentional and unexpected; however, knowing how difficult many pilgrimage experiences can be, it is best to prepare oneself, whenever possible, for the journey that

¹⁴ Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), Kindle.

¹⁵ Ibid.

lie ahead, and the best way to accomplish this goal is for one to familiarize oneself with what is likely to be experienced on a pilgrimage.

From Moses to Ruth: What is Experienced along the Way

What is experienced on a pilgrimage is just as unique as the structure of pilgrimage. Pilgrimage is a journey of the senses, and we all sense things differently.¹⁶ In this way, the experience of the pilgrimage is a continuation of engaging the prophetic aesthetic. Just like Moses sitting before the burning bush, a pilgrimage engages all of one's senses and gives one a glimpse of the divine, and, just like the appearance of the burning bush, a pilgrimage opportunity can appear out of the blue. Whether one is walking through a museum or taking a stroll through the streets of one's neighborhood, one can come in contact with the Divine Presence in a way that ignites the senses and transforms. Being able to perceive what is happening on one's pilgrimage is paramount when it comes to the impact of the experience; however, what is actually sensed on one's pilgrimage is going to be unique to each individual. In her book *Pilgrimage of a Soul*, Phileena Heuertz offers the reader seven movements of pilgrimage that encapsulate well what can be experienced on a pilgrimage: awakening, longing, darkness, death, transformation, intimacy; union.¹⁷ Knowing the names of these movements is one thing, however, feeling the weight of them and moving within them is another. To successfully navigate these movements, one must also have the internal tools that are necessary to act within them, i.e., agency.

¹⁶ Jennifer Westwood, *On Pilgrimage: Sacred Journeys around the World* (New Jersey: Hidden Spring, 2003), 179.

¹⁷ Phileena Heuertz, *Pilgrimage of a Soul: Contemplative Spirituality for the Active Life* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 21, Kindle.

In the third chapter, I used Moses as an example of how the Spirit inspires action in God's people, and where I could continue to use Moses' story as an example for pilgrimage, I believe the story of Ruth is more beneficial when considering the modern nature of pilgrimage. The problem with Moses' story is that his experiences of God are hard to relate to in a modern context. I do not know of too many people that were lucky enough to have a burning bush show up and tell them exactly what to do with their life and then have spirals of cloud and fire guide them to their destiny. The story of Ruth, on the other hand, is about a woman that experiences God through relationships and her environment. At the outset of her journey, she knows something important is happening; however, she does not know the outcome. Instead of being given a concise plan from a burning bush, Ruth is given, "As it happened," as if the author is saying it was by chance she encountered a situation that offered transformation, and it was up to her to engage to receive God's blessing.¹⁸

Ruth was launched into her journey by an unexpected crisis – a common story for those on pilgrimage.¹⁹ Ruth's husband dies and there is a famine in the land. In other words, almost all of the things that gave her meaning in her life had disappeared. Ruth experiences some epic darkness and death; however, she also finds the courage to persevere and be transformed along the way. This is why Campbell and Gennep speak of the liminal space of pilgrimage as an invitation – one is being invited to engage something that will inevitably transform their life. Now, this as-it-happened view of life is kind of a scary reality to consider; however, I argue it reflects a more accurate

¹⁸ Ruth 2:3 (NRSV).

¹⁹ Simon Coleman and John Eade, *Reframing Pilgrimage: Cultures in Motion* (New York: Routledge, 2005), Kindle.

representation of what people actually experience in their life, as opposed to the experience of Moses. This is why engaging one's senses are so important. Without being mindful of what is being experienced, the weight of the moment is lost, and one begins to move into the realm of tourism. Even though Ruth was not given a direct revelation from God, she was able to recognize the importance of the moment and move into it well. This is something to which the average person can relate.

Emerging Adulthood as Pilgrimage

In order to see the connection between Emerging Adulthood and pilgrimage more clearly, it is beneficial to revisit the experience of emerging adults. The initial crisis that launches emerging adults into their journey toward adulthood is the realization that there is no longer a clear path toward adulthood – as the markers previous generations used to solidify their entrance into adulthood are no longer viable options. Emerging Adulthood is a stage marked by identity exploration/formation and characterized by feelings of liminality, instability and possibility. It is a time to experience new things and places; however it is also a time that is set apart so one may explore the depths of one's own soul. Within Emerging Adulthood, one experiences a time of unparalleled choice and almost unrestricted freedom. Similar to Ruth, the hope of emerging adults is formed through relationship and linked to a desire to find a home in an unpredictable world. The primary purpose of this home is to protect the hopes and dreams of the emerging adult.²⁰ The relationships forged in this process provide a safe space for young people to discover who they are as well as gifts the imagination of the emerging adult with images of an

²⁰ Sharon Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams* (San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass, 2000), 157.

abundant life.²¹ In other words, Emerging Adulthood is a pilgrimage. Both the obstacles associated with pilgrimage and the actions prompted by these obstacles parallel those found in Emerging Adulthood, and both journeys revolve around creating home and identity within a context that is essentially unique; therefore, it is my argument that the wisdom used to navigate pilgrimage can transfer to Emerging Adulthood. There is very little history or wisdom on what it means to navigate Emerging Adulthood; however, there is a rich history and wisdom associated with what it means to undertake a pilgrimage well. From this rich history, I will explore how the pilgrim's wisdom around home and identity can be beneficial for those journeying through Emerging Adulthood.

Finding a Home Takes Time: The Boon is the Story

In *Pilgrimage: The Sacred Art*, Dr. Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook writes, "Like the characters in *The Wizard of Oz*, some go on pilgrimage seeking meaning; some are looking for their heart's desire; other want to heal; and still others hope to find a more authentic home."²² This is a wonderful analogy for pilgrimage, as it speaks to its individualized nature; however, it is also a little misleading as it compartmentalizes the characteristics of pilgrimage into different persons. It is better to view the characters in *The Wizard of Oz* as representing themes rather than individual pilgrims – especially when considering Emerging Adulthood. Emerging Adulthood is a journey that can last years, and one finding meaning, healing, desire and a home are all expeditions that one engages along the way at different times. There are going to be times, when digging into the depths of their soul, that one recognizes they need healing. Healing, then, becomes

²¹ Sharon Parks, "Social Vision and Moral Courage: Mentoring a New Generation," *Cross Currents* 40, no. 3 (1990): 60.

²² Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook, *Pilgrimage – The Sacred Art: Journey to the Center of the Heart* (Vermont: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2013), Kindle.

the primary focus of one's journey; however, there is also going to come a time when one desires to find intimacy and meaning, and the idea of finding a home becomes one's primary goal. Pilgrimage is a journey that ushers one into a deeper level of life by challenging every part of the individual. Cousineau writes, "Pilgrimage is the art of reimagining how we walk, talk, listen, see, hear, write, and draw as we ready for the journey of our soul's deep desire."²³ In other words, it is a process that transforms the identity of the individual as well as the way they experience the world. It is unreasonable to believe this process happens quickly or that one's desires are met all at once. Acquiring one's identity and a sense of home is a process that takes place over the course of the entire journey and may not even occur until the journey comes to a close.²⁴

I think Victor Turner was onto something when he described a pilgrimage as an ellipses rather than a straight line.²⁵ In Turner's case, he was referring to how pilgrimage is made up of several smaller journeys; however, in the case of Emerging Adulthood, this metaphor carries an additional meaning. As well as being viewed as a collection of small journeys, the journey of Emerging Adulthood is still being written. Many of the first pilgrims of Emerging Adulthood (Millennials) are still on the journey. Society is just now at a point where the first stories of these pilgrimages are being heard, and the wisdom gleaned from his first round of stories is going to be the foundation on which the practices of future emerging adults are based. Turner writes, "A pilgrimage's foundation is typically marked by visions, miracles, or martyrdoms. The first pilgrims tend to arrive

²³ Phil Cousineau, *The Art of Pilgrimage: The Seeker's Guide to Making Travel Sacred* (San Francisco: Conari Press, 1998), Kindle.

²⁴ Ellen Badone and Sharon Roseman, *Intersecting Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage and Tourism* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 92, Kindle.

²⁵ Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), Kindle.

haphazardly, individually, and intermittently, though in great numbers, ‘voting with their feet’; their devotion is fresh and spontaneous. Later, there is progressive routinization and institutionalization and the sacred journey.”²⁶ In other words, there are going to be young adults that experience things on the journey that will enchant them, and there are going to be young adults that suffer through the journey and may not make it home at all. The treasures earned from the journey – commonly referred to as the ‘boon’ – are the stories of the journey that are heard at home. These are the stories that have the ability to enchant the culture, and even though a structured form has yet to be given to this new journey called Emerging Adulthood, the shared testimony is what will inspire current and future emerging adults in their journey.

A New Narrative: Home and Identity

In *Reframing Pilgrimage: Cultures in Motion*, Coleman and Eade write, “there cannot even be ‘experience’ in any meaningful way unless we can construct a narrative.”²⁷ The narratives of Emerging Adulthood are still being written; however, there are a few examples one can look to in order to get some perspective on the journey. In the same book, Coleman and Eade speak about a group of Vietnam veterans that ride their motorcycles from southern California to the Vietnam Memorial. When many of these veterans got home from the war, they were not given a happy homecoming. They came back to realize that they were leaving one war for another – a cultural war. They had bought into the narrative that said they were defending their country and involved in a just cause; however, when they got home, they soon realized that the narrative that had

²⁶ Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), Kindle.

²⁷ Simon Coleman and John Eade, *Reframing Pilgrimage: Cultures in Motion* (New York: Routledge, 2005), Kindle.

once framed their identity and idea of home was no longer acceptable. In many ways the purpose of this trip parallels Emerging Adulthood. Like emerging adults, these veterans are in a position where they are required to construct a new narrative that can replace the collapsed, hopeless narrative they find themselves in. Coleman and Eade write, “The Run for the Wall can be seen as a pilgrimage...one that combines the individual search for healing and identity with the creation of a collective narrative that unfolds as the Run moves across the United States.”²⁸ In other words, as these pilgrims rode their motorcycles across America, they begin to construct a narrative that brought transformation and hope to their lives.

Similar to the story of Moses, these veterans are engaging their past, present and future in order to find hope and an abundant life. The welcome these veterans receive along the way serves as the welcome they never received when they returned from the war (past), and the ride creates a safe place that is used to construct meaning out of their experiences (present), and to ask questions about what it looks like to live into a new narrative (future). This pilgrimage is helping these veterans build a home; however, home is so much more than a place where one grew up. Home is a narrative that nurtures hope and speaks the first language of one’s soul. People don’t go on pilgrimages because they are looking for a place they have been before. People go on pilgrimage because they are looking for something they could not find in the places they had previously inhabited. In short, pilgrims are looking to be transformed. They want to do and feel things they have never done or felt before.

So when it comes to Emerging Adulthood, the importance of finding home is amplified even further. Not only are emerging adults looking for a narrative that can hold

²⁸ Ibid.

their hope, they are also trying to bring back the idea of homesteading to a culture that is obsessed with movement and future progress. The narrative of Modernity and Postmodernity valued the journey; unfortunately, it is a journey that has no end and no place to call home. Sharon Parks writes, “We will not find the wholeness we need until the imagery of home, homesteading, dwelling, and abiding is restored to a place of centrality in the contemporary imagination...Homemaking and homesteading are activities which build a space where souls can thrive and dream.”²⁹ In other words, emerging adults are trying to find a home for themselves – a home that gives them meaning and hope; however, emerging adults are also trying to find a home for their culture. The journey of Emerging Adulthood is not just about young people finding their home in a chaotic world; it is also a journey that involves creating a culture of hope and abundance that can transform our chaotic world into a home rather than a conquest.

Finding Home Away From Home

In Christopher Nolan’s latest film, *Interstellar*, the earth is in danger. Humanity has pushed the natural world beyond its limits, and the earth is turning into one giant dust bowl that can no longer support human life. Cooper, played by Matthew McConaughey, leads a group of astronauts into space to try and find a habitable world that can sustain life before it is too late. Cooper did find what he was looking for; however, the journey did not end with him finding a new world to inhabit. Cooper’s journey ended with him playing a part in transforming the world he had left behind. The journey was unpredictable and dangerous, but it was able to produce a result that was both necessary and transformative. Similar to Cooper’s story, emerging adults are on journey that is both

²⁹ Sharon Parks, “Home and Pilgrimage: Companion Metaphors for Personal and Social Transformation,” *Soundings* 72, no. 2 (1989): 303-04.

unpredictable and necessary. It is impossible to say with certainty what home will look like for emerging adults; however, it is clear that continuing on with the old narratives is not going to work. The wisdom of homesteading is something that not only needs to be understood but embodied. The testimonies of emerging adults are gifts that can help build a home in an unstable world. Phil Cousineau writes, “This is the key to the poetry of pilgrimage: The story that we bring back from our journeys is the boon.”³⁰ The stories that are brought back from Emerging Adulthood are not just for the benefit of emerging adults. The boon is meant for everyone, and the stories of emerging adults are precious gifts meant to transform the world. Simply put, the hope of Emerging Adulthood is tied to the hope of the world. Emerging adults cannot create an abundant life by themselves; however, Emerging Adulthood can be a stage of pilgrimage where people journey to find seeds of hope and abundance, and, once planted, these seeds have the potential to grow into a narrative that creates a home for the whole community.

³⁰ Phil Cousineau, *The Art of Pilgrimage: The Seeker's Guide to Making Travel Sacred* (San Francisco: Conari Press, 1998), Kindle.

CHAPTER 5:
THE STORY OF RUTH AND EMERGING ADULTHOOD

Your daily life is your temple and your religion.
Whenever you enter into it take with you your all.
Take the plough and the forge and the mallet and the lute,
The things you have fashioned in necessity or for delight.

— Kahlil Gibran. *The Prophet*

When considering the issues associated with Emerging Adulthood, I found the story of Ruth to be a treasure trove of wisdom. Many of the themes associated with Emerging Adulthood - hope, agency, and identity - are also found in the story of Ruth. In this way, it is my argument that the story of Ruth can offer emerging adults wisdom on how to navigate their situation as well as encourage a multigenerational approach to bringing about an abundant life. In this chapter, I will discuss the themes found in the story of Ruth that parallel the experiences of Emerging Adulthood. I will begin by briefly discussing how one's posture before scripture affects one's ability to engage contemporary issues. After engaging how one engages scripture, I will explore the themes within the story of Ruth that speak well to the issues of Emerging Adulthood. First, I will argue that, through the themes of famine and migration, the hope found in Ruth speaks to one's past, present, and future. Second, I will discuss how the theme of providence expresses itself in a way that makes the story of Ruth relatable to contemporary emerging adults. Third, I will explore how the theme of *hesed*, as a counter text, can help bridge the gap between Millennials and the Boomers and help them work together toward an abundant life. Lastly, I will discuss how identity is formed within the

story of Ruth, and how emerging adults can use the story of Ruth as an example for forming an identity in their current context.

Postures of Worship: The Text and the Individual

When attempting to glean wisdom from scripture on contemporary issues, it is important to tread lightly. Like I mentioned in the previous chapter, humanity's understanding is constructed through metaphors - metaphors that inevitably change their meaning over time; therefore, any attempt at creating prescriptions for contemporary issues using ancient metaphors is tricky to say the least. Considering that over twenty centuries separate us from most of the authors of scripture, it is safe to assume that many of the metaphors being employed in the text no longer convey the same meaning they once did. This is not to say that one cannot gain understanding and wisdom from the text, it just means that more work is required if one is going to extract the essence of the ancient metaphors and bring them into contemporary language that is closer to the original spirit of the text. Therefore, as I begin my exegesis of the story of Ruth and attempt to bring it into relationship with the contemporary issue of Emerging Adulthood, it is important to note that my intention in doing so is not to offer a prescription for emerging adults that mimics the cultural norms apparent in the story of Ruth, but to offer wisdom on contemporary issues by addressing the themes within the narrative that can transcend time and culture and speak to Emerging Adulthood today. These themes are going to manifest themselves differently in today's culture; however, I believe that the wisdom found in the text has the ability to guide emerging adults toward an abundant life. In her book *Ruth: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, Katharine Sakenfeld offers one a glimpse of this process. She writes:

In every instance, therefore, faithful readers must choose which aspects of the text they find authoritative, and which aspects they will not seek to preserve in their own cultures and societal structures... Which parts of a text should be literally replicated must be considered again and again by successive communities of faith... In assessing the significance of Ruth for this conversation, it is essential to read the story as one individual picture of the true meaning of human community, rather than as a prescription for how that community ought always to be organized.¹

In other words, when attempting to bring texts such as Ruth into contemporary Christian living, it is just as important to understand the themes as well as the actions undertaken in the narrative. Once the themes have been identified, one can begin the process of deciphering what are appropriate ways in which those themes find expression in a contemporary culture. The final step, Sakenfeld writes, involves “recognizing the continuity between the biblical story and our own broken world seems an appropriate first step. Those who have power to work for cultural change are challenged to transform that brokenness.”² That being said, it is clear that, even before one engages the themes of the story, one must first address one’s posture toward the text. How one views the Bible is going to have a huge effect on how the material is received and applied; therefore, some time must be spent engaging the Bible as a whole before I engage the books found therein. This brings me to an important distinction in my argument. When I use words like: Bible, text and scripture, I am referring to the actual book of the Bible; however, when I use the phrase: “story of God,” I am referring to something much bigger. The story of God includes all of creation - including the stories of contemporary Christians. The distinction between these terms will become clearer as my argument progresses.

¹ Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *Ruth: Interpretation; A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 10-11.

² Ibid., 87.

Fear and Worship

When it comes to taking a stance on scripture, there are two extremes between which most people vacillate, and both postures have to do with worship rather than theology. The first extreme could be described as a miraculous posture, and the other extreme could be described as a humanist posture. The miraculous posture holds the belief that the Bible is a miracle and that God's providence supersedes human agency - it represents a posture of worship toward the text. Within this view, the Bible transcends humanity and the natural way of producing the written word. The writing and organization of the text are argued to be perfect and inerrant - even though it was written and organized with "fallen" hands. Also, the story of God is completely regulated to the text, as many believe that the book of Revelation represents the period at the end of the story of God; therefore, one should not look to add anything to the story of God. In short, this side of the argument argues that all that is known/knowable about God, and living a Christian life, is contained within the binding of one's Bible. Within this posture, there is a correct way to read scripture and a correct understanding of scripture. Any variations of understanding are attributed to humanities "fallenness" and, thus, inability to understand properly.

This posture is problematic for several reasons. First, if God truly is infinite, how can there be anything in the created order that encompasses all of God? It is impossible to hold a belief in an infinite God and an object that can contain that infinite God without that object being considered either on the same level as God (the Holy Quadrality) or greater than God; therefore, my argument against this posture is based not on an interpretation of the text, but on the Trinitarian nature of God. Within this framework, human agency is completely stripped away from the production of the text, and scripture

is afforded all of the attributes of God; therefore, this posture completely collapses the possibility of an individual engaging the story of God on a personal level. Not only does this posture strip away one's personal agency in relation to God, it also destroys the possibility of multiple readings of the text. Removing the possibility for individuals to express their unique hermeneutical lenses in relation to the text severely hinders one's ability to bring the text into their current situations in a way that honors both the themes of the original text as well as the changes in culture that naturally occur over time. If there is a single, correct interpretation attributed to every word of the text that transcends context and culture, the individual truly does not matter when it comes to the text. One's personal experience, as well as any further commentary on the text, is regulated to the task of addressing humanities flawed understanding of the text, and humanities relationship to the story of God becomes one primarily defined by academic and theological ventures. Within this framework, there is nothing new that God will do in our contemporary culture, because the story of God is limited to a book. In this way, God's ability and/or willingness to break into creation is limited to the past and the future, as there is no place for the present within this posture. Christians can be fortune tellers - as they believe they have an unchangeable script (prophetic texts) for their future; however, they cannot, and should not, try to find God working in ways that are not found in the text. In the first season of HBO's series *True Detective*, time is described as a flat circle, and, in many ways, this does a great job of describing the providential posture. In a scene where he is being interviewed by police investigators, Detective Rust Cohle, played by Matthew McConaughey, describes this idea. He states, "Someone once told me that time is a flat circle. Everything we've done, or will do, we are going to do over and over and

over again...In eternity, where there is no time, nothing can grow. Nothing can become. Nothing changes. So Death created time to grow the things it would kill, and you are reborn, but into the same life that you've always been born into.”³ In other words, humanity is destined to follow a script over and over again. Nothing can change in the sequence, as humanity is predestined to repeat what has already existed in the text. Now, God's providence is not something I am looking to dismiss altogether; however, I do believe a more nuanced posture toward providence is needed if this idea is going to be beneficial for humanity - especially if one is looking to engage Millennials. Without a posture that values the present, engaging a demographic that lives in a perpetual presentism is difficult, if not impossible. There are many expressions of this posture - one of which I described in my chapter on prophetic texts, and there are many reasons why people end up in a providential extreme; however, I believe fear of the “other” is the primary motivator for pursuing an extreme position. The “other,” in this case, is manifested by the humanist posture; therefore, before I speak about the role of fear in taking an extreme position, it is important that I discuss the other extreme posture.

The humanist posture represents the opposite extreme, and, where the providential stance is a posture of worship toward the text; the humanist posture represents a posture of worship toward the individual. This posture is primarily identified through its relationship to authority. One who takes the humanist position would argue that scripture is merely a human production; therefore, the text, just like any other work in existence, carries with it inherent errors and/or the personal opinions of the authors that may differ from God's. This posture is individually universalistic in nature, as one would believe

³ *True Detective*, directed by Nic Pizzolatto (HBO, 2013), Blu-ray (HBO Home Entertainment, 2014).

that God is constantly speaking through the created order; therefore, putting a limit on the revelation of God to a specific book does not make sense. Mistakes are inevitable, as we are human; however, instead of claiming that specific texts are authoritative by nature, individuals can rely upon their own authority to determine if something is true or not. On the extreme end of this posture, one's identity can be lost, as an overemphasis on individualistic pursuits can lead to isolation. Within a Christian context, the traditional markers that have distinguished faith traditions begin to evaporate, and one is left to oneself to create what will be one's identity. There is a lot of freedom within this posture; however, as many emerging adults are finding out, having unlimited freedom and options can be overwhelming. The reasons for choosing to take this extreme posture are similar to those of the providential posture - fear of the "other" being the primary motivator for one moving further and further to the opposite extreme; therefore, now that I have described both sides of spectrum, I will move on to discussing the driving force that often pushes people from one extreme to another - fear.

Firstly, it is important to note that sometimes fear is warranted and can be a beneficial feeling that prompts one to avoid further harm. Living out of a posture of fear is not the same thing as having feelings of fear. The former is a posture that resigns one to a life of fear without relief, and the latter is a natural feeling that can prompt one to move away from further harm and toward healing. Harm is an inevitable experience of the human condition. Whether it is intentional or not, everyone has parts of their story that have caused, and may continue to cause, personal anguish. By denying these parts of one's story, one denies oneself, and denial is neither an effective remedy for pain or deterrent for fear. Therefore, I am not arguing that one should view feelings as negative

or positive. I am arguing that we all carry with us stories that can produce feelings of fear, and categories like positive and negative should be limited to how we hold those feelings and the realities these feelings produce. For example, as someone that carries the title of pastor in Seattle, it is always an interesting experience when I meet people for the first time, and they find out what I do. Just by observing body language, it is easy to tell which people have feelings of harm connected to the office of pastor. Even though they might experience fear when they hear I am a pastor, there are those who have found some kind of healing around the harm that has been done to them. In situations like this, I am usually, and very graciously, afforded the benefit of the doubt until they get to know me; however, I have also experienced instances where people have been so hurt by people in my position that they are in no position to give me anything - let alone their presence. In both of these cases, I believe that the fear these people are feeling is warranted. I feel lucky, and very thankful, that the first person in my example was in a place where we could pursue a friendship, and I feel sad that the second person was carrying around so much pain about anything in at all. All I can really do in this situation is acknowledge the pain in this person's story, trust that their feelings are warranted, and pray that one day they might find relief and healing. A positive response to fear in this case is not dependent upon me being good friends with this person. A positive response happens when fear is not allowed to get the last word in this person's story, and that has nothing to do with their relationship to me in that moment. A positive response has to do with keeping a good hope alive, and a negative response has to do with killing a hope that can bring healing; therefore, when considering a posture before scripture, I believe a good hope can bring balance to extremes. In other words, hope can keep one from throwing

away both an identity (humanist posture) in Christ as well as the idea that God has a plan to heal creation (providential posture). Hope can offer one a posture that values both the agency of God and the agency of humanity. Hope can speak of the abundant life of which fear wishes to rob humanity.

Themes in Ruth

If one wishes to bring an ancient folktale like Ruth into contemporary society, one must first familiarize oneself with the story. Because Ruth's name is in the title, one might assume that Ruth is the central character in the narrative; however, after reading the story, it becomes clear that the main character in the story is Naomi. In her book *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, Adele Berlin writes, "[W]e see things through her eyes, feel things as she feels them: her bereavement and loneliness, her return to Bethlehem, her bitterness and poverty, her concern with Ruth's future security, her view of Boaz, and her restoration through the birth of her grandson."⁴ Ruth, on the other hand, is the main interest of the story as well as the primary agent whose actions move the plot. Berlin goes on to write, "Ruth is the focus of the interest point of view. Certainly she is Naomi's main interest throughout the story... So even though the events of the story are perceived from Naomi's point of view, it is Ruth who facilitates Naomi's perception - just as it is Ruth who facilitates Naomi's fulfillment."⁵ In short, the dynamic between Ruth and Naomi is the force that drives the story, and it is through their relationship that the important themes of the story are manifested by the characters and expressed to the reader.

⁴ Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Winona Lake, IN: Amond Press, 1994), 84.

⁵ Ibid.

Next, it is important to identify the genre of Ruth. I would agree with the scholarship that argues Ruth is a piece of comedic fiction, written as a folktale, that takes place during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.⁶ I recognize that it is never a simple matter to argue that a piece of scripture is fictional, and I want to recognize that many would disagree with this assessment of Ruth - especially those who like to use words like “literalist” to describe their view of the text. Unfortunately, the scope of this project does not allow me to delve into the intricacies of this specific argument; therefore, I will simply rely upon the work of the scholars - which I believe shows ample evidence that Ruth can be classified in this way. In her commentary on Ruth, Judy Fentress-Williams argues that the story of Ruth is a comedy.⁷ This is not to say that the story is full of jokes - even though there are a few moments where one could argue humor is the intent, or that the sole purpose of the story is to make the intended audience laugh. Ruth is considered a comedy within the ancient Greek classifications - briefly defined as the struggle of one group to be integrated within a society that is being controlled by an opposing group. More specifically, a comedy often tells the story of a hero or, in the case of Ruth, a heroine that transcends their social standing and transforms the culture in which they live. It is also a story that often ends with a marriage - not a mandatory happening, but a relevant one given the story of Ruth. In his book *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, Northrop Frye argues that the primary theme of a comedy is a struggle between the younger generation and the social structures that were constructed by the past generations

⁶ André LaCocque, *Ruth: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 2.

⁷ Judy Fentress-Williams, *Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries: Ruth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), 9.

that thwart their hopes and desires.⁸ Within this comedic structure, the younger generation is assumed to have no authority on social matters. Humor, often in the form of irony, is born when the youth begins to push back against the social structures that are oppressing them. Later in her commentary, Fentress-Williams offers a great description of the narrative arch of a comedy. She writes,

Ruth is a story about survival. As such, it can function for subsequent audiences as a survival manual disguised as a comedy. A comedy usually begins with a normal society, into which some crisis comes, upsetting the norms and creating conflict. The disruption can be natural or supernatural, but the structure of the comedy will move to resolve the conflict and reestablish a society. Often the society at the end of the comedy is transformed; it sometimes incorporates elements or results of the chaos into the new order. In other words, the ‘happily ever after’ at the end of a comedy is not the ‘once upon a time’ with which the story began. The resolution in a comedy comes in part from a reintegration of people into the group and a recommitment to shared life together. This often involves compromise and the acceptance of some limitations within a given culture. The crisis of a comedy is one that threatens identity within a society and the resolution of the crisis is some form of reintegration. The comedy may focus on a few individuals, but the individual is envisioned in relationship with a community...A comedy affirms our desire for family and community.⁹

In this brilliant description of a comedy, Fentress-Williams does an excellent job of not only describing the structure of this ancient narrative, but one could also make the argument that she gives an excellent description of the milieu and hopes of contemporary emerging adults in America. Within this classic definition, I argue that Ruth is a comedy, and, it is within this definition, that the story Ruth can begin to speak to the current struggle of emerging adults. The conflict that arises when a young person tries to find their way in the world as well as the hope that, at the end of the story, there will be abundance are two important motifs that drive the stories of both Ruth and emerging

⁸ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 43.

⁹ Judy Fentress-Williams, *Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries: Ruth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), 134-35.

adults. In other words, within the greater cultural narrative, the Millennial story is a comedy. This is not to say that there are not going to be times of extreme hardship or that the characters will not experience the full gambit of emotions. A comedy is not marked by a lack of complex emotions and situations, but on the difficulties faced by the characters found therein; therefore, it is clear that, based on the primary concerns of Emerging Adulthood and the inherent characteristics of a comedic tale, emerging adults in contemporary America can glean a lot of wisdom from ancient comedies like *Ruth*.

Hope: Past, Present, and Future

Similar to Moses' experience with the burning bush in Exodus, the story of *Ruth* speaks of a hope that includes one's past, present and future. Even though *Ruth* is considered to be a piece of fiction, the author speaks to the past, present and future of the audience by situating the story within the history of Israel and drawing on themes and literary devices that are already found within that historical narrative. In the story of *Ruth*, the themes that are being used to speak to hope are famine and migration. Famine seems like an odd theme to connect to hope; however, the famine that originally brought Elimelech and his family to Moab connects the audience to the famines that have already been experienced by Israel's forefathers and, thus, connects to the complex hope that is tied to each of those historical narratives. Judy Fentress-Williams writes, "The motifs and patterns in *Ruth* are laden with an acute awareness of the past. Elimelech moves his family because of famine, but moving for food is nothing new. The migration of a family because of famine is a contextual reality and an established pattern in Old Testament

texts (Abraham in Gen. 12:10; Isaac in Gen. 26:1; and Jacob in Gen. 46).”¹⁰ In other words, the author connects the hope of the fictional characters to the hope already found in the history of Israel. The original audience of this narrative would have recognized the theme of famine and connected the migration of the characters to the migration of their forefathers as well as the hope found within those narratives of migration. Abraham moves to Egypt and is protected by God from the whims of Pharaoh, the Lord appeared to Isaac and gave him instructions on where to move, and the Lord appears to Jacob in a dream and tells him to make his way to Egypt. In Genesis 46:3, very similar to the words heard by Moses from the burning bush, God speaks to Jacob and says, “I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid...”¹¹ In short, the hope of this story is held in the historical narratives of Israel that are being alluded to through the themes in Ruth. In this way, the author of Ruth uses the stories of famine and migration that are found in Genesis to speak to the past hope of the characters in an indirect way. The characters that hold the past hope in Ruth are not even the story. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is called forth through these themes and into the audience’s mind to allow them to rest assured that they can place their hope in YHWH.

In the same way the author speaks to a past hope, the story of Ruth speaks to the future hope of the audience. Just as the people hearing the story would be able to look back at the theme of famine and migration and gain insights from their past hope, they can also look to the stories of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob’s stories and connect it to their own future hope. Sakenfeld writes, “The story offers to its readers ‘a memory of the

¹⁰ Judy Fentress-Williams, *Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries: Ruth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), 15.

¹¹ Gen. 46:3 (NRSV).

future', a vision of future hope couched in the form of a story from the past."¹² In other words, the characters future hope is tied to the future hope of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The characters in Ruth and the audience listening to the story can look to the fulfilled promises of their forefathers and feel a sense of security that God is in their midst, bringing about the fullness of God's creation. God made good on the abundant futures promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and with the birth of Obed, the characters in the story get a glimpse of the future abundance that God has in store for them. Up until Obed was born, the future of Naomi's family was still up in the air; however, at the end of the story, Naomi is given the gift of seeing her grandson - a moment full of hope that guarantees Naomi's family will have a future. If this were not enough, the genealogy found at the end of the story serves as an exclamation point that signifies, without a doubt, the characters have a future that is filled with abundance.

Lastly, God speaks to the present in the same way God speaks to the past and future - indirectly. Berlin writes, "The text does not read: 'Naomi heard "God remembered his people'. We do not see Naomi hearing this, we see only the result of her having heard. The information is presented indirectly, as part of the narrated background."¹³ In the story of Ruth, God engages the immediate struggles of Naomi and Ruth in a way that speaks to the famine as well as the loss of their husbands, and all the security that comes from having a husband. The character that embodies the present hope of God is Boaz. Boaz's willingness to step into the role of redeemer is a testament to the goodness of God. Boaz was not required to bring Naomi and Ruth into his household;

¹² Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *Ruth: Interpretation; A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 10.

¹³ Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Winona Lake, IN: Almond Press, 1994), 96.

however, he decided to go above and beyond the letter of the law. Of all the facets of hope, how God engages the characters in their present is the most important when it comes to bringing the story of Ruth into the milieu of Emerging Adulthood. Present hope is going to gain the ear of emerging adults before anything else. Like I mentioned in my previous chapter on Emerging Adulthood, emerging adults live in a state of perpetual presentism. They have seen what happens when too much emphasis is put in the past and future; therefore, even if they are putting in the effort to live into a complex hope that includes one's past, present and future, they are going to have a hope that has a baseline that is closer to the present.

Another reason why the story of Ruth speaks so well to emerging adults is because it is not only a story that speaks about practical needs of average people being met by God, but it is a story that shows people's practical needs being met by God in a way that is relatable to emerging adults everyday lives. There is no manna falling from the sky to feed the people suffering through the famine in Bethlehem, and the characters are not miraculously teleported to and from Moab. God's presence and actions are embodied through normal human beings living out their lives. In other words, instead of experiencing God through miracles, the characters in Ruth experience God through God's providence - a much more complex experience that requires more exploration.

Providence

One of the main reasons I want to draw from the story of Ruth to address issues found within Emerging Adulthood is because, on many levels, the experiences of the characters in the story are something to which most people can relate. One of the primary reasons Ruth is so accessible to its audience is because it presents the relationship

between humanity and the divine in a way that matches most people's experiences. On this subject, McKeown writes, "What makes the book of Ruth so relevant for us is that the experience of the characters, particularly Naomi is not far removed from the experience of many people today...the message of the book of Ruth is that God's absence was only apparent and he was very much in control and was moving events toward his chosen denouement."¹⁴ In other words, unlike the story of Moses, where God shows up in a burning bush and gives very specific directions concerning Moses' future, Ruth is a story that explores what it means to faithfully live as a servant of God when one does not receive a clear vision for their future from a burning bush. In this way, it is my argument that the story of Ruth can be a beneficial traveling companion for the pilgrimage that is Emerging Adulthood. Ruth can help nurture hope within emerging adults by serving as an example of what it looks like to work through the complexities of life without a definitive path and, yet, find fulfillment along the way. It serves as a healthy example of what it looks like to balance the idea of God's providence and human agency.

As I previously mentioned, there is no burning-bush moment for the characters in the story of Ruth; however, there does exist within the pages of the text a reality of God working behind the scenes and through the people in the narrative. Within the Christian tradition, God's orchestration of reality often falls within the category of providence. In short, to believe in God's providence is to believe that God has a plan for creation and is an active agent in bringing about that plan. Unfortunately, unless something supernatural presents itself with a message from the Lord (as happened for Moses), determining the providence of God is tricky to say the least; therefore, it is only with humility and

¹⁴ James McKeown, *Ruth: The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2015), 114.

wisdom that one should presume to claim an event as being the providence of God. The story of Ruth serves as a fantastic example of what it means to hold the providence of God alongside human agency; however, it is also an easy example, as the story has nothing but positive results for the characters in the story. In this way, the story of Ruth is unrealistic, as it lacks a diversity of endings that speaks to the range found within the human experience; however, Ruth is a single story in the larger story of God, and like many short stories, it is intended to represent a single lesson derived from a single experience. Within the library that is the Bible, there is a plethora of examples that speaks to the diversity of the human experience, and this is why one should always approach the stories in the Bible within the greater context of the entire story.

Just because Ruth does not contain an ending that speaks to ideas of continued pain and suffering does not mean the story of God has nothing to say on those issues. It is also important to note that the goodness found in the ending of the story of Ruth is context specific. Within the time and culture the story was written, it was truly considered a joyous thing for a woman to find a man that could take care of her; however, this concept does not translate easily into many modern cultures. Today, people marry for love, and women have the ability to live a life that is not defined by a man. This is why the fairytale-type ending of Ruth is not the focal point of my argument. Taken out of context, one could argue that Ruth is a story that proves there are no real struggles in life, as there is always a treasure waiting for one at the end of every experience. The story of Ruth serves as a single testament of humanities experience of God, and it does not cancel out all the other stories that are found within the pages of the Bible and the lives of the people of God; therefore, even though I am using the story of Ruth as an example for

emerging adults, I am not intending it to be a story that serves as a fix-all for every emerging adult. Just like there are going to be unique attributes to every individual's story, the story of Ruth is not going to completely match any one person's experience; however, it can be a story in which one can gain wisdom and insight into their life. God is working behind the scenes, but God also has the ability to be experienced differently by each individual. If one is lucky enough to receive instructions for their life from the audible voice of God, that is fantastic, but this does not mean that the story of Ruth cannot be helpful to this individual. Ruth is just a single example of what can happen when God interacts with humanity. Does every part of Ruth speak directly to every emerging adults experience, no; however, it does offer a plethora of themes that can be beneficial along the road to Adulthood, and a healthy view of providence is one of those themes.

When it comes to tracking God's movement in Ruth, one finds that there are only two verses in the story that speak of YHWH taking direct action in the lives of the characters in the story. In Ruth 1:6, Naomi hears that YHWH has remembered his people and provided food during a famine, and, in Ruth 4:13, the conception of Obed is credited to YHWH; however, even in these instances where YHWH is given credit for having acted, these are not actions that people witness God doing firsthand, and everything else happened through human initiative.¹⁵ On this subject, McKeown writes, "This absence of the activity of God in the book allows readers to decide whether the book suggests underlying divine providence or simply a human story... Thus the book of Ruth is true to life. Some people will judge what happens to them in the light of their faith in the

¹⁵ John Wilch, *Ruth: Concordia Commentary* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 2006), 52.

providence of God, and others will judge daily events as purely coincidence. Just as life leaves us this choice, the book of Ruth leaves the reader to decide.”¹⁶ In other words, the audience is left to determine if it was God working behind the scenes or happenstance that brought about the events in the story. I have argued that the presence of certain themes - famine and migration - allows one to come to the conclusion that God is not absent, and I would agree with McKeown that the details of the story indicate that God is behind the scenes.

To further expound upon the idea of providence, I would argue that, in the story of Ruth, God is exclusively working through secondary agents. As I mentioned in my chapter on art and agency, objects have the ability to hold the agency of a primary agent, and I would argue that the characters in the story of Ruth are working out of the agency of YHWH; however, unlike the relationship between art objects and humans, in this case, the agency of God is held by autonomous subjects rather than inanimate objects. John Wilch writes, “Thus Ruth is about the God who works through his people. Naomi, Ruth and Boaz did not wait for the Lord to perform a wondrous miracle to provide for two destitute widows and save a family’s existence and inheritance. Instead, they did the best they could in the situations in which they found themselves, making use of the opportunities God made available to them as believers.”¹⁷ In other words, God’s ability to bring about an abundant life for the characters in the story is dependent upon the choices and subsequent actions of the characters in the story. Through the actions of Ruth and Naomi, the author of the story is showing how average people can participate with God in

¹⁶ James McKeown, *Ruth: The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2015), 110.

¹⁷ John Wilch, *Ruth: Concordia Commentary* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 2006), 53.

bringing about an abundant life within their particular context. McKeown goes on to write, “The overall message of the book is that Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz were all guided and provided for by the unseen and impalpable presence of God. They were under the providential care of God.”¹⁸ That is to say, the audience hearing this narrative would be able to find hope that God is working behind the scenes - just like God did for the characters in Ruth and their forefathers. This is a posture of providence that resists fearful extremes and can be beneficial for humanity. It is a posture that both acknowledges the work of God in the background and prompts people to engage their present situation with loving-kindness, or, as Nicholas King argues in his book *The Helplessness of God*, “Once again we see that God’s model of leadership or authority is not by way of bullying, but rather by allowing human beings their autonomy; so God is, strictly speaking, quite helpless.”¹⁹

Hesed and Counter Text

The next themes one needs to address when approaching the book of Ruth has to do with the reasons Ruth was written. Clues for answering this question are found in the subject matter of Ruth and its relationship to the time in which the story takes place. In his commentary on Ruth, LaCocque writes, “For what reason - asks the Midrash - was the book of Ruth written? To teach us how great the reward is for those who practice hesed [goodness, loyalty, love].”²⁰ I would agree with LaCocque that *hesed* is the primary subject of the text, but I would also agree with Alicia Ostriker that Ruth’s

¹⁸ James McKeown, *Ruth: The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2015), 113.

¹⁹ Nicholas King, *The Helplessness of God* (Suffolk: Kevin Mayhew, 2014), 81.

²⁰ André LaCocque, *Ruth: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 154.

relationship to scripture is one of a counter text - *hesed* being the driving force. In her article entitled “The Book of Ruth and the Love of the Land,” Ostriker describes a counter text as “a text embedded in Scripture that forms a counter-current to certain dominant biblical concepts and motifs, and thereby enriches and deepens the Bible as a whole.”²¹ In other words, a counter text is a section of scripture that both challenges the status quo and enhances the story as a whole. As a piece of fiction, the author could have chosen to place the story of Ruth in any time period; therefore, determining why the author chose “the time of the judges” as the backdrop to their narrative is vital to understanding the role of *hesed* in the story. In the story of Ruth, acts of *hesed* serve as the counter current to the ethos of the time. Ruth challenges the rules of Ezra and Nehemiah, and, at the same time, brings them to a fullness that would not be possible without it; therefore, if I am going to fully speak about the role of *hesed* in the story of Ruth, I must also speak about the larger context in which the story of Ruth sits.

Hesed speaks to the practicality of what it looks like to move from a posture that values both providence and personal agency. Roughly translated as “loving-kindness,” Robert Gordis describes it as “the basic attribute of God in dealing with his creatures” within the story of Ruth.²² Like I previously mentioned, God is regulated to the background in this story; therefore, the characters in the narrative embody God’s agency. The author of Ruth uses *hesed* as the primary marker for determining if people are properly embodying the will of God. *Hesed* is only referenced three times in the story of

²¹ Alicia Ostriker, “The Book of Ruth and the Love of the Land,” *Biblical Interpretation* 10, no. 4 (2002): 334.

²² Robert Gordis, “Love, Marriage, and Business in the Book of Ruth: A Chapter in Hebrew Customary Law,” in *A Light Unto My Path: Old Testament Studies in Honor of Jacob M. Myers*, eds. Howard N. Bream, Ralph D. Heim, and Carey A. Moore (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), 241.

Ruth (1:8, 2:20, 3:10); however, each time it is referenced, it is being used to describe acts of loving-kindness that go above and beyond what is required by the Law. These acts of *hesed* are contagious and drive the story. For example, the first two acts of *hesed* - Ruth giving her devotion to Naomi and gleaning in the field - inspires Naomi to help Ruth pursue Boaz which then inspires Boaz to move into an act of *hesed* that brings Ruth and Naomi into his family and, thus, brings forth an abundance that is pleasing to God. “To put it another way,” writes Alicia Ostriker, “the kindness of human beings reveals the kindness of a God who acts through human agents when people act with *hesed*, God is acting in them.”²³ In the story of Ruth, the author is making the argument that there is merit in following the Law, but there would be no abundance in this story if all the characters did was obey the Law. Without *hesed*, there would essentially be nothing that made this story exceptional. There would be no conflict, and the story would end before it even began. LaCocque writes, “If Boaz remains fastidious about the Law, nothing of what Ruth expects will come to pass.” (LaCocque pg. 31) In other words, without *hesed*, God truly is absent in this story. Thankfully, Ruth is the story of a God that is at work in bringing about the fullness all things in which all of humanity has a part to play. Even those labeled “other” are pulled into the story of God and invited to participate in bringing about goodness for creation.

In one sense, *hesed* is understood to be a marker that signifies the presence of God moving amongst humanity; however, if one is going to fully understand the role of *hesed* in the story of Ruth, one must also understand how Ruth functions as a counter text to books that surround it. The story of Ruth is a counter text because it challenges the

²³ Alicia Ostriker, “The Book of Ruth and the Love of the Land,” *Biblical Interpretation* 10, no. 4 (2002): 352.

religious-social structures that were established by Ezra and Nehemiah; however, it is important to note that just because Ruth challenges what has become normalized in the Israelite's culture, this does not mean that the story of Ruth represents a movement away from the Law - it represents a change in the way the Law is fulfilled. Both Ezra and Nehemiah had good intentions. They wanted to make sure that their people were following the Law of God. Unfortunately, the practices they demanded to be within the Law were harsh, to say the least. They demanded that Israel completely separate themselves from foreign influence, i.e., if they had foreigners in their family, they were to get rid of them. Within the religious framework of Ezra and Nehemiah, Ruth would not have been allowed to marry Boaz. Ruth would have been viewed as a problem that needed to be kept at a distance, but by telling the story of a Moabite that marries an Israelite during the time of the judges without so much as a mention of anyone challenging the idea, the author creates a counter text. In this prophetic act of storytelling, the author is reminding the audience that God has not only promised to bless Israel, but God has also promised to bless the entire world through Israel; therefore, any posture that would regulate people to being outside God's blessing is not an acceptable posture, i.e., part of God's providence.²⁴ The story of Ruth represents an answer to the question: How might God bless all the nations through Israel? The answer, of course, is through acts of loving-kindness; therefore, if an interpretation of the Law requires an absence of loving-kindness toward anyone, one must find a new interpretation so that the fullness of the Law might be realized. That is the quality of a counter text, and, in this way, the characters in Ruth can be seen as both transgressors of the protocol surrounding the Law as well as fulfillers of the Law. Ruth challenges the rules that were established by Ezra

²⁴ Gen. 22:18 (NRSV).

and Nehemiah by holding a light to the larger story - the story of God that looks to bless all nations. The law of the judges was broken; however, it was done in a way that allowed the essence of God's Law to bless an outsider. I believe Sakenfeld says it best when she writes, "The people that practice hesed in the story go above and beyond what is required... Thus it is the extraordinary behavior of Ruth in response to Naomi's need, together with the extraordinary behavior of Boaz in response to Ruth's example and suggestion, that moves the story from grief to joy, from emptiness to fullness."²⁵ In this way, the book of Ruth acts as a supplement to the Law, rather than a replacement for the Law; however, it also serves as a counter text to the period in which the story takes place - a text used to bring about the fullness of the story of God. The book of Ruth sits after the book of Judges as a challenge to the ethos of the time. The book of Judges is filled with stories of extreme violence and death, and the judges of the time - Ezra and Nehemiah - are more than strict in their handling of the Law in how it relates to the day-to-day lives of the people of God. Ruth, on the other hand, is a story about the fullness of life.²⁶

In the same way that the story of Ruth serves as a counter text for its particular time period, it can also serve as a counter text for Christian culture in America. As one surveys the landscape of contemporary Christian culture, one will find a Christian/Secular divide painted as a culture war - an all too familiar theme; however, what I find more interesting are the divides that exist within the Church. Unlike the story of Ruth, there are many different forms of religion present in contemporary America.

²⁵ Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *Ruth: Interpretation; A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 11.

²⁶ Alicia Ostriker, "The Book of Ruth and the Love of the Land," *Biblical Interpretation* 10, no. 4 (2002): 346.

Whereas the story of Ruth contains three different belief structures - Judaism (Ezra/Nehemiah), Judaism (Ruth), and “Other,” the story of American Christianity contains within itself tens of thousands of different types of belief structures, and that is not even counting systems of belief that are outside Christianity. Therefore, before I begin discussing how Ruth might be brought into contemporary Christianity, I must identify the contemporary structures and beliefs to which I believe Ruth is a counter text. In short, I am going to be arguing against a posture toward scripture in current Christian communities that mimics the posture of Ezra and Nehemiah, and one does not need to look far before one starts to see the similarities between the posture of the judges and the posture of leaders in American Christianity. Similar to the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, the Bible, i.e. the Law, has become everything. “Biblical” and “orthodox” have become adjectives that have essentially lost all meaning as the diversity of people using those adjectives to describe themselves represents the entire gambit of Christian theology. The most famous and, subsequently, the most listened to preachers of today have made their name by advocating a strict observance of the Bible that transcends context. These are communities that are formed out of a posture that resembles the stories of Ezra and Nehemiah, and it is my argument that both the communities of Ezra and Nehemiah and contemporary Christianity are dealing with similar cultural shifts and fears.

It is not surprising that Ezra and Nehemiah took the stance that they did. They were trying to figure out what it meant to be faithful to God when all of the markers that helped them do so were no longer available. Israel was exiled in Babylon. They no longer had access to their temple and, thus, the practices that formed their faith and identity. It is, therefore, not surprising to find out that it was during their exile in Babylon that the

Israelites started writing down the stories of their faith. The written word became a tool that they could use to solidify their stories, beliefs, and practices while they were away from their land and temple - it preserved their cultural identity; however, when they were finally able to return to their land and rebuild their temple, they returned with the books of their faith. As they returned from their exile and began the rebuilding process, Ezra and Nehemiah used the text as both fuel and structure for the rebuilding process.

Unfortunately, they went a bit overboard in their efforts and allowed the fear of losing their identity to blind them to their neighbors. They not only excluded their neighbors from their activities, they commanded that all Israelites that married foreigners get divorced, and by doing so, they forsook their responsibility to be a blessing to the world. This is the posture that I am arguing against in American Christianity. People are living in fear that the Christian identity is being lost in the culture, and they are willing to take extreme measures to make sure that it does not happen. Just like with Ezra and Nehemiah, pastors and leaders are using the text, rather than an encounter with the infinite God, as the foundation for their faith. This inevitably creates a community that resembles a clenched fist rather than an open hand.

Unlike the story of Ruth, which has people stepping toward the “other” in acts of loving-kindness that gives one a glimpse of the eternal God, the stories of Ezra and Nehemiah show what happens when people cut themselves off from the “other” and acts of loving-kindness - God truly feels absent. In an effort to secure and maintain a Christian identity within a nation that is changing, modern Christians are beginning to take the path of the Israelites in exile. Unfortunately, there is no reason to believe that the results are going to be different this time around. From this posture of scarcity and fear, modern

Christians are placing all their hope in the past. Ostriker writes, “We may imagine the change in the global religious climate if literalist and fundamentalist readers of every stripe - Jewish, Christian, Muslim - should come to understand that the petty structures of our intellects, theologies and dogmas, can never contain God.”²⁷ Now, is holding onto one’s identity a noble pursuit? I do not think too many people would argue that having a sense of identity is a bad thing; however, there is a huge difference between finding one’s identity in an infinite God and finding one’s identity in a book - no matter how inspired those words may be. Scripture cannot be a substitute for God if one is expecting to experience an abundant life.

Identity

Another important theme in Emerging Adulthood that is present in the story of Ruth is identity. Judy Fentress-Williams defines identity as:

[T]he set of characteristics that allows a person to be known and identified within a group. These characteristics and values assigned by any given community come out of the life of that community and serve its interests...Identity determines who is an insider and who is an outsider. How and why the category of ‘other’ is defined and used in a culture will indicate the values and mores that are important to a community at a given time. Moreover, the aspects of identity that do not fit easily into the construct or defy the existing construct will point out what issues a community is struggling with at a given time.²⁸

In other words, identity gives one a place in a community. This is a great way to look at identity; however, what happens when the constructs in society that mark identity begin to fade away? Finding an identity apart from a structure that gives clear markers for identity within a society is a heavy burden to carry, and, today, many emerging adults are

²⁷ Alicia Ostriker, “The Book of Ruth and the Love of the Land,” *Biblical Interpretation* 10, no. 4 (2002): 344.

²⁸ Judy Fentress-Williams, *Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries: Ruth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), 25.

starting to feel the strain of trying to carry that weight. When it comes to constructing an identity, the difficulties that face emerging adults in contemporary America are comparable to the difficulties of the Israelites during the time of Judges in one specific way - both are trying to construct an identity after all the markers previous generations used for creating such an identity have been lost. Before the exile, Israel marked their identity by their covenant with God and their location - the Promised Land; however, after being exiled to Babylon, the Israelites were forced to figure out what it meant to create an identity apart from their land and temple. Upon their return to Judah, Israel began to rebuild the temple; however, they still needed to find some kind of structure that could hold their identity until the temple could be rebuilt. In the face of collapsing markers for identity, it is often the case that people look to the rubble for something that can give them a sense of identity, and this is exactly what happened with Ezra and Nehemiah.²⁹ The leaders in charge of retaining Israel's identity decided that the best way to create stability for their people was to use the Law, as it represented the remnant of their identity that survived the exile; therefore, they would rebuild the temple and live a life that reflected the Law until they had brought their nation back to its former glory. Unfortunately, it appears that, even after the temple was rebuilt, the leaders in the Israelite community never quite moved away from the Law as the primary source of identity; hence, the story of Ruth was needed to remind the people that God is bigger than the Law.

As I argued in the previous sections, I believe Ezra and Nehemiah put too much emphasis on the Law because they were scared Israel was losing its identity. Even those

²⁹ Ibid., 142.

that worshiped YHWH, and offered to help rebuild the temple, were rebuffed if they were not ethnically pure. Ezra 4:1-4 states:

When the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the returned exiles were building a temple to the Lord, the God of Israel, they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of families and said to them, 'Let us build with you, for we worship your God as you do, and we have been sacrificing to him ever since the days of King Esar-haddon of Assyria who brought us here.' But Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the rest of the heads of families in Israel said to them, 'You shall have no part with us in building a house to our God; but we alone will build to the Lord, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus of Persia has commanded us.' Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah, and made them afraid to build, and they bribed officials to frustrate their plan throughout the reign of King Cyrus of Persia and until the reign of King Darius of Persia.³⁰

Even though their neighbors are worshiping the same God, their offer to help is refused, and they are treated harshly; therefore, it makes sense that they would be angry and use political tactics to make it difficult for the Israelites to complete their plans. Some scholars have argued that the reason Israel was so harsh toward their foreign neighbors that wanted to join their ranks is because they had not yet established categories for conversion; however, by refusing their neighbors access to the temple, they were continuing the cycle of violence that had been done to them by the Persians. Just as the Persians denied the Israelites the markers that they used to create their identity, the Israelites denied their neighbors the same thing. Within this context, Ruth can represent an apology to the foreigners that were abused during the rebuilding of the temple, as Israel moves away from an extreme posture of the Law born from fear and into a posture that honors God's desire to bring all of creation into relationship with God.

When it comes to identity, location plays a huge role. Ruth, for example, has the identity of a Moabite. Within her homeland, this is no big deal; however, when she moves to Bethlehem with Naomi, Ruth takes on the identity of a foreigner, and, not just any

³⁰ Ezra 4:1-4 (NRSV).

foreigner, a foreigner that carries a very negative stigma. Alicia Ostriker describes the relationship between Israelites and foreigners as one of eternal enemies. She writes, “When Ruth and Boaz marry, theirs is not just any happy marriage. For Ruth is a Moabite, and for much of biblical history the Hebrew people are commanded to treat Moab as an eternal enemy - ‘No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the Lord,’ commanded Deut 23:3 - because they refused aid to the Israelites during their sojourn in the wilderness.”³¹ In other words, it is a big deal that Ruth is a Moabite and moving to Bethlehem. Even though she had married an Israelite, and most likely took the religion of her husband (if she was not already one of the foreigners that worshiped YHWH), Ruth would have been viewed as a trespasser by a people that were looking to retain their cultural identity through the teachings of Ezra and Nehemiah.

In the story of Ruth, fullness of identity is only brought about through *hesed* - acts of loving-kindness that embody the will of God. For Ruth, obtaining an Israelite identity was a process. Ruth’s designation changes three times throughout the story, and with each change, she moves higher and higher in social standing until she is finally looked upon as an equal. Berlin writes:

The story seems to be wrestling with the problem of identity...It is part of an ongoing tension in the Bible between Israel and its relationship to foreigners, expressed in different ways in the Pentateuch, the Deuteronomistic History, and prophetic literature. Both Naomi and the narrator view Ruth’s identity as a constant, but the most interesting insight into her identity comes from the way it shifts in the naming that Boaz and Ruth use. There is a progression in both, from lower to higher, but they are in different classes. Ruth uses three terms to refer to herself when speaking to Boaz: ‘foreigner’ (2:10), ‘maidservant’ (2:13), and ‘handmaid’ (3:9). These reflect a change of status from a foreigner, i.e. One

³¹ Alicia Ostriker, “The Book of Ruth and the Love of the Land,” *Biblical Interpretation* 10, no. 4 (2002): 352.

without a relationship at all, to a gradually ascending relationship of servitude or dependency.³²

What Berlin so eloquently describes in this section is not only relevant to the story of Ruth, but it is also relevant to the situation of emerging adults in contemporary America. If one types “Millennials are” into Google, the results include: 1) lazy, 2) the worst, 3) stupid; 4) idiots.³³ Now Millennials may not be looked upon as bad as Moabites in the Old Testament; however, it is clear that, in contemporary America, Millennials do not carry the best reputation. This is where the story of Ruth can offer wisdom. In Ruth, the foreigner is brought in by someone that is already established in the community. Boaz raises Ruth’s identity from a lowly foreigner to an equal, marries her, and brings her into the community of Israel, and, by doing so, Boaz not only transformed the future of Ruth, but also the future of Israel. In this way, I believe Boomers in contemporary America have the responsibility of bringing Millennials into adulthood. Boomers are holding onto the pieces rubble that were once markers of adulthood, and Millennials are desperately trying to figure out what it means to be an adult. The old markers are no longer beneficial, and new ways are needed. The creativity necessary for change lies with the Millennials, but the authority to acknowledge new ways of doing things still lies with the Boomers; therefore, the generations need each other if they are going to flourish. Millennials need a Boaz to help them enter into adulthood, and the Boomers need a Ruth to help them bring about the necessary changes within the culture. My hope is that, like the story of Ruth, both sides can come together in a way that brings about an abundant life for everyone.

³² Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Winona Lake, IN: Almond Press, 1994), 88.

³³ Google, “Millennials are,” accessed July 1, 2015.

Multigenerational Communities

Lastly, I believe the story of Ruth is a good example of what it looks like for different generations to work with each other. Within the narrative, there are three generations interacting with each other, and each generation is dependent upon the other generations for an abundant life. Naomi and Boaz are a part of the older generation. The problems facing Naomi have been well documented in the story. She lost both her husband and sons - leaving her with no protection or opportunity to continue the family line; however, the problems facing Boaz are less explicit in the text. The original audience of this story would have noticed that Boaz was not married. Whether it was because he never got married or his wife tragically died at a young age, Boaz is single at a time in his life when marriage and a family were expected of him. He was obviously a man of means, but, without a family, he is still lacking in the eyes of the community. Ruth represents the younger adult generation and, similar to Naomi, her problems are easily seen in the text. Ruth lost her husband and had no children. To compound her problems, she decided to follow her mother-in-law to Bethlehem instead of heading back to the house of her family in Moab. Not only did she intentionally enter a situation where she had no protection, she moved to a land where the natives were hostile toward her people and had rules in place that would not allow her to marry into the community. Lastly, there is the youngest generation - represented by Obed. Within the story of Ruth, Obed has a very small part, but it is a very important part. Viewed more as a symbol of future hope, Obed's birth is the only mention of him in the entire narrative. Obed's struggle is the same as every baby's and future hope. He is fragile and needs care to make sure he survives. When considering all the difficulties faced by each generation in the narrative, it is clear that only by working together can they all find abundance, or, as

LaCocque states, “There can be no joy for the one if there is no joy for the other. The entire story is on this theme.”³⁴

When it comes to bringing the story of Ruth into contemporary America, it is clear that there are many similarities between the generations represented in Ruth and the generations in America today. The older generation in Ruth shares many of the same difficulties and advantages as Boomers. For example, Boaz is in a position where he has control of the majority of the resources; however, he is also without a family and, thus, a way to extend his hope into the future. I argue that Boomers are in the same position today - especially in Church communities. They have control over the majority of the resources; however, they are also uncertain about their legacy. Similar to Boaz, Christian Boomers are left with two options. They can either take a posture that reflects Ezra and Nehemiah, or they can take a posture that reflects the posture of Boaz. The former is a posture of fear that would look to hoard the resources and rebuff any semblance of change, and the latter is a posture of hope that invites others into the community to share in the abundance, desires to be a part of the change, and moves toward a future that reflects a more complex hope. The cultural and religious shifts in Ruth are very similar to those in contemporary America. Like I previously mentioned, Christianity is primed for some serious changes. Whether one looks at it from a philosophical or theological perspective, not since the Reformation has there been this many social structures looking to change. The Boomer generation is going to have to decide whether they invest in change or isolate and take their resources to their graves. At the intersection of Law and *hesed*, Boaz chose to take the road of loving-kindness; however, he was not able to do it alone. Boaz needed to be inspired before he chose his path. He needed the younger

³⁴ André LaCocque, *Ruth: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 4.

generation to offer him a taste of what a new future might look like, and, just like Boaz needed Ruth, Boomers need Millennials to help them move into change.

Within my argument, Ruth's character would represent Millennials. Both Ruth and Millennials are in a position where they are trying to construct an identity in a situation where there are no valid markers to do so, and they both represent ideas and practices that go against the status quo. Just like Ruth is dependent upon Boaz to receive resources and validation in the community, Millennials are dependent upon Boomers; however, Boomers are not the only ones in this relationship that have something to offer. Even though Millennials may not have the resources or validation of the older generation, they do have the experience and wisdom necessary to navigate the changing world and bring the Church into the future. The story of Ruth is a great example of what it looks like for both of these generations to work together. Speaking to this generational reciprocity, LaCocque writes:

This uncalculated mutuality, freely given, assures Ruth's success. She tells her mother-in-law, from the older generation, 'I will do all that you tell me' (Ruth 3:5). Also belonging to the older generation Boaz echoes that declaration in saying to Ruth, 'I will do all that you tell me' (3:11). As we shall see, Ruth's goodness is contagious, at least with those that are well born; she will transform Naomi and Boaz, and even 'the whole people' (4:11).³⁵

In other words, the transformation of the entire community was dependent upon the generations working together. Through acts of loving-kindness, Boaz was given a glimpse of the divine that inspired him to do the same. The reality of this exchange is going to be far more nuanced, as following all the advice from anyone is likely to end badly; however, the important theme that I want take from this section is that the generations took the time to listen and learn from each other. Their actions were not

³⁵ André LaCocque, *Ruth: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 3.

merely dictated by the Law, but served as blessings that looked to honor the promises of God. A different way to look at this relationship is that one knows God by loving others. The generations may have different characteristics and interests; however, their hope is one in the same and can only be attained by working together.

Lastly, there is the youngest generation. Like I mentioned earlier, Obed's character is more important for what he represents rather than what he does. Within the story of Ruth, Obed represents the realization of the future hope of the characters. Through acts of loving-kindness, Naomi, Ruth and Boaz were all able to come together and find the hope and abundance that God desired for them. Unlike the other characters, Obed does not yet have a comparable expression in modern Christianity; however, I think the times in which we live is pregnant with possibility. The story of Ruth says nothing about the pregnancy of Ruth and, thus, skips over the difficult portions of what it looked like to birth a hope; however, the metaphor of pregnancy should not be overlooked just because it is not explicitly mentioned in the text. Approaching this text as a semiotician, one can begin to imagine the struggles associated with pregnancy during this time period. There were no easy pregnancies, and the infant mortality rate was astronomical compared to today. In other words, the gestation period of hope is fragile and requires a lot of support to successfully be brought into the world; therefore, when one begins to imagine what it will look like for different generations to work together and create an abundant life for their community, one should not assume that this is going to be a stress-free process that requires minimum attention. Not only is this process going to require a tremendous amount of time and energy to accomplish this goal, but it is also going to take a lot of personal work for those involved, as nothing sinks a hope faster than failures

in the interpersonal realm. The specifics on what this birthing is going to look like is dependent upon the context in which it is birthed; however, like I argued earlier, it requires the same prophetic posture that begins with turning toward God and ends with transformation. The question for today's generations is: Do we do the work to keep hope alive, or do we allow fear to abort our shared future?

Emerging Adults: Part of the Story

Lastly, the story of Ruth is a good example of how one's personal story and identity might be incorporated into the larger narrative of God. If a character like Ruth can be brought into the story of God and find her identity in YHWH, I have to believe that contemporary emerging adults can do the same. The story of God is not something that is confined to a book - it is an open source story that serves as a testament to the lives that have turned toward God. This is why I have never enjoyed using the phrase "People of the Book" to describe Christians. Yes, Christians are a people that have a book at the core of their practice; however, they are not a group of people whose hope and identity are found within the binding of any book – hope and identity come from an experience with the Divine Presence. If Millennials and future emerging adults are expected to be participants in the Christian faith, there has to be a place for them in the community that values their story and experience of the Divine Presence. The posture of Ezra and Nehemiah that is currently being taken by many churches today needs to be re-imagined, and the story of Ruth serves as a great example of what that re-imagining looks like. As I mentioned previously, metaphors are the building blocks from which we build our understanding - that includes our understanding of ourselves. In other words, the building blocks of identity are metaphors, and, when it comes to Millennials and emerging adults,

new metaphors are needed if an abundant life is going to be constructed. There is no prescription or program that is going to bring about this reality – it is going to take new narratives and metaphors to act as counter texts to the prevailing understanding.

If one is going to “[recognize] the continuity between the biblical story and our own broken world,” as stated by Sakenfeld, one must find a posture that both speaks to the sacredness of the text as well as the inherent humanness of the text - a posture that sees the text as inspired by God, yet not God.³⁶ The posture I am arguing for must be a posture that holds scripture as a unique and vital part of God’s story; however, it does not limit the story and workings of God to a book. It must be a posture that values the providence of God without completely removing personal agency, and it must be a posture that allows room for individuality without devolving into isolation. This is a posture is both prophetic and relational in nature. Not only does it require that one turn toward God, it also requires that one turn toward the other. If the different generations are ever going to work together to produce an abundant life, they have to first turn toward each other and honor each other as image bearers as well as turn toward God. Whether it is through a piece of art or the acts of an individual, an encounter with the Divine Presence is the inspiration that is responsible for creating new metaphors and narratives that can serve as the building blocks of our identity as Christians.

³⁶ Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *Ruth: Interpretation; A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 87.

Chapter 6:

Conclusion: Practical Applications for Research

If in the twilight of memory we should meet once more, we shall speak again together and you shall sing to me a deeper song.

And if our hands should meet in another dream we shall build another tower in the sky.

— Kahlil Gibran. *The Prophet*

As a Millennial minister who sits at the end of his Emerging Adulthood, I feel like I offer a unique perspective on what church communities can do to engage this emerging demographic; therefore, the final section of this project will include wisdom that I have gained through my research into Emerging Adulthood and my experiences as a Millennial in the Church. My research looked at the cultural shifts that produced Emerging Adulthood in the American, and it was clear that an overemphasis on generational differences created a view of Millennials that was neither accurate nor beneficial. Millennials are not a rogue generation that needs to be brought back in line. Millennials are the first generation of emerging adults; therefore, the problem is not that Millennials are wrong in their approach to life; it is that society is not recognizing the change that has occurred in human development. The Church is not doing any better than the culture at understanding Millennials. It is clear from my research that churches have no idea what to do with this new demographic, but, to be fair, many Millennials do not know what they are doing with their Emerging Adulthood either. As the first generation of emerging adults, Millennials are the first set of explorers to map this new landscape of human development, and sometimes explorers get lost. The old markers for adulthood have been pushed back, and a new set of markers has yet to be identified to help

emerging adults navigate this new terrain; therefore, stability becomes a key issue for this demographic.

I have identified two ways in which emerging adults can gain stability within Emerging Adulthood. The first type of stability comes from one's upbringing. Christian Smith's research has shown that practices that are formed before one becomes an emerging adult have a good chance of sticking throughout. If a child is lucky enough to have a person that is willing to invest in their lives from a young age, the child has a better chance of finding stability within the storms and stress of Emerging Adulthood; however, the responsibility of parents, pastors, guardians and mentors to aid young people does not end when an adolescent reaches Emerging Adulthood. Yes, the dynamic changes, as Emerging Adulthood is marked by transience, i.e., the amount of time spent with each other is going to drastically shorten; however, the importance of those relationships is not diminished. Even if a mentor only interacts with their mentee once a month, that one meeting can mean the world to an emerging adult that is trying to find some semblance of stability in their life. This is the second type of stability, and it comes from relationships within the Emerging Adulthood experience. Whereas the first type of stability is more akin to helping young people learn how to sail a ship so they may safely navigate the seas of Emerging Adulthood, the second type of stability is like a port where emerging adults can get supplies and directions for their next voyage.

Like I argued previously, this is not a one-way street. Yes, Millennials need the resources and wisdom of the older generations to bring stability to their life; however, the older generations need the experience of the younger generations to help them navigate the changing world. In short, the generations need each other if anyone is going to

experience an abundant life. Practically speaking, this is going to involve being in relationship with each other and letting go of the power dynamics at play between the generations. The older generations are going to have to let the younger generation have a say in the direction of the community, and the younger generations are going to need the wisdom of the older generations to help them avoid unnecessary shipwrecks. Programs that segregate the generations from each other are not going to get this done. Like Ruth, there is going to need to be someone that is willing to go above and beyond the expectations of the community and love that which is “other” to them. If the story of Ruth teaches one anything, it is that acts of hesed are contagious and, once infected, the community can begin to work together to bring about abundance for everyone.

New Metaphors: From Reformation to Reframation

The story of Ruth served as a great example of how generations can come together; however, as a historical piece of fiction, the story of Ruth also showed how new narratives and metaphors can transform culture. Similar to the time in which the story of Ruth was written, new metaphors are needed if Christians are going to be a blessing to the world. Whereas the story of Ruth was written as a counter text to the posture of Ezra and Nehemiah, contemporary Christians need a counter text that speaks to the metaphors for sin employed by Augustine that rob Christians of their agency as well as the Fundamentalist Christian narrative that wishes to summon the posture of Ezra and Nehemiah.

When it comes to addressing new metaphors for sin, I am not sure that one needs to get away from the image of debt as much as one needs to reframe one’s understanding of the cancellation of debt. Debt has become such a huge part of the American culture

that it would be remiss of me to do away with it altogether. The problem I have with Augustine's understanding of debt is that the practice of jubilee is absent. Augustine's view of sin creates a situation where humanity is indebted to God, and, instead of simply forgiving humanity for its offenses - as humans are commanded to do - Augustine argued that God demanded the blood of an innocent. Combine that with the idea that Jesus is God, and one is left with a picture of God whose character is defined by mercilessness, bloodlust and masochism. This is not the message of Jesus; however, instead of scrapping the whole metaphor of sin as debt, I argue that inserting the idea of jubilee is a more fruitful way of proceeding. The American culture is built on debt. We are in a position where the people that are creating and controlling the money are charging interest; therefore, there is never enough money in the system at any one time to ever repay all the debt that has been incurred. In other words, in order for one person to pay back their debts, it is required that someone else does not have enough money to pay back their balance and, thus, go further into debt. This is why the practice of jubilee is so important. Not only would it create a metaphor for God to forgive humanity without seeming like a monster, but it would also create a metaphor that could change the way we think about society.

The image of God forgiving a debt is far more powerful than the image of God demanding the repayment of a debt, especially for an emerging adult that is looking to go into some serious debt in order to get an education, start a family, or buy a house. Therefore, instead of offering narratives and metaphors that continually speak of God as a debt collector, I argue that Christianity needs new narratives and metaphors that speak of God as jubilee, and I believe Millennials are going to be the generation that produces

such metaphors and narratives. As a generation that is primarily concerned with goodness, I believe that Millennials are uniquely equipped to construct metaphors and narratives that speak to the lack of goodness inherent in the theological and social systems in which we find ourselves. The process that is going to produce these new metaphors and narratives is prophetic in nature and, thus, requires a posture that turns toward God and EPIC-ly reflects that encounter onto the community; however, it also requires that the different generations turn toward each other, acknowledge the Imago Dei, and work together toward a life that reflects that encounter with the Divine Presence.

Craft Community

If I could say anything about the preferences of the Millennial generation, it would be that they love things that could be described as craft. Millennials like to see the story that lies behind the objects that surround them, and they love to see that attention was given to the design. Whether it is a craft beer that was brewed by a local brewery in their neighborhood, or an independent coffee roaster that pays more for its beans so the growers can earn an acceptable living wage and make sure their product is environmentally friendly, Millennials love to see the connection between their purchases and the humans that created those objects. As I was pondering this idea, I attended an Advance on Orcas Island with Dr. Len Sweet, and during his second lecture, he offered some insight into why the Millennial generation tends to want these kind of products. In short, Dr. Sweet argued that the Boomer generation was responsible for “Warehouse Christianity.”¹ In other words, many churches began to look at beauty as an indulgence that held no real value for the Church. The money that would go to beautifying a space

¹ Leonard Sweet, “Boomer’s Effect on the Church” (lecture, Orcas Advance Orcas Island, May 23, 2015).

could better be spent feeding the poor or financing a mission trip. Slowly but surely, churches traded in their cathedrals for gray warehouses whose defining quality is a huge parking lot. Inside these buildings, instead of finding beautiful images and icons that tell the story of the Christian faith, one can see fabric hanging on the walls to keep the sound from echoing off the cinderblock walls. Dr. Sweet described this situation as “the bland leading the bland,” and I would have to say that I agree.

Beauty needs to be brought back into the church because it is an important part of living a full life. As I have already argued, beauty has the ability to give one a glimpse of the Divine Presence and inspire one toward an abundant life; therefore, it is not shocking to me to see Millennials wanting objects that are beautifully designed. They have been starved of this beauty for too long in their church communities, and they are desperately trying to get a taste wherever they can. To be fair, when cathedrals were being built, they were being built by and for entire communities to use; therefore, in our current state of Protestantism, where there is a church on every corner, it does not make sense for every church to be overly extravagant in the beautification of their buildings. There are not enough resources. If churches are going to create beauty that inspires a sense of awe in their communities, they are going to have to start working together. This can look like churches pooling their resources to beautify a vacant lot or restore a park that has been left to rot, or it can look like churches coming together to build a shared place of worship. Similar to the prophet, the important piece of this process is not what is built but how one builds. It demands a posture that both turns toward God and toward each other. There have been too many casualties of friendly fire between churches. Just imagine the beauty that could be created if churches just started working together.

Just as Millennials are making an effort to find beautiful beer or coffee, Millennials are in search of a beautiful expression of faith. They are looking for something that will inspire and fill them with awe. They are in search of the majestic cathedrals that are scattered across the landscape of their pilgrimage. Unfortunately, the majority of churches in America are closer to Budweiser and Folgers than they are to a specialty beer from a local brewery that has been barrel-aged in whiskey casks or a cup of pour-over coffee that has notes of citrus and hints of wild flowers. Millennials will wait in line for a wonderful cup of coffee. They will sit with anticipation as the barista pours that steaming water over the coffee grounds, and they will watch as the grounds flower and the coffee slowly drips down through the filter and into the cup. Finally, they will take the cup, feel the heat in their hands, breathe in the wonderful aroma bursting from the top, and drink in the wonderful flavors that they have come to know so well. It is all very EPIC. The Folgers being served in the church lobby truly cannot compare.

The Absurdity of Christianity

One of the things that always confused me about many churches is their approach to evangelism. About twice a year, I get a knock on my door, and I open it to find two people with Bibles in their hands ready to convert me to Christianity. What I find so interesting about these interactions is that no matter how many times I tell them that I am already a practicing Christian, they keep trying to convert me. The younger of the two people - an obvious trainee that looks so nervous that I wonder if he had ever spoken to someone outside his community before - goes right into his speech the second I open the door. He quickly blurts out the “how to convert people speech” he memorized beforehand, and I can see the sense of relief wash over his face when he finishes. It

usually only takes one well-placed, somewhat playful question to get the older leader involved, who is just as unconcerned as the young man with the fact that I have already professed my Christian faith. These interactions are minor inconveniences at most; however, as I began to consider the ideas behind this approach and how this approach is experienced by Millennials in America, I realized that I could not think of a reason why a Millennial would ever return, or enter for the first time, a faith community if traditional approaches to evangelism are not reimaged.

The Great Commission is the first thing that comes to mind when I think of evangelism, and there are many takes on what it actually means to fulfill this commission from Jesus; however, I think the whole thing needs to be rethought if it is going to produce fruit within the emerging adult population. Firstly, unlike the disciples, the vast majority of people that are being evangelized to have already heard about Christianity. In other words, people have already heard the “good news” and, for whatever reason, are choosing to go another way. To be honest, many people have good reasons for not wanting to be a part of a faith community; therefore, I argue that the problem is not that Christians have failed to get the word out about Jesus, it is that very few are buying what Christian evangelists are selling because they know the experience of the Christian community will leave them wanting or hurting. No amount of Bible verses is going to convince someone to enter a faith community if that community is not producing good fruit, and one cannot expect emerging adults to be involved in a faith community if it is not producing good things in their lives. In other words, evangelism is less about convincing people that God is real and more about convincing people that God’s community is worthwhile.

For example, when I consider my journey through Christianity, I would have to say that Christians played a larger role in me stepping away from the faith than they ever did in welcoming me into it. At the age of twenty-four, after being hurt by yet another church community, I decided to become one of the “Nones.” Nones is a term used to describe a person that claims to be spiritual but retains no religious affiliation, and, according to Pew Research Center, there are around forty-six million Nones in America today.² According to a poll taken by Pew Research Center, sixty-eight percent of Nones believe in God, fifty-eight percent feel a close connection with nature, thirty-seven percent say they are spiritual but not religious, and twenty-one percent of them say they pray every day, in one form or another.³ The article states, “With few exceptions, though, the unaffiliated say they are not looking for a religion that would be right for them. Overwhelmingly, they think that religious organizations are too concerned with money and power, too focused on rules and too involved in politics.”⁴ In other words, God is not the problem for the vast majority of Nones – it is the organizations that claim God that are the obstacle, and this is exactly where I was when I was twenty-four. I was at a place where I did not feel the need to question the existence of God; however, I was also at a place where I had to hold the reality that the Church people in my life were fundamentally worse than the unreligious people in my life. I had found more love, acceptance, joy and kindness in nonreligious communities than I ever found in a church,

² Pew Research Center, “‘Nones’ on the Rise,” Pew Research Center, October 9, 2012, accessed July 28, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

so I left my religious community, and, if it was not for the writings of Thich Nhat Hanh, I probably never would have come back.

When it comes to engaging Millennials, one of the most important things a church can do is to leave the contrived Christian anecdotes behind. To be clear, I am not saying that one should leave their faith behind when interacting with an emerging adult; however, I am arguing that one should make sure that the emerging adult is seen before one blurts out an answer to their concerns. The vast majority of Millennials sees this type of ministering as unproductive and patronizing – more advertising than caring. In other words, Millennials have the most sensitive bullshit meters that the world has ever seen, and if churches want to break through this barrier, they need to offer an absurd love that transcends the cynicism that Millennials have for faith communities. If one looks closely at advertisements that are geared toward Millennials, one will notice that absurdism is the language that many companies are starting to use to communicate their message to Millennials. The Geico insurance company has some of the best examples of absurdist advertising. For example, they have a commercial where the only thing that is said by the actors is, “Savings!” The two actors proceed to give each other a jumping high-five; however, instead of coming down, they remain suspended in the air by strings. As they hang there, a voiceover states, “You can’t skip this Geico add because it’s already over. Fifteen minutes could save you fifteen percent or more on car insurance.” Then for the final six seconds of the commercial, there is just silence as the two actors just hang there. In this brief fifteen second commercial, Geico was able to do two things. First, they were able to poke fun at the traditional advertising narrative that tries to convince consumers that buying their product will make their life infinitely happier and, thus, break through

the cynicism that Millennials have toward advertising. Second, they were able to provide a memorable image and connect it to their message. The Church should take a lesson from these anti-advertisements and introduce a little absurdism into their programming.

The core message of absurdism is that specific paths that humanity uses to create meaning and value have been proven to be lacking. Absurdism is not arguing meaning and value are impossible to achieve. It just unveils how the ways in which people create meaning and value have/are failing us as a society. If the Church wants to get a message through to the Millennial generation, they should embrace the absurdity of the Christian faith. Jesus speaking to the woman at the well was absurd. Ruth being invited into the Israelite nation was absurd. Loving your enemy is absurd. Giving your money to the poor is absurd. The Bible is full of absurd moments and teachings that have the ability to break one out of one's cynical mindset and call one to something far more abundant. This is why the current Pope is so popular with the Millennial generation. Instead of constructing opinions and theologies for the world's problems, he is washing the feet of prisoners. Instead of driving past a large crowd in his Pope-mobile, he stops to accept a pizza that was delivered to him from a local pizzeria. These are actions that will cut through cynicism, and these are the holy experiences that will ignite the imagination of the Millennial generation.

A Complex Hope

One of the most helpful tools that I found within my emerging adulthood in regards to faith practices was the Enneagram. There are two main reasons why the Enneagram was so helpful to me during my Emerging Adulthood. First, it was a practice that exercised my personal agency, and, second, it brought a sense of creativity to my

faith practice that better reflected my natural way of relating to the world – both of which allowed me to hope that I could have an encounter with the Divine Presence. In short, the Enneagram is an ancient typology that describes nine different characters within the human experience. These characters correspond to numbers that are as follows: 1) The Reformer, 2) The Helper, 3) The Achiever, 4) The Individualist, 5) The Investigator, 6) The Loyalist, 7) The Enthusiast, 8) The Challenger; 9) The Peacemaker.⁵ These nine characters are further divided into three sections that reflect the “three basic components of the human psyche: instinct (8,9,1), feeling (2,3,4), and thinking (5,6,7).”⁶ Through a series of tests, one can find the character that corresponds best to their personality; however, the goal is less about getting pigeonholed into a single number and more about learning to grow in areas where one is weak. In other words, if one finds out that they are a Type 2 character, this does not mean that one must try one’s hardest to live into that Type 2 identity. All this means is that Type 2 reflects one’s natural way of engaging the world; therefore, in order to become a more full human, one should begin to work on reflecting the other characters of the Enneagram, but the Enneagram has so much more to offer than just knowledge of the self - it offers clues and wisdom on what it means to grow a vibrant faith practice.

As I began ministering to other emerging adults, I quickly found that I was not alone in my struggle to find meaningful practices that could grow my faith and self. As it turns out, many of the people that I was meeting with had a similar story. Basically, they were raised in a church that reflected only one style of relating, and they were not that

⁵ Don Richard Riso and Russ Hudson, *The Wisdom of the Enneagram: The Complete Guide to Psychological and Spiritual Growth for the Nine Personality Types* (New York: Bantam Books, 1999), 49.

⁶ Ibid.

number. These people were formed in a tradition that only offered them one way to engage their spiritual practice – which usually reflected the head pastor’s way of relating, and, since they were having difficulties relating to these practices, they thought that they were somehow failing in their spirituality. As an introverted person that grew up in a Pentecostal tradition, I thought for sure there was something wrong with me when it came to my expression of faith. I always encountered the Divine Presence more during contemplative prayer and on quiet walks through my neighborhood than I ever did at a Sunday service, and it was not until a friend had me take the Enneagram test and explain how spiritual practices correspond to each number that I began to feel like less of a failure. In that moment, I was given a great gift. I was given the gift of creativity within my spiritual practice. I was not a failure in my spiritual practice because I did not engage my spirituality the same way as my pastors. There are multiple ways of turning toward the Divine Presence, and I had the opportunity to try all of them.

Figuring out that my first language of my soul was an important start; however, that was just the beginning. I began to realize that, even though it was not my primary way of engaging the divine, I needed my Pentecostal brothers and sisters to help me grow in my practice as well as an individual, but instead of allowing our differences to make me feel like a failure, now I was able to see the beauty in the differences and allow myself to exercise the muscles of my spiritual practice that were a bit atrophied. For example, in his book *The Enneagram: A Christian Perspective*, Richard Rohr offers the reader wisdom on how the Enneagram might be employed to help one better navigate their spiritual practices. In a sectioned entitled “The Enneagram and Prayer,” Rohr talks about how the three basic types of prayer – from the outside in, from the inside out, and

emptiness - correlate to the triad within the Enneagram.⁷ He argues that people that fall within the instinctive portion of the triad are more inclined toward emptiness, people that fall within the feeling triad are more inclined to express themselves (inside out), and people that fall within the thinking triad are more inclined to seek input from the outside (outside in).⁸ However, he goes on to say, “[I]t makes sense to begin with what comes easy to me. Of course, this can become a pitfall in the long run. Heart types who do nothing but express themselves must, on their way to integration and redemption, leave this realm and allow themselves to enter other realms that are further away from them.”⁹ In other words, the Enneagram test offers one a glimpse of their primary way of engaging the world, but it does not give one permission to stay there. For a robust expression of faith and self, one must work toward incorporating all of the numbers of the Enneagram into their life and practice.

Proceed with Hope

In closing, it is clear that many preconceptions need to be rethought when considering the Millennial generation. First, Millennials are not failing to be adults by living out an extended Adolescence. Millennials represent the first generation to experience a new stage of human development – Emerging Adulthood. The markers that previous generations used to signify their movement from Adolescence to Young Adulthood have been pushed back, and new markers for a new stage of development are needed. Second, I argued how important it is to rethink the metaphors and narratives

⁷ Richard Rohr and Andreas Ebert, *The Enneagram: A Christian Perspective* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2012), 246.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

around sin that rob people of their agency, as exercising one's personal agency is a key component in navigating one's faith during Emerging Adulthood. Third, I talked about how the prophetic posture may be used to harness one's agency in a way that reflects the Divine Presence onto humanity. This reflection can be brought about through EPIC pieces of art that both hold the agency of God and offer a complex hope that speaks to one's past, present and future. Fourth, given the individualistic nature of Emerging Adulthood, I found pilgrimage to be an important metaphor that gives meaning and structure to this transient time in one's life. Millennials are the first pilgrims on this journey called Emerging Adulthood, and it will be from their stories that future emerging adults will attempt to construct a map to lead them through the choppy seas of Emerging Adulthood. Fifth, I argued that the story of Ruth served as a great example of how new narratives and metaphors can change the landscape of American Christianity and bring about an identity that is marked by loving-kindness. Ruth also offers one a great example of just how important it is to incorporate the "other" when it comes to constructing an abundant life, and that is the most important thing that I took away from my research. Whether one is looking at generational trends, stages of development, or stories in scripture, it is clear that humanity's hope is connected, along with its ability to have an abundant life.

In a recent New York Times article entitled "The Brain's Empathy Gap: Can Mapping Neural Pathways Help Us Make Friends with Our Enemies?", Jeneen Interlandi discusses what happens in the human brain when one encounters an enemy. In this article, Interlandi references the work of Emile Bruneau, a cognitive neuroscientist at M.I.T., and writes, "When considering an enemy, the mind generates an 'empathy gap.' It mutes the

empathy signal, and that muting prevents us from putting ourselves in the perceived enemy's shoes. He couldn't yet guess at the mechanism behind the phenomenon, but he hypothesized that it had nothing to do with how empathetic a person was by nature."¹⁰ In other words, the part of our brain that would have us understanding and be in relationship with our enemy naturally shuts down when we engage them. The fact that there is a mechanism in our bodies that naturally causes one to separate oneself from one's enemies makes the whole idea of needing the "Other" or loving our enemy even more tenuous and absurd than it already is; however, this is the absurdism that is the Christian faith - that we are called to love our enemy as ourselves and that we need the "Other" to experience the abundant life that Jesus promised. The world needs all the numbers of the Enneagram, all the generations, and all of the ethnicities to have a seat at the table if humanity is ever going to find a hope that reflects Jesus, and I find that wonderfully absurd.

¹⁰ Jeneen Interlandi, "The Brain's Empathy Gap: Can Mapping Neural Pathways Help Us Make Friends with Our Enemies?" New York Times Magazine, March 19, 2015, accessed August 6, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/22/magazine/the-brains-empathy-gap.html?_r=0.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anderson, Gary. *Sin: A History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. Kindle.
- Arnett, Jeffrey Jensen. "Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from the Late Teens Through the Twenties." *American Psychologist Association*, 55, no. 5 (May 2000): 469-80.
- . *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. Kindle.
- . "Emerging Adulthood: What Is It, and What Is It Good For?" *Society for Research in Child Development* 1, no. 2 (2007): 68-73.
- . "Oh Grow Up! Generational Grumbling and the New Life Stage of Emerging Adulthood." *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 5, no. 1 (2010): 89-92.
- Arnett, Jeffrey Jensen, and Jennifer Lynn Tanner, eds. *Emerging Adults in America: Coming of Age in the 21st Century*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2008.
- Augustine. *Confessions*. Translated by R.S. Pine-Coffin. London: Penguin Books, 1961.
- Badone, Ellen, and Sharon R. Roseman, eds. *Intersecting Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage and Tourism*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004. Kindle.
- Bass, Diana Butler, and Joseph Stewart-Sicking, eds. *From Nomads to Pilgrims: Stories from Practicing Congregations*. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2006.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007.
- Bennett, Roger, ed. *Unscrolled: 54 Writers and Artists Wrestle with the Torah*. New York: Workman Publishing, 2013.
- Berlin, Adele. *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*. Winona Lake, IN: Almond Press, 1994.
- Braiterman, Zachary. *The Shape of Revelation: Aesthetics and Modern Jewish Thought*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007.
- Brant, Jonathan. *Paul Tillich and the Possibility of Revelation through Film*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

- Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles Briggs. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *An Unsettling God*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009.
- Buber, Martin. *I and Thou*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Touchstone, 1996.
- Buechner, Frederick. *Secrets in the Dark: A Life in Sermons*. New York: HarperOne, 2006.
- Charles, Sébastien. "Paradoxical Individualism: An Introduction to the Thought of Gilles Lipovetsky by Sébastien Charles" in *Hypermodern Times* by Gilles Lipovetsky. Translated by Andrew Brown. Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2005.
- Choung, James. "What the Father is Doing: Generations, Diversity, and Hope; A Conversation with James Choung." Vineyard USA. 2012. Accessed August 6, 2015. <http://www.vineyardusa.org/site/articles/james-choung>.
- Coleman, Simon, and John Eade, eds. *Reframing Pilgrimage: Cultures in Motion*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Kindle.
- Cousineau, Phil. *The Art of Pilgrimage: The Seeker's Guide to Making Travel Sacred*. San Francisco: Conari Press, 2012. Kindle.
- DeSilva, David. *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods and Ministry Formation*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004.
- Downing, Crystal L. *Changing Signs of Truth: A Christian Introduction to the Semiotics of Communication*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012. Kindle.
- Eade, John, and Michael J. Sallnow, eds. *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1991.
- Enter the Dragon*. Directed by Robert Clouse. Warner Brothers, 1973. Blu-ray. Warner Home Video, 2013.
- Enroth, Ronald, Edward E. Ericson, and C. Breckinridge Peters. *The Jesus People: Old-Time Religion in the Age of Aquarius*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1972.
- Erikson, Erik H., and Joan M. Erikson. *The Life Cycle Completed*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1997. Kindle.
- Fentress-Williams, Judy. *Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries: Ruth*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012.

- Fredriksen, Paula. *Sin: The Early History of an Idea*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012. Kindle.
- Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973.
- Fujimura, Makoto. *Culture Care: Reconnecting with Beauty for our Common Life*. New York: Fujimura Institute, 2015. Kindle.
- Fujimura, Makoto. *Refractions: A Journey of Faith, Art, and Culture*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2009.
- Geary, James. *I is an Other: The Secret Life of Metaphor and How It Shapes the Way We See the World*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001. Kindle.
- Gell, Alfred. *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. Kindle.
- Gordis, Robert. "Love, Marriage, and Business in the Book of Ruth: A Chapter in Hebrew Customary Law." In *A Light Unto My Path: Old Testament Studies in Honor of Jacob M. Myers*, edited by Howard N. Bream, Ralph D. Heim, and Carey A. Moore, 241-64. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974.
- Gottschall, Jonathan. *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012. Kindle.
- Heschel, Abraham J. *The Prophets*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.
- Heuertz, Phileena. *Pilgrimage of a Soul: Contemplative Spirituality for the Active Life*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010. Kindle.
- Interlandi, Jeneen. "The Brain's Empathy Gap: Can Mapping Neural Pathways Help Us Make Friends with Our Enemies?" *New York Times Magazine*. March 19, 2015. Accessed August 6, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/22/magazine/the-brains-empathy-gap.html?_r=0.
- Johnston, Robert K. *God's Wider Presence: Reconsidering General Revelation*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014. Kindle.
- Kazin Alfred, ed. *The Portable Blake*. New York: Penguin Books, 1976.
- King, Nicholas. *The Helplessness of God*. Suffolk: Kevin Mayhew, 2014.
- Kinnaman, David, and Gabe Lyons. *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity...and Why it Matters*. Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 2007.

———. *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church...And Rethinking Faith*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011. Kindle.

Kujawa-Holbrook, Sheryl A. *Pilgrimage – The Sacred Art: Journey to the Center of the Heart*. Woodstock: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2013. Kindle.

LaCocque, André. *Ruth: A Continental Commentary*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004.

McKeown, James. *Ruth: The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2015.

Myers, Joseph R. *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003.

Ostriker, Alicia. "The Book of Ruth and the Love of the Land." *Biblical Interpretation* 10, no. 4 (2002): 343-59.

Paintner, Christine Valters. *The Soul of a Pilgrim: Eight Practices for the Journey Within*. Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2015. Kindle.

Parks, Sharon. *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000.

———. *The Critical Years: Young Adults and the Search for Meaning, Faith and Commitment*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1986.

———. "Home and Pilgrimage: Companion Metaphors for Personal and Social Transformation." *Soundings* 72, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 1989): 297-315.

———. "Social Vision and Moral Courage: Mentoring a New Generation." *Cross Currents* 40, no. 3 (Fall 1990): 350-67.

Peterson, Eugene H. *Revised Thunder: The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991.

Pew Research Center. "'Nones' on the Rise." Pew Research Center. October 9, 2012. Accessed July 28, 2015. <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/>.

Prusak, Bernard P. *The Church Unfinished: Ecclesiology Through the Centuries*. New York: Paulist Press, 2004. Kindle.

Riso, Don Richard, and Russ Hudson. *The Wisdom of the Enneagram: The Complete Guide to Psychological and Spiritual Growth for the Nine Personality Types*. New York: Bantam Books, 1999.

- Rohr, Richard, and Andreas Ebert. *The Enneagram: A Christian Perspective*. New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2012.
- Rossing, Barbara R. *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation*. New York: Basic Books, 2004.
- Rushkoff, Douglas. *Present Shock: When Everything Happens Now*. New York: Penguin Books, 2013. Kindle.
- Sakenfeld, Katharine Doob. *Ruth: Interpretation; A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011.
- Settersten, Richard, and Barbara E. Ray. *Note Quote Adults: Why Twenty-Somethings Are Choosing a Slower Path to Adulthood, and Why it's Good for Everyone*. New York: Bantam Books, 2010.
- Smith, Christian, Kari Christoffersen, Hilary Davidson, and Patricia Snell Herzog. *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. Kindle.
- Smith, Christian, and Melinda Lundquist Denton. *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. Kindle.
- Smith, Christian, and Patricia Snell. *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. Kindle.
- Smith, James K. A. *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009.
- Sweet, Leonard. *Giving Blood: A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014. Kindle.
- Thiessen, Gesa Elsbeth, ed. *Theological Aesthetics: A Reader*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004. Kindle.
- Turner, Marci. "Marriage and the Single Girl: Eight Lessons on How to Steward Singleness that Marci Turner Wishes She Would Have Known in Her Pre-Marriage Days." *Invest Your Gifts Blog*, March 15, 2015. Accessed August 6, 2015. <http://investyourgifts.com/marriage-and-the-single-girl/>.
- Turner, Victor, and Edith L.B. Turner. *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1978. Kindle.

- Twenge, Jean M. *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled – and More Miserable Than Ever Before*. New York: Free Press, 2006.
- Van Gennep, Arnold. *The Rites of Passage*. Translated by Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960. Kindle.
- Viladesau, Richard. *Theological Aesthetics: God in Imagination, Beauty, and Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Westwood, Jennifer. *On Pilgrimage: Sacred Journeys Around the World*. Mahwah, NJ: HiddenSpring, 2003.
- Wiesel, Elie. *Messengers of God: Biblical Portraits and Legends*. New York: Touchstone, 1976.
- Wilch, John. *Ruth: Concordia Commentary*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 2006.
- Wiley, Tatha. *Original Sin: Origins, Developments, Contemporary Meanings*. New York: Paulist Press, 2002.
- Wright, N.T. *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense*. New York: HarperCollins, 2009. Kindle.
- . *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*. New York: HarperOne, 2008.
- Wuthnow, Robert. *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007. Kindle.
- . *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950's*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1998.