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Aging Baby Boomers, Churches, and the Second Half of Life (Challenges for Boomers and Their Churches)

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

AGING BABY BOOMERS, CHURCHES, AND THE SECOND HALF OF LIFE
(CHALLENGES FOR BOOMERS AND THEIR CHURCHES)

A DISSERTATION
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
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PORTLAND, OREGON

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George Fox Evangelical Seminary
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Portland, Oregon

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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has been approved by
the Dissertation Committee on February 11, 2016
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Spiritual Formation.

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ABSTRACT

Growing numbers of Baby Boomers are experiencing a transformation in their values, perspectives, and beliefs. As a result, they no longer fit in their churches. This dissertation proposes that, for many, this is an indication of healthy spiritual growth from the First to the Second Half of Life. This is not a problem to resist or fix; it is growth to celebrate, adjust for, and enter into.

Section One develops a typology of the First and Second Halves of Life based on work by Richard Rohr, James Hollis, John W. Fowler, and Ken Wilber.

Section Two describes the Baby Boomers cohort. It proposes that several characteristics of Baby Boomers prepare them for transition into the Second Half of Life. It further proposes that Baby Boomers are entering a time of life that invites transition to the Second Half of Life.

Section Three proposes that churches oriented to the First Half of Life will continue to lose resonance with Boomers in the Second Half of Life. As a result, Boomers will continue to withdraw their involvement from churches. It calls for innovative scholars, churches, and Baby Boomers to understand, accept, nurture, and incorporate values, perspectives, and beliefs in the Second Half of Life into the life of the Church.

Sections Four and Five introduce and describe an artifact, a product created to address the perspective, challenge, and solutions proposed in this dissertation. The author chose to design and launch a multi-year blogging project to help Baby Boomers and churches explore, understand, and respond wisely to the challenge and potential of transition from the First to Second Half of Life.

Section Six reflects on the completed project.

An Appendix includes beginning blog content, screen shots, and a link to the blog.

SECTION ONE:

A TYPOLOGY:

A DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE BASED ON TWO HALVES OF LIFE

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

— Dylan Thomas, *Do Not Go Gentle into that Good Night*

I have a cause.
We need those don't we?
Otherwise the darkness and the cold get in
and everything starts to ache.

— St. Thomas, Aquinas, *Otherwise the Darkness*

Section Introduction and Summary

This project is founded on a conviction that Baby Boomers have the potential to experience continued growth, purpose, and meaning throughout their aging years. Retirement years can become much more than a time to settle in, opt out, become irrelevant, and wait for inevitable mental and physical decline. In the words of the song popularized by Frank Sinatra, “The Best is Yet to Come.”

In this section I describe a way of seeing the full span of life that supports and illuminates such a perspective. It sees life as coming to us in two halves: a First Half of Life and a Second Half of Life.¹ Studies by Richard Rohr, James Hollis, James Fowler, and Ken Wilber provide a platform for this way of seeing and approaching the Second Half of Life. I present this section in four parts:

¹ I capitalize *First Half of Life* and *Second Half of Life* when the terms refer to the way of seeing the halves of life developed in this project. I retain the capitalization format used by source authors when in quotations.

1. Reasons I chose Richard Rohr, James Hollis, John W. Fowler, and Ken Wilber
2. Perspectives by Rohr, Hollis, Fowler, and Wilber
3. Cautions, corrections, and supplements from other authors, responding to perspectives by Rohr, Hollis, Fowler, and Wilber
4. Synthesized descriptions of the First Half of Life, the transition from the First to Second Half of Life, and the Second Half of Life

Why Richard Rohr, James Hollis, John W. Fowler, and Ken Wilber?

My challenge was to find authors who spoke richly and profoundly about aging. It was also to decide which authors to select as central to this project. I considered Jung, Erikson, Piaget, Kohlberg, Maslow, Sheeny, Strauss, Kegan, Schachter-Shalomi, and others. Why Rohr, Hollis, Fowler, and Wilber? I used twelve filtering criteria, which these four developmentalists fit better than others I considered. Each of the four selected perspectives met the following criteria:

1. Directly and extensively address the Second Half of Life (the aging stages of life)
2. Speak from a broad perspective (beyond one aspect of development)
3. Present a positive, hope-filled, faith-friendly, and open-ended perspective
4. Include the mystical (mystics, sages, seers, wisdoms)
5. Move beyond limiting ways of seeing, such as: literalism, linear time, dualism, egoic stages, and fundamentalism
6. Include an appreciation for and teachable attitude toward world perspectives (Western and Eastern thought, Christian and other faith systems)
7. Build on classical Western developmentalists such as: Erikson, Kohlberg, Piaget, and Jung

8. Resonate with my heart and personal experience
9. Fit with my observations of people's development over the decades of my life and ministry
10. Help me imagine my past and future with a sense of ongoing, sustainable growth, purpose, and meaning
11. Show congruency with other authors selected, while supplementing, extending, and balancing their perspectives
12. Developed by respected (even if controversial) scholars in their field

Perspectives by Richard Rohr, James Hollis, John W. Fowler, and Ken Wilber

People progress through several stages of development during their lifetime.

Professor James W. Fowler, a developmental psychologist, defines such stages:

A stage, then, we may say, is an integrated set of operational structures that constitute the thought processes of a person at a given time. Development involves the transformation of such "structure of the whole" in the direction of greater internal differentiation, complexity, flexibility and stability. A stage represents a kind of balanced relationship between a knowing subject and his or her environment. In this balanced or equilibrated position the person *assimilates* what is to be "known" in the environment into her or his existing structures of thought. When a novelty or challenge emerges that cannot be assimilated into the present structures of knowing then, if possible, the person *accommodates*, that is, generates new structure of knowing. A stage transition has occurred when enough *accommodation* has been undertaken to require and make possible a transformation in the operational pattern of the structural whole of intellectual operations.²

Fowler focused on intellectual stages of development in this description. The perspective of a "balanced or equilibrated position" can also be applied to psychosocial development, moral development, and faith development. Whichever aspect of human life is being considered, from a developmental perspective, is "very like the geological

² James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 49.

formation of the earth, psychological development proceeds, stratum by stratum, level by level, stage by stage, with each successive level superimposed upon its predecessor in such a way that it includes but transcends it.”³

Authors speak variously of the full scope of human development as coming in two halves, three thirds, or several stages. Richard Rohr and James Hollis speak of two halves, while recognizing and honoring those who speak about several stages of development. James Fowler proposes six stages of development. Ken Wilber proposes twelve stages of development grouped into three phases. In Part Four of this section I group Fowler’s six stages and Ken Wilber’s three phases into two halves of life congruent with Rohr and Hollis. These four sources come from different disciplines, often use different words, and range from two halves to twelve stages. Yet they reach surprisingly similar conclusions about tasks, challenges, and perspectives inherent in the First Half of Life and those we are invited into during the Second Half of Life.

Richard Rohr on the Two Halves of Life

Richard Rohr is a Franciscan friar in the Roman Catholic Church and the Founding Director of the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, New Mexico. In his book, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*, he views much of the first part of life as preparation for the second: “There is much evidence on several levels that there are at least two major tasks to human life. The first task is to build a strong ‘container’ or identity; the second is to find the contents that the container

³ Ken Wilber, *The Atman Project: A Transpersonal View of Human Development* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 1996), 2.

was meant to hold.”⁴ Later, he emphasizes the importance of completing the first task well in order to engage the second:

You need a very strong container to hold the contents and contradictions that arrive later in life. You ironically need a very strong ego structure to let go of your ego. You need to struggle with the rules more than a bit before you throw them out. You only internalize values by butting up against external values for a while.⁵

Rohr describes the First Half as being “largely concerned about *surviving successfully* ... establishing an identity, a home, relationships, friends, community, security, and building a proper platform for our only life.”⁶ In order to accomplish this challenging task, one lives into the First Half as a soldier who is “very loyal to strict meritocracy, to his own entitlement, to obedience and loyalty.”⁷ This leaves little room for contradictions, doubts, or paradox: “In the first half of Life, the negative, the mysterious, the scary, and the problematic are always exported elsewhere.”⁸

As one transitions into the Second Half, one experiences a larger capacity to hear more, include more, and accept more. One learns “to *hear and obey* (a deeper voice of God) in the second half of life. It will sound an awful lot like the voices of risk, of trust, of surrender, of soul, of ‘common sense,’ of destiny, of love, of an intimate stranger, of your deepest self.”⁹

⁴ Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), xiii.

⁵ Ibid., 26.

⁶ Ibid., xiii-xiv.

⁷ Ibid., 45.

⁸ Ibid., 148.

⁹ Ibid., 48.

Rohr notes that a transformative shift is made possible by this larger capacity: “In the second half of life, all that you avoided for the sake of a manufactured ego ideal starts coming back as a true friend and teacher.”¹⁰ With our enlarged capacity, “we can give our energy to making even the painful parts and the formerly excluded parts belong to the now unified field – especially people who are different, and those who have never had a chance.”¹¹

As one transitions from roles of personal identity (ego) builder and loyal soldier into the Second Half of Life “you find happiness in likeness, which has become much more obvious to you now; and you do not need to dwell on the differences between people or exaggerate the problems.”¹² We are able to relax, receive, and rejoice in differences because “we do not have strong and final opinions about everything, every event, or most people, as much as we allow things and people to delight us, sadden us, and truly influence us.”¹³ The categorizing dualism that characterized the First Half of Life no longer dominates our perspective. “You no longer need to divide the field of every moment between up and down, totally right or totally wrong, with me or against me. It just *is*.”¹⁴

Rohr introduces us to a perspective of life offered in two halves. He describes a First Half of Life that is challenging and rich. When lived fully, it can lead us to and

¹⁰ Ibid., 148.

¹¹ Ibid., 114.

¹² Ibid., 120.

¹³ Ibid., 122.

¹⁴ Ibid., 146.

prepare us for a full experience of the Second Half of Life. His portrait of the Second Half is different from the First Half and is, in its own way, as challenging and rich.

I thrived in my First Half of Life. I was able to establish an identity, home, relationships, friends, and security. I was loyal and clear on who and what to obey. I successfully exported much of the mysterious, scary, and problematic. It was hard work, but incredibly satisfying. Now, having transitioned to the Second Half of Life, I fully expect to thrive in my aging years as well. The mysterious new risks, calls to surrender, a deeper inner journey, and discovering fresh unity and inclusion intrigue me and draw me in. I consider my aging years to be a gift to be appreciated and entered into with great expectation. I will face challenges, some brought forward from my First Half as well as fresh ones related to aging. I am confident, however, they will not negate or detract from the growth, purpose, and meaning Rohr describes in my future years.

We turn from Rohr, a Roman Catholic priest, to Hollis, a Jungian analyst and professor. They present shades of difference in perspective on the two halves of life, supplementing and enriching each other's work.

James Hollis on Two Halves of Life

In his book, *Finding Meaning in the Second Half of Life: How to Finally, Really Grow Up*, Hollis sees life coming to us in two parts, which he calls the first and second halves of life. From his perspective, a person requires the experience and effective work of the First Half to “provide the agenda of growth, purpose, and meaning” available uniquely in the Second Half.¹⁵

¹⁵ James Hollis, *Finding Meaning in the Second Half of Life: How to Finally, Really Grow Up* (New York: Gotham Books, 2005), 260.

In the First Half of Life one seeks to answer the question, “What does the world ask of me, and what resources can I muster to meet its demands?”¹⁶ This search sets the First Half’s tone and agenda: “The psychology of the first half of life is driven by *the fantasy of acquisition*: gaining ego strength to deal with separation, separating from the overt domination of parents, acquiring a standing in the world, whether it be through property, relationship, or social function.”¹⁷ He continues, “The chief task of the first half of life is to build a sense of ego strength sufficient to engage relationship, social role expectations, and to support oneself.”¹⁸

When one has built sufficient ego strength, the agenda shifts as one is invited into the Second Half of Life: “The task of ego consciousness in the second half of life is to step out of the way and embrace a larger spiritual agenda.”¹⁹ Similarly, once one has sufficiently answered expectations of society, “the agenda shifts to reframing our personal experience in the larger order of things, and the questions change. ‘What does the soul ask of me?’ ‘What does it mean that I am here?’ ‘Who am I apart from my roles, apart from my history?’”²⁰ One has shifted from a social to a spiritual agenda. A correlative shift invites one to move from acquisition to “*relinquishment* – relinquishment of identification with property, roles, status, provisional identities – and the embrace of other, inwardly confirmed values.”²¹

¹⁶ Ibid., 86.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 149.

¹⁹ Ibid., 233-234.

²⁰ Ibid., 86.

²¹ Ibid.

One perspective prevalent in Western culture views aging and “retirement” years as moving out of the exciting phase of life. One phases *out of* the challenge of growing career, family, wealth, and influence. One phases *into* years of leisure, decline, and marginalization. The *Cambridge Handbook of Age and Aging* describes this bleak perspective on growing old:

This dismissive interpretation of old age is a social construction, reflecting negative beliefs and attitudes about old age rather than any valid objective evidence concerning the quality of life of older people or their ability to make a positive contribution to society. ... Ageism, then refers to a process of collective stereotyping which emphasizes the negative features of ageing which are ultimately traced back to biomedical ‘decline’, rather than the culturally determined value placed on later life.²²

Hollis paints a very different and profoundly more engaging picture of the Second Half of Life:

We learn that life is much riskier, more powerful, more mysterious than we had ever thought possible. While we are rendered more uncomfortable by this discovery, it is a humbling that deepens spiritual possibility. The world is more magical, less predictable, more autonomous, less controllable, more varied, less simple, more infinite, less knowable, more wonderfully troubling than we could have imagined being able to tolerate when we were younger.²³

While this invitation may be welcomed by some, it is daunting to many. Some will embrace a Second Half of risk, mystery, humbling, magic, troubling, and less control. Many, perhaps most, will resist. Author Marianne Williamson builds on Robert Frost’s poem “The Road Less Traveled” to describe why many turn away from such a dynamic portrait of the Second Half:

²² *The Cambridge Handbook of Age and Ageing*, (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2005). s.v. “Images of Ageing in Social Gerontology,” accessed October 17, 2011, http://www.credoreference.com/entry/cupage/images_of_ageing_in_social_gerontology.

²³ Hollis, 85.

Most people, once they hit middle age, face a fork in the road. And which road they take, in the words of Robert Frost, will make all the difference. One road leads to gradual dissolution—a cruise however slow toward death. The other road becomes a birth canal, a pattern of spiritual rebirth. The older we get, the harder it is to choose rebirth. The ego’s gravity seems harder to resist.²⁴

Hollis warns against taking another road from the Second Half of Life: “The false gods of our culture, power, materialism, hedonism, and narcissism, those upon which we have projected our longing for transcendence, only narrow and diminish.”²⁵ He also warns of the soul’s movement toward the Second Half, even as one’s ego resists or denies that movement:

Too often we remain in service to the agenda of the first half of life when the soul has already moved on to the agenda of the second. [...] We all fall into an overidentification with the ego and these various roles. No matter how successfully one has played out those roles, no matter how worthy they may be, and often they are not, ego identifications alone will not suffice to satisfy the soul over the long run.²⁶

Carl Jung put it succinctly: “We cannot live the afternoon of life according to the program of life’s morning; for what was great in the morning will be little at evening, and what in morning was true will at evening have become a lie.”²⁷

I close this summary of Hollis with Al Lauzon’s resonant description of the Second Half:

The journey ... in the second half of life is often dominated by the developmental journey that begins when they are asked “What does my soul ask of me, and who am I?” It is a journey characterized by lightness and darkness as they revisit the past and imagine the future: a time of experimentation, a time of surrendering rationality for discernment as the individual seeks to hear the quiet voice of the

²⁴ Marianne Williamson, “Keep a Sense of Adventure,” in *50 Things to Do When You Turn 50: 50 Experts on the Subject of Turning 50*, ed. Ronnie Sellers (Portland, ME: Sellers Publishing, 2005), 37.

²⁵ Hollis, 14-15.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 149-150.

²⁷ Carl G. Jung, *The Portable Jung*, edited by Joseph Campbell (New York: Penguin, 1976), 17.

soul whisper gently in their ear; a voice that provides them with guidance and direction in discovering their own personal authority and vocation. It is a journey that has its own agenda and timetable, a journey that cannot be rushed.²⁸

Now we turn from Hollis, a Jungian therapist, to Fowler, a developmental psychologist and minister with the United Methodist Church. Fowler based his work on systematized observation and developed a more detailed description of stages of development than either Rohr or Hollis. While Fowler's area of discipline, language, and number of stages differ from Rohr's and Fowler's, his work shows strong congruency with theirs.

James W. Fowler on Six Stages of Faith Development

James W. Fowler proposed six stages of faith in his book, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*. He founded his perspective on three often quoted and highly respected developmentalists:

As a background for our conversation of faith and human development I want to communicate some of the immense richness I have found in the worlds of Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg and Erik Erikson. I have read and learned from many other theorists of human development, but as regard the timbers and foundations of my own work these three keep proving most fundamental.²⁹

Fowler, with theories and studies of these and other scholars, conducted a study of 359 people to explore how they were experiencing faith and finding meaning. From his studies he developed six stages, which he defined as "generalizable, formal descriptions of integrated sets of operations of knowing and valuing. These stagelike positions are

²⁸ Al Lauzon, "The Changing Nature of Graduate Education: Implications for Students in the Second Half of Life," *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 30, no. 3 (January 1, 2011): 287-307. Accessed April 28, 2014, ERIC, EBSCOhost.

²⁹ Fowler, 39.

related in a sequence we believe to be invariant. Each new stage integrates and carries forward the operations of all the previous stages.”³⁰

Fowler’s six stages describe ways of finding meaning throughout the lifespan. He discovered, however, that “in terms of the structural stages, normal persons can reach a longlasting or even a lifetime equilibration at any Stage from 2 on.”³¹

Children ages two to six/seven settle into Stage 1, which Fowler calls *Intuitive-Projective* faith. It is “the fantasy-filled, imitative phase ... marked by a relative fluidity of thought patterns. ... The imaginative processes underlying fantasy are unrestrained and uninhibited by logical thought.”³² People do not normally remain in this stage; school-age children usually move into Stage 2.

Stage 2, *Mythic-Literal* faith, develops as a child acquires concrete operational thought. The “capacity for and interest in narrative makes the school-age child particularly attentive to the stories that conserve the origins and formative experience of the familial and communal groups to which he or she belongs.”³³ The child or adult in “Stage 2 does not step back from our stories, reflect upon them, and ... communicate their meanings by way of more abstract and general statements.”³⁴ One accepts the stories literally and takes on the beliefs of the most meaningful groups to which he or she belongs. Creeds and ways of finding meaning may shift within Stage 2 as the person’s

³⁰ Ibid., 99-100.

³¹ Ibid., 107.

³² Ibid., 133.

³³ Ibid., 136.

³⁴ Ibid., 136-137.

defining groups shift. Throughout any such shifts, the person continues to take on the ways of seeing and living into the life of his or her current groups.

Stage 3, *Synthetic-Conventional* faith,

typically has its rise and ascendancy in adolescence, but for many adults it becomes a permanent place of equilibrium. ... It is a “conformist” stage in the sense that it is acutely tuned to the expectations and judgments of significant others and as yet does not have a sure enough grasp on its own identity and autonomous judgment to construct and maintain an independent perspective.³⁵

A person in Stage 3 is aware of values and beliefs. He or she can describe, discuss, and defend them. The need to conform to primary identity groups is still so strong, however, that “he does not discuss values to distinguish himself, or to examine the values, or to be sure that his views are correct. Rather, in such discussion he seeks to establish a sense of commonality or relatedness with the other person present.”³⁶

Fowler chose the name *Synthetic-Conventional*: “The Stage 3 individual’s faith system is conventional, in that it is seen as being everybody’s faith system or the faith system of the entire community. And it is synthetic in that it is nonanalytical; it comes as a sort of unified, global wholeness.”³⁷ A person in Stage 3 is aware of alternate belief and value systems, but the need to belong and fit in with an identity group is still stronger than the need to establish a way of seeing, being, and living that can stand apart from those most important to that person. For many, however, questions and alternatives grow more intense over time and they are drawn into Stage 4.

Stage 4, *Individuative-Reflective* faith, is the stage when

³⁵ Ibid., 172.

³⁶ Ibid., 167.

³⁷ Ibid., 167.

the self, previously sustained in its identity and faith compositions by an interpersonal circle of significant others, now claims an identity no longer defined by the composite of one's roles or meanings to others. ... Self (identity) and outlook (world view) are differentiated from those of others and become acknowledged factors in the reactions, interpretations and judgments one makes on the actions of the self and others.³⁸

The *we* of previous stages shifts toward *I* in Stage 4. The question “Where do we stand on this?” becomes “Where do I stand on this?” One forms a personal credo and rule of life, which is at least in part distinct from, at times opposed to, the persons and groups one holds important. “While others and their judgments will remain important to the Individuative-Reflective person, their expectations, advice and counsel will be submitted to an internal panel of experts who reserve the right to choose and who are prepared to take responsibility for their choices.”³⁹

The shift from the previous stage, *Synthetic-Conventional*, to Stage 4 is not a given. “For some adults Synthetic-Conventional faith becomes a stable, equilibrated, lifelong structural style.”⁴⁰ In Fowler's study group, 35.3% of people 51-60 years old and 24.2% of those 61+ were determined to be in Stage 3.⁴¹ “For a genuine move to Stage 4 to occur there must be an interruption of reliance on external sources of authority. The ‘tyranny of the they’—or the potential for it—must be undermined.”⁴² Fowler notes two times in a person's life which are ripe for this to occur: during the transition into young adulthood and during the mid-life transition (crisis). Whether this transition takes place

³⁸ Ibid., 182.

³⁹ Ibid., 179.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 114.

⁴¹ Ibid., 318.

⁴² Ibid., 179.

depends at least in part on several factors, such as: exposure to alternate perspectives, strength of internal identity, pressure from groups to which a person belongs, and space in which to wonder about questions of identity and meaning.

Stage 5, *Conjunctive* faith, reflects a shift in perspective from either/or dualistic thinking to one comfortable with paradox, mystery, and both/and. “Stage 5, as a way of seeing, of knowing, of committing, moves beyond the dichotomizing logic of Stage 4’s ‘either/or.’ It sees both (or the many) sides of an issue simultaneously.”⁴³ In the shift to Stage 5 one moves from needing to define and defend personal or group beliefs over against those with other perspectives to expecting and seeking wisdom and truth from them.

Stage 5 accepts as axiomatic that truth is more multidimensional and organically interdependent than most theories or accounts of truth can grasp. Religiously, it knows that the symbols, stories, doctrines and liturgies offered by its own or other traditions are inevitably partial, limited to a particular people’s experience of God and incomplete. ... Conjunctive faith, therefore, is ready for significant encounters with other traditions than its own, expecting that truth has disclosed and will disclose itself in those traditions in ways that may complement or correct its own.⁴⁴

Along with a shift from dualism to both/and perspective comes awareness “that the conscious ego is not master in its own house.”⁴⁵ This enables a profound ability to risk one’s own hard-fought-for beliefs and perspectives. “What the previous stage struggled to clarify, in terms of the boundaries of self and outlook, this stage now makes porous and permeable. ... It generates and maintains vulnerability to the strange truths of

⁴³ Ibid., 185.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 186.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

those who are ‘other.’”⁴⁶ This wider perspective and openness enables a fresh, more open way to engage the world: “This stage’s commitment to justice is freed from the confines of tribe, class, religious community or nation. ... This stage is ready to spend and be spent for the cause of conserving and cultivating the possibility of others’ generating identity and meaning.”⁴⁷

Fowler found Stage 5 to be rare before mid-life. No test subjects under 31 years old lived from this perspective. The percentage of Stage 5 in mid-life and older adults was found to be: 14.6% for the age group 31-40, 12.5% for 41-50, 23.5% for 51-60, and 16.1% for those 61 and older.⁴⁸

Fowler suggests reasons for these relatively small percentages. First, he sees each stage of development coming to a person “in a sequence we believe to be invariant.”⁴⁹ At each stage one must find equilibrium and assimilate what was known in previous stages and what is known in the environment.⁵⁰ This process takes time. And as one proceeds to each later stage, there are more previous stages and more of what is known to assimilate and equalize. Then, only when adequate experience and inner perspective can no longer assimilate into the stage, a person shifts to the next stage. Each person transitions into, develops an equilibrated position within, and shifts to the next stage at individual paces; Fowler’s study suggests that for most it takes decades of life and work.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 198.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 318.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 99.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 49.

Second, Fowler suggests that people can settle into an equilibrated position for a long period of time or permanently.⁵¹ Thus, a majority of those surveyed had not yet transitioned stage-after-stage into Conjunctive faith or had permanently settled into a previous stage.

I will explore other potential reasons for these relatively low percentages in the remainder of this project:

- Perhaps people in Fowler's study had been taking a road most traveled. Cohorts previous to Baby Boomers saw and lived into older age with little or no expectation of rich, fresh stages of development. When a majority of aging models show people in Stage 4 or lower, it becomes an expected way to live.
- Our Western culture has failed thus far to give aging adults a rich, honored portrait of Stage 5. "Almost all of the data generated by orthodox Western psychology pertains only to the gross realm [First Half of Life, Fowler's Stages 1-4]."⁵² Perhaps invitations to Stage 5 were going unheeded by most in Fowler's study for lack of vision, symbol, and hope.
- The transition from the First to Second Half of Life (from Fowler's Stage 4 to Stages 5 and 6) is challenging and unsettling. Our culture, both inside and outside the Christian church, has failed to affirm and raise up mentors, rites of passage, and honored examples of those who have faced the challenges and made the transition. Perhaps most in Fowler's study lacked crucial support and had failed to complete the transition.

⁵¹ Ibid., 107.

⁵² Wilber, 75.

Rather than wondering why so many did not enter into Fowler's Stage 5, we should perhaps be amazed by and honor those who actually did. Such a continuing journey is challenging, with ample opportunity to settle down along the way, due to either internal or external encouragement. But some stayed the course and lived to experience the wonders and disruptions of Stage 5.

We now turn to Fowler's Stage 6. While a minority of mid-life and aging adults makes the shift to Stage 5, even rarer is a shift to Stage 6, *Universalizing* faith. It is a way of living in which barriers and limits fall away. He notes that one is still limited in Stage 5:

Stage 5 acts out of conflicting loyalties. Its readiness to spend and be spent finds limits in its loyalty to the present order, to its institutions, groups and compromise procedures. Stage 5's perceptions of justice outreach its readiness to sacrifice the self and to risk the partial justice of the present order for the sake of a more inclusive justice and the realization of love.⁵³

In transition to Stage 6 these limits of loyalties, self-preservation, and a need for stability lessen:

Heedless of the threats to self, to primary groups, and to the institutional arrangements of the present order that are involved, Stage 6 becomes a disciplined, activist *incarnation*—a making real and tangible—of the imperatives of absolute love and justice of which Stage 5 has partial apprehensions. The self at Stage 6 engages in spending and being spent for the transformation of present reality in the direction of a transcendent actuality.⁵⁴

Persons in Stage 6 are extremely rare; Fowler discovered only one within 359 test subjects.⁵⁵ Additionally, "their heedlessness to self-preservation and the vividness of their taste and feel for transcendent moral and religious actuality give their actions and words

⁵³ James W. Fowler and Sam Keen, *Life-Maps: Conversations on the Journey of Faith* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1978), 87-89, quoted in James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 200.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 318.

an extraordinary and often unpredictable quality.”⁵⁶ It is little wonder that others find them strange and hard to understand. “Universalizers are often experienced as subversive of the structures (including religious structures) by which we sustain our individual and corporate survival, security and significance. Many persons in this stage die at the hands of those whom they hope to change.”⁵⁷

Fowler’s Stages 5 and 6 correlate well with the Second Half of Life as described by Rohr and Hollis. They describe a way of living that is rare, often misunderstood, and resisted in Western culture. M. Scott Peck might call it “The Road Less Traveled.” Jesus might say, “Small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to [this kind of] life, and only a few find it (Matthew 7:14 TNIV, interpretation added).

Turning from Rohr, Hollis, and Fowler to Wilber is entering a different perspective entirely. Wilber is a self-identified Buddhist who incorporates cultural and faith-based perspectives from across the world into one. His language is challenging to understand, including technical concepts and words from Eastern thought and developmental studies. His non-theistic perspective challenges those of us with a conventional Christian background. Yet, once I worked through these barriers, I found surprising resonance between Wilber and Rohr, Hollis, Fowler, and my own heart.

Ken Wilber on Twelve Stages of Development in Three Phases

Ken Wilber is a philosopher who helped launch transpersonal psychology. This dissertation project focuses primarily on one of his earlier books, *The Atman Project: A*

⁵⁶ Fowler and Keen, 87-89.

⁵⁷ James W. Fowler, “Perspectives on the Family from the Standpoint of Faith Development Theory,” *The Perkins Journal* 33, no. 1 (Fall 1979), 13-14, Quoted in James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 201.

Transpersonal View of Human Development, first published in 1980, in which he sought to merge several developmental schemata into one developmental framework. He brought in perspectives from “East and West, conventional and contemplative, orthodox and mystical.”⁵⁸

Wilber describes a complex schema of twelve stages of development, which he groups into three phases of a fully experienced life: “subconsciousness (instinctual, impulsive, id-ish) to self-consciousness (egoic, conceptual, syntactical) to superconsciousness (transcendent, transpersonal, transtemporal).”⁵⁹

Wilber’s first phase, subconsciousness, relates to early childhood development. While rich and instructive, it does not directly relate to the scope of this project. We will focus on his second and third phases: self-consciousness and superconsciousness.

Wilber describes the second phase of a fully experienced life, Self-Consciousness, as the Mental-Egoic Realms. It includes development of the ego, which he defines as

a self-concept, or constellation of self-concepts, along with the images, phantasies, identifications, memories, subpersonalities, motivations, ideas and information related or bound to the separate self-concept. Thus a “healthy ego,” as psychoanalysis puts it, is a more or less “correct self-concept,” one which adequately takes account of the various and frequently discordant trends of the ego.⁶⁰

The goals of this phase are to become “socially adapted, mentally adjusted, egoically integrated, syntactically organized, conceptually advanced.”⁶¹ One is exploring, testing, learning, and integrating a challenging set of skills. One is seeking to become

⁵⁸ Wilber, Back Cover.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 4.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 36.

⁶¹ Ibid., 3.

competent relationally, mentally, psychologically, linguistically, and imaginatively. This sets an agenda for adolescence and early adulthood. For some, it sets an agenda for most or all of their adult lives.

Wilber founds his third phase, superconsciousness, on four premises. First, a healthy and mature ego is not an end goal of the stages of development. Rich stages remain: “The individual ego is a marvelously high-order unity, but compared with the Unity of the cosmos at large, it is a pitiful slice of holistic reality. Has nature labored these billions of years just to bring forth this egoic mouse?”⁶² He answers this rhetorical question with a strong “no.”

Second, Wilber proposes that Mystics are models of the stages of development within the superconsciousness (transcendent, transpersonal, transtemporal) realm:

The problem ... lies in *finding* examples of truly higher-order personalities—and in deciding exactly *what* constitutes a higher-order personality in the first place. ... Those few gifted souls who have bothered to look at this problem have suggested that the world’s great mystics and sages represent some of the very highest, if not the highest, of all stages of human development.⁶³

Wilbur crosses cultural and religious boundaries to find such mystics and sages.

As he does so, he discovers congruence in their experiences and perspectives:

For indications as to the nature of any higher levels of consciousness, beyond the ego and centaur, we have to turn to the great mystic-sages, Eastern and Western, Hindu and Buddhist, Christian and Islamic. It is somewhat surprising, but absolutely significant, that all of these otherwise divergent schools of thought agree rather unanimously as to the nature of the “farther reaches of human nature.” There are indeed, these traditions tell us, higher levels of consciousness—as far above the ego-mind as the ego-mind is above the typhoon.⁶⁴

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 76.

These sage mystics, in Wilber's perspective, show persons' potential for a life fully lived. They are also early examples of humanity evolving. He does not view them as peculiar, fringe, or unattainable models for others. He wrote a companion book to *The Atman Project* titled *Up From Eden: A Transpersonal View of Human Evolution*. Wilber proposes "that history is the unfolding of human consciousness (or various structures of human consciousness.)."⁶⁵ He views sage mystics as precursors and models of where we as humanity are evolving. Jesus is such a precursor, model, and sage mystic for me. He is a primary example, one showing us a way and bidding us follow.

Third, Wilber proposes that *mystical union* (wholeness) is an ultimate goal of human development: "One dissolves into Deity, *as* Deity—that Deity which, from the beginning, has been one's own Self or highest Archetype. In this way only could St. Clement say that he who knows himself knows God. We could now say, he who knows his overself knows God. They are one and the same."⁶⁶ This language and way of seeing spiritual formation, though not unknown in the fathers and mothers in our Christian heritage, stretches those in the conventional church. As discussed later in this section, it also conflicts with some perspectives of theists. Yet, while I am not able to go as far as Wilber in this area, he stretches me toward more openness and expectation for union with God. I find his work in mystical union to be both challenging and inviting.

Fourth, Wilber proposes that there is a draw built into humans as individuals and into humanity as a whole toward continuing stages of development that culminate in mystical union:

⁶⁵ Ken Wilber, *Up From Eden* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 1996), 9.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

Psychological development in humans has the same goal as natural evolution: the production of ever-higher unities. And since the ultimate Unity is Buddha, God, or Atman (to use those terms in their broadest sense as “ultimate reality”) ... each stage toward God is still not itself God. Each stage is a search for God which occurs under conditions which fall short of God. The soul must seek Unity through the constraints of the present stage, which is not yet Unity. ... Only at the end of psychological growth is there final enlightenment and liberation in and as God, but that is the *only* thing that is desired from the beginning. ... Each successive stage achieves a higher-order unity, and this continues until there is *only* Unity.⁶⁷

This correlates well with Christian perspectives of promptings of the Spirit, sanctification, and developmentalism. The work of the Spirit is not over and against human “natural” development. It is within it, empowering it, drawing it on, and inviting one to step beyond constraints to discover new stages of growth toward fullness of life (glorification, union).

From Wilber’s perspective, the mental-egoic phase of human development (his second of three) is seeking unity, but it is unity within one’s own life and relationships. The self seeks to pull it all together and live as a *whole* individual. But this is a stage on the way to a much fuller whole, one with all that is. When a person has it all together in the self-conscious phase, the built-in draw kicks in and a restlessness, albeit a gracious one, draws one who is listening and open toward the superconscious phase of human development.

Wilber includes three realms within superconsciousness: subtle, causal, and ultimate. In the subtle realm, “a very high-order differentiation and transcendence is occurring. Mediated through high-archetypal symbolic forms—deity forms, illuminative or audible—consciousness is following a path of transformation upward which leads

⁶⁷ Ibid., 117-118.

quite beyond the gross bodymind.”⁶⁸ One moves beyond self-consciousness and no longer identifies with physical and mental aspects of life. One experiences a profound and subtle *more*. The self is “dissolved or reabsorbed into archetypal deity, *as* that deity—a deity which from the beginning has always been one’s own Self and highest Archetype.”⁶⁹

In the causal realm there is “total and utter transcendence and release into Formless Consciousness, Boundless Radiance. Here there is no self, no God, no final-God, no subjects, and no thingness, apart from or other than Consciousness as Such.”⁷⁰

In Wilber’s ultimate realm, there is only mystical union: “the extraordinary and the ordinary, the supernatural and mundane, are precisely one and the same.”⁷¹ He is careful to note that one does not lose touch with things of the body and mind: “This is utter Eternity, which is aware of linear time and aware of the immediate present, but is anchored in neither. This is *not* the immediate passing present, which lasts only a second or two, but the eternal present, which—lasting not at all—underlies and embraces all duration.”⁷² In the traditional Christian challenge, one experiences what it means to be “in the world, but not of it.”

⁶⁸ Ibid., 80.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 83.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 84.

⁷¹ Ibid., 86.

⁷² Ibid., 90.

Cautions, Corrections, and Supplements

Scholars have responded to Rohr, Hollis, Fowler, and Wilber with appreciation and support, certainly some more than others. They have also proposed cautions, corrections, and supplements.

Regarding Richard Rohr

Badley cautions that many will resist the Second Half as Rohr describes it:

Not all will want to read about the necessity of admitting that we have constructed a *persona* (of the person we wish we were and want others to see) or of confronting our *shadow side* as the prerequisite for emerging into later adulthood as the kind of people that others might want to work or live near. For Rohr, mature adulthood entails anxiety, doubt, and paradox. It involves admitting that I and my group might not be right, news that some will not want to hear.⁷³

Badley states things mildly when he suggests that “not all” will be open to consider needed steps toward the Second Half. He might be more on target to say that *many* will not want to admit to their persona and shadow side. Indeed, *very few* may want to hear that they and their group might not be right.

Mattes supplements Rohr’s perspective by describing how slowing down facilitates the shift from the First to Second Half:

When we are young ... life presents itself as ours to explore, conquer and claim. Swiftly we glide through the years, experiencing the ups and downs while eagerly awaiting the new adventure yet to unfold. ... [Inevitably,] the moment emerges when the rapid pace in which we’ve journeyed begins to slow. In that slowing pace, our vision changes, as the desire to live in the future doesn’t present itself with as much urgency as before. Our hearing changes, as the din of accomplishment, ambition, and status gives way to the quiet whispers of our past

⁷³ Ken Badley, “Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life/Courage and Calling: Embracing Your God-Given Potential,” *Journal of Education & Christian Belief* 16, no. 2: 277. Accessed April 19, 2014. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.

inviting us to listen and learn. Our journey gradually becomes a quest for deeper integration.⁷⁴

One must accept the invitation to slow down enough to learn to see and hear differently, then to stick with it as one continues to live in a world of sights and sounds that might prompt anxiety, doubt, and paradox. The Hebrew Scriptures speak of God's whisper:

The Lord said [to Elijah], "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came *a gentle whisper*. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave (1 Kings 19:11-13 NIV, emphasis added).

We are surrounded by loud and overt sights and sounds. The call is to differentiate ourselves from noise and enter into quiet spaces to hear whispers and respond to subtle invitations. One need only listen to aging adults say with pride and joy that they've never been busier to know they have not embraced slowing down and living more quietly to listen more carefully.

McFadden and Gerl supplement Rohr's perspective by listing aspects of aging that prompt a person toward the Second Half:

In the second half of life, role transformation, the deaths of loved ones, physical change, and the myriad other inevitable outcomes of the aging process conspire to precipitate a reassessment and restructuring of the self's priorities ... Reassessment and restructuring can occur at this time because of the cognitive and emotional growth that enables aging adults to think abstractly, tolerate

⁷⁴ Ray Mattes, "Spiritual Need One: Spiritual Development: The Aging Process: A Journey of Lifelong Spiritual Formation," *Journal of Religion, Spirituality & Aging* 17, no. 3/4 (March 2005): 64. Accessed March 11, 2014. SocINDEX with Full Text, EBSCOhost.

ambiguity and paradox, experience emotional flexibility, and commit themselves to a [more transcendent] values system ...⁷⁵

The combination of aging realities and inherent potential for maturing may not only invite one into the Second Half as described by Rohr; it may enable one to face and overcome those aspects of life (as noted above) that conspire to keep one ensconced in the First Half. Intersections of life (crises, deep changes, profound decision points) plus the experience of decades of life having been lived may gift one with what is needed to release First Half of Life perspectives and enter into the Second Half of Life. Some such intersections might be welcomed, such as retirement, increased freedom, and reduced stress. Others might be viewed negatively and be unwelcomed, such as deaths of loved ones, physical challenges, financial cutbacks, and less influence. Yet whether seen as positive or negative, welcomed or not, these intersections may become gifts within the chaos, joy, and suffering of aging life, gifts that can lead to renewed growth, purpose, and meaning. In the words of the New Testament book of James:

Consider it pure joy, my [aging] brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you (James 1:2-5 NIV, focus added).

The transition from the First to Second Half of Life can be daunting and counter-cultural. It often involves (even requires) deep struggle and pain. At the same time, one can watch for and invite profound growth toward deep, transformational wisdom in the midst of all of life. One may enter into experiences of pure joy in all aspects of aging.

⁷⁵ Susan H. McFadden and Robert R. Gerl, "Approaches to Understanding Spirituality in the Second Half of Life," *Generations* 14, no. 4 (Fall 1990): 35. Accessed March 14, 2014. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.

Regarding James Hollis

Hollis emphasizes a shift from an outer world in the First Half to an inner world in the Second Half. Robertson describes this movement:

In the first half of life, we struggle to develop our individual egos, first within our family of origin, then beyond that to the larger world. For most of us, introspection is at best a secondary consideration during this process. But at some point, this outer development proves insufficient. The outer world has taken us as far as it can as our teacher; now it's time for the inner world to have its say.⁷⁶

Schlitz, Vieten, and Erickson-Freeman remind us that a shift toward more emphasis on an inner life does not remove us from those around us. As we shift from social to personal emphases, there is what might seem a counter-intuitive movement from I to We:

While aging is a personal process, conscious aging sees the shift as more than a personal quest—all about personal achievement or some outcome for personal benefit—to a process move from *I* to *we* ... In other words, the conscious aging practice infuses one's life, as many people report, the wish for and active work toward the transformation of their community.⁷⁷

Movement from social to personal does not require a corresponding movement from engaged to isolated. It may renew passion for engagement with others but this time from “altruism and compassion born of shared destiny rather than duty or obligation.”⁷⁸

Thornstam affirms Hollis' teaching of deep shifts taking place as one moves from the First to Second Half of Life:

The individual reaches an understanding of the difference between self and the roles played in life, sometimes feeling an urge to abandon and transcend roles in order to come closer to the genuine self ... The individual develops a new skill to

⁷⁶ Robin Robertson, “A Review of: ‘A Guide to the Books of James Hollis,’” *Psychological Perspective* 49, no. 1 (June 2006): 144. Accessed April 19, 2014. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.

⁷⁷ Marilyn Mandala Schlitz, Cassandra Vieten, and Kathleen Erickson-Freeman, “Conscious Aging and Worldview Transformation,” *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 43, no. 2 (2011), 231.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

transcend needless conventions, norms and rules, which earlier in life had curtailed freedom to express the self. ... Being cocksure about right and wrong, good and bad, as in youth and sometimes even in midlife, gives way to an understanding that the answer is seldom that easy in reality. A reluctance to superficially separate right from wrong, and thus withholding from judgments and giving advice, is discerned. The transcendence of the right-wrong duality is accompanied by an increased broadmindedness and tolerance.⁷⁹

Lauzan studied graduate students in the Second Half of Life. He describes turmoil and challenge this kind of deep shifting can cause:

The middle passage requires the surrendering of one's provisional identity as they seek to develop a more authentic and genuine identity that is not premised upon the expectations of others, but is premised and rooted in their soul's desire. This period can be characterized by a variety of differing mixed emotions as they slowly surrender that which they know for that which remains unknown, that which is beyond their immediate grasp ... This can be a very emotional period in an adult's life as they move between exhilaration and the depths of despair as the journey seemingly has an agenda and timetable of its own independent of the wishes and desire of the individual.⁸⁰

The shift from the First to the Second Half of Life that Hollis teaches is both inviting and challenging, both satisfying and undoing. It is well worth the journey, but it is not for the fainthearted.

Regarding James Fowler

McFadden and Gerl caution against making Fowler's six stages of faith development overly rigid and applicable for all persons: "Fowler's work, like other organismic theories, has been criticized because of its assumptions of universality ... An organismic theory of spiritual development would insist that all persons develop in the same way, regardless of their individual contexts."⁸¹ They helpfully note that some may

⁷⁹ Lars Tornstam, "Maturing into Gerotranscendence," *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 43, no. 2 (2011), 166.

⁸⁰ Lauzon, 13.

⁸¹ McFadden, 3.

not be able to journey through all stages due to personal challenges (mental, linguistic, emotional) or cultural constraints.

They also caution against assuming Fowler's Stage 6, Universalizing Faith, is a most desirable end stage for every person in every circumstance: "While Fowler and his students have claimed that his theory does not posit a higher value for the higher stages of faith development ..., still that conclusion is hard to avoid given the structure of the theory."⁸²

This project proposes that choosing (implicitly or explicitly) to not enter into later stages of development is a viable alternative for many persons. Later stages of development are available to many, but not all, people. Further, though available, they may not be preferable or possible in specific circumstances.

Schmidt cautions against seeing Fowler's Stage 6, Universalizing Faith, as the final stage available to people: "James Fowler squeezes faith and spiritual development into the narrow confines of ego psychology. This study does not intend to overturn the insights gained up to this point, but to supplement them ..."⁸³ He suggests that Fowler's perspectives be extended by "supplementing them with a trans-egoic paradigm which can begin to map the 'farther reaches' of psycho-spiritual development."⁸⁴ He then goes on to commend Ken Wilber for providing a needed perspective for later stage development. This project follows Schmidt's commendation, using insights from Wilber to develop a richer sense of the Second Half of Life.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ William S. Schmidt, "An Ontological Model of Development," *Journal of Pastoral Care* 40, no. 1 (March 1, 1986): 56. Accessed March 11, 2014. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Mattes cautions against seeing faith development as a passive process in which a person does not play an active and vital role:

The aging process can produce, but only if we freely choose to allow it to do so, a fertile place where things of the spirit can be explored more fully and a framework for the development of one's own spirituality is constructed in which the questions of our lives are pondered, explored, and engaged. ... The aging process by its very nature fosters a deepening personal spiritual development by drawing a person through the spiritual tasks of discovering, pondering, integrating, surrendering, and companionship.⁸⁵

He notes both the contribution of the aging process, which draws a person into faith development, and a need to choose to allow it to do its work through engaging spiritual tasks. "The journey of discovery is never a one-time endeavor but rather it becomes a way of life. In order for one to embark one must prepare for the endeavor through practice."⁸⁶ We gratefully receive the contribution that aging makes to faith development as a gift. At the same time, we can actively engage practices which facilitate that development.

Parrott cautions against taking Fowler's age guidelines for Stages 5 and 6, Conjunctive Faith and Universalizing Faith, too rigidly:

Fowler locates Stage 5 in mid-life and onward; Stage 6 he assigns to older adults. ... It is intriguing that some of [Fowler's] examples of [Stage 6] are relatively young. Mother Teresa arrived at a sense of her self-giving vocation as a nun at the age 33. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was executed at age 39. Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated at age 39. These were not "older adults," but relatively young middle-agers.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Mattes, 58-59.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 61.

⁸⁷ Rod Parrott, "Spiritual Need Two: Continued Learning for Older Adults and Older Adult Organizations," *Journal of Religion, Spirituality, and Aging* 17, no. 3/4 (October 2005): 77. Accessed March 11, 2014. SocINDEX with Full Text. EBSCOhost.

Fowler's age guidelines may be helpful for many or most, as they have been for me personally; but individuals journey through stages of development at their own pace, or remain in a stage. Fowler provides a road map, but people make both active and passive choices as to how they will make their individual life journeys.

Regarding Ken Wilber

Mattes shares Wilber's core conviction that there is something built into people's lives that brings promise for growth at every age:

Deep within a seed, just as deep within each individual, rests all that is needed for growth. The potential lies hidden away patiently waiting for the right set of circumstances to converge in order for the growth to occur. ... The later years of life then contain the invitation to move forward into an unknown place that grows slowly within us, bearing its root and breaking forth through the rich fertile soil that is life.⁸⁸

The potential for growth and an expectation of invitations to grow are inherent parts of what it means to be human. In Mattes' imagery of seeds and fertile soil, growth doesn't stop in the First Half of Life. Perhaps shorter-growth-season crops have completed their growth and harvest. There remain those crops that grow more slowly and those waiting for the right set of circumstances. A natural response to this perspective is one of expectancy, watchfulness, nurture, and meaning.

Jung shares a sense of expectancy for later stages of life: "A human being would certainly not grow to be seventy or eighty years old if this longevity had no meaning for the species. The afternoon of human life must also have a significance of its own and cannot be merely a pitiful appendage to life's morning."⁸⁹ He appeals to a purposefulness within nature that can prompt expectation for meaning in later years of life. One in the

⁸⁸ Mattes, 69.

⁸⁹ Jung, 17.

aging years of life need not focus upon a loss of youthful vigor and meaning. One can instead invite and enter into the aging years of life expecting to discover fresh and vital significance.

Schlitz, Vieten, and Erickson-Freeman represent a stream of study and practice that takes potential for continued growth, significance, and meaning seriously and seeks ways to nurture its fulfillment.

There is a growing movement to bring greater awareness to the process of aging and the potentials for growth and transformation that lie therein. A movement of *conscious aging* offers a new way of considering aging that moves past the industrial world's preoccupation with youth, toward an appreciation for the transformative potentials that come with aging.⁹⁰

These authors and communities seek to change perspectives and expectations in our culture to re-vision aging years as rich in growth, purpose, and meaning.

Transpersonal psychologies such as Wilber's provide language and foundation for such movements.

Schmidt and Rowan view Wilber's work as supplementing and going beyond most classical Western developmentalists. Schmidt notes that "most developmental schemes such as those developed by Freud, Piaget, Loevinger, Erickson, or Kohlberg, tend to operate out of an ego-bound paradigm."⁹¹ He does not see Wilber as contradicting these studies: "This study does not intend to overturn the insights gained up to this point, but to supplement them with a trans-egoic paradigm which can begin to map the 'farther reaches' of psycho-spiritual development."⁹² It is not that Western perspective was

⁹⁰ Schlitz, 225.

⁹¹ Schmidt, 56.

⁹² Ibid.

wrong; it didn't go far enough. As more and more people get older, the phenomenon of added stages of development is becoming more evident and must be addressed. "The population aged 65 and older has been increasing as a percentage of the total U.S. population. The older population represented 8.1% of the total population in year 1950. That percentage increased to 12.8% in 2009 (not in table), and is projected to reach 20.2% in 2050. Stated another way, one in five persons in 2050 will be aged 65 or older."⁹³

Adams and Bidwell respond to Wilber as theists. Adams takes a dim view of Wilber's core perspective: "Wilber has provided transpersonal psychology, seen by many in the academic world as a fringe discipline at best, with a degree of scholarly respect and philosophical and scientific legitimacy that it otherwise might not have achieved."⁹⁴ He goes on to criticize Wilber's "deliberately polemical and provocative style"⁹⁵ and "illogical and philosophically invalid reasoning."⁹⁶

Though strongly critical of much of what Wilber proposes and how he presents it, Adams "concedes that people really do attain the type of internal experience which [Wilber] describes as 'transpersonal' or 'non-dual.' We also acknowledge that the internal experience to which he refers is well-documented in various spiritual traditions

⁹³ Laura Shrestha, "The Changing Demographic Profile of the United States," *Congressional Research Service*, RL32701, March 31, 2011, accessed December 15, 2014, 13 <http://fas.org/sqp/crs/misc/RL32701.pdf>.

⁹⁴ George Adams, "A Theistic Perspective on Ken Wilber's Transpersonal Psychology," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 17, no. 2 (2002): 165. Accessed March 11, 2014. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

of many different cultures over the past two millennia.”⁹⁷ He goes so far as to “grant that the various stages in Wilber’s spectrum of consciousness indeed describe real experiences or states of awareness experienced by human beings in various times and places.”⁹⁸ Where Adams differs from Wilber is in his interpretation and description of these experiences. For purposes of this project, we will focus on Adams’ concerns as a deist.

Adams is particularly concerned that “Wilber suggests that non-dual mysticism reveals an awareness of the ultimate nature of reality, which he equates with an experience of God, the All, Suchness, etc. Clearly, he sees this mode of consciousness as revealing the ultimate truth.”⁹⁹ Adams then gets to the core of his criticism: “If there is a God who in some sense transcends the Kosmos, by definition—even when one experiences the Suchness of the totality of the Kosmos in non-dual mysticism—one is not experiencing that God who somehow stands outside that Kosmos.”¹⁰⁰ He expands on his perception of Wilber’s error:

To a theist, the unity or non-duality of the created universe, including both material and spiritual dimensions, does by definition not encompass the transcendent God who is the object of theistic belief. Thus, Wilber’s error is essentially one of over-extending his interpretation of the meaning of a certain kind of spiritual experience. What he might legitimately refer to as an experience of the non-dual nature of the Kosmos, he instead refers to as an experience of the Kosmos *and* God.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 169.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 170.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 171.

Bidwell also notes differences between Wilber and deism from a conventional Christian perspective. He does so, however, from a far less vitriolic posture than Adams. He recognizes that: “Institutional Christianity does not take a central role in Transpersonal Psychology.”¹⁰² While Wilber’s perspective is not Christ-centered, for Adams, that does not negate his contribution to Christian thought and practice: “[Wilber’s] refusal to make Christ central may be a large hurdle separating Transpersonal Psychology from Christian pastoral theology and pastoral counseling, but it certainly does not keep us from taking Wilber’s thoughts seriously.”¹⁰³

Adams identifies another of Wilber’s beliefs that sets up a barrier between him and Christians: “Wilber rejects the Christian doctrine of eternal life. ... While some Christians would agree with Wilber, his position may alienate many (if not most) others.”¹⁰⁴

Adams shares Bidwell’s concern about Wilber’s lack of appreciation for God’s transcendence: “I am uncomfortable ... with Wilber’s merging the finite and infinite realms at the highest levels of consciousness. The created world emanating from the Great Chain of Being is vastly different than the infinity of God, and this chasm cannot be bridged by our finite being.”¹⁰⁵

Even as Adams notes profound differences between Christian theology and Wilber’s positions, he sees bridges as well. He applies this even to the core of Christian

¹⁰² Duane R. Bidwell, “Ken Wilber’s Transpersonal Psychology: An Introduction and Preliminary Critique,” *Pastoral Psychology* 48, no. 2 (November 1999): 86. Accessed March 11, 2014. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 86-87.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 88.

belief: “While Wilber rejects the notion of salvation by Jesus Christ, he ... draws on the metaphor of crucifixion and resurrection to describe the human experience of growth across the Spectrum of Consciousness.”¹⁰⁶

While recognizing these and other profound differences in core theology, Bidwell believes “Wilber’s thought deserves serious engagement by today’s pastoral theologians and pastoral counselors.”¹⁰⁷ He believes that Christians would do well to learn from Wilber: “In particular, Wilber’s anthropology, doctrine of vocation, eschatology, doctrine of creation, and inherent emphasis on the sovereignty of God deserve further attention.”¹⁰⁸ In short, Bidwell recognizes where Christian deists and Wilber differ in their core theology and is open to learn from Wilber and Transpersonal Psychology.

I am grateful to both Adams and Bidwell for clarifying differences between conventional Christian beliefs and practices and those of Wilber. One can seek to synthesize them just so far, beyond which core differences must remain. I am also grateful for ways Adams and Bidwell approached those differences. In my opinion, Adams speaks from an egoic, First Half perspective. Bidwell speaks from a post-egoic, Second Half perspective. Adams responds dualistically, declaring Wilber to be someone to be defended against. Bidwell, while recognizing differences, does not condemn Wilber dualistically and is therefore more open to incorporate many of his perspectives into his own.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 81.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 87.

I remember when I would have identified differences between Wilber's core theology and my conventional Christian beliefs, judged him wrong, and distanced myself from him. That was life in the First Half as I knew it. Now, in my Second Half, I am able to see differences, celebrate them, and wonder what I may discover through them. For example, rather than rejecting the way Wilber merges the finite and infinite realms at the highest levels of consciousness, I am curious. My questions have shifted from "Is he right or wrong?" to "What is he teaching me about what I might experience in higher levels of consciousness?" Rather than asking whether he is with us or against us as Christ-followers I am asking how his work enriches, deepens, and critiques my faith perspectives.

Thus, Wilber, a self-proclaimed Buddhist, remains in this project as a central influencer on an equal footing with Rohr (a Roman Catholic Priest), Hollis (non-affiliated), and Fowler (a minister with the United Methodist Church).

Synthesized Descriptions

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines *synthesis* and *synthesize*:

synthesis ... **1 a** : the composition or combination of parts or elements so as to form a whole ... **c** : the combining of often diverse conceptions into a coherent whole¹⁰⁹

synthesize ... **1** : to combine or produce by synthesis **2** : to make a synthesis of¹¹⁰

This describes the process I used to produce Part Four. I *synthesized* perspectives from Rohr, Hollis, Fowler, Wilber, and authors I chose to critique them. I combined them to

¹⁰⁹ Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th ed., s.v. "Synthesis."

¹¹⁰ Ibid., "Synthesize."

form a whole way of seeing: (1) the First Half of Life, (2) the transition from the First to the Second Half of Life, and (3) the Second Half of Life.

For the First Half, I used Rohr's First Half, Hollis' First Half, Fowler's Stages 1 through 4, and Wilber's Subconsciousness and Self-Consciousness phases. For the Second Half, I used Rohr's Second Half, Hollis' Second Half, Fowler's Stages 5 and 6, and Wilber's Superconsciousness phase.

I present three synthesized descriptions in the form of lists, rather than as seamless and harmonious summaries. These lists present a *whole* picture, one with complexity and paradox. Aspects of life in each half and through the transition between them tug and push at each other. This complexity has the potential to make later life creative, mysterious, inviting, annoying, seemingly impossible, and profoundly meaningful.

Synthesized Descriptions of the First Half of Life:

- A. Ego Building: Persons in the First Half are struggling to build a strong ego structure, one sufficient to engage relationships, expectations, and personal needs. They are learning to stand apart from others and develop a personal identity. They ask: Who am I? What do I believe and value? How can I exert myself to make space for my ideas, become valuable in others' eyes, and feel good about myself? (Rohr, Hollis, Fowler, Wilber, Robertson)¹¹¹
- B. Learning Rules and Values: Persons in the First Half are learning, obeying, and struggling with rules and values. They ask: What does my world ask of me? What does God expect of me? What is the *right* way to believe, act, and relate? What is

¹¹¹ Names at the end of each description note the sources quoted earlier in Section 1 that I used to develop the concepts and wording used.

the *wrong* way to believe, act, and relate? Whose rules do I live by when groups don't agree? Can I live by the rules? How do I respond when I or others do not live rightly? (Rohr, Hollis, Fowler, Wilber, Thornstam)

- C. Acquisition: Persons in the First Half are establishing an identity, a home, skills, knowledge, material wealth, standing in the world, and security. They ask: What does success look like to me and those around me? How will I acquire what I need and what others expect of me? (Rohr, Hollis, Wilber)
- D. Social Standing: Persons in the First Half are learning to relate with others competently, gain influence, and be respected. They are learning to adapt, sacrifice, and become what is expected in order to become successful in their primary social groups. They ask: What do people expect me to say, do, and become? Am I competent, valuable, and successful in their eyes? Do I fit? How do I gain influence, power, and status? (Rohr, Hollis, Fowler, Wilber)
- E. Categorizing Dualism: Persons in the First Half are sorting actions, people, groups, beliefs, and pretty much everything else into up or down, totally right or totally wrong, friend or foe, righteous or evil, with me or against me, for us or against us. They resist risky ambiguity, doubts, mystery, humbling, magic, troubling paradox, and loss of control. They ask: Who is good and who is bad? What is praiseworthy and what is not? What do I support and what do I condemn? What is truth and what is heresy? (Rohr, Fowler, Wilber, Thornstam)
- F. Conventional: Persons in the First Half are seeking to meet the expectations of society and significant identity groups. They are adapting to conditions imposed by their environments. They take on, with little or no questioning, cultural and

institutional perspectives, creeds, dogmas, and practices. They ask: How should I live to fit in well and be accepted by people and groups important to me? How do I stand firm and defend our (true) way from heresy and wrong thinking? (Rohr, Hollis, Fowler)

Synthesized Descriptions of the Transition from the First to the Second Half of Life:

- A. Prompted: People bumping into the transition from the First to Second Half are being prompted to act, relate, think, and see themselves differently. They are finding it more and more difficult to fit their life experiences into old perspectives and patterns. There is something built into them that increasingly invites them to ask bigger questions and see beyond the simple either-or of their past way of thinking. Someone is summoning them toward transformation. They are also being nudged by life circumstances. They are slowed or stopped by struggles of illness, loss of loved ones, retirement, less physical strength and stamina, and cultural marginalization. They are bone weary of the “rat race.” They discover that they finally have enough power, stuff, and status. They ask: Is this all there is? How do I fit this loss (inconsistency, feeling, mystery, etc.) into what I’ve been told to believe and how I’ve been expected to live? What do I do now without my life partner (child, friend)? What am I going to do now that I am retired? Now that I can no longer perform like I used to, what’s next? What happened to my drive for more? Why does less suddenly look so much better? Something shifted in me: What now? (Rohr, Hollis, Fowler, Wilber, Mattes, McFadden and Gerl, Robertson, Thornstam)

- B. Appealing: People bumping into the transition from the First to Second Half increasingly yearn for life with less need to always have to be right or clear, defend “their” groups, accumulate, compete, and influence. They yearn to slow down, relax boundaries, ponder more, learn to think non-dualistically, and divest. They yearn to rest into listening more and fighting less, wondering more and resisting less, believing more broadly and less rigidly. They need to speak into their new questions and tentative answers. They resonate with fresh voices of wise and often marginalized sages, mystics, and elders. They ask: Is it okay to not toe the line? What if I gave myself permission to entertain heresy (according to my group)? I wonder what my life would be like if I didn’t have to keep competing? Could it be that I am done and ready for a new chapter in my life, a gentler, more gracious, accepting, open, and wonder-filled life? How might I engage this new thing in my life? What changes do I need to make to keep this process alive? Who could I back away from and who could I spend more time with? What could I listen to, read, and study now? What groups might help this process? What groups might hinder this process? (Rohr, Hollis, Fowler, Wilber, Mattes, Lauzan, Thornstam)
- C. Frightening: People bumping into the transition from First to Second Half face daunting challenges. They begin to entertain questions about the rightness of their thinking and that of their groups. They increasingly question the very foundational assumptions of their lives. They ask unacceptable questions and think heretical thoughts. Things they were sure about become increasingly unstable and fluid. Their enemies look less so and their allies feel more

threatening. Part of them resists the transformational shifts. They are loath to risk hard-fought-for security, success, and status. They resist an invitation to make room for painful parts of life, people who are different, and beliefs beyond those of their own groups. They resist offending those important to them. They fear questioning core dogma and risking eternal security. They ask: Are these questions okay to ask? If I can no longer sort things into what is right and wrong, then what will I believe and who will I trust? What can I still be sure of and what is up for grabs? If I can't be sure about "this" then what can I be sure of? Can I handle a world that is riskier, more powerful, and mysterious than I thought? How can I feel so drawn to risking so much and yet feel so afraid? Should I stick with what I know or explore these feelings and heretical ideas? Is it worth risking my friendships, status, and positions? Should I stop thinking this way? Can I? (Rohr, Hollis, Fowler, Wilber, Badley, Lauzan)

Synthesized Descriptions of the Second Half of Life:

- A. Post-Egoic: Persons in the Second Half discover meaningful life beyond self-image, role, power, prestige or possessions. They no longer have passion or desire to serve as warrior either for their own agenda or for those of their groups. They are ready to step out of the way of power structures, struggles, and systems. They ask: Why have I been so uptight about so many things? What am I trying to prove and to whom? What will it look like to live non-defensively, non-combatively, and non-anxiously? (Rohr, Hollis, Fowler, Wilber, Badley, Mattes, Robertson, Thornstam)

- B. Expansive: Persons in the Second Half are able to hear more, include more, and accept more. They are able to receive what they avoided in the First Half: painful parts, alternative perspectives, and people who are different. They humble themselves; acknowledge their weak, confused, and wounded parts; and incorporate them into their life. They discover and cherish likeness where they didn't see it before. Ideas, things, and people can now simply delight them, sadden them, and truly influence them. They ask: What can I learn from this memory (wound, person, situation, idea)? How can I honor my own traditions while knowing our truth has been partial, limited by our own experiences? What will I encounter today and how will it delight, humble, and grow my soul? (Rohr, Hollis, Fowler, Wilber, Mattes, McFadden and Gerl, Thornstam)
- C. Non-Dualistic: Persons in the Second Half shift perspective from either/or dualistic thinking to one comfortable with paradox, mystery, and both/and. They do not have strong and final opinions about everything, every event, or most people. They celebrate more, judge less. They ponder more, analyze less. They are grateful more, upset less. They ask: How will I be surprised today? What new mystery will I experience next? In what way is this world more unified than I ever dreamed possible? What boundary I formed before will I see dissolve and how will it open my horizon even farther? How will I rest into this wondrous sense of Oneness I am experiencing more and more? (Rohr, Hollis, Fowler, Wilber, Badley, Thornstam, Adams)

- D. Mystical: Persons in the Second Half know “a spiritual meaning or reality that is neither apparent to the senses nor obvious to the intelligence.”¹¹² They experience a “direct subjective communion with God or ultimate reality.”¹¹³ They hear and obey a still, small voice of the soul, a deeper voice of God. They surrender their creeds, rationality, and norms as they discern this quieter and deeper voice within them. They are drawn to simplicity, risk, guidance and direction, and wisdom. They ask: How can I reduce the noise of my life that has been drowning out this quieter, subtler voice? Please, mind, can you trust enough to listen to this deeper Soul within? How can I further relax the hold of creeds, dogmas, voices, groups, and traditions that keep me from hearing and obeying this deeper voice? How do I live now that I am discerning this new Mystery? How can I experience more wonder, joy, and peace I now know and cherish? (Rohr, Hollis, Fowler, Wilber, Lauzon, Robertson, Mattes, Jung)
- E. Activist: People in the Second Half continue to engage the world but now from their superconscious perspective. They now receive painful parts along with harmonious parts. They are now open to those who are different, including those who are troubled, marginalized, and labeled as enemies. Being freed from egoism and dualism, their response is compassion enriched by joy, sadness, and acceptance. They are able to spend and be spent in quiet and profound love and justice. Being freed from grasping for power and competition—while empowered by deep inner knowing—they engage turmoil and injustice without being engaged

¹¹² *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed., s.v. “Mystical.”

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

by it. They disrupt systems not as warriors, but as mystics. They are marginalized, mocked, and martyred (literally and figuratively). Yet they influence their communities through their compassion, openness, grace, courage, and joy. They are heard, even as they are quieted; attractive, even as they are repelled; and transformational, even as they are shut out. They ask questions, but now less to find answers for themselves and more to prompt reflection and wonder in others. (Fowler, Schlitz, Vieten, and Erickson-Freeman)

I believe these descriptions are an accurate way of seeing life's journey. By that I mean that I "accept [the descriptions] as true, genuine, or real."¹¹⁴ I am convinced, however, this is not enough because "believing a set of claims to be true has very little transforming power."¹¹⁵ I am also *believing into* this way of seeing and anticipating. I am watching for evidences of the Second Half in my life and those around me. I am finding ways to invite that which is described as the Second Half of Life into my day-to-day living. I am differentiating myself from those groups and persons who hold me back from transitioning more fully from the First to the Second Half of Life. I am engaging groups and persons who nurture a continuing transition into and deepening within the Second Half. This project is not only helping me clarify how I think about things as an aging Baby Boomer; it is also a matter of my heart, helping me form how I live, interact, and develop supportive disciplines.

This believing into the Second Half continues to have profound effects on my relationship to the mainline Protestant church, The Reformed Church in America, which I

¹¹⁴ Ibid., s.v. "Believe."

¹¹⁵ Marcus J. Borg, *The Heart of Christianity* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2003), 31.

belonged to, thrived in, and served for decades. John Shelby Spong wrote that he was “increasingly convinced that the followers of Jesus today must learn how to live apart from Christianity, at least the kind of creedal orthodoxy that through the centuries Christianity has unfortunately become.”¹¹⁶ For me, this is true, at least for the early part of my Second Half. Am I an exception or a typical example?

In Sections Two and Three, I will explore effects, responses, tensions, and potentials Baby Boomers face as we are invited to transition from the First to Second Half of Life, especially when part of a church. Are we as a Boomer cohort poised to hear and respond to invitations into the Second Half of Life? Can we expect our churches to make room for both First and Second Half of Life participants with our different ways of seeing and living? Does believing into the Second Half mean leaving our churches? We will consider these and other questions.

¹¹⁶ John Shelby Spong, *The Fourth Gospel: Tales of a Jewish Mystic* (New York: HarperOne, 2013), 18.

SECTION TWO:

A CONTEXT:

BABY BOOMERS ARE TRANSITIONING INTO THE SECOND HALF OF LIFE

Old men ought to be explorers
Here and there does not matter
We must be still and still moving
Into another intensity
For a further union, a deeper communion
Through the dark cold and empty desolation,
The wave cry, the wind cry, the vast waters
Of the petrel and the porpoise. In my end is my beginning.

— T. S. Eliot, *East Coker* from *The Four Quartets*

Section Introduction and Summary

Merriam-Webster defines a “proposition” as:

Proposition *n* **1 a** something offered for consideration or acceptance ... **b** : the point to be discussed or maintained in argument ... **2 a** : an expression in language or signs of something that can be believed, doubted, or denied or is either true or false ...¹¹⁷

In Section One, I offered a first proposition for consideration:

Proposition 1: Richard Rohr, James Hollis, John W. Fowler, and Ken Wilber describe a growth-oriented, purposeful, and meaningful Second Half of Life that is available to Baby Boomers.

I sought to express it in sufficient depth and language that you, the reader, can believe, doubt, or deny its validity.

In this section, I present two additional propositions for your consideration:

Proposition 2: Several characteristics of Baby Boomers prepare them for transition into the Second Half of Life.

¹¹⁷ *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed., s.v. “Proposition.”

Proposition 3: Baby Boomers are entering a time of life that invites transition into the Second Half of Life.

Baby Boomer Characteristics that Support Transition to the Second Half of Life

In this section I speak of Baby Boomers as a *cohort*. Cohorts in this context are groups of people who are “socialized within a common segment of history and carry the impact of these socio-historical experiences with them as they age ... Cohorts develop and retain similar values and life skills as they go about constructing their lives in shared social and historical contexts.”¹¹⁸ While cohorts are usually identified as having been born during specific time periods (in this context, Baby Boomers born 1946 to 1964), the term *cohort* emphasizes a group’s shared experiences and resulting perspectives toward life. I am here proposing that several characteristics of the Baby Boomer cohort support, even encourage, transition into the Second Half of Life.

Supporting Characteristic 1: Expectations of an Expanded Future

Baby Boomers are entering their aging years expecting an expanded future as compared with their grandparents and parents, both in terms of quantity and quality.

The grandparents of Baby Boomers who lived to 65 could reasonably expect to live to 70 years. Boomers’ parents could expect to live longer, to 75 years on average. Boomers turning 65 in 2007 could expect to live to 80 on average.¹¹⁹ “Living to old age is

¹¹⁸ Tracy X. Karner, “Caring for an Aging Society: Cohort Values and Eldercare Services,” *Journal of Aging & Social Policy* 13, no. 1 (2001): 19. Accessed October 11, 2011. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.

¹¹⁹ Elizabeth Arias, “United States Life Tables, 2007,” *National Vital Statistics Reports* 59, no 9 (2011): 51-52.

becoming a normative expectation, without the aura of survivorship it carried years ago.”¹²⁰

The added years offered to Baby Boomers promise to be very different from what was offered to their grandparents and parents.

Overall, the past 40 years have witnessed a spectacular revolution in the quality of life for elderly Americans. For the vast majority of older people in the United States today, life in old age is characterized by:

- Reasonably healthy and active lives ...
- Generally adequate income ...
- Significant wealth, for many ...
- Independent living arrangements arising out of financial independence ...
- A dramatic rise in the number of years in retirement.¹²¹

As they enter retirement years, Baby Boomers have strong reason to see a very different landscape ahead of them than did previous cohorts. It is one thing to imagine five or ten years of decline and isolation. It is quite another to imagine fifteen or more years of relative health, vitality, and freedom. Indeed, “Social observers believe there’s a new stage emerging, with 77 million baby boomers on its cusp. This third stage encompasses the bonus years of vitality and longevity midcourse between the career- and family-building tasks associated with adulthood, but before the debilitating infirmities associated with old age.”¹²²

The transition into the Second Half of Life may be challenging, but Boomers have high expectations for their aging years. They expect to be healthier, more energetic, and

¹²⁰ Paul Wink and Jacquelyn Boone James, “Conclusion: Is the Third Age the Crown of Life?,” in *Annual Review of Gerontology and Geriatrics Dynamics of the Early Postretirement Period Volume 26, The Crown of Life.*, eds. Jacquelyn Boone James and Paul Wink (New York: Springer, 2007), 305.

¹²¹ James H. Schulz and Robert H. Binstock, *Aging Nation: The Economics and Politics of Growing Older in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 2-3.

¹²² Phyllis Moen, “Existing Scripts for Retirement are Obsolete, but What’s Next?,” in *MetLife Foundation/Civic Ventures New Face of Work Survey* (June 2005), San Francisco: Civic Ventures, 2005, 14, accessed November 8, 2011. [http://www.encore.org/files/new_face_of_work\[1\].pdf](http://www.encore.org/files/new_face_of_work[1].pdf).

longer-lived than previous cohorts. They bring expectations and resources to the invitation to a Second Half of Life previous cohorts didn't imagine.

Supporting Characteristic 2: Desire for a Fresh Approach to Aging

Baby Boomers are eager for a fresh approach to their aging years, one very different from their grandparents and parents.

Boomers saw their grandparents and parents live into an expectation of decreasing health, declining energy, and less engagement, either as their only option or as a self-fulfilling mindset. Boomers are deciding that they will not believe into and live into that same image of old age. They are pushing back against that path and are determined to forge a new way into older age.

The 2005 Merrill Lynch New Retirement Survey “discovered that three-quarters of baby boomers had no intention of seeking a ‘traditional’ retirement. Instead, boomers intend to create a whole new life stage ...”¹²³ They envision this fresh approach as very different from expectations of previous cohorts. “Running throughout these findings is a vision of the post-midlife years that is inimical to the notion of decline, whether that be the precipitous cliff of complete disengagement or the more prevalent notion these days of pulling back gradually but steadily. Or phasing out.”¹²⁴

This is not to say that Boomers have a clear picture of what their life will look like into old age:

Baby Boomers as a group hope that somehow aging will be different when they themselves become 65, 75, 85, and older. They see their grandparents and parents growing old and, though they may not articulate how aging should be different,

¹²³ Ibid., 1.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 4.

they have a clear understanding that they do not want to grow old in the same way that those before them are growing old.¹²⁵

Boomers hope to discover a fresh way of aging. This will prepare them to hear and respond positively to the invitation to transition into the Second Half of Life. It promises a much more dynamic, mysterious, and transformational approach to aging than they saw lived out in cohorts before them.

Supporting Characteristic 3: A History of Cultural Transformation

Baby Boomers have a history of transforming each stage of life with its related norms and institutions.

Baby Boomers' parents "learned to accept a future that played out one day at a time" as they valued "personal responsibility, duty, honor, and faith."¹²⁶ Baby Boomers, however, have tended more toward taking control of their future. They value personal freedom and the challenging of norms that hold them back. "More indulged as children, boomers also [are] more inclined to question the status quo and more willing to speak out and challenge authority than the members of any previous generation."¹²⁷ They have not only spoken out; they have created change for themselves. "Dubbed the 'me' generation, baby boomers are noted for debunking tradition and forging a life-path that is considerably different from that of the preceding generations."¹²⁸ This new life-path

¹²⁵ M. Joanna Mellor and Helen Rehr, *Baby Boomers: Can My Eighties Be Like My Fifties?* (New York: Springer, 2005), 159.

¹²⁶ Tom Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation* (New York, Random House, 1998), xix-xx.

¹²⁷ Ken Dychtwald, "The Age Wave Is Coming," *Public Management* (00333611) 85, no. 6 (2003): 7. Accessed January 26, 2012. MasterFILE Premier, EBSCOhost.

¹²⁸ Norma A. Winston and Jo Barnes, "Anticipation of Retirement Among Baby Boomers," *Journal of Women & Aging* 19, no. 3/4 (2007): 139. Accessed December 13, 2011. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost.

engages deep and broad change. “Culturally, they have focused on creating social change to fit their expectations, the cult of the body, the narcissism of recreating one’s life through recreating one’s self, consumerism as high art and a projection of the self, and many other experiences wildly different from earlier cohorts.”¹²⁹

Boomers are accustomed to forging fresh paths and settings. They have a history of considering fresh alternatives, deciding what they want, and doing the hard work of making it happen. The Baby Boomer generation has “changed each social institution with which it has come in contact. ... There are no indications that social structures of ‘old age’ will be any less altered.”¹³⁰ When presented with a potential for entering the Second Half of Life, as contrasted with remaining in an increasingly uncomfortable First Half, many may very well decide it is what they want and go for it. They may do so even if it is—perhaps *because* it is—challenging and counter-cultural.

Supporting Characteristic 4: Tolerance for Complexity

Baby Boomers are envisioning dynamic aging years of life filled with much more complexity than previous cohorts experienced.

Cohorts before the Baby Boomers expected and mostly experienced a relatively straightforward life course. People grew up in one source family and went through a school system as they prepared for a productive adult life. In their late teens or early twenties they got married, worked hard in a career, raised a family, and became responsible members of their community. If they were fortunate enough to live into their sixties, they retired to a life of leisure, grandchildren, and inevitable decline.

¹²⁹ Karner, 30.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 17.

This life course has not, however, been the predominant experience of the Baby Boomer cohort. Nor has it been their preferred expectation. Boomers have experienced more complex and unpredictable life courses. Even before leaving home for work or college, Baby Boomers frequently experienced complexity through two or more source families due to a divorce of their parents. This brought them into multiple school systems, houses, and neighborhoods. This complexity continued into adulthood: “One may go to school or back to retrain at several points along the continuum. One may marry multiple times and raise multiple families. One may retire and then return to work. The possibilities are multiple! The life course has become circuitous, curvilinear, and repetitive.”¹³¹ This messiness has become a “new normal” for Boomers: “Indeed, the postmodern world of multiplicity, pastiche, and hyperreality has reconstituted current understandings of the life course.”¹³²

There is little indication that this messy, non-linear way of life will be abandoned as Boomers retire. “It will become normal for 50-year-olds to go back to school and for 70-year-olds to reinvent themselves through new careers. Phased retirements, part-time and flex-time work, and ‘rehirements’ will become common options for elder boomers who either need or want to continue working.”¹³³

Baby Boomers are approaching and living into retirement years expecting a longer, healthier life and an expectation of complexity. This leaves great freedom and an open field of options. Transitioning into the Second Half of Life may have looked too

¹³¹ Ibid. 21.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Dychtwald, 8.

unsettling to previous cohorts, but for Baby Boomers, with their propensity toward self-determination and options, it will look exciting and life-giving.

Supporting Characteristic 5: Expectations of Continued Growth

Baby Boomers are envisioning a second half of life filled with potential for new beginnings and personal growth.

This is a radical shift from previous cohorts who viewed retirement as pulling back from engagement and into a life of leisure and slow (or rapid) decline toward death. Most Baby Boomers are captivated by and resonate with a sense that their fifty-plus years can become much more than a depressing addendum tacked onto a vital life before retirement. After conducting 1,000 phone surveys with Baby Boomers approaching retirement, Princeton Survey Research Associates International discovered “a vision of the post-midlife years that is inimical to the notion of decline, whether that be the precipitous cliff of complete disengagement or the more prevalent notion these days of pulling back gradually but steadily, or phasing out.”¹³⁴

Boomer expectations for retirement extend beyond a desire to resist decline and disengagement. They envision it as a dynamic and creative phase of life:

For a majority of Americans age 50 to 70, retirement is about starting a new chapter in life, not simply about rest and relaxation. Fifty-three percent of Americans age 50 to 70 agree that “retirement is a time to begin a new chapter in life by being active and involved, starting new activities, and setting new goals.”¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Marc Freedman, “The Boomers, Good Work, and the Next Stage of Life,” in *MetLife Foundation/Civic Ventures New Face of Work Survey* (San Francisco: Civic Ventures, 2005), 4, accessed November 2, 2011. [http://www.encore.org/files/new_face_of_work\[1\].pdf](http://www.encore.org/files/new_face_of_work[1].pdf).

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

Boomers are taking their experience of life complexity forward and are envisioning a dynamic retirement. This is, for them, a chance to begin a new phase of life. They are entering aging years with hope and high expectations. While previous cohorts projected a life of stepping back and resting as they struggled against decline, the Boomer cohort projects newness and proactive self-determination. This, for them, promises to be a positive, creative, and fun time.

With the increasing life expectancy, the nature of retirement in the U.S. is already changing. For the first time in history, retirement is viewed as a period of life in which to pursue interests, to travel, and to acquire new skills and knowledge. Regardless of the financial concerns overshadowing retirement plans, it is anticipated that the Baby Boomers, in large numbers, will continue to view retirement from this perspective as a period of life in which to enjoy themselves.¹³⁶

That is not to say that challenges will suddenly go away. They will face financial and health problems. Family members and peers will become infirm and die. But for Boomers, who grew up on complexity and challenge, this will not of necessity lead them to become passive or pessimistic. They have been through divorce, unpopular wars, job loss, stock market meltdowns, the AIDS epidemic, discrimination struggles, and cultural upheaval. They have not only survived, but have somehow held to their dreams of forming a better world for themselves and others. They are not showing signs of backing away from that trajectory simply because they are passing through their sixties. This isn't a time to wind down their story; it is opening a new chapter of their complex, sometimes painful, oftentimes hope-filled life. The invitation to transition into a fresh half of life, even if challenging and mysterious, will be welcomed as the new chapter they are looking for.

¹³⁶ Mellor, 92-93.

Supporting Characteristic 6: Openness to New Values, Perspectives, and Beliefs

Baby Boomers are asking questions about religion and spirituality and they are exploring answers outside their traditions and conventions.

Boomers operate from deep values, significantly influenced by experience in their youth and young adult years, especially in the 1960s and 1970s. In a major study of Boomer attitudes conducted by Professor Wade Clark Roof at the University of California, Santa Barbara, in the late 1980s, “twenty-nine percent of the older boomers said they had little or no confidence in the country today, compared with 24% of younger boomers. ... Boomers still feel some ‘distance’ from almost every institution, whether the military, banks, public schools, Congress, or organized religion.”¹³⁷

Boomer values and behavior flow from this distrust and distance: “They value experience over beliefs, distrust institutions and leaders, stress personal fulfillment yet yearn for community, and are fluid in their allegiances—a new, truly distinct, and rather mysterious generation.”¹³⁸ These values have enabled a differentiation of the spiritual from the religious in their perspective: “For many, maybe even the majority of boomers today, personal faith and spirituality seem somehow disconnected from many of the older institutional religious forms.”¹³⁹

This has prompted Baby Boomers to show less loyalty to their religious affiliations than previous cohorts. “They move freely in and out, across religious boundaries; many combine elements from various traditions to create their own personal,

¹³⁷ Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 41.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 8.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 30.

tailor-made meaning systems. Choice, so much a part of life for this generation, now expresses itself in dynamic and fluid religious styles.”¹⁴⁰ In the Roof study, “forty-seven percent agreed (and the same percentage disagreed), with the statement ‘All the great religions of the world are equally true and good.’ ... Overlooking the 6% without an opinion, this would indicate that about one-half of all boomers hold to a non-particularistic view of religion.”¹⁴¹

This sense of openness and non-identification with one religious perspective or affiliation opened the Boomer cohort to leaving their churches in massive numbers:

Nine out of ten people in our survey reported attending religious services weekly or more when they were children eight to ten years old. ... As children they were as religious as any generation before them in this century ... But by their early twenties, slightly more than one-fourth were involved to the same extent; the great majority had dropped out altogether or, if still attending, they did so irregularly.¹⁴²

In a recent survey by the Barna Group, this propensity to differentiate themselves from a religious group and drop out has continued through their middle age and into the transition to their aging years. Boomers returned to churches to help raise their children; then as children left their homes, Boomers left their church homes:

Church attendance plummeted by 12 percentage points [after 1991], dipping to 38% in 2011. ... While the Boomers have never been the generation most likely to attend church, during the past 20 years the percentage of unchurched Boomers has risen dramatically, jumping up 18 points! At 41%, they are now the generation most likely to be unchurched...¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 5.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 72.

¹⁴² Ibid., 55.

¹⁴³ George Barna, “State of the Church Series, 2011: Part 2: Generational Change” (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, July 27, 2011, accessed June 9, 2014, <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/faith-spirituality/506-barna-describes-religious-changes-among-busters-boomers-and-elders-since-1991#.U6hiVpRdWSo>).

In addition, many Boomers who continue to be churched supplement their church's teaching with that of others, if they feel something is missing. "Members of this generation have few inhibitions about multiple associations with vastly different groups ... Even more common is the phenomenon of picking and choosing beliefs from a variety of sources."¹⁴⁴ Growing up in a more pluralistic culture, they are comfortable with a more pluralistic belief and engagement system. They may remain in their churches, but that doesn't mean they remain within the boundaries of their church's creeds and practices.

This openness and willingness to explore prepares Boomers to hear the developmental invitation into the Second Half of Life. Conventional ways of thinking and boundaries of belief systems will not hold them back from exploring. They already think less dualistically and have more porous boundaries than previous cohorts. Many characteristics of the Second Half will resonate with who they already are.

Supporting Characteristic 7: Emphasis on Self-Realization

Baby Boomers highly value personal potential and a rich inner life.

Boomers center their sense of power less in affiliations and groups to which they belong and more on "the belief that strength comes from within. When boomers are asked to describe themselves, they focus on personal, individual qualities."¹⁴⁵ This results from their culture and experience: "Influenced by a faith in the flexibility of human nature, and inspired by the traditional American values of self-improvement and individualism, the boomers were to become the carriers of an ethic of self-realization that

¹⁴⁴ Roof, 201.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 46.

had been in the making for a long time and was now a dominant cultural theme in American life.”¹⁴⁶

The theme of self-realization profoundly affects their approach to spirituality. “As a generation many years deeply for a religious experience they can claim as ‘their own.’ ... The concern is to experience life directly, to have an encounter with God or the divine, or simply with nature and other people, without the intervention of inherited beliefs, ideas, and concepts.”¹⁴⁷ When surveyed by Roof, 53% reported they would prefer to be alone and meditate as compared with 29% who would prefer to worship with others. The same survey found that 60% would prefer to explore teachings compared to 28% who would prefer to stick to a faith.¹⁴⁸

The Boomer emphasis on personal potential and a rich inner life will prepare them well for a Second Half of Life emphasis on direct experience and an inner journey. Transitioning from egoic to post-egoic will challenge what has been called the “me generation,” but much within the transition will resonate well with who they already have become in their First Half of Life.

A Baby Boomer Stage of Life that Supports Transition to the Second Half of Life

Baby Boomers are entering a time of life that invites transition into the Second Half of Life. “In 2011, the first of the baby boom generation reached what used to be known as retirement age. And for the next 18 years, boomers will be turning 65 at a rate

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 47.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 67.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 71.

of about 8,000 a day.”¹⁴⁹ Baby Boomers, born 1946 to 1964, are 50 to 68 years old in 2014. This positions them to have experienced or be poised to increasingly experience many life transitions and events that can prompt a movement toward and into the Second Half of Life.

Section One noted several life stages and events that studies suggest trigger an invitation to the Second Half of Life:

- A. Adequate years to have passed through earlier, First Half of Life, stages of development (Fowler, Rohr, Hollis, Thornstam, Mattes, Jung)
- B. Adequate years to develop ego strength through acquisition (Rohr, Hollis, Fowler, Wilber, Robertson, Thornstam)
- C. Middle age (Williamson, Fowler)
- D. Slowing down to develop room to wonder and pay attention (Fowler, Mattes)
- E. Role transformations such as retirement, marginalization from positions of authority, and an empty nest (McFadden and Gerl)
- F. Loss of loved ones (McFadden and Gerl)
- G. Physical change, illness, and loss of physical strength (McFadden and Gerl)

These factors are listed separately, but interrelate as one prompts another. Older Boomers are now retiring in large numbers as younger Boomers are living into their middle years. From now (2014) through the upcoming decades, Boomers will experience these promptings to hear and respond positively to an invitation to make the challenging and transformational transition to the Second Half of Life.

Boomers have characteristics that fit them well for life in the Second Half and are living into a time of life when more and more of them will sense life’s promptings to make the transition. Does that mean that all or even a majority will enter the Second Half

¹⁴⁹ AARP, “Boomers @ 65: Celebrating a Milestone Birthday,” accessed June 9, 2014, http://www.aarp.org/personal-growth/transitions/boomers_65/.

as described here? Probably not. Studies noted in Section One show that, at least in cohorts before the Boomers, a minority of people enter the Second Half. It is my expectation, however, that a larger percentage of the Boomer cohort will do so because of its characteristics. What percentage I do not know, nor have I discovered any author who projected such a percentage. I do know that I am one such Boomer and am discovering others like me, only a small minority so far, but 8,000 of us a day are passing into promptings toward the Second Half of Life.

SECTION THREE:

A CHALLENGE:

BOOMERS ARE ENTERING THE SECOND HALF OF LIFE IN CHURCHES ORIENTED TO THE FIRST HALF OF LIFE

Contrary to popular opinion, it's not only young people avoiding our sanctuaries. The losses are particularly noticeable in the baby boomer generation, many of whom grew up with at least some exposure to faith and church.

— Henry Stewart, *Good Faith Hunting*

Section Introduction

I went through a tumultuous time in my teens. I now apprehend and appreciate it as a healthy and needed adolescence. What I didn't foresee was another such time later in life, what I now name *halfolescence*.

I didn't expect things to look and feel this different. I didn't expect my energy to shift so drastically from some interests to others. I was surprised by what newly resonated in me and what no longer did, what used to be dissonant but surprisingly harmonized with my life.

I also didn't expect such joy and peace in my life. I was surprised to feel my volcano of rage subside and my well of tears gently fall. I had seen other retirees become frustrated in their boredom. I was amazed by the growth, purpose, and meaning I experienced and continue to discover.

Another thing I didn't expect was to become unchurched, which brings us to Section Three.

Section One revealed how to understand and appreciate the challenging transition from the First to Second Half of Life. It also developed a portrait of the Second Half of Life we are living into.

Section Two affirmed that we are not going against our nature as Baby Boomers when we transition to the Second Half of Life; indeed, we are living into characteristics of our cohort. We are not an aberration. We are scattered and not linked with each other, at least not yet. But we are here and will increase in numbers and cultural presence.

In Section Three, I will explore ramifications of movement from the First to Second Half of Life. Our movement into the Second Half of Life affects our relationships with those persons and groups to whom we are close. For many of us one such community is the church, which is the focus of this section.

This section is designed to help us understand and respond wisely to what is happening between us and churches that gave us growth, purpose, and meaning, churches in which we invested decades of time, talent, and treasure. How will our transition from the First to the Second Half of Life change our relationship with our churches? Does it mean that many or most of us will no longer fit in our churches? Is there a way we can be included in our Second Half of Life? Are there churches that have space for us? How can we support churches, even if from a marginalized place, and encourage them to expand their vision to include both Halves of Life?

Sections One and Two explored three propositions:

1. Richard Rohr, James Hollis, John W. Fowler, and Ken Wilber describe a growth-oriented, purposeful, and meaningful Second Half of Life that is available to Baby Boomers.
2. Several characteristics of Baby Boomers prepare them for transition into the Second Half of Life.

3. Baby Boomers are entering a time of life that invites transition into the Second Half of Life.

Section Three explores the implications of these propositions for Baby Boomers and churches through two additional propositions:

4. When Baby Boomers transition into the Second Half of Life they lose resonance with churches oriented to the First Half of Life and withdraw.
5. First Half Churches need innovative scholars, churches, and Baby Boomers to understand, accept, nurture, and incorporate Second Half Boomers.

Reasons Baby Boomers Are Leaving Churches

Baby Boomers are leaving churches. A study by the Barna Group concluded that from 1991 to 2011 the percentage of Baby Boomers who were unchurched rose by 18 percentage points: “At 41%, they are now the generation most likely to be unchurched.”¹⁵⁰ They found that Boomer “church attendance plummeted by 12 percentage points, dipping to 38% in 2011.”¹⁵¹

Types of Leavers

A study of *church leavers* concluded that a vast majority did not leave due to a loss of faith. Of 108 adults who left evangelical, Pentecostal and charismatic churches, Alan Jamieson identified 1% as “Lost faith – Atheist,” 2% as “New Age,” and 5% as “Agnostic.” The remaining 92% were continuing in their faith journey apart from their churches.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Barna.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Alan Jamieson, *A Churchless Faith: Faith Journeys Beyond the Churches* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2002), 123.

Why, then, are people leaving, if not due to loss of faith? Jamieson identified 18% of those who left their churches as “Disillusioned Followers.” They left either “angry about a major church decision, direction, leadership structure or with a key church leader”¹⁵³ or “through a sense of disappointment and hurt with their church. They have accepted an understanding of how the church will care for and respond to people in need, but didn’t receive this level of support when they most needed it.”¹⁵⁴ They were, however, able to differentiate their church experience from their faith. “Although the Disillusioned Followers have disengaged from the church, they have not disengaged from an EPC [evangelical/Pentecostal/charismatic] faith.”¹⁵⁵

This describes friends from the last church I served, Crystal Cathedral Ministries in Southern California. Church members felt betrayed and neglected during transitions when Dr. Robert H. Schuller, the founding pastor, retired and the church downsized radically due to financial realities. Pastors left who had cared for them and nurtured their growth. Worship styles changed and program areas ended. They left confused, angry, and hurt. Hearing their stories and reading their comments on blogging sites saddened and concerned me.

Jamieson found that the Disillusioned Followers stage became transitional for church leavers. “The ‘hurts’ are far more open to returning to church in the future, although the risk of being hurt again often holds them back. ... If they do move back into a church, they will be looking for one that would be more accepting and caring of the

¹⁵³ Ibid., 49.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 50.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 51.

people within it.”¹⁵⁶ This has been true for friends who left Crystal Cathedral Ministries. They have found other local churches in which they are once again thriving. Some helped plant a new Reformed Church in America. Several others moved to a large Presbyterian congregation in the area. While leaving the Crystal Cathedral, they remained within the Reformed tradition.

Other Disillusioned Followers revealed “indications of wanting to look beyond the ought-to-bes, and the shoulds of the EPC faith. ... Here the comments of the interviewees reflect a dissatisfaction that is broader and less clearly articulated than those generally expressed by the Disillusioned Followers.”¹⁵⁷ They were transitioning to the next group, “Reflective Exiles.”

Reflective Exiles (30% of “church leavers” in the study) “are not leaving the church because it is not functioning as it should, or because they have relational difficulties with the leaders or disapprove of the new vision or direction of the church, but because of a more foundational questioning of their underlying faith.”¹⁵⁸ They have “grumbles that question the foundations of the EPC faith they had previously believed. ... [They] are reflecting on and questioning the basis of the Christian faith received from the EPC church community. For these people it is the core of their faith that is being shaken in this process.”¹⁵⁹ When their church cannot make space for such confusion and exploration, they leave.

Jamieson found that

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 56-57.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 58.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 62.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 61.

the Reflective Exiles phase becomes for many a static place – a permanent place of exile. Those who do move on toward an autonomous and integrated faith are joined in the next [phase] by those who leave their church when they have substantially navigated the reflective phase while still participating, however loosely, within their church community.¹⁶⁰

They have become “Transitional Explorers.”

Transitional Explorers (18% of church leavers in the study) “displayed an emerging sense of ownership of their faith. This was shown in a confidence of faith, a clear decision to move from a deconstruction of their received faith to a re-appropriation of some elements of Christian faith and giving energy to building a new, self-owned faith.”¹⁶¹ This perspective is very different from that of Reflective Exiles. “The focus of [Transitional Explorers] is not on what they have left, as it is for the Reflective Exiles, but on beginning to find a new way forward.”¹⁶² This more proactive approach sets them on a more confident trajectory. “Where the Reflective Exiles are confused and hesitant about their faith, the Transitional Explorers have an emerging sense of what their faith entails, and a new acceptance of this as their own faith system.”¹⁶³ This prepares them to transition into a next stage, “Integrated Wayfinders.”

Integrated Wayfinders (27% of church leavers in the study) “have incorporated statements of truth, beliefs and values from wider faith backgrounds than the EPC church. This impression is reinforced by the openness expressed by Integrated Wayfinders toward people of other belief systems. These people are more accepting, less

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 74.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 77.

¹⁶² Ibid., 79.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 84.

defensive and more willing to enter into open discussion.”¹⁶⁴ They “may well ground their beliefs on the Bible or personal experience but it is a reliance on experience or Scripture that has been critically examined and found to be plausible.”¹⁶⁵

Now, back to our exploration of Baby Boomers, their transitions in the Second Half of Life, and churches. Boomers in the process of transitioning from the First to Second Half of Life fit well within Jamieson’s first two categories: Reflective Exiles and Transitional Explorers. I am not proposing that all Reflective Exiles and Transitional Explorers are transitioning from the First to Second Half of Life. Instead, I propose transitioning Boomers are included in these groups that make up 48% of those in Jamieson’s study. When Boomers transition to the Second Half of Life, they no longer resonate with their First Half Churches. They locate the loss and resulting struggle either outside themselves as Reflective Exiles or within themselves as Transitional Explorers.

A First Half Church

Before exploring this further, I will clarify what I mean by a “First Half Church.” I am suggesting that not only are Boomers oriented to the First or Second Half of Life, but churches are also oriented similarly.

First Half Church 1 a : a local church or denomination predominantly oriented toward the First Half of Life **b** : < > whose values, perspectives, and beliefs predominantly orient toward characteristics of the First Half of Life **2 a** : < > whose pastors, teachers, and leaders predominantly orient toward characteristics of the First Half of Life **b** : < > whose active participants predominantly orient toward the First Half of Life. [Working definition for this project]

Orient vb 1 “**a** : to set right by adjusting to facts or principles **b** : to acquaint with the existing situation or environment”¹⁶⁶ **2** : “To align or position with respect to a point or system of reference”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 94.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

A First Half Church adjusts its values, perspectives, and beliefs to those of the First Half of Life. It orients its life with the synthesized descriptions of the First Half of Life listed toward the end of Section One of this project. Note the repeated use of the qualifier “predominantly” in the working definition above. A First Half Church does not reflect only First Half characteristics, but these characteristics predominate in the formation and sustaining of its values, perspectives, and beliefs.

Using these synthesized descriptions as an outline, First Half Churches:

- A. (Ego Building) Seek to stand apart from others and develop a personal identity. They define values, perspectives, and beliefs as differentiated from other churches and faith traditions. They view their own beliefs as truth and those that differ as error. This ranges from disagreements within similar traditions on issues such as baptism, women in ministry, and worship styles to disagreements with other world religions on issues such as salvation and the nature of God (Other, Ultimate).
- B. (Learning Rules and Values) Emphasize learning, obeying, and struggling with rules and values. They ask: What does God expect of us as a church and each of us as a member? They seek to define the *right* way to believe, act, and relate. They struggle with how to respond when participants do not believe, act, and relate within the norms of their rules and values.
- C. (Acquisition) Pursue identity, knowledge, property, standing, and security. They define what it looks like to be successful and develop plans and strategies to

¹⁶⁶ *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed., s.v. “Orient.”

¹⁶⁷ The Free Dictionary Online, thefreedictionary.com, s.v. “Orient,” accessed October 28, 2014.

achieve it. They emphasize quality staff, programming, and facilities. Values and beliefs assure participants of an identity, standing, and security in relation to God, the world, and eternity.

- D. (Social Standing) Teach participants how to relate with others competently, gain influence within their community, and be respected. Participants learn to adapt, sacrifice, and become what is expected in order to become successful in the group. Those who learn are rewarded with influence, power, and status.
- E. (Categorizing Dualism) Sort actions, people, groups, and beliefs into up or down, totally right or totally wrong, friend or foe, righteous or evil, with us or against us. They resist risky ambiguity, mystery, and troubling paradox. They clarify who is good and who is bad; what is praiseworthy and what is not; what they support and what they condemn; what is truth and what is error. A church might both categorize homosexuality as sin and sever relationships with other churches who decide differently. A church might proclaim salvation through Jesus alone and condemn any other way as heresy.
- F. (Conventional) Take on, with little or no questioning, institutional perspectives, creeds, dogmas, and practices of traditions and previous generations they inherited. They expect their participants to do the same. They clarify what it means to fit in well and be accepted by organizations, communities, and persons important to them. They stand firm and defend the *true* way handed down to them over against heresy and wrong thinking, against deep change and loosening boundaries.

Reflecting on my ministry as pastor and churches in which I served, my ministry was oriented to First Half values, perspectives, and beliefs. Further, I served exclusively in First Half Churches. After retiring from pastoral ministry, I participated in church communities in denominations within the Evangelical Protestant, Mainline Protestant, and Liberal traditions; they were all First Half Churches. I conducted a casual survey of fifteen church participants and leaders. None could identify a local (Southwest Michigan) church or denomination that did not orient itself to the First Half of Life descriptors above.

Resonance and Dissonance Between Baby Boomers and Churches

Now, back to my proposal that Transitioning Baby Boomers fit well within categories of Reflective Exiles and Transitional Explorers. As long as Boomers are in the First Half of Life, they resonate with First Half Churches.

Resonate *vb* “**2** : to respond as if by resonance ... **3** : to relate harmoniously : strike a chord ...”¹⁶⁸

Harmony *n* “**3 b** : correspondence, accord ... **4 a** : an interweaving of different accounts into a single narrative”¹⁶⁹

Resonance *n* “**1 d** : a quality of evoking response ...”¹⁷⁰

When we resonate with something, we relate with it harmoniously. It corresponds with who we are, what we feel, and how we think. It interweaves our lives naturally, with little effort or pretention. It clarifies, enhances, and amplifies something already present or emerging within us. We respond with appreciation and affirmation.

¹⁶⁸ *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed., s.v. “Resonate.”

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, s.v. “Harmony.”

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, s.v. “Resonance.”

So it is when we encounter values, perspectives, and beliefs. When they resonate within us, we relate harmoniously with them. They correspond with who we are, what we feel, and how we think. They interweave our lives naturally, with little effort or pretention. They clarify, enhance, and amplify something already present or emerging within us. We respond to the value, perspective, or belief with comfort, appreciation, and affirmation.

Baby Boomers in the First Half of Life participating in First Half Churches resonate with the values, perspectives, and beliefs of their church, its leaders, and fellow participants. They find a place to belong, be respected, and serve. But what happens when Boomers transition to the Second Half of Life? In short, they lose resonance with their church.

- A. First Half Churches continue to learn, obey, and struggle with rules and honor convention. Transitioning Boomers are being prompted to act, relate, think, and see themselves differently from the way they did before.
- B. First Half Churches continue to define the right way to believe, differentiate themselves from other churches and faith traditions, and view their own beliefs as truth and those that differ as error. Transitioning Boomers ask bigger questions and increasingly see beyond what have become limiting and narrow perspectives of their First Half of Life.
- C. First Half Churches continue to dualistically sort actions, people, groups, and beliefs into right or wrong, with us or against us. They continue to resist risky ambiguity, mystery, and troubling paradox. Transitioning Boomers increasingly yearn for life and community with less need to always be right or clear, defend

“their” group, accumulate, compete, and influence. They yearn to rest into listening more and fighting less, wondering more and resisting less, accepting more and rejecting less, celebrating mystery more and seeking simple answers less.

- D. First Half Churches continue to stand firm and defend the way handed down to them. They resist loosening boundaries between themselves and “others.” Transitioning Boomers increasingly resonate with fresh voices of wise and often marginalized sages, mystics, and elders who don’t fit expectations and standards of their church. They are drawn to entertain what their church might define as heresy. As Boomers shift into the Second Half of Life, their boundaries become more porous. They become increasingly open to relate with and receive from those who were once categorized as “others.”
- E. First Half Churches take on and defend, with little or no questioning, most of the institutional perspectives, creeds, dogmas, and practices they inherited from their faith tradition and previous generations. They resist deep change. Transitioning Boomers explore deep changes needed to adjust to emerging way of seeing. They borrow freely from “others.” The inherited values, perspectives, and beliefs of their church, those that once sustained them and helped them grow, now become confining and negotiable.

In short, First Half Churches and transitioning Baby Boomers no longer resonate with each other. Their ideas, questions, and self-perceptions no longer relate harmoniously. What one says no longer strikes a chord in the other. Narratives have diverged. What one says no longer evokes a response in kind.

This lack of resonance can turn to dissonance between church and Boomer.

Dissonance *n* “**1 a** : lack of agreement ... **2** : a mingling of discordant sounds...”¹⁷¹

Dissonant *adj* “**1** : marked by dissonance : discordant **2** : incongruous **3** : harmonically unresolved ...”¹⁷²

Cognitive dissonance *n* : “psychological conflict resulting from incongruous beliefs and attitudes held simultaneously”¹⁷³

A church in dissonance with a person elicits response, but it is different than resonance. It is a mingling of discordant sounds that remain unresolved. Discord, incongruous beliefs and attitudes, and lack of agreement do not come together. The parts remain separate. They cannot, even if they work at it, come together in harmony. One current example is the Presbyterian Church (USA) as members struggle with issues such as homosexuality and the uniqueness of salvation through Jesus Christ. “The exodus from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) continues, as congregations seeking a more conservative home leave for other denominations. Some are small congregations — 20 or 30 members — and some are among the largest and wealthiest churches in the PC(USA).”¹⁷⁴ After decades of working side by side and years of discussion, they cannot resolve the dissonance, much less restore resonance.

Resonant parts can also sound discordant and separate at times, but they eventually resolve into a harmonious whole. Sometimes, almost mysteriously, they come together into something amazing. This is one distinctive aspect of Jazz music, something

¹⁷¹ Ibid., s.v. “Dissonance.”

¹⁷² Ibid., s.v. “Dissonant.”

¹⁷³ Ibid., s.v. “Cognitive dissonance.”

¹⁷⁴ Leslie Scanlon, “Who’s Joining the Exodus?: Departure of PC(USA) Congregations to Other Denominations Accelerates,” *The Presbyterian Outlook*, September 20, 2013, accessed March 9, 2015, <http://www.pcusa.org/news/2013/9/20/whos-joining-exodus/>.

I love. It is also something I cherished in church group discussions. We could come to an exploration with various perspectives, sometimes with little resonance. Then, through open discussion and careful listening, hearts and minds would resolve into a fresh whole, different from any one person, yet mysteriously harmonious with the whole. Dissonant parts, however, do not resolve into one harmonious whole. They remain incongruous and unresolved. They do not blend perspectives, experiences, and ways of relating into one, even if both sides try to adjust and accommodate. If the dissonance continues, persons' voices are silenced. They part ways.

Applying this to the two halves of life, I propose that characteristics of the First and Second Halves of Life are different to the degree that what resonates with one may be in dissonance with another. This can perplex both First Half Churches and transitioning Boomers. After what may have been decades of shared growth, purpose, and meaning, dissonance enters the relationship, a dissonance that isn't resolved even with mutual effort and good will.

Responses to Loss of Resonance

When transitioning Boomers lose resonance with their First Half Churches, they may locate the source of loss in organizational and relational aspects of their churches or in the perspectives and beliefs of their churches. When they identify the cause as organizational and relational, they become part of Jamieson's Disillusioned Followers. Their lack of resonance turns to dissonance as they identify problems in church structures, members, pastors, leadership, and ministry. They struggle and the church does not respond to them as they hoped and expected. Transitioning Boomers disengage from

their churches at the same time participants and leaders in their First Half Churches are disengaging from them. They often leave in confusion, anger, and grief.

When transitioning Boomers locate a cause of their lack of resonance in emerging differences from perspectives and beliefs of their churches, they become part of Jamieson's Reflective Exiles. They don't see it as caused by the leaders, organization, or direction of the church. Instead, they struggle with deeper perspectives and beliefs, ones they often confessed and lived into for decades. When First Half Churches cannot understand, accept, nurture, and incorporate emerging Second Half perspectives and beliefs, Boomers disengage and leave.

I understand myself to be a Reflective Exile. I have distanced myself from active participation in my home church, the Reformed Church in America. I did not do so in confusion, anger, and grief as might a Disillusioned Follower. I could not find a local Reformed Church that could make room for my questions and emerging answers. I remember a stage of faith in my own life when I could not have made such room for someone like who I am now. I've quietly disengaged and left, but with continuing appreciation for those who nurtured my faith and provided a place to belong and thrive for decades. It was simply time for me to move on.

We turn now to Boomers who have transitioned and are living in the Second Half of Life. They fit well within Jamieson's categories of Transitional Explorers and Integrated Wayfinders. Once transitioning Boomers have worked through the struggle of letting go of First Half of Life perspectives and the churches that supported them, their focus can shift from what they have left to finding a new way. They join Transitional Explorers. They find ways to re-appropriate elements of Christian faith within a fresh

framework provided by the Second Half of Life. They give energy to building a belief system that resonates with their heart. They are still exploring and unsure, but have a sense of discovery and expectation. Boundaries have become more porous as they wonder about and hear voices outside their own faith stream. They discover a much broader world to explore than they dared imagine in their First Half of Life in their First Half churches.

Then, as Boomers live into their Second Half of Life more deeply, they may join Integrated Wayfinders. These Boomers come to a more settled internal space. They process and accept the loss of resonance with much of their First Half of Life experience. They make peace with having left comfortable belonging in First Half Churches. Wayfinders synthesize personally owned sets of values, perspectives, and beliefs that resonate deeply within them. Much is from their First Half Churches, only transformed to fit their Second Half. They no longer listen to the voices they relied on before. They discover new voices that nurture and form their experience. They become more open and accepting, less defensive and reactive, and more curious and eager to continue their Second Half of Life experience, filled with growth, purpose, and meaning.

On a personal note, it took me eight years to make transitions from a resonant First Half of Life Baby Boomer in a First Half Church through Reflective Exile and Transition Explorer to Integrated Wayfinder. I was fortunate to not have experienced Disillusioned Following, perhaps because I was a senior staff pastor in a First Half Church and was friends with other First Half leaders I still appreciated and called friends. I miss the comfortable community provided by First Half Churches when I resonated so well within them. But I do not experience dissonance with them now that my leaving is

more complete and settled. I am able to enter into conversations and enter into times of community, feeling comfortable as someone with different values, perspectives, and beliefs.

I bless Baby Boomers in their First Half of Life thriving in First Half Churches. I also support Baby Boomers who are beginning the struggle and adventure of transitioning, exploring, and settling into their Second Half of Life. They are on a continuing faith development adventure. It might mean the difficult loss of resonance with their First Half Churches, which is not something to take lightly. The alternative, however, is to deny themselves the growth, purpose, and meaning offered in the Second Half of Life.

The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life hosted a discussion by leading experts in the arena of survey research on religion. Sociologist Michael Hout summarized their discussion this way: “I think if we had to sum it up, God’s alive and well; the churches are having a problem.”¹⁷⁵ The participants laughed. I laughed, too, and went on to ponder his words over the next weeks. From the perspective of First Half Churches, his statement rings true regarding transitioning Baby Boomers who are leaving. They are losing core members, leaders, experienced volunteers, and ongoing relationships. Boomers who once fit well in their communities and believed *rightly* are adopting *wrong* values, perspectives, and beliefs.

From a faith development perspective, however, Hout’s summary doesn’t resonate comfortably in me. When transitioning Boomers leave First Half Churches it

¹⁷⁵ PewResearchCenter, “Event Transcript: Religion Trends in the U.S.,” The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, August 19, 2013, accessed November 15, 2014, <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/08/19/event-transcript-religion-trends-in-the-u-s.html>.

may be a sign that churches are doing well. They have played their role. They have completed what they were designed to do: support, nurture, and bring to maturity First Half of Life Baby Boomers. When transitioning Boomers leave for reasons of growth and development, it may actually be something to celebrate.¹⁷⁶ It was time for Boomers to leave their First Half home with its settings, culture, and ways in order to continue to grow into the Second Half of Life. This does not negate the pain and struggle of such leaving. It affects relationships, rhythms of a life of faith, resources available to the church community, and one's deep sense of belonging. Both church families and leaving Boomers grieve losses, even when it might be a sign of growth.

From a care and nurture perspective, First Half Churches are not doing well. "Often ... church leaderships are confused, even threatened, by people's decisions to leave. ... All too often those in church leadership focus their attention on those coming in the front door."¹⁷⁷ Jamieson affirms churches wanting to be seeker sensitive, but adds a caution: "While this has been a very positive step in church life we also need to become 'leaver sensitive.' ... We need to give the same energy, time and prayer to leavers."¹⁷⁸

I agree with Jamieson's admonition to pay attention to both newcomers and leavers. I disagree with him, however, when he goes on to indict non-leaver-sensitive leaders by quoting Ezekiel 34:4: "You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost ..."

¹⁷⁶ Though beyond the scope of this dissertation, this applies to other cohorts as well. Millennials, for example, are also leaving churches in large numbers.

¹⁷⁷ Jamieson, 141.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 145.

(NIV).¹⁷⁹ He categorizes leavers as weak, sick, injured, strays, and lost. Boomers do indeed leave for unhealthy and non-celebratory reasons such as divorce, empty nest, addictions, unresolved shame, and broken relationships within the church family. Other Boomers who leave, however, do not fit this description. They are leaving due to healthy development into the Second Half of Life.

Jamieson also appeals to what members could continue to contribute to churches if they did not leave. He suggests it would be wise for church leaders to restore leavers in order to retrieve their “time, skills, efforts, and wallets.”¹⁸⁰ This feels more like sensitivity to institutional needs than those of the leavers.

I propose leaver-sensitive churches care for and nurture Transitioning Boomers, not to restore them back to the First Half of Life in a First Half Church, but to listen to and learn from them, honor their First Half with the community, bless their journey if they leave, and offer help in finding models, guides, and settings for their Second Half of Life. This prompts my next proposal.

Conclusion: Churches Need Innovators

Innovate v “**1** : to introduce as or as if new **2** : to effect a change in”¹⁸¹

My fifth proposition is that First Half Churches need innovative scholars, churches, and Baby Boomers to understand, accept, nurture, and incorporate Second Half Boomers.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 141.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 143.

¹⁸¹ *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed., s.v. “Innovate.”

When I was in seminary, my Mainline Protestant denomination, the Reformed Church in America (RCA), was struggling whether to expand ordination to include women. It seems strange now, but I was wary. I reflected well the tradition and previous teaching of my lifelong church community. I needed key influencers to help me expand my vision and examine my perspectives.

Cleo Ludwig, a fellow seminary student, was instrumental in my transition. She gently confronted me with a reality of a gifted and called woman in ministry. She translated theory into experience.

Churches in the RCA, mainly on the East Coast, were taking bold steps toward ordination of women. These were local churches with pastors I respected, with a long history of sound theology and ministry. They helped me envision ordination of women being practiced with grace and integrity.

Dr. James Cook provided a third component in my transition. He was a professor at the seminary who provided scholarship and biblical basis I needed to support women's ordination. He was not a rebel on the fringes. He was an honored and respected scholar and teacher in the RCA who helped many of us look deeper into our scriptures, theology, and hearts.

I needed an innovative model and mentor such as Cleo Ludwig, innovative churches such as RCA congregations on the East Coast, and innovative scholars such as Dr. Cook and authors he introduced. As innovators, they had already seen and done something in a new way and they introduced it to me in a way that effected a change in me. They were the innovators I needed to help transform my perspectives and ways of living.

Baby Boomers who transition to the Second Half of Life lose resonance with their First Half Churches. These churches are not presently equipped to understand, accept, nurture, and incorporate Transitioning Boomers. From the churches' perspective, the same Boomers who resonated and supported them for decades are inexplicably shifting their core values, perspectives, and beliefs. It is perplexing, disruptive, and threatening. How could the same Boomers who thrived within the boundaries of the church's values, perspectives, and beliefs now question them and propose alternatives? These are the leaders and key influencers in the church community. Churches wonder what happened with these members who meant so much to them.

First Half Churches need innovators who can help them see and relate to Second Half Boomers in a new way. Differences between the values, perspectives, and beliefs of the First and Second Half of Life are significant and deep. The resulting lack of resonance causes pain and confusion. Simple solutions will not work; the differences are too complex. Change will require innovative scholars, churches, and Boomers to equip First Half Churches and Second Half Boomers to discover and celebrate ways to accept and support each other.

Why might First Half Churches bother? Why not allow or encourage Transitioning Boomers to withdraw, either partially to the fringes or fully as leavers? If values, perspectives, and beliefs no longer fit, why not try to correct errors and, if that doesn't work, send them off with or without their churches' blessing? Frankly, I expect many or most First Half Churches to do just that. Core change requires openness, porous boundaries, and curiosity. These characteristics are not easily experienced in First Half Churches.

There are, however, reasons for First Half Churches to do the hard work of trying to understand, accept, nurture, and incorporate Second Half Boomers. First, many Boomers have a deep and affectionate relationship with their churches. They may have grown up in the community of faith. Their First Half children may be deeply integrated into its life. They have deep, continuing affection for others in the community and for its mission. Church leaders and influencers may hate to see Transitioning Boomers withdraw. This may prompt them to do the hard and challenging work of seeking mutual acceptance, understanding, and support.

Second, the Church has deep roots in Second Half characteristics. The Bible includes persons who lived into the Second Half of Life, the primary example for Christ followers being Jesus. The Gospels portray Jesus as reflecting each Second Half characteristic through his life, ministry, and teaching.¹⁸² The Church has additional roots in Second Half characteristics in its mystics, sages, and seers. Some church streams draw from these roots more deeply than others. The values, perspectives, and beliefs of the Second Half of Life are already a part, hidden or not, of our traditions and linguistics.

Third, the First Half is just that, a half; so is the Second Half. For the Church to be whole, it needs both halves. Without both, the harmonies are partial; the sound is not as full or rich as it can become. Churches are best with both halves of life working together: filling and emptying, action and stillness, voice and silence, gathering and releasing, building and divesting, knowing and unknowing, certainty and mystery. I hope to see room for both halves. It will require innovators to help us envision how First Half Churches can make space for Second Half Boomers with their *strange and new* values,

¹⁸² This would be a helpful study, but is beyond the scope of this project. I include such studies in the list of innovations needed that appears later in this section.

perspectives, and beliefs. I hope to experience emerging and innovative *Both Half of Life Churches* where First and Second Half of Life participants thrive and mature in rich and full harmony.

What follows is a three-part list introducing ideas of how innovators could help First Half Churches understand, accept, nurture, and incorporate Transitioning Boomers. I limit myself to five ideas in each part.

Needed: Innovative Scholars

First Half Churches need innovative scholars to:

1. Confirm and question the scope and characteristics of Baby Boomers shifting into the Second Half of Life through surveys and related studies
2. Develop and teach a contextualized¹⁸³ biblical and theological understanding that honors both the First and Second Halves of Life
3. Expand current Western faith developmental perspectives into stages of faith within the Second Half of Life
4. Propose creeds, confessions, and liturgies that include values, perspectives, and beliefs of the Second Half of Life
5. Write accessible and contextualized books and curricula that introduce the Second Half of Life, mystics and sages, and biblical and theological understandings of both Halves of Life

Needed: Innovative Churches

First Half Churches Need Innovative Churches to:

¹⁸³ By contextualized I mean within the tradition of a First Half Church and its Transitioning Boomers. For my tradition that would include innovations from scholars, churches, and Baby Boomers respected by Mainline Protestant denominations and the RCA in particular. Further, these innovations would be presented in such a way as to elicit openness to change within that church tradition.

1. Listen to and care for Transitioning Boomers who leave churches (become leaver-sensitive as well as seeker-sensitive churches)
2. Understand, accept, and support Baby Boomers as they transition to the Second Half of Life
3. Plant churches and other organizations that orient themselves to the Second Half of Life
4. Develop, staff, and launch ministries within their programming to serve Boomers in the Second Half of Life
5. Model and teach other churches to incorporate and serve Transitioning Boomers

Needed: Innovative Second Half Baby Boomers

First Half Churches need innovative Second Half Baby Boomers to:

1. Continue inviting and seeking transformational growth into latter stages of development
2. Mentor Transitioning Boomers, offering understanding, support, and resources
3. Tell contextualized stories of transitions into the Second Half of Life and ongoing, sustainable growth, purpose, and meaning in the Second Half of Life
4. Remain in First Half Churches, graciously and gently living into Second Half of Life values, perspectives, and beliefs
5. Plant and serve Second Half Churches and other Second Half organizations

With others, I hope to equip churches and Boomers to live into a whole church, creatively and fully experiencing and serving from both the First and Second Half of Life.

“No first step can be really great; it must of necessity possess more of prophecy than of achievement; nevertheless, it is by the first step that we mark the value, not only of our cause, but of ourselves.”¹⁸⁴ Others have already made and are making such first steps. With enough first steps, pathways are made, pathways others will follow. I pray it is so for First Half Churches and Second Half Boomers.

¹⁸⁴ Katherine Cecil Thurston, “The Masquerader,” Public Domain, 1904 The Project Gutenberg, accessed December 8, 2014, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/5422/5422-h/5422-h.htm>.

SECTION FOUR:

ARTIFACT INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This dissertation proposes that as people enter into later stages of development, they transition from a First Half of Life¹⁸⁵ to a Second Half of Life.¹⁸⁶ Evidence found suggests that the values, perspectives, and beliefs of these two halves are very different. The ministry problem addressed is that as Baby Boomers transition into the Second Half of Life, their transformed values, perspectives, and beliefs no longer resonate with those of churches oriented to the First Half of Life. As a tragic result, these healthy, growing Boomers are emotionally and physically withdrawing from churches.

This dissertation proposes radical perspectives as well as surprising solutions to the problem. It encourages Boomers and church leaders to:

1. Recognize that healthy, growing Boomers are emotionally and physically leaving their First Half of Life churches due to loss of resonance prompted by growth into later stages of faith development.
 - a. Such leaving is understandable and can be expected until innovative and courageous Boomers and churches can find ways to incorporate Second Half of Life values, perspectives, and beliefs into the life and ministry of churches.

¹⁸⁵ Persons grow through earlier stages of development in the First Half of Life. They seek to learn and meet what is expected as they create a space in the world from which to live and influence. It is typified by: ego building, learning rules and values, acquisition, social standing, categorizing dualism, and convention. (See Section 1).

¹⁸⁶ Persons grow through later stages of development in the Second Half of Life. When prompted by developmental processes, one is invited into a Half of Life characterized by shifted values, perspectives, and beliefs. To hear and respond is to be transformed into stages of development that are: post-egoic, expansive, non-dualistic, mystical, and activist. (See Section 1).

- b. These Boomers have not stopped following Jesus nor have they left the worldwide, Christ-centered Church. As they grow into later stages of development, they discover a fresh and vital way of living into the Kingdom of God with values, perspectives, and beliefs Jesus taught and lived.
- 2. Affirm that when such healthy, growing Boomers leave churches it represents a tragic loss for both Boomers and churches.
 - a. Leaving Boomers no longer find a way to resonate with churches that nurtured their growth and empowered their service and leadership. They face the painful choice of losing themselves or losing the community of people they love.
 - b. Churches no longer find a way to resonate with Boomers that lived and served comfortably and well. As Boomers withdraw and leave, churches lose the wisdom, service, and fullness they could contribute in later stages of development.
- 3. Accept a loss of resonance between growing, healthy Boomers and churches as a challenge for Boomers and churches to build up one another.
 - a. Churches have found ways to include children, youth, and adults, each in very different stages of development. As people live longer and continue to develop into later stages, churches can and must discover ways to include people in the Second Half of Life as well.
 - b. Both Boomers and churches are challenged to find innovative and courageous ways to honor, include, support, and learn from those in all

stages of faith development. The challenge of a thriving multi-generational church is to develop values, perspectives, beliefs, and practices that are rich, varied, and inclusive enough for a healthy, growing Christ-following community from earliest childhood to latest adulthood.

Chosen Communication Medium: Blog

The conclusions above were reached via literary review, secondary research, writing, interactions with others, and personal experience. The next step was to choose a medium through which these proposals could be shared, explored, further developed, and applied within a large and diverse community. I chose *blogging* to gain active dialog with Boomers and church leaders. A blog fits the following criteria:

1. Do Boomers and church leaders go to the Internet for answers to questions and to present their opinions? Yes.

Boomers are readily accessing the Internet and are increasingly comfortable online. An article by Immersion Active concludes:

Baby boomers are the Web's largest constituency, making up more than 30 percent of the United States' 200 million+ internet users. Older adults are willing to spend their money online and are quickly adapting to mobile. They use the Internet for research, shopping and are active on social media. Here is a select list of stats and data surrounding older adults as online consumers.

- The 50+ age group is the fastest growing demographic online (Pew, 2012).
- Boomers and seniors are spending 16 hours per week watching TV and 19 hours per week online (Google/Ipsos, 2013).
- 82% of the 65 million online boomers and seniors use the Internet to research health and wellness information (Pew/American Life Project).
- Boomers are asked their opinions 90 times a year and 90% of the time they give it, 45% of the time they give it online (eMarketer, 2007).
- 82% of boomers and seniors use a search engine to gather information on a topic of interest (Google/Ipsos, 2013).¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ Immersion Active: The Digital Agency for the Mature Markets, "50+ Facts and Fiction: Mature Consumers Online," Immersion Active, accessed September 23, 2015, <https://www.immersionactive.com/resources/50-consumers-online/>.

Boomers are on the Internet in large numbers and for a significant number of hours for research and to interact. *People Leaving Churches*¹⁸⁸ will intentionally feel comfortable for the Boomer demographic. It will also maximize the potential for Boomers to find it through use of popular search engines and terms.

Note: I do not include separate discussions for church leaders in these criteria. Church leaders are also Boomers or other generational cohorts. While I found no study that separated Internet use surveys into church leaders and others, I know of no compelling reason to believe Baby Boomers who are church leaders would show significantly less Internet use than Boomers who are not leaders. Further, I expect church leaders from younger demographics to use the Internet in higher percentages. The Pew Research Center reported that among adults, the percentage who use the internet, email, or access the internet via a mobile device in 2014 was: 88 percent for adults 50-64, 93 percent for adults 30-49, and 97 percent for adults 18-29.¹⁸⁹ Pew also reports that use of online social media in 2014 shows significantly higher percentages of use by younger groups: 65 percent for adults 50-64, 82 percent for adults 30-49, and 89 percent of adults 18-29.¹⁹⁰

2. Do Boomers and church leaders go to the Internet expecting to encounter radical ideas? Yes.

¹⁸⁸ “People Leaving Churches” is an abbreviated version my blog’s full title, “Why Healthy, Growing People in their Second Half of Life Are Leaving Healthy, Vital Churches Oriented to the First Half of Life.”

¹⁸⁹ Pew Research Center, “Internet User Demographics,” Pew Research Center, accessed October 7, 2015, <http://www.pewinternet.org/data-trend/internet-use/latest-stats/>.

¹⁹⁰ Pew Research Center, “Social Media Use by Age Group Over Time,” Pew Research Center, accessed October 3, 2015, <http://www.pewinternet.org/data-trend/social-media/social-media-use-by-age-group/>.

The Internet offers all kinds of information, from the mainstream to the fringe, from well-researched to off-the-cuff opinion, from culturally acceptable to counter-cultural. Blogs in particular are open to nearly anyone with an opinion. Bloggers range from businesses connecting with customers to families staying connected to people sharing surprisingly personal journals. Boomers and church leaders will not be surprised to find fresh perspectives such as those proposed in my blog.

3. Will a blog provide a safe and easy way for Boomers and church leaders to explore perspectives, ask questions, and respond openly and honestly? Can it facilitate a community that can imagine, learn, and innovate together? Yes.

A blog has great potential for open interaction, and collaboration. Comment features enable readers to respond publicly, interact with me and each other, and do so without divulging publically who they are. Adding an email option will provide an even safer space to ask questions and respond.

Blogs are highly social tools designed to build relationships and network. With a blog, you can connect with people around the world from the comfort of your own home. ... A blog includes a comment feature that allows readers to publish their own comments on the posts they read. Comments provide interactivity, discussions, and relationship-building opportunities between the blogger and his community of readers.¹⁹¹

Readers can respond quickly and easily to what *People Leaving Churches* will propose. They can push back, share resonance, ask questions, and respond to each other. They can participate in a vibrant community for displaced Boomers, one of exploration, restored resonance, and care. They can find a space in which they can once again offer

¹⁹¹ Susan Gunelius, *Blogging All-In-One for Dummies* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 12.

and receive wisdom, compassion, understanding, prayer, laughter, encouragement, and healing.

It requires vigilance on the part of the blog host to ensure that lines are not crossed into offensive language, putting down, and negativity. I will design and moderate the blog to create an open forum where people can share feelings and opinions without fear of being shamed or ridiculed.

4. Does blogging fit my experience, strengths, stage of life, and geographical location? Does it appeal to me? Yes.

To explore this question, I launched an exploratory blog in January 2015. I've tried various subject areas, shades of voices, and posting frequency. I've discovered the following:

- Blogging is a lot of work. I estimate from experience and research that it will require twenty-five to thirty-five hours per week to launch and support a blog with excellence. This fits my retirement years. I have the time and interest for the project.
- Building a readership, following, and collaborating community takes from several months up to a few years. I have learned patience and persistence as a teacher and pastor starting communities in three settings and with new ministry launches within them. I also have the stability to commit years to this project.
- Blogging will enable me to build the kind of collaborative community I crave. I love to prompt response, exploration, and innovation through focused interaction. I yearn for discussions with people with diverse backgrounds,

perspectives, and options. I thrive on pushback, correction, morphing ideas, and coming to one mind on something. The openness of the blogging community provides this in abundance.

- Blogging will enable me to reach people beyond my local conservative religious context in Southwest Michigan, one dominated by Mainline Protestant churches. I question whether I could find a “critical mass” of people locally to generate needed energy for passionate exploration. A blog reaches across geography, religious affiliation, and cultures. The scope and number of people on the Internet will provide the potential to generate the needed energy.

In summary, blogging fits both my goal to present my proposals to Second Half of Life Baby Boomers and church leaders. It also fits who I am, in this stage of my life.

I am eager to gather an online community through the blog to explore the transformations of later stages of development that we are experiencing and what they mean for our Christian life as individuals and as part of the world-wide, Christ-centered church. I am committed to continued research, consistent personal reflection, and interaction with both like-minded and skeptical persons.

My blogging partner, Dan, and I expect this to become a multi-year project of (a) developing an effective blogging *voice* and presence, (b) gathering a community, (c) learning to build up one another online, (d) coming to shared values, perspectives, beliefs, and practices, and (e) engaging the world and churches in fresh and innovative ways.

The themes and hopes of this dissertation project may very well become a life-remaining passion in my life. I am eager to live into the Second Half of Life myself, encourage others do the same, and integrate what we are discovering into the life of churches. That sounds like a vision worth living into for however many years I am given.

SECTION FIVE:
ARTIFACT SPECIFICATION

Introduction

Healthy, growing Baby Boomers are leaving healthy, vital churches for developmental reasons. As they continue to grow into the Second Half of Life, they no longer resonate with churches oriented to the First Half of Life. This is a tragic loss for both Boomers and churches. The blog will challenge Boomers and church leaders to explore ways to incorporate Boomers with Second Half of Life values, perspectives, and beliefs into the life of churches.

In the blog I expand the vision from the Baby Boomer cohort specifically discussed in this dissertation to include other generational cohorts. Growth into later stages of development within the Second Half of Life is not confined to Boomers. My blog will invite persons from all cohorts to explore and participate.

Markets

People Leaving Churches targets two related groups: first, persons who are emotionally and/or physically leaving churches due to growth into later stages of development and, second, church leaders.

I reported in this dissertation (see Section Three) that George Barna concluded from his research that between 1991 and 2011, some 18 percent of Boomers became unchurched. The U.S. Census Bureau reported slightly more than 75 million Baby Boomers in 2014. Using these numbers, 13.5 million Boomers left churches in those two decades (18 percent of 75 million). This does not include those who left churches before 1991 and those who still consider themselves churched, but have lost resonance. Nor

does it include those from other generational cohorts who are experiencing loss of resonance with churches due to development into later stages. The market for the blog's message is huge. With 60 of the 75 million Boomers online, my blog's market is 10 million when I only include Boomers who left churches between 1991 and 2011. Gaining a hearing from only 1 percent would touch 100,000 people.

My second target is leaders of churches losing participants. This is a more challenging market to estimate. "Hartford Institute estimates there are roughly 350,000 religious congregations in the United States. This estimate relies on the RCMS 2010 religious congregations census. Of those, about 314,000 are Protestant and other Christian churches, and 24,000 are Catholic and Orthodox churches."¹⁹² Using this number of churches and dividing it into the 13.5 million Boomers who left churches between 1991 and 2011 results in an average congregation having lost 43 Boomers in those decades. That same report noted the average size church had 186 attendees. Considering only Boomers who left during this time frame is a highly significant factor, nearly 25 percent of their participants. As church leaders notice this cumulative loss, or perhaps one more participant leaving after so many before, they will wonder what's going on. As noted above, many will turn to the Internet for answers.

¹⁹² Hartford Institute for Religion Research, "Fast Facts about American Religion," Hartford Seminary, Hartford Institute for Religion Research, accessed September 26, 2015, http://hrr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast_facts.html.

Goals¹⁹³

The blog will:

1. Gather a community of healthy, growing people who have left churches and invite them to consider and explore the proposals of this dissertation; respond with resonance, lack of resonance, or dissonance; and further develop the proposals.
2. Provide a community in which people who have lost resonance with churches can find acceptance, perspective, care, and encouragement.
3. Encourage healthy, growing people and leaders of healthy, vital churches to explore and implement strategies that incorporate the transformed values, perspectives, and beliefs of the Second Half of Life into the life and ministry of the churches that have been oriented to the First Half of Life.

Promotion: Building Readership

I will devote about half of my time in blog-related activities other than researching and writing posts. I plan to use much of that half in connecting Internet users to my blog. I will:

- Optimize the potential for people to find the blog through search engines. I will intentionally use keywords that online researchers might use. I will blog regularly and frequently to come up on search results.
- Promote myself and my blog through social media.
- Participate in related blogs and forums, linking my blog with theirs.

¹⁹³ The goals are intentionally not S.M.A.R.T.: specific, measurable, achievable, results-focused, and time-bound. Blogs require several months, often more than a year, to attract readership and build an online community. I found no blogging advisor who suggested that if I did *X* and *Y*, I could expect result *Z*. I will remain focused on the specifications outlined in this section, make adjustments along the way, and hold the course until efforts produce hoped-for results.

- Invite guest bloggers to my site and offer to guest blog on theirs.
- Interact with other authors exploring similar themes.
- Produce downloadable PDFs and presentation products.

Later in the project, I will include some or all of the following:

- Expand the blog website to include related research, links, and reports.
- Produce eBooks, video blogs, and podcasts.
- Blog tours.
- Speak at churches and conferences.
- Submit articles for publications, digital magazines, and organizations (AARP, WebMD, etc.).
- Write a newsletter.
- Turn the blog into a book.

The challenge is not whether to promote the blog or how to find ways to do so. It is which and how many promotional channels to use first and which to add later. This will require significant time investment. I hired a partner for launching, supporting, and promoting the blog. Dan Heemstra is artistic, innovative, and passionate.

Competing and Comparable Blogs

1. Blogs focusing on a positive perspective of growing into later stages of development.

I expected to have to choose between many options for blogs that focused on a positive perspective on stages of development in the Second Half of Life. I was disappointed.

I discovered several sites that focus on developmental stages in children and adolescents. A few scholarly sites presented results of surveys, essays, and teaching on later stages of development, but in a more formal presentation format. Blog posts exploring stages of development for maturing adults showed up through web searches, but were isolated posts on blog sites that focus on other or much broader subjects. A few other sites with a complementary focus were found, but had been inactive for a year or more.

Three blogs that focus on mature stages of development in the Second Half of Life follow. The first is highly complementary, while the second and third are less so.

- *Dynamic Aging Institute* (<http://www.dynamicaginginstitute.com/>).

Dr. Dudley Tower presents strong perspectives of continuing to grow and develop into the aging years of life. He also proposes a *dynamic* and positive approach.

Dynamic aging is a unique, systemic, more fully engaged, and proactive approach to one's own aging process. It is informed by the latest theory and research from multiple sciences – including gerontology, positive psychology, neuroscience, sociology, cognitive psychology, physiology, and developmental psychology.¹⁹⁴

I plan to link this site to the blog. Though he does not discuss churches and how development affects resonance, he compellingly teaches advanced stages of development in the Second Half of Life.

- *The Generation Above Me* (<http://thegenerationaboveme.blogspot.com/>).

Karen D. Austin introduces herself on her blog: “After teaching college English for 30 years, I earned a master's in gerontology. Now I teach classes in Aging Studies for

¹⁹⁴ Dudley Tower, “What is Dynamic Aging?” Dynamic Aging Institute, accessed September 29, 2015, <http://www.dynamicaginginstitute.com/what-is-dynamic-aging/>.

WSU. I am also a lay minister to women (primarily older adults) at my church, a wife of a college administrator, and a mom of two teens.”¹⁹⁵

While Austin addresses a broad scope of topics related to aging, she includes several developmental posts scattered throughout her blog, which are categorized well. She presents both a positive and realistic perspective on aging. Her writing is a mix of anecdote, book reviews, and commentary. It is well written, informative, and engaging.

- *Aging Parents Insights* (<http://www.davidsolie.com/>).

Solie “challenges outdated assumptions that older adults have stopped growing and are simply diminished versions of their younger selves.”¹⁹⁶ He approaches the topic of later stages of development from the eyes of children of aging parents and how to connect with them.

2. Blogs exploring developmental reasons participants leave churches:

I did not find sites that focused on growth into later, Second Half of Life, stages of growth and a resulting loss of resonance with and withdrawal from First Half of Life churches. Several sites focus on problems in the church that cause people to leave their churches. They raise real issues to be addressed by churches, but don’t directly complement my blog. Others are more helpful and supportive of those who have left. Many suggest ways to woo the unchurched back into what I perceive to be First Half of Life churches. Here are three sites with similarities to the scope of the present study that remain substantially possibility oriented and encourage continued growth:

¹⁹⁵ Karen D. Austin, “About Me,” *The Generation Above Me: A Blog by Karen D. Austin*, accessed September 30, 2015, <http://thegenerationaboveme.blogspot.com/>.

¹⁹⁶ David Solie, “Closing the Communication Gap with Our Aging Parents,” *David Solie: Aging Parents Insights*, accessed September 28, 2015, <http://www.davidsolie.com/audio-cd-on-aging-parents/>.

- *Church of the Churchless* (http://hinessight.blogs.com/church_of_the_churchless/)

Brian Hines describes his site:

If you are spiritual but not religious,
If you don't belong to an organized faith but sometimes wish you did,
Or if you do belong but sometimes wish you didn't,
Welcome to the Church of the Churchless.

If you are tired of dogma that divides rather than unites,
That demands blind faith rather than open-eyed investigation,
That proclaims "You'll see when you believe"
Instead of "You'll believe when you see,"
Welcome to the Church of the Churchless.¹⁹⁷

As the blog title indicates, Hines seeks to form a sense of community belonging for those who have left or never belonged in traditional churches. He describes characteristics of the Second Half of Life without linking them to developmental growth. He contrasts the values, perspectives, and beliefs of those who are unchurched with churches, but does not go the step further to show how this could become good news for those who have left, those who remain without resonance, and churches.

- *The Evangelical Liberal* (<https://evangelicalliberal.wordpress.com/>)

The Evangelical Liberal is a blog to discuss and debate ideas around more open, liberated and emotionally healthy ways of being a Christian, particularly for those who have struggled to find their way within the evangelical tradition. It's a search for ways of emerging from the evangelical cocoon.¹⁹⁸

Edser, author of the blog, includes a faith development component in this blog. He describes several characteristics of the Second Half of Life without naming it such.

¹⁹⁷ Brian Hines, "About This Site," Church of the Churchless, accessed October 1, 2015, http://hinessight.blogs.com/church_of_the_churchless/about_this_sitestart_here/index.html.

¹⁹⁸ Harvey Edser, "About," The Evangelical Liberal, accessed October 1, 2015, <https://evangelicalliberal.wordpress.com/about/>.

He seeks to adjust a conventional First Half of Life Evangelical perspective to fit post-conventional stages of faith in the Second Half of Life. *People Leaving Churches* proposes that it is unrealistic to make such incremental adjustments to the values, perspectives, and beliefs of the First Half of Life in order to resonate with people in the Second Half of Life. The values, perspectives, and beliefs of the two halves are too different from each other. Deeper, more profound solutions are needed.

- *Christianity Without the Religion* (<http://www.ptm.org/cwr/>)

Christianity Without the Religion (CWR) is representative of sites that seek to connect with people who have left the church or never attended. In CWR's case they provide an alternative, online church with worship services. In their words:

We started providing Christianity Without the Religion (CWR) because there is a need. Many who look to PTM¹⁹⁹ for spiritual direction have implored us to give them Christ-centered and biblically based teaching within the format of worship services. There are many whom we already serve who have had a hell-on-earth experience with a group of people who called themselves a church. These folks have been burned -- and have no intention of darkening the door to any building with a sign outside that pronounces itself to be a church -- they just won't take the risk of being religiously mugged again. They feel safer worshipping online. ... Why not serve those who cannot or will not attend church in a building?²⁰⁰

Groups such as this seek to form alternative communities for healthy, growing people who have left churches. They do so with First Half of Life values, perspectives, and beliefs. They may gather a community of faith, but from the perspectives presented in this dissertation they will not resonate with people in the Second Half of Life. These people may remain for a while, but will again lose resonance and leave. *People Leaving*

¹⁹⁹ PTM, Plain Truth Ministries, is an organization that promotes Christianity without the religion.

²⁰⁰ Greg Albrecht, "An Interview with Greg Albrecht," Christianity Without the Religion, accessed October 1, 2015, <http://www.ptm.org/cwr/info/interviewCWR.htm>.

Churches will function from values, perspectives, and beliefs intentionally resonant with the Second Half of Life.

3. Conclusion

I found no blogs that explore *People Leaving Churches*' niche. A few blogs speak to aspects of what I will address, such as: developmental growth into later stages, unchurched believers, and ways to support the unchurched. Looking to individual posts, I found a goldmine of complementary sources. The blogs I discovered are like pieces in a puzzle that hasn't been put together in the overall picture I see and am eager to show.

Artifact Elements

The artifact will include:

1. Screen shots of the blog site, including, but not limited to: front/welcome, contents, about author and site, and main blog postings pages.
2. Content included on static pages.
3. Content of the first thirteen postings.

Resources Needed

1. Personnel
 - Assistant Blog Developer. I have already contracted with someone to work 10-15 hours per week. He is presently taking the lead in designing, launching, and developing the blog site. Later, he will partner in site maintenance, editing, guest posting, and responding to comments and email. Cost: \$500-1,000 per month.
 - Professional Blogging Consultant. I will contract with a local consultant to review the proposed blog site and recommend changes with our target

audience in mind. I will contract with the consultant to review the site semi-annually. Cost: \$1,000 in first year.

2. Website: Blog domain name, software, hosting, Internet connection, etc. Cost: \$500-1,000 in first year.
3. Other: Photo subscription, research materials, training materials and classes, etc. Cost: \$1,500-2,500 per year.

Title and Content Overview

PEOPLE LEAVING CHURCHES

Why Healthy, Growing People Are Leaving Healthy, Vital Churches.
How It Is Good News and Can Become Great News.

People Leaving Churches is organized around three areas: Discovery, Challenge, and Exploration. It includes collections of posts that discuss and solicit reader responses to nine sets of questions, three under each area.

Discovery: People are discovering that what they thought was a full life is in actuality only the First Half of Life. More and more healthy, growing people are discovering and living into later stages of adult development, a “second half of adult life.”

Collection 1 What does life look like in earlier stages of adult development?

Collection 2 What does life look like in later stages of adult development?

Collection 3 Is the Second Half of Life a new idea? Why are more and more of people discovering the Second Half of Life now?

Challenge: Healthy, growing people in later stages of development are leaving healthy, vital churches oriented to earlier stages of development.

Collection 4 What does a church look like when it is oriented to earlier stages of development?

Collection 5 What does a Christian look like in later stages of development? Is that person still “Christian”?

Collection 6 Why do healthy, growing people in later stages of development leave healthy, vital churches oriented to earlier stages of development?

Exploration: Healthy, growing people in later stages of development have much to offer each other, the Church, and the world.

Collection 7 How can healthy, growing people in later stages of development relate to the churches they have left in a gracious, compassionate, and helpful way?

Collection 8 Where do Christians in later stages of development turn for affirmation, understanding, support, and nurture, if not the churches they have left behind? How can *People Leaving Churches* help?

Collection 9 What would church oriented to later stages of development be like? What would church oriented to all stages of development be like? How might present churches oriented to earlier stages expand to include those in later stages?

Schedule

Design and launch blog site October through December 2015 (12/31 launch)

Write material for static pages and first twelve postsOctober through December 2015

Write and post three or more posts per week.....2016

Maintain, support, and grow site and readership2016

SECTION SIX:

POSTSCRIPT

I participated in this Doctor of Ministry program for more than eleven years. It's been a long haul. A seminar leader told us a decade ago that we would circle our final topic and core content for a while before nailing it down. In the meantime, we were to research, write, and explore topics. He probably did not imagine I would take him so seriously as to circle for a decade.

A complication to my process was my changing context. I was a thriving, driven senior staff pastor in a megachurch when I began the program. My evolving topic related to local church leadership and organizational development. I am now retired with minimal church involvement and little interest in organizational development. I began the program firmly ensconced in the First Half of Life and am now well into the Second Half of Life.

The D.Min. program served as a sounding board, source of research, aid in mindfulness, and a constant reminder to remain intentional in my ongoing development. I relaunched the dissertation from scratch several times as my focus and context have changed. I worked with three sets of advisors. I changed from Track 1 to Track 2. I drafted more than 100,000 words, most of which I discarded from this project. Through it all I have grown, repurposed, and found fresh meaning. My values, perspective, and beliefs changed. I don't regret any of it.

Now I am (finally) completing this project, at least the George Fox Seminary-related portion of it. I think of it as completing a phase of a larger project. I will soon exchange D.Min. courses and processes for what I expect to become a multi-year

blogging project that takes the content from this dissertation and presents it to a wide audience. I am eager to engage people in what I am proposing, working with them to explore challenges and potential solutions to the problem of healthy, growing people leaving healthy, vital churches.

It feels like I have tapped a few exploratory *wells* into a vast and rich *aqueduct*. I've only begun to draw on the experiences of mystics and discoveries of scholars. I am still a neophyte in this amazing Second Half of Life.

I have hardly begun to explore how such factors as personality, religious background, economic resources, education, and culture enhance or form barriers to growth into later stages of faith development. How do marginalization and suffering from structural oppressions like racism, sexism, and classism affect the invitation into and life within the Second Half of Life? What will I know and experience, how will I relate with others and churches, as I continue to grow and develop into stages beyond where I am now living?

As I conclude this dissertation project, I am aware that the entire written statement could have been labeled *An Introduction*. I once asked a group of people if they believed there was life after retirement from career life. I now smile at my own question. I envision amazing, sustainable growth, purpose, and meaning in these aging years of my life. This project has launched me in a promising direction. The best may very well be yet to come.

APPENDIX:

ARTIFACT

I chose to launch and host a blog titled *People Leaving Churches* to flesh out and extend this dissertation project. It takes the proposals from the halls of academia, opens the doors, and invites people across the Internet to consider and respond to them.

This section includes a snapshot of the blog site that was developed the last two quarters of 2015 and publically launched on December 31. At launch, *peopleleavingchurches.com* consisted of a site layout, foundational static pages, and one introductory post. I began adding articles the first week in January, beginning with two per week.

I noted above that this is a snapshot of the site. The blog will continue to evolve as readers respond and as I learn to work more effectively in this genre. What follows is blog layout and content as of January 10, 2016. I invite you to go to the blog site, *www.peopleleavingchurches.com*, to see how it has expanded and changed.

The *voice* and format of the blog are intentionally different from the rest of this dissertation due to seven goals:

1. Articles are “scannable.” Readers generally glance at, scan over quickly, or read through an article hastily. Only then may they decide to go back and read a part or the entire article more carefully. The writing style and format aids this process through simple sentences, short paragraphs, bullet lists, highlights, headers, pictures, etc.

2. Articles “hook” and engage readers. People decide quickly whether to stay with a blog site longer than a few seconds. Titles, introductions, and headers will engage readers enough to catch their attention, while giving an accurate sense of what follows.
3. Articles provoke response. They include strong statements, propose unconventional perspectives, and stretch readers’ thinking. They prompt readers to respond through comments, email, and by giving them the opportunity to subscribe.
4. Articles are accessible to a broad audience: Churched, unchurched, and de-churched; people of all reading levels; and those with varying spiritual perspectives read and respond. Articles convey Second Half of Life values, perspectives, and beliefs related to life as a Christ-follower. At the same time, they engage those with very different values, perspectives, and beliefs. They translate information often accessible to a narrower academic audience into language and format for a broader audience.
5. Articles combine to form a complete picture over time. The blog structure and beginning static pages form a *root system*. The first several articles form a *trunk* and *main branches*. Over the next months, articles will add *smaller branches* and *leaves*. Reader comments will add deeper *foliage*.
6. Articles are written well, but within the reality of constraints of time. Researching, drafting, editing, and formatting two to three articles per week takes time. So does marketing the blog, expanding the blog, and

responding to readers' comments. As a result, articles are more "ragged" than in other writing genre. This is expected in the blogosphere.²⁰¹

7. Articles reflect an emerging voice and style. I am in "blogging Kindergarten." I am in many respects still playing, having much to learn and develop. The blog and my writing will evolve over the next months and years. Practice will help. Reader responses will guide. Reading other blogs will provide a form of mentorship for me.

The remainder of this section consists of snapshots of various articles within the *People Leaving Churches* blog site as of January 10, 2016. Each article snapshot includes a screenshot of what readers see after clicking the related link.²⁰² The content of the article follows the screen shot.²⁰³

To get a more complete sense of an article, visit the blog site (www.peopleleavingchurches.com) where additional pictures and formatting supplement the content. Online articles may also include subsequent modifications based on reader responses.

²⁰¹ The articles that follow in this section were written under time constraints close to what I expect to encounter in the upcoming months. I did not solicit expert editing before posting or including in this section. A raggedness remains. I will, however, proof each article one more time on the morning before it is scheduled to go online.

²⁰² Dan Heemstra took the lead in designing and setting up the blog site. Terry Nyhuis wrote the content, except where noted.

²⁰³ Each article begins on a new page to minimize the risk of screenshots disappearing or moving to other pages.

Article 1

Static Page: Posted December 31, 2015

ABOUT US



People Leaving Churches
Healthy Growing People Leaving Healthy Thriving Churches

HOME OUTLINE ABOUT US GLOSSARY CONTACT US

Healthy Growing
People Leaving
Healthy Thriving
Churches

HOME

SMALL PRINT STUFF

Search

RECENT COMMENTS

CATEGORIES

Select Categ
207

DECEMBER 2015

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

ABOUT US

About Terry Nyhuis and Dan Heemstra, the hosts of *People Leaving Churches*

We began our friendship and collaboration in 1991 while working on staff at Trinity Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan Terry was a fledgling senior pastor, Dan was a fledgling seminary student intern. We were both trying to survive, thrive, serve well, and figure things out on the fly.



Our relationship began with Terry mentoring Dan. It soon morphed into a collegial collaboration. We met weekly and went to seminars together for eight years as Dan graduated and became a fledgling senior pastor in another local church and Terry continued to "fledge" as senior pastor in his church.

Over the years, we discovered a lot about each other. We cannot room together at seminars without contemplating murder. Terry supplies a steady, practical perspective; Dan

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Email Address

SUBSCRIBE

ABOUT US

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Our relationship began with Terry mentoring Dan. It soon morphed into a collegial collaboration. We met weekly and went to seminars together for eight years as Dan graduated and became a fledgling senior pastor in another local church and Terry continued to struggle as the senior pastor in his church.

Over the years, we discovered a lot about each other. We cannot room together at seminars without severely risking our relationship. Terry supplies a steady, practical perspective; Dan an artistic, bold one.

We collaborated, disagreed, and learned together. Throughout that time, we consistently thought we knew much more than we actually did.

After eight years, we helped each other decide we needed to get out of our local churches and into fresh settings. We were both tired, frustrated, faced increasing opposition, and bored. We yearned to work in a larger church and in staff positions, rather than as senior pastors.

Terry left to work in a church in Orange County, California and Dan to a church on Long Island, New York.

Over the next several years, we thrived in our churches. We imagined serving there for years, if not decades.

Over the years, we had mostly lost contact, at least regular interaction. The busyness and successes of ministry consumed us. Our staff relationships supplied the collegiality and friendships we needed. **Separately and concurrently, each of us lost resonance with our role as pastor. It was like someone reached in and opened a “passion drain” in our guts.** Dan resigned, Terry retired, and we each moved back to the Holland, Michigan area.

After moving back to Michigan, we both did the following:

1. Attempted to reengage churches, both as leaders and “normal” members
2. Read books and articles
3. Went to therapy
4. Meditated
5. Started meeting weekly again. We drank gallons of bold brew coffee and ate a billion calories of pastries
6. Discussed a doctoral dissertation Terry was writing

In the end we could not rekindle our passion for life in churches. We concluded that:

- Many of us (not just Boomers) are leaving churches because our values, perspectives, and beliefs have shifted as we continued to grow and develop as Christ followers. As a result, we no longer fit in churches as we once did.

- It's nobody's fault. Nothing is broken. Churches are still healthy. We are still healthy. We still appreciate and affirm churches. We simply no longer fit in churches as we once did.
- We and millions like us have entered fresh stages of development in a *Second Half of Life*. Churches, on the other hand, continue to be oriented to resonate with and serve people in earlier stages of adult development, the First Half of Life. We no longer fit as we once did.

That's okay with us. In fact, **we see it as good news**. It shows that millions of us are growing and developing into fresh stages of development. We are still Christian, but with shifted values, perspectives, and beliefs than we lived into before.

At the same time, it's tragic. There are real losses, both for those who are leaving and the churches being left. People leaving churches lose meaningful friendships, ritual, care, settings in which to serve, and deep sense of belonging. Churches lose support, leadership, maturity, and affirmation.

Our hope is that the good news/tragic loss will prompt helpful questions, encourage deep change, and lead to a fuller expression of what it means to follow Christ. We are eager to provide a setting in which that can happen.

About People Leaving Churches

We teamed up to host this blog. The project grew out of Terry's doctoral dissertation project and our ongoing discussions. It was not launched because we know all the answers. In reality, we have more questions than answers. What we do have is curiosity and some perspectives and beliefs to share that can get discussions started. Where things go from there, we are eager to discover.

In *People Leaving Churches*, we simply say, "This is what we've discovered and the way we see things."

We ask you:

- What are you experiencing?
- How do you see things?"

We wonder with you:

- How do we live now with our shifted values, perspectives, and beliefs?
- What does being "Christian" look like in the Second Half of Life?
- How do we best relate with First Half Churches?
- Is there a way for us to reengage church life? If so, what would that look like?

- How do we serve our communities and world from this new stage of life?

About Getting Started

A good way for you to get started in *People Leaving Churches* is to click the **Outline** tab. On that page we provide an overview of our perspective, nine sets of questions that will frame our discussions, and a growing list of posts.

Please feel free to roam around the site and consider what we have to say. If you wish, jump in anytime and let us know what you think and feel. Push back, fill in, give alternative perspective, affirm, and extend what we suggest. Go for it.

You can comment below posted articles where other readers can consider what you have to say and respond. **If you would prefer to keep your comments and our conversations private**, you have two choices. You can click on the *Connect* tab and leave us a message there and we'll respond to you through email. Or you can email us at the addresses listed on the *Connect* page.

Now ... if you'd like to know more particulars about us, read on. If not, poke around the site and let us know what it prompts in you. You can always check here later to see who is saying such things and what deep psychological and environmental issues might prompt them. Just kidding, at least mostly.

Terry's Story

I grew up on a small farm near Holland, Michigan. Our life was wrapped up in Overisel Reformed Church, a small Dutch Reformed church, and making a living with the whims of cattle prices and growing seasons.

I survived high school and Overisel Reformed Church, became an atheist, and graduated from a liberal arts college, Hope College, with a degree in physics. I pursued careers in industrial research and farming. Later, I came back to Christianity and the church with a passion. I enrolled in seminary, graduating from Fuller Seminary in 1979.

I married Anita in 1970, while we were both at Hope College. We had literally met in bed. Okay, to be technical, we met in separate cribs in the church nursery sometime in 1950, at least so they tell us. Our first glimpse of each other was through bars. After riding school buses together, seeing each other for decades at church and school, and playing duets in evening services in country churches, we got serious and married.

Anita was a timid, way smart farm girl when I married her. She is now a confident, way smart and highly educated estate planning attorney. Our life has been "interesting," as I shifted from an atheistic physicist to a passionate pastor to a mostly de-churched writer and blogger. This was while she transforming from an insecure education major to an increasingly confident secretary to a highly competent estate planning attorney. It's been hellish and heavenly, depending upon our season of life. After more than 45 years of marriage we love, support, challenge, and drive each other crazy at times.

I began my church career as an intern and associate pastor at Lake Hills Community Church, in Laguna Hills, California. Anita and I both thrived and “grew up” as adults and professionals there. We loved it. To this day, we don’t understand how growing up on farms in the Midwest prepared us to thrive in Orange County, California, but it did. Anita transitioned from legal secretary, through law school, to attorney. I transitioned from seminary intern through seminary and just about every role possible in a young, growing church, to executive pastor.

Then, after fourteen years of all-out, non-stop work and life, I burned out. I had as long as I could remember lived with a smoldering *volcano of rage* in me. I needed to be careful to keep it underground. I got therapy for it as needed. But after 14 years at Lake Hills, the lava of rage got hotter and built pressure. I knew it was only a matter of time before something blew. So resigned from my position and enrolled in law school. That turned out to be a sabbatical from church work, rather than a permanent change. After a semester, I took a call to serve as a senior pastor at **Trinity Reformed Church**, where Dan and I met.

Again, we thrived. The church grew, we increased programming and property, and strong leadership emerged. But eight years into it, I decided I was not fit for the senior pastor role, had grown weary of managing a growing disgruntled segment of the congregation, and didn’t work well with Midwest, life-long church people.

Anita had already decided she was not fit for a stuffy and cut-throat Midwest law firm. I accepted a senior staff position at **Crystal Cathedral Ministries**, a huge church in Southern California. Anita returned to the law firm she had left eight years before.

It was my dream position in faith, leadership, and organizational development. I often said that I was born for that role and position; I still say that. I loved my coworkers, the inquisitive minds, an amazing diversity of perspective, and working with a brilliant and complex senior pastor, Dr. Robert H. Schuller.

Then, seven amazing and fulfilling years into our life there, Anita and I both discovered that **we were done**. We were tired and burned out. This time there was no increasing volcano of rage. I simply lost passion for it. I no longer resonated with life as a busy pastor. That’s when we moved back to Michigan this last time in 2006.

I tried volunteer denominational work, Specialized Interim Pastor work, and volunteer local church service in several roles. I couldn’t develop and sustain passion for any of it. Anita and I joined and delved into four local churches, the last one in which we attend from time to time.

I am completing a doctorate in Leadership and Spiritual Direction at George Fox Seminary, one I began in 2004 (yes, more than a decade ago). **My dissertation is “Aging Baby Boomers, Churches, and the Second Half of Life: Challenges for Boomers and their Churches.”**

In addition to writing and blogging, I serve as house husband for Anita, who continues to work as a full-time estate planning attorney with her Southern California law firm. I am

considering another blog on how to retire early and become a house husband to a successful attorney. [Just kidding. I have no idea.]

Dan's Story²⁰⁴

Unlike Terry, I was a city boy. I grew up in Northwest Iowa in the towns of Boyden (a village of 900) and Orange City (a metropolis of 5,000). **Life centered around church and school, and in many ways there was no difference.**

My mother was the church secretary, my father served as an elder on the church board. I sang in the choir, led the youth group, served on regional church teams, directed the children's choir, and faithfully attended Sunday school and catechism.

I majored in music at Northwestern College (a small Christian liberal arts college in NW Iowa). After college, **I enrolled at Western Theological Seminary**, in Holland, Michigan. I interned in three different church settings (one was where Terry and I met).

After graduating, **I accepted the position as Senior Pastor at Overisel Reformed Church** just outside of Holland, MI (yes, the same Overisel in which Terry grew up).

Over the next years, I learned a lot, accomplished a lot, and discovered firsthand the personal toll of leading a congregation. My family grew during this time—having four kids in six years.

After 6 years of this I was ready to move to a new adventure. I accepted the position of associate pastor of a church on Long Island, New York.

A year after moving to **New Life Community Church**, the senior pastor took a sabbatical. It was during this sabbatical that two planes hit the World Trade Center in lower Manhattan. Many members of our congregation lost a family member or knew someone who was missing. I officiated a funeral for a young 20-something woman who was never found.

The Senior Pastor came back from his sabbatical, decided that after 20 years, he wanted to move to a new challenge and resigned. After other staff resignations, I was the only pastor on staff. A year later **the church called me to become their "Senior Pastor."**

For several years the congregation had been hemorrhaging members. We worked hard to stop the membership drain. We hired a new youth director and music director. The budget stabilized and giving began to increase.

In the fall of 2004 the church board asked me to preach a sermon series based on the popular Rick Warren book, *"The Purpose Driven Life."*

²⁰⁴ Dan Heemstra wrote the draft of "Dan's Story."

As I studied and preached through the book, **I increasingly realized that I didn't connect with this conventional theology as I once did.** There was nothing wrong with what the author was saying, but it no longer resonated with me.

During the busyness of the previous years, **my theology had shifted** from my conventional upbringing. I realized I was not in the same place of faith where the congregation was.

As I came to that realization, I also looked at my marriage and saw that while I was changing, my wife wasn't. She was content and committed to the faith of her childhood. It was at this point that an old and familiar story began—I met someone.

I took a step into the dark and my life, as I knew it, came crashing down. For six weeks I lived two completely different lives—one I showed in the pulpit and at home, the other in private. One Sunday I preached my last sermon, by that afternoon I was removed from the pulpit and placed on leave. By the end of the week I had moved out the house. Within a month I was suspended from ministry by my denomination.

Although it was clear what I could do to return to the pulpit, I knew I didn't want to. I walked away from a marriage of 13 years and a promising pastoral career. I floundered for a year, working odd jobs and trying to make ends meet.

In the end, I moved back to West Michigan to be near my kids (who had moved there with their mother). I began to read a wide variety of subjects; journal regularly and ponder deeply; and connect with people with a variety of perspectives.

I attended a few churches within my denomination, some progressive Christian churches, liberal churches, and a Unitarian church. Each was helpful for a time, but I stopped going. Surprisingly, **church and conventional Christianity didn't resonate with me anymore.**

During this time, I worked in retail, landscaping, construction, manufacturing, shipping, and as an administrative assistant.

In 2010 I met my wife. Martha is a Hospice & Palliative Physician. Between the two of us, we have four kids in college, one in high school and one married and beginning his career. I love being married to Martha and interacting with our grown-up children.

Starting in seminary, through two pastorates, and into post-pastoral career transitions, a constant has been my friendship with Terry. We met weekly for years, then talked regularly on the phone after we moved to opposite coasts, and then lost track for a few years. When Terry retired to West Michigan, we reconnected.

We started having weekly discussions and drinking lots of bold coffee. We talked about his dissertation, what we were reading, and how our values, perspectives, and beliefs were shifting.

We came to understand that leaving church was not necessarily a digression or problem, but rather a result of moving into a new developmental stage. And we realized that we weren't alone in this process. We knew family and friends who also were becoming de-churched.

Although I no longer find a church (*i.e.* congregation) that resonates with me, I still believe that the church serves a valuable purpose. As I move into a second-half of life, I ponder how the faith of my parents and ancestors, and my children, relates with this new emerging spirituality and how to awaken and expand the Christ-likeness within me and those I love.

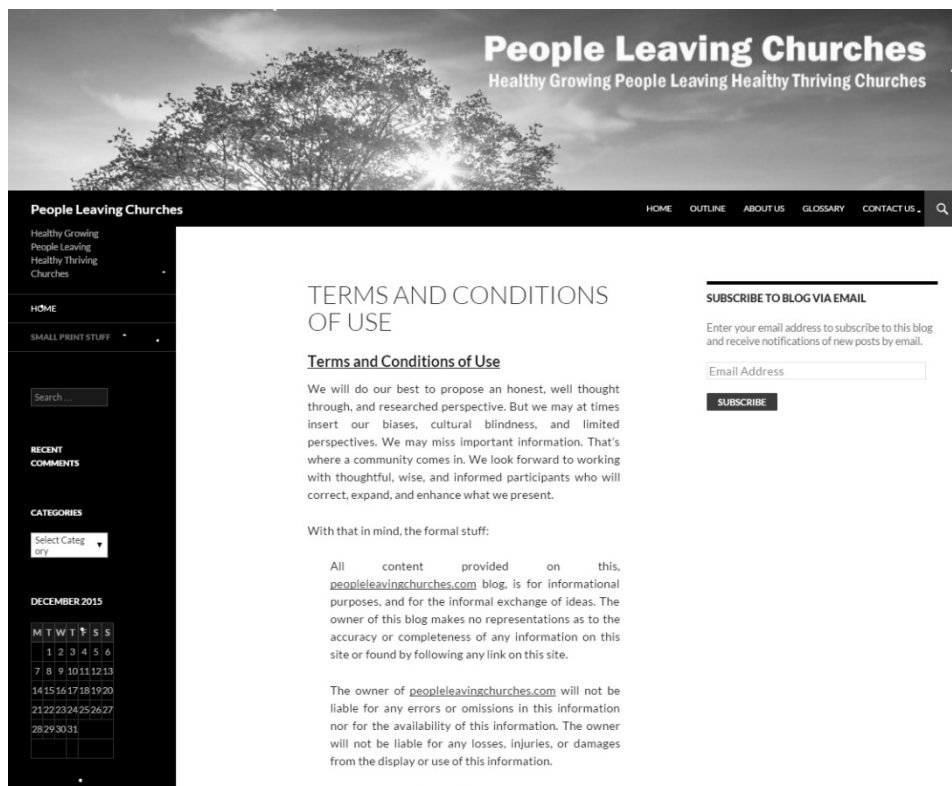
Currently I spend my time working as a secretary in a public school system and partnering with Terry in writing and publishing the "People Leaving Churches" blog. I serve Martha as her house husband and enjoy my adult children. I also care for two large dogs and one lazy cat.

Article 2

Static Page: Posted December 31, 2015

SMALL PRINT STUFF

(TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF USE)



TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF USE²⁰⁵

Terms and Conditions of Use

We will do our best to propose an honest, well thought through, and researched perspective. But we may at times insert our biases, cultural blindness, and limited perspectives. We may miss important information. That's where a community comes in.

²⁰⁵ We (Dan and I) hope through this article to: (1) Create a safe and inviting environment for honest and open interaction, (2) minimize those who might abuse the site for personal gain or another person through nastiness, and (3) protect our rights and ensure our legality.

We look forward to working with thoughtful, wise, and informed participants who will correct, expand, and enhance what we present.

With that in mind, the formal stuff.²⁰⁶

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- vulgar, offensive, threatening, or harassing language;
- content that violates the privacy of another individual or attack a person or group individually;
- comments that are spam or are clearly off topic; or
- promotions of commercial products or services.

²⁰⁶ The formal legal language came from several blog sources. Dan researched, selected, and merged formal language to find an appropriate balance of freedom and boundaries for the target audience and content of this blog. I added the less formal paragraphs to soften and provide context.

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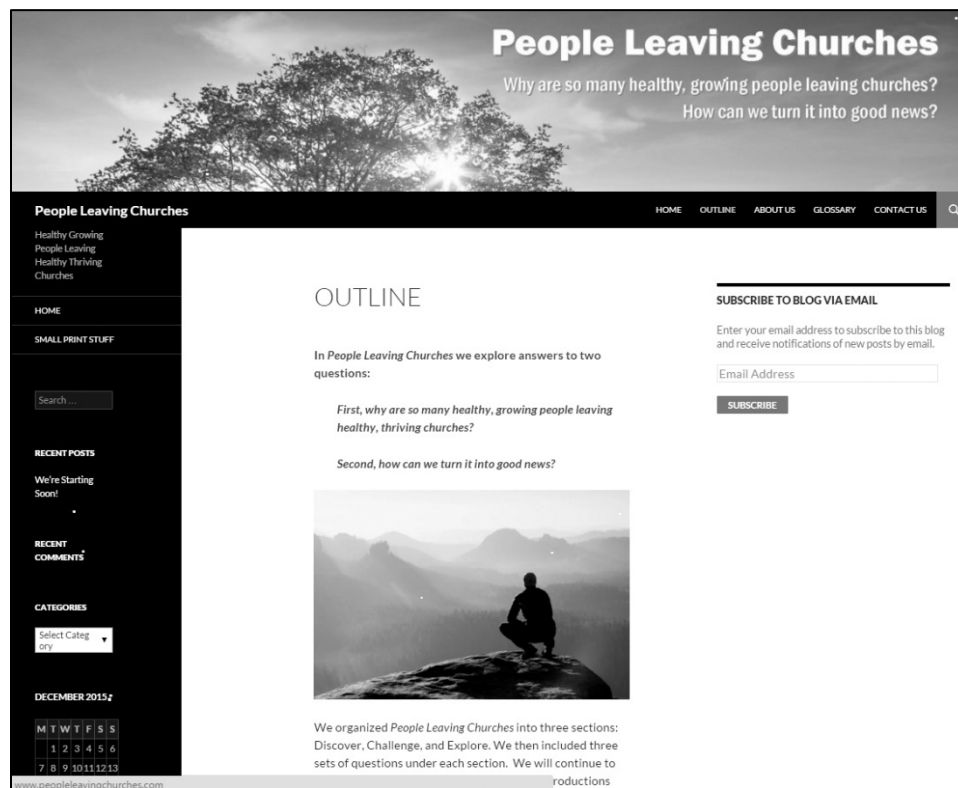
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Blog Policy Changes

We may amend or modify this blog policy statement at any time to ensure its continued use is consistent with the blog's intended purpose as a limited forum. This policy has been made on December 9, 2015.

Article 3

Static Page: Posted December 31, 2015

OUTLINE²⁰⁷

PEOPLE LEAVING CHURCHES

In *People Leaving Churches* we ask two questions:

First, why are so many healthy, growing people leaving healthy, thriving churches?

Second, how can we turn it into good news?

²⁰⁷ This page is designed to assist people who are less acquainted with blog format. It serves a similar purpose as *categories* in that it helps people find articles with similar themes. Readers can use either categories or the outline, whichever they find more functional.

We organized People Leaving Churches into three sections: Discover, Challenge, and Explore. We then included three sets of questions under each section. We will continue to add links to articles under the appropriate introductions and questions as we post them.

• *Healthy, Growing People Are Leaving Churches*²⁰⁸

DISCOVER

(Section I) People are discovering that what they thought was a full life is in actuality only the First Half of Life. More and more healthy, growing people are discovering and living into later stages of adult development, the Second Half of Life.

(Part 1) What does life look like in the First Half of Life?

• *Four Challenges We Face in the First Half of Life*

(Part 2) What does life look like in the Second Half of Life?

• *Five Characteristics of Life in the Second Half of Life*

(Part 3) Is the Second Half of Life a new idea? Why are more people discovering the Second Half of Life now?

CHALLENGE

(Section II) Healthy, growing people in the Second Half of Life are leaving healthy, vital churches oriented to the First Half of Life.

(Part 1) What does a church look like when it is oriented to the First Half of Life?

(Part 2) What does a Christian look like in the Second Half of Life? Is that person still “Christian”?

(Part 3) Why do healthy, growing people in the Second Half of Life leave healthy, vital churches oriented to the First Half of Life?

EXPLORE

(Section III) Healthy, growing people in the Second Half of Life have much to offer each other, the Church, and the world.

(Part 1) How can healthy, growing people in the Second Half of Life relate to the churches they have left in a gracious, compassionate, and helpful way?

²⁰⁸ This is the first linked article, which was posted December 31, 2015 when we publically launched the blog. It gives an overview of our basic premises.

(Part 2) Where do Christians in the Second Half of Life turn for affirmation, understanding, support, and nurture, if not the churches they have left behind? How can *People Leaving Churches* help?

(Part 3) What would churches oriented to the Second Half of Life be like? What would churches oriented to both halves be like? How might present churches oriented to the First Half of Life expand to include those in the Second Half of Life?

Article 4

Posted December 31, 2015

HEALTHY, GROWING PEOPLE ARE LEAVING CHURCHES



HEALTHY, GROWING PEOPLE ARE LEAVING CHURCHES

Why People Are Leaving Churches and How to Turn It into Good News

Sometimes I wish I could be more like older people who still love to go to church. They continue to find meaning in the message they grew up with, songs they know so well, and interactions with friends and fellow believers. But I am not like them.

I no longer am drawn to churches as I once was. I no longer resonate with the messages and songs of our churches. I don't feel comfortable in many conversations with members. I prefer other ways to invest my time and money. And I am not alone:

Healthy, growing people are leaving churches by the millions.

Many of us are older and participated in churches our whole lives.

We are still Christian. We are deeply spiritual.

We aren't angry or frustrated; we simply dropped out.

Something is going on, something unfortunate in many ways, but something also full of potential to become good news

Healthy, Growing People Are Leaving Healthy, Thriving Churches

A 2014 report by the Barna Group found that **114 million adults in the United States have not attended a Christian church service during the past six months.**

- That is just less than half of all adults.
- **This number has been growing: it increased by 30% from 2004-2014.**

The vast majority of the unchurched in the United States have attended a church in their past:

- The Barna Group calls the majority of the unchurched the “de-churched.”
- Most unchurched (76%) were once church members, but now prefer to use their time in other ways.

A study by Alan Jamieson found that **92% of people who left churches in his study were continuing in their faith journey** apart from their churches.

Something is going on and it is significant.

People are Leaving Churches Because of Spiritual Development

People are leaving churches for lots of reasons.

- Some have been hurt or offended in some way.
- Some have disagreements with pastors or members.
- Some are no longer interested in spiritual things anymore.

Often, however, people are leaving churches for a very positive reason, one to be celebrated and supported: **People Are Shifting into Fresh Stages of Faith Development.**

When I was about ten, my grandfather shared his picture of aging with me. He said, “People work hard their whole life. Then they retire, stop, move to town, and sit in a rocking chair. In a few years they’re dead.”

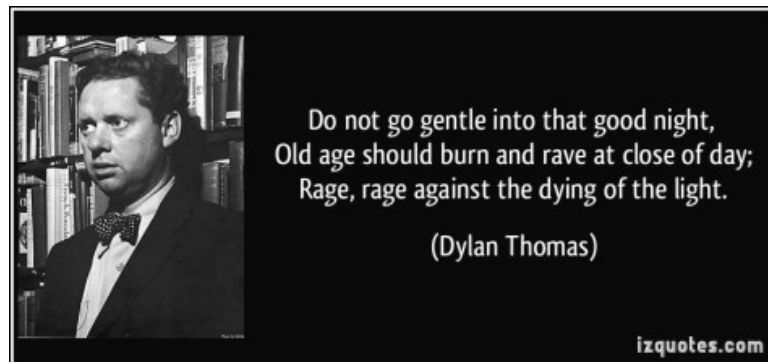
My takeaway picture of aging at that time was that when people get older, they stop and settle in waiting to die. No wonder I dreaded getting older.

Now I’m older and retired. Between my grandfather’s statements and now I discovered developmentalists like Erik Erikson and James Fowler who taught me a developmental perspective. I got to know a few aging mystics in churches who continued to grow and be transformed into their eighties and nineties. I listened to voices such as:

- T. S. Eliot in *East Coker* from *The Four Quartets*

*“Old men ought to be explorers
Here and there does not matter
We must be still and still moving
Into another intensity
For a further union, a deeper communion
Through the dark cold and empty desolation,
The wave cry, the wind cry, the vast waters
Of the petrel and the porpoise. In my end is my beginning.”*

- Dylan Thomas in *Do Not Go Gentle into that Good Night*



- Carl Jung in *The Stages of Life*

“We cannot live the afternoon of life according to the program of life’s morning; for what was great in the morning will be little at evening, and what in morning was true will at evening have become a lie.”

My grandfather's perspective doesn't fit me. My life expectancy is much longer. My generation thinks differently. **My expectations are much higher.** His picture doesn't fit my experience nor that of more and more people around me.

We don't expect to stop growing and developing as we age. We plan to keep morphing into new stages of development.

We in Western Culture are learning what many in Eastern cultures learned a long time ago: Growth through stages of development doesn't have to stop in adulthood.

- Western developmentalists have identified, studied, and written extensively about development. They've formed a picture of several rich and meaningful stages of development. But most stop with middle adulthood.
- We are now discovering a second set of stages of development that follow those previously known in our Western culture.
- What we've previously identified as adulthood is in reality only the First Half of Life.
- There is a Second Half of Life available to us. More and more of us are now living into it.

Before considering this emerging experience of later adulthood, let's consider the earlier adult stages of development many of us have completed and know so well.

What Life in Earlier Adulthood Looks Like

Life in earlier adulthood, the First Half of Life, feels familiar to most of us. That's why it's often called *Conventional*.

During our earlier adulthood, we invest ourselves in completing challenges that tend to be common to us all:

- Ego Building: We learn to stand apart from others, develop a personal identity, and form self-esteem.
- Learning Rules and Values: We learn what our world asks of us, what to believe, and how to live properly.
- Acquisition: We establish lots of things: an identity, a home, skills, knowledge, wealth, standing in the world, and security.

- Social Standing: We work hard to gain influence and respect. We learn how to become successful in our important groups.
- Categorizing Dualism: We learn to sort people, groups, beliefs, and pretty much everything else into up or down, right or wrong.

These are important challenges to engage. For most of us they take decades to complete satisfactorily. It took me until I was in my fifties to complete them. Only then could I transition to the Second Half of Life.

What Life in Later Adulthood Can Look Like

The following descriptions of life in the Second Half of Life may sound unfamiliar. That's why it's often called *Post-Conventional*.

Later stages of development are quite different from those in earlier adulthood. In later adulthood:

- Post-Egoic: We are able to relax our drive for and the hold of self-image, role, power, prestige, and possessions.
- Expansive: We are able to hear more, include more, and accept more. We learn to receive painful parts, alternative perspectives, and people who are different.
- Non-Dualistic: We shift from either/or to become comfortable with paradox, mystery, and both/and.
- Mystical: We discover the Divine residing within. We learn to hear and obey a still, small voice of the soul, a deeper voice of God.
- Activist: We open ourselves to those who are different, including those who are troubled, marginalized, and labeled as enemies. We are able to spend and be spent in quiet and profound love and justice.

These later stages of adult development are rich and valuable. They add purpose, value and meaning to our maturing years. Our world desperately needs people who live this way.

At the same time, shifting into the Second Half of Life creates a problem for those of us who are active participants in churches.

Churches are Oriented to Life in Earlier Adulthood

As with people, organizations and groups orient themselves either to characteristics of the First Half of Life or the Second Half of Life.

Healthy, thriving churches in our culture are distinctly oriented to life in earlier adulthood. They are formed by, led by, and serve people living in the First Half of Life.

Churches share characteristics with people in earlier adulthood

Common, shared, and valuable characteristics of our churches include:

- Ego Building: They define values, perspectives, and beliefs as differentiated from other churches and faith traditions. They view their beliefs as truth and those that differ as error.
- Learning Rules and Values: They emphasize learning, obeying, and struggling with rules and values. They clarify what God expects, how to meet those expectations, and what to do when their members and others do not.
- Acquisition: They pursue identity, knowledge, property, standing, and security. They seek success, influence, and respect.
- Dualism: They sort actions, people, groups, and beliefs into right or wrong, with us or needing conversion to our way.
- Conventional: They take on, with little questioning or transformation, the institutional perspectives, creeds, dogmas, and practices of traditions and previous generations.

Churches orienting themselves to the First Half of Life isn't a bad thing in and of itself

Millions of participants continue to grow and develop as participants and leaders within these churches. Most of us did while we were in our earlier adulthood.

Churches oriented to early adulthood, what we are discovering to be the First Half of Life, can be appreciated and celebrated. **They are serving a great need in the lives of millions of people.**

However, churches and their participants are facing a growing challenge.

People are Leaving Churches as They Grow into Later Stages of Development

As long as people live in stages common to earlier adulthood, they resonate with churches oriented to those stages.

- They share common characteristics.
- They seek similar things.

- People support the goals of their churches and their churches support them as they support their personal goals.

The challenge comes when people shift into later stages of faith development.

- They lose resonance with churches oriented to earlier stages of faith

<p>res·o·nate /ˈrezn̩, āt/, verb</p> <p>: to produce or exhibit resonance</p> <p>: to respond as if by resonance...</p> <p>: to relate harmoniously : strike a chord</p>

development.

- They no longer respond as they once did. What is said and done no longer strikes a chord.

When people lose resonance with their churches, the result can be expected. It makes perfect sense that healthy, growing people are leaving healthy, thriving churches.

How to Turn People Leaving Churches into Great News

People leaving churches is a sign of health and growth. People are leaving because they are entering fresh, expanding stages of faith development.

- This isn't something to be condemned.
- It isn't something to be ashamed of.
- It's not a sign that either the persons leaving or the churches being left are wrong or faulty.
- It is something to be accepted, seen as filled with potential, and embraced.

Healthy, growing people who leave churches need support

When healthy, growing people leave healthy, vital churches it is tragic for the people who leave. They lose:

- Friendships,
- Care and support when in need,

- Rituals and rhythms of faith community life such as worship, baptism, communion, and seasons.
- A place to serve and meet needs, and
- Community life in which to understand, celebrate, and express faith and life.

They need people and groups to:

- Listen and care for them.
- Understand, accept, and support them as they transition and live into the Second Half of Life.
- Envision fresh practices and rhythms in sync with their transformed values, perspectives, and beliefs.
- Affirm and build them up toward continuing growth and service in this fresh post-conventional way of following Jesus.

Healthy, vital churches being left behind need support

When healthy, growing people leave healthy, vital churches it is tragic for churches. They lose:

- Friendships,
- Leadership and service,
- Resources, and
- The wisdom and richness of those in the Second Half of Life.

They need people and leaders to:

- Expand current Western faith development perspectives into those later stages of faith being discovered by many of their participants.
- Propose creeds, confessions, and liturgies that include values, perspectives, and beliefs of the full span of adult faith development.
- Write books and curricula that introduce mystics and sages speaking from later stages of adult faith development.
- Develop biblical and theological understandings that speak to both earlier and later stages of adult faith development.

- Teach biblical studies that honor and encourage the values, perspectives, and beliefs common to later stages.
- Plant innovative churches, departments, and programs oriented to those in later stages of adult development.
- Challenge and show churches how to honor and include values, perspectives, and beliefs of adults in both earlier and later stages of faith development.

Does This Resonate with You?

We at People Leaving Churches have left our churches as we transitioned into later stages of faith development. Join us as we:

- Celebrate our healthy growth and development,
- Support and care for each other, and
- Encourage churches to innovate and expand by discovering who we are and what we have to offer in the Second Half of Life.

Subscribe to People Leaving Churches as we explore and grow into fresh and profound later stages of adult life.

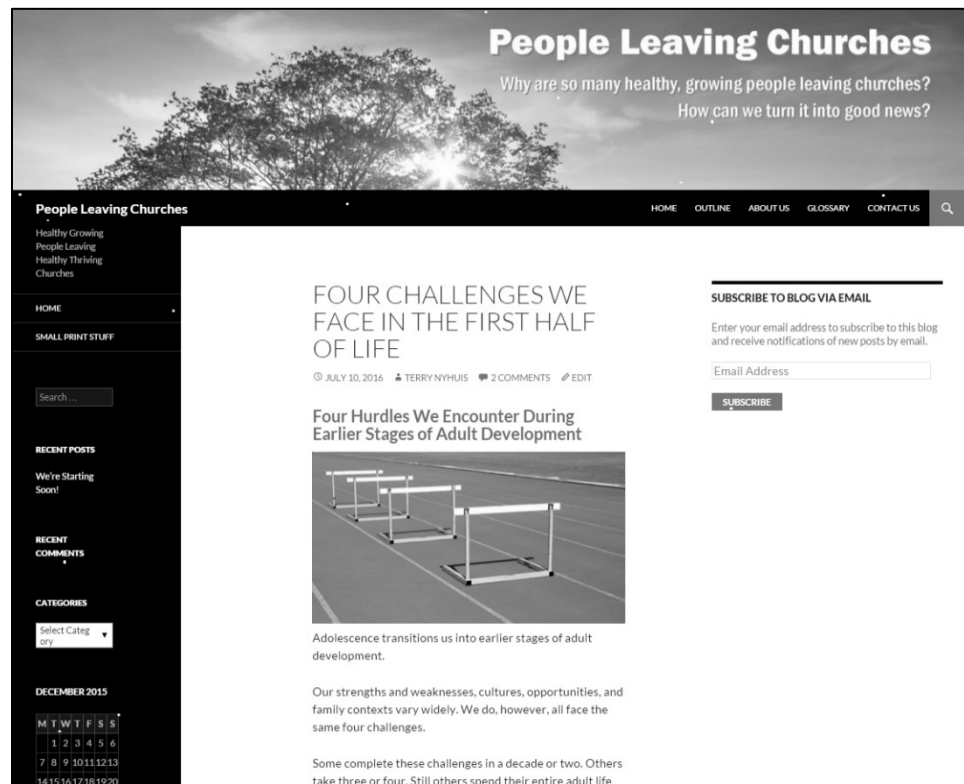
Share your story in the comments section below or by emailing us at People Leaving Churches:

1. Have you left your church or are thinking about doing so?
2. Did you do so because of your own growth and faith development?

Article 5

Posted January 5

FOUR CHALLENGES WE FACE IN THE FIRST HALF OF LIFE



FOUR CHALLENGES WE FACE IN THE FIRST HALF OF LIFE

Four Hurdles We Encounter During Earlier Stages of Adult Development

Adolescence transitions us into earlier stages of adult development.

Our strengths and weaknesses, cultures, opportunities, and family contexts vary widely. We do, however, all face the same four challenges.

Some complete these challenges in a decade or two. Others take three or four. Still others spend their entire adult life trying to complete them.

We don't teach ourselves about these challenges. As adults, even though we invest great time and energy in completing them, we generally don't name and look at them objectively. It's time we do.

Challenge One: Build a Healthy, Strong Ego

The first of four challenges we all struggle to complete is to build a healthy, strong ego.

Let's name an elephant in the room right away: **Many of us have or had reservations about seeking a strong personal ego.** This reluctance may have been planted and reinforced by churches.

Part of the problem is that we mean different things when we talk about an ego. In this blog, we define it to mean something very specific.

Our ego is our personal sense of self-esteem, self-respect, self-image, and self-confidence.

When our ego is weak, we lack self-esteem, don't respect who we are, don't like how we are in the world, and live insecurely.

When our ego becomes egotistical, we live with a bloated sense of our own importance, self-centeredly, self-conceitedly, and arrogantly.

Our ego (self-esteem, self-respect, self-image, self-confidence) must become strong enough to:

1. Live into meaningful relationships,
2. Choose between and meet expectations,
3. Meet personal needs,
4. Stand apart from others,
5. Make a positive difference in our spheres of influence, and
6. Help others build their own healthy ego without it threatening our own.

In the earlier adult stages of development, we search for satisfying answers to such questions as:

- How can I learn to accept who I am? Who must I become to feel good about myself?
- When will I be able to respect myself? What will it take? What must I accomplish?
- What will it take for me to feel comfortable with the way I relate to others? When will I feel comfortable just being myself in my world?

- How can I exert myself to make space for my ideas and become valuable in others' eyes?

Some build a healthy, strong ego relatively quickly. For most of us it takes decades of work. Tragically, some are still struggling in old age.

We've accomplished the challenge of building a healthy, strong ego when we can sigh and, from a deep place in us, say, "I accept who I am, respect myself, like how I am with others, and can function well in my world."

Challenge 2: Learn Rules and Values Expected of Us

Much of life in the First Half of Life involves learning to get along, survive, and thrive in the world. This means learning to fit in, meet expectations, and "play nice" with others.

In the first half of our adult life are learning, obeying, and struggling with rules and values. This is hard work, because:

- Not everyone and every group important to us agrees on those rules and values.
- Sometimes rules and values are designed to further another's goals at our expense.
- Learning and obeying imposed rules and values requires submission and humility. We don't always like it.
- It's complicated to build a strong ego while learning, obeying, and struggling with imposed expectations.

Are you getting the idea yet that **the First Half of Life isn't for wimps**? Well, it's not. Still, the developmental process built into each of us moves us into the challenges and gives us the tools we need. And we are not alone. We are in this process with others facing the same core challenges.

When we are learning rules and values, we ask:

- What does my world ask of me? What will it take to be accepted, gain influence, and security?
- What does God expect of me?
- What is the *right* way to believe, act, and relate?
- Whose rules do I live by when groups don't agree? Which church, political party, gang, neighborhood, company, etc. should I join?

- Can I live by the rules? Am I willing to? If not, do I fake it, fight to change the rules, move to another group, or isolate myself? What happens when my moral compass points in a different direction than that of a group that is important to me?
- How do I respond when I or others do not live by the rules and values of my significant groups?

When the process of learning values and rules is complete, we can say, “I know and feel comfortable with my own set of values, perspectives, and beliefs. I understand what others expect of me. Some of their values and rules resonate in me; others do not. I have learned to humble myself and submit when appropriate. I can also ask questions, step back, and stand against”

Challenge 3: Acquisition

Life in the earlier stages of adulthood is often focused on building and accumulating. For some of us it’s a focus of most of our adult life.

We work hard to accumulate much more than physical stuff. We seek out, work hard for, accumulate, and establish such things as:

- A satisfying identity,
- A home,
- Skills and knowledge,
- Material wealth,
- Standing and influence in the world, and
- Security.

Three questions we must answer are:

1. **What does success look like to me and those around me?**
2. How will I acquire what I need and what others expect of me?
3. **When will I have accumulated enough?** How will I know when I have enough skill, knowledge, wealth, influence, or security?

I struggled with this challenge for over four decades. To be successful I needed to accumulate academic degrees, a big house, and a secure investment portfolio. I had to lead the biggest spiritual and leadership church department in my denomination, making tangible, positive difference in people’s lives.

I worked my brains out and maximized my potential to do so. Then in my mid-fifties I realized I had accumulated everything I'd needed. Something shifted in me. I didn't regret the effort I'd taken. But I no longer was motivated by it. I was ready to let go, pass as much as I could on to others, and let them have their turn. I was done.

Some mysterious developmental process brings us to a time when we can say, "Enough. I don't need more. In reality, I am weary of how much I have."

Challenge 4: Learning to Sort

The more formal name for this challenge is "Categorizing Dualism." We must learn to categorize things into a Group A or Group B.

In the earlier stages of adulthood, we learn to sort actions, people, groups, beliefs, and pretty much everything else into:

- Up or down; in or out
- Totally right or totally wrong
- Friend or foe; with us or against us
- Righteous or evil

As younger adults, we are not ready to cope with too much risky ambiguity, doubts, mystery, humbling, troubling paradox, and loss of control.

We need clarity, therefore we learn to sort things.

Our groups help us sort. Indeed, to belong to a group often requires that one sorts things the same way as the group does.

It works the other way too. We often choose what groups to join based on whether they sort things in a way that makes sense to us.

Ironically, one must learn how to sort pretty much everything before no longer needing or wanting to do so.

We have completed this challenge when we no longer see the sense in sorting.

- We no longer have strong and final opinions about everything, every event, or most people.
- People and things no longer fit cleanly into Group A or Group B. Sometimes they fit in both; sometimes neither. In fact, the groups themselves seem artificial and harmful.

- We ask, “Why can’t we simply receive things, people, and events as they are? What are we afraid of?”

As we continue to mature and grow into fresh stages of development, we are invited to relax our need to sort everybody and everything. If we are listening, courteous, and courageous, we learn to simply accept most things as they are.

Pulling Things Together

These four challenges accomplish the following:

- Give us purpose and meaning,
- Simplify the complexity of our world to a manageable degree,
- Clarify values, perspectives, and beliefs to give us much-needed security, and
- Provide us what we need later in life to enter The Second Half of Life.

Please tell us what you are thinking and feeling in the comments section below or through email. Use these questions as prompts, if helpful:

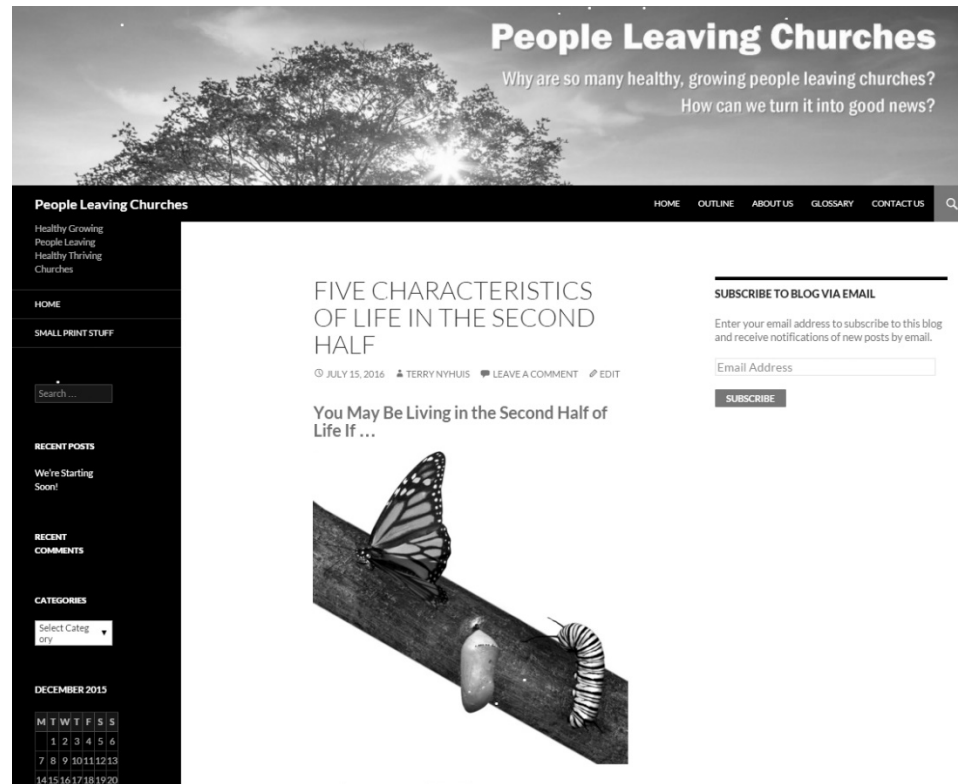
1. What resonated with your experience? What did not?
2. Where do you see yourself in completing these challenges? Are they bringing passion and meaning to your life? Do they no longer bring you passion and meaning as they once did?

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Article 6

Posted January 7, 2016

FIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF LIFE IN THE SECOND HALF OF LIFE



FIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF LIFE IN THE SECOND HALF OF LIFE

You May Be Living in the Second Half of Life If ...

What we, in Western culture, have thought of as a full experience of adult life is in reality the first half of a fully lived adult experience.

People in other cultures have known about and lived into this second half experience for generations.

A minority of people in our culture have done so as well, a minority that is growing from generation to generation. We call them sages, mystics, seers, strange, even heretics.

Many don't understand what is happening in their lives when they grow into later stages of adult development. They are confused by how it is affecting their relationships, values, perspectives, and beliefs.

You may be a person who is growing into later stages of development. If so, it will explain a lot.

1) You May Be Living in the Second Half of Life If You Live with a Healthy, Strong Ego

People in Later Stages of Adult Development Live “Post-Egoically.”

When in the First Half of Life, we struggle to build a healthy, strong ego. (Check out "Four Challenges We Face in the First Half of Life"). We work hard to establish a solid sense of personal self-esteem, self-respect, self-image, and self-confidence.

It takes most of us decades of experience to complete this process. When we do so, we are ready to enter later stages of adult development.

Richard Rohr, a Franciscan friar, described the process well: “You ironically need a very strong ego structure to let go of your ego.” (a)

Read through the following descriptions of what it is like to live beyond building a healthy, strong ego. Do they describe your life? If so, you may be in an amazing second half of adult life.

I am living in later stages of adult development when:

1. I am discovering meaningful life beyond self-image, role, power, prestige or possessions.
2. I no longer have passion or desire to serve as warrior either for my own agenda or for those of my groups.
3. I am ready to step out-of-the-way of power structures, struggles, and systems.
4. I wonder why I have been so uptight about so many things.
5. I’m not sure anymore what I was trying to prove and to whom.
6. I yearn to live non-defensively, non-combatively, and non-anxiously.

Self-assessment: Are you living post-egoically?

Before deciding where you are in this process, please consider this: **There is no “better answer” to this self-assessment.**

- One lives a rich and meaningful life in both the First and Second Halves of Life. One isn't better than the other. They simply occur at different times in our life.
- Earlier stages of development are just what is says, they are "earlier" than those that come "later." It's about chronology, not priority or value.
- Persons live richly, deeply, and fully into earlier stages of adult development in order to live richly, deeply, and fully into later stages. You cannot skip the first part. A fully-engaged First Half of Life makes possible a fully-lived Second Half of Life.

With that reminder, does the above list of six descriptions of post-egoic life fit who you are and who you are becoming?

- If the six statements describe you well, you may be living in the Second Half of Life.
- If the six statements don't describe you well, you are doing the important work of building a healthy, strong ego.

2) You May Be Living in the Second Half of Life If You Are Living Expansively

People in Later Stages of Adult Development Are Able to Hear, Include, and Accept More.

When in earlier stages of adult development, we protect ourselves from spending much time and energy with such things as painful parts of our lives, alternative perspectives, and people who are different. The challenges of earlier stages of development are hard enough work without lots of ambiguity.

As we live through the decades of earlier adulthood, we learn to cope with complexity. Life doesn't overwhelm us as it once did. Some early challenges such as raising a family, finding a career, and finding and fitting into groups no longer overwhelm us.

We come to a stage in life, the Second Half of Life, when "one experiences a larger capacity to hear more, include more, and accept more." (b)

I taught and preached from James 1 many times while in my First Half of Life:

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (James 1:2-4 NIV)

It was always a discipline to try to act appreciative for the “bad stuff.” Now, in my Second Half of Life, I am hearing it differently. Now I know that it all belongs. I lack nothing when I can include everything.

I am living expansively when:

1. I am able to receive and incorporate painful parts of my life. **I can humble myself**, acknowledging I live with weaknesses, confusion, and wounds.
2. I am discovering and cherishing alike-ness where I didn't see it before. **Ideas, things, and people now simple delight me, sadden me, and truly influence me.** I am able, even eager, to receive and learn from alternative perspectives and people who are different.
3. I approach life wondering what **I can learn from each memory, wound, person, situation, or idea.** I am curious about what I will encounter each day and how it will delight, humble, and grow me.
4. I want to honor my own traditions, while knowing our truth has been partial and limited by our own experiences. **I no longer need my groups, values, perspectives, and beliefs to be “right,” while others’ are “wrong.”** I am interested in hearing more, including more, and accepting more from others.

Self-assessment: Are you living more expansively?

Do the four descriptions of a more expansive life fit who you are and who you are becoming?

If they describe you well, you may be living in the Second Half of Life..

3) You May Be Living in the Second Half of Life If You Are Living Non-Dualistically

People in Later Stages of Adult Development Shift from Either-Or Thinking to Both-And Thinking.

When in earlier stages of adult development, we sort pretty much everything and everyone into up or down, in or out, totally right or totally wrong, friend or foe, with us or against us, righteous or evil. (Check out "Four Challenges We Face in the First Half of Life").

As we shift into the Second Half of Life, we experience a shift in perspective from either/or dualistic thinking to one comfortable with paradox, mystery, and

both/and. James Fowler, a developmental psychologist and pastor, explains it this way:

[Life in later stages of faith development], as a way of seeing, of knowing, of committing, moves beyond the dichotomizing logic of [earlier stage's] 'either/or.' It sees both (or the many) sides of an issue simultaneously. (c)

I am living non-dualistically when:

1. I no longer have strong and final opinions about everything, every event, or most people.
2. **I celebrate more and judge less**, ponder more and analyze less, and am grateful more and upset less.
3. I ask: How will I be surprised today? What new mystery will I experience next?
4. My world looks more unified than I ever dreamed possible. **My hard-fought-for boundaries are becoming more and more porous.** I wonder what new boundaries I formed before will dissolve next and how it will open my horizon even farther.
5. I find myself resting into a wondrous sense of Oneness as I experience it more and more.

Self-assessment: Are you living non-dualistically?

Do these five descriptions of a non-dualistic life fit who you are and who you are becoming?

If they describe you well, you may be living in the Second Half of Life.

4) You May Be Living in the Second Half of Life If You Are Living Mystically

People in Later Stages of Adult Development Know a Deep Spiritual Meaning or Reality.

As we move into later stages of adult faith development, **our focus turns inward.** Experience, listening, and deep knowing become more important than what others tell us about how we “should” confess our values, perspectives, and beliefs.

James Hollis, a psychologist, wrote that, once one has sufficiently answered expectations of society,

the agenda shifts to reframing our personal experience in the larger order of things, and the questions change. 'What does the soul ask of me?' 'What does it mean that I am here?' 'Who am I apart from my roles, apart from my history?' (d)

We are finally able to hear that still, small voice (1 Kings 19:11-13) with clarity, consistency, and quiet assurance.

We resonate with "strange" mystics like St. John of the Cross:

*The calm soul knows more
than anything this world
can offer from her
beautiful
womb.*

I am living mystically when:

1. I know a first-hand spiritual meaning, a reality, that is neither known by the senses nor obvious to the mind.
2. **I hear and obey a still, small voice of the soul, a deeper voice of God.**
3. I surrender my reliance on creeds, rationality, and norms as I discern this quieter and deeper voice within me.
4. **I am drawn to simplicity, risk, guidance and direction, and wisdom.**
5. I seek to reduce the noise of my life that has been drowning out this quieter, subtler voice.
6. I yearn to experience more of the wonder, joy, and peace I now know and cherish.

Self-assessment: are you living mystically?

Do these six descriptions of a mystical life fit who you are and who you are becoming?

If they describe you well, you may be living in the Second Half of Life.

5) You May Be Living in the Second Half of Life If You Are a Compassionate Activist

**People in Later Stages of Adult Development Engage the World
Compassionately, Openly, Graciously, Courageously, and Joyfully.**

As we move into later stages of adult faith development we continue to engage the world but now from very different values, perspectives, and beliefs.

We have been transformed; therefore, our ways of engaging the world have been transformed as well. We still seek to influence, disrupt, and transform our world, but now post-egoically, more openly, non-dually, and as mystics.

I wonder, is this what Jesus was talking about in the parable of the yeast?

He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough." (Matthew 13:33 NIV)

I am living as an activist in later stages of adult development when:

1. **I am now open to those who are different**, including those who are troubled, marginalized, and labeled as enemies. I can engage them with compassion enriched by joy, sadness, and acceptance.
2. Being freed from grasping for power and competition—while empowered by deep inner knowing—I **engage turmoil and injustice without being engaged by it.**
3. I disrupt systems, not as a warrior, but as a mystic. I am heard, even as I am quieted; attractive, even as I am repelled; and transformation, even as I am shut out.
4. I may be marginalized, mocked, and martyred (literally and figuratively); yet **I influence my communities through my compassion, openness, grace, courage, and joy.**

Self-assessment: Are you engaging your world as a transformed activist?

Do these four descriptions of a transformed activist fit who you are and who you are becoming?

If they describe you well, you may be living in the Second Half of Life.

Now, Combine the Five Self-Assessments

You may have noticed how often I suggest that, "You **may** be living in the Second Half if ..."

One of the areas of self-assessment listed above, considered alone, does not give a strong indication of which half we are living in. Take the five together, however, and we get a much stronger indication.

Combine the five self-assessments. You can know with significant confidence that:

1. You are living in the rich and exciting First Half of Life if the lists under each of the five areas above, taken together, do not describe you in this stage of your life.
2. You are transitioning into the Second Half of Life if the lists, taken together, increasingly describe you and you hope they will do so more and more in upcoming months and years.
3. You are living in the Second Half of Life if the lists, taken together, describe you well at this stage of your life.

If you would like a deeper assessment:

1. Check with a few people who: (a) know you well, (b) are probably living the Second Half of Life, and (c) you respect and trust.
2. Ask them to consider the five assessment areas with you in mind.
3. Talk with them about what they sense, as non-defensively and openly as you are able.

What Do You Think?

Please let us know what's on your mind in the comments section below or through email. Use these prompts, if helpful:

1. Are you living into later stages of adult development, according to these five characteristics? Or are you living in earlier adult stages? ("Four Challenges We Face in the First Half of Life")
2. Does this perspective toward growth and development make sense to you? Does it help to explain your experience?
3. What questions, concerns, or disagreement do you have?

Subscribe (Link) to *People Leaving Churches* to receive upcoming posts and conversations that explore:

- The shift from earlier to later stages of adult development,
- How it affects our relationship with churches, families, and other groups, and

- How to maximize our continued growth and potential for making positive change in ourselves, the churches we are leaving, and in the lives of others.

(a) Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halve of Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 26.

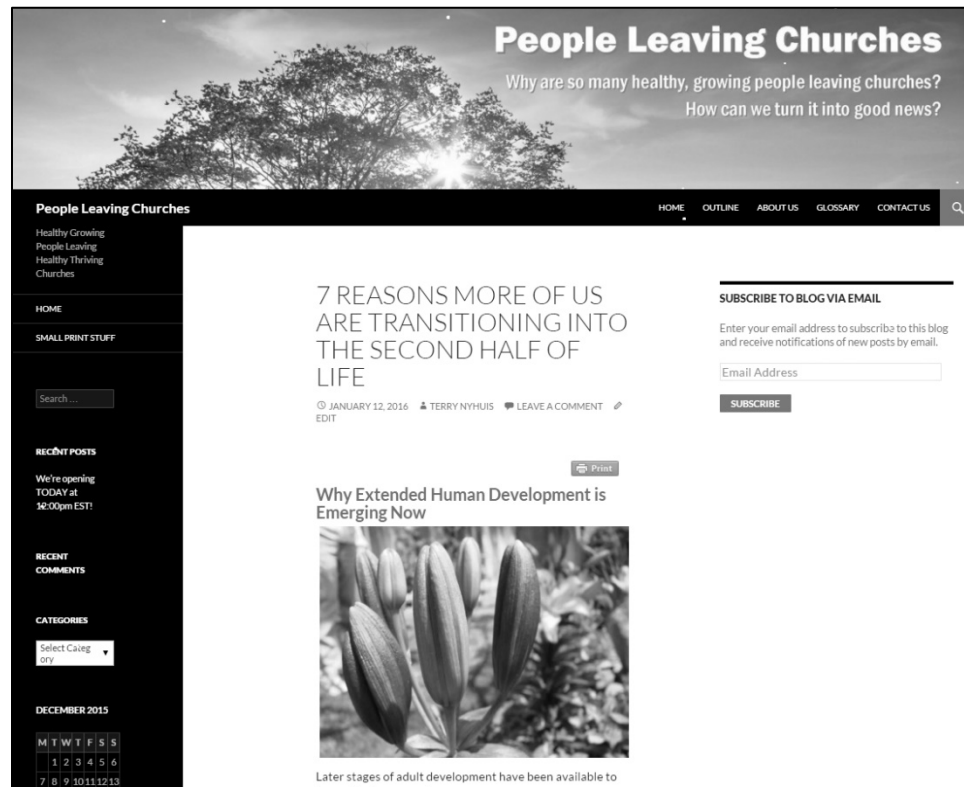
(b) Ibid., 48.

(c) James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 185.

(d) James Hollis, *Finding Meaning in the Second Half of Life: How to Finally, Really Grow Up* (New York: Gotham Books, 2005), 86.

Article 7

Posted January 12, 2016

7 REASONS MORE OF US ARE TRANSITIONING
INTO THE SECOND HALF OF LIFE7 REASONS MORE OF US ARE TRANSITIONING
INTO THE SECOND HALF OF LIFE*Why Extended Human Development is Emerging Now*

Later stages of adult development have been available to humanity for generations.

A small minority of people have matured into them in the past. We call them mystics, sages, poets, and saints.

Now, however, we are seeing more and more people entering the later stages of development.

Something is changing. And this is only the beginning.

What about our time is prompting this expanded growth and development? Why now? What' s going on?

Here are 7 reasons why more and more of us are transitioning into later stages of development:

1) We Have More Time to Grow

We are entering our aging years expecting an expanded future as compared with our grandparents and parents, both in terms of quantity and quality.

People born in 1850 could expect to live until about 40; in 1900 until about 50; in 1950 into their mid to upper 60s; and in 2000 into their mid to upper 70s.

Growth into the Second Half of Life takes time. We have more of it.

But that' s just quantity; what about quality? It is one thing to imagine more years of decline and isolation. It is quite another to imagine more years of relative health, vitality, and freedom.

We have strong reason to see a very different landscape ahead of us that did previous generations. **We expect more years of healthy and active lives than did our parents and grandparents.**

Additional healthy, active years translates into extended stages of growth and development.

2) We Want a Fresh Approach to Aging

I saw my grandparents and parents live into an expectation of rapidly decreasing health, declining energy, and less engagement.

When I was around ten years old my grandfather said to me, “You know, son, you work hard your whole life. Then, if you live long enough, you retire, move to town, sit around, and in a few years you’ re dead.”

He was in his earlier retirement years then. There’ s no way I see my future that way. **I feel like I’ m in the elementary school years of the Second Half Life. I’ m just beginning a new phase of life.**

Will decreasing health, declining energy, and less engagement finally catch up with us? Yes, but most of us don’ t expect it to happen soon or to do so rapidly.

Greater expectation translates into openness to new stages of growth and development.

3) We Have a History of Transforming Life

Our parents and grandparents learned to accept life as it was given to them. They honored tradition, lived responsibly within their groups, and met expectations.

We tend more toward taking control of our future. We value personal freedom and challenging norms that hold us back.

We Baby Boomers and generations after us are noted for debunking tradition and transforming ways of living and seeing that are very different from convention.

We have a history of considering fresh alternatives, deciding what we want, and doing the hard work of making it happen.

When presented with a potential for entering fresh, later stages of adult development, as contrasted with remaining in increasingly less satisfying earlier stages, we are going for it.

4) We Are Used to, Even Invite, Complexity

Generations before us expected and mostly experienced a relatively straightforward life course. People grew up in one source family and went through a school system as they prepared for a productive adult life.

In their late teens or early twenties, they got married, worked hard in a career, raised a family, and became responsible members of their community.

This has not, however, been our predominant experience. Nor has it been our preferred expectation.

Many of us experienced complexity through two or more source families. This brought us into multiple school systems, houses, and neighborhoods.

Many, such as I, went back to school to retrain at several points. Some married multiple times and raised multiple families.

This messiness has become a “new normal” for us. There is little indication that this messy, non-linear way of life will be abandoned anytime soon.

This leaves great freedom and an open field of options. Transitioning into later stages of growth and development may have looked too unsettling to previous

generations, but for us, without our tolerance, even preference for, complexity, it looks exciting and life-giving.

5) We Expect to Continue to Grow

We envision our middle and later adult life filled with potential for new beginnings and personal growth.

This is a radical shift from previous generations who viewed their later years as pulling back from engagement and into a life of leisure and slow decline toward death.

We are captivated by and resonate with a sense that our middle and later years can become much more than a depressing addendum tacked onto a vital early life.

From our perspective it's never too late to start a new chapter in life. We see our upcoming years filled with hope and high expectations.

While previous generations projected a life of stepping back and resting, we project newness and proactive self-determination. The future, for us, promises to be a positive, creative, and fun time.

Will we face challenges? Absolutely. But we've been through divorce, unpopular wars, job loss, stock market meltdowns, the AIDS epidemic, discrimination struggles, and cultural upheaval. We not only survived, but have somehow held to our dreams of forming a better world for ourselves and others.

This isn't a time to wind down our story; it is opening a new chapter of our complex, sometimes painful, oftentimes hope-filled life. The invitation to transition into a fresh half of adult growth and development, even if challenging and mysterious, is being welcomed as a new chapter we are looking for.

6) We Are Open to New Values, Perspectives, and Beliefs

We are asking questions about religion and spirituality and we are exploring answers outside our traditions and conventions.

Many of us are pulling back from and leaving our churches. This doesn't mean we are rejecting our beliefs. It does mean, however, that we are choosing to move beyond the confines of one tradition and convention.

I grew up in and served as a pastor in a Mainline Protestant denomination, the Reformed Church in America. I don't see myself as less Christian because I've stepped back from deep involvement there. Nor do I see myself as less Christian because I am open to learn from other faith traditions. I see myself as more than, not less than.

I am not alone. Today, more and more of us show less loyalty to our religious affiliations than previous generations. **We move freely in and out, across religious boundaries.**

We are used to making choices among many options and are doing so in our life of faith. Many of us combine elements from various traditions to create our own personal, tailor-made meaning systems.

One of my favorite books is *The Essential Mystics, Poets, Saints, and Sages: A Wisdom Treasury* by Richard Hooper. I read and ponder what it says almost every morning.

Each chapter includes quotes from Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, Sufis, Jews, and others. I learn from them all. **Some might say that makes me less "Christian" ; I believe it makes me more deeply Christian.**

This kind of openness and willingness to explore prepares us to hear the developmental invitation into later stages of growth. Conventional ways of thinking and boundaries of belief systems will not hold us back from exploring.

7) *We Emphasize Self-Realization*

We highly value personal potential and a rich inner life. We sense that strength comes from within.

We want to experience life directly. We yearn for a direct encounter with God, the divine, nature, and others. We are not satisfied with the intervention of inherited traditions, stories, creeds, and beliefs.

We look for a religious experience we can claim as "our own." We are left wanting by conventional values, perspectives, and beliefs that dominate earlier stages of adult development. We want deeper, more personal, and profound encounter. We want to be affected, rocked, and changed.

This emphasis on personal potential and a rich inner life prepares us well for later stages of growth and development with their emphasis on direct experience and an inner journey.

It's Only the Beginning

We are primed for transition into the Second Half of Life. Many of us have already made the transition.

So far, we are scattered and disconnected. We don't have well-developed language for what we are experiencing. Our culture doesn't understand us, is even threatened by us. This doesn't make it easier.

Over the next decades we will connect with each other. We will discover and develop values, perspectives, beliefs, and practices that support our continued growth.

Perhaps our culture, churches in particular, will come to understand us, become more comfortable with us, and eventually embrace us.

Of two things I am confident:

1. A mysterious developmental process will continue to call us into continued growth and development across our whole life span.
2. We are primed to hear and respond to the call into later stages of adult development.

Look out world. Look out Western Culture. Look out churches. Here we come. Let's figure out how to make this the good news it already is.

Does This Resonate in You?

Please let us know how you are responding. If it helps, use one of these questions to get you started:

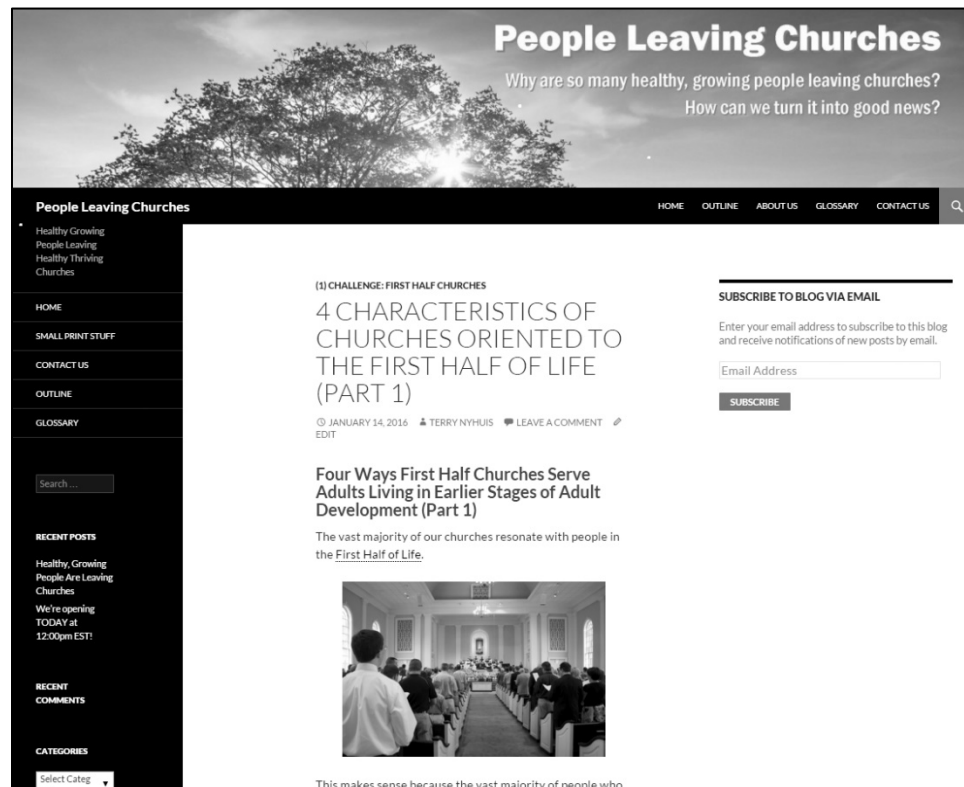
- Does this make sense to you? Does it resonate with your experience and what you see around you?
- Are there other characteristics that might prompt us toward continued growth than the seven mentioned above? Are there characteristics that might hold up back from continued growth?

Please leave a comment below or send us an email. We are eager to learn, adjust, and continue to develop our values, perspectives, and beliefs.

Article 8

Posted January 14, 2016

4 CHARACTERISTICS OF CHURCHES ORIENTED TO THE FIRST HALF OF LIFE (PART 1)



4 CHARACTERISTICS OF CHURCHES ORIENTED TO THE FIRST HALF OF LIFE (PART 1)

Four Ways First Half Churches Serve Adults Living in Earlier Stages of Adult Development (Part 1)

The vast majority of our churches resonate with people in the First Half of Life.

This makes sense because the vast majority of people who start, lead, teach, support, and attend our churches are in earlier stages of development.

That's why so many of us who are in the Second Half of Life have lost resonance and left our churches. We are no longer singing the same tune.

This post describes two of four indications that a church is doing valuable work as a First Half Church, but has lost harmony with many of us. The next post, Part 2, will describe two more.

1) First Half Churches Meet Our Need to Build and Sustain a Healthy Ego

When we live in the First Half of Life, we face the challenge of building a healthy ego. First Half Churches reflect and seek to meet this need.

- When in the First Half of Life we are growing a personal sense of self-esteem, self-respect, self-image, and self-confidence.

Our First Half Churches reflect this need and seek to help us meet it by building impressive facilities, staffs, and programs.

They teach us a theology of self-esteem, building us up through biblical teaching and community affirmation.

They grow our self-confidence by emphasizing the personal security found in holding right beliefs and being accepted within the church community.

- When in the First Half of Life we are learning to exert ourselves to make space for our ideas and to become valuable in others' eyes. We need to figure out how to stand apart from others.

Our First Half Churches reflect this need and seek to help us meet it by developing their own identity as a faith community.

They define our shared values, perspectives, and beliefs as differentiated from other churches and faith traditions. They identify our shared beliefs as truth and those that differ as error.

They give us spaces in which to share our ideas, affect decisions, and make a difference. They commission us to lead within the church and to witness boldly in our world.

First Half Churches attract, engage, and hold us while we live in earlier stages of adult development.

- They enable us to build a healthy, strong ego in order to survive and thrive in our world.
- When done well, they help us navigate between the extremes of low self-esteem and becoming egotistical.
- In time they help us grow to where we live from a gentle and gracious self-assurance.

I grew up in churches that erred on the side of nurturing a low self-esteem. Our theology emphasized original sin and depravity. I felt weak, unworthy, and lacking in potential.

I cannot overemphasize the transforming influence of churches I transferred to in my twenties and after. They boldly and skillfully taught a theology and practice of self-esteem. Pastors affirmed and challenged me. I memorized self-affirming Bible verses. Later, I did the same as a pastor and teacher.

At times I reverted to low self-esteem patterns, but was nurtured out them by caring church staff and members. At other times I overshot into arrogant egotism. Gentle mentors in the church community nudged me back or restored me when my overreach humiliated me.

I say with confidence that I can now live post-egoically in the Second Half of Life in large part because my First Half Churches did a good work in me.

First Half Churches serve the valuable function of helping us grow a healthy, strong ego when we are in the First Half of Life.

As long as we continue to need help in building a healthy, strong ego, we resonate with and remain engaged in our First Half Churches.

When we transition into the Second Half of Life, however, we increasingly lose resonance with this emphasis.

- We have transitioned into a time of life when we live with and beyond a healthy, strong ego.
- We no longer grasp for or cling to self-esteem, self-respect, and self-confidence. We have been there.
- While First Half Churches are helping people build a healthy, strong ego, we are learning to live beyond self-image, role, power, and pretty much self-anything.

The churches are still doing good, needed work. It's just that it no longer engages and holds us.

2) First Half Churches Meet Our Need to Learn and Live by Rules and Values

When we live in the First Half of Life, we face the challenge of learning the rules and values we must follow in order to survive and thrive in the world.

We figure out how to function in a healthy, empowering way in families and friendships, school and work settings, churches and other communities, and neighborhoods and the world,

It's a complex, often confusing, challenge. The appropriate rules and values aren't always written down. They are not consistent from one context to another, sometimes not even within a context. Plus, they sometimes conflict with our internal rules and values.

First Half Churches help us meet the challenge of learning and living by rules and values.

- When in the First Half of Life we learn to get along, survive, and thrive in the world. This means learning to fit in, meet expectations, and “play nice” with others.

Our First Half Churches tell us what they expect of us. They are better than most groups at writing down, teaching, and reinforcing rules and values.

They also help us by setting rules and values for life in family, friendships, work settings, among strangers, and as citizens.

- When in the First Half of Life we must figure out whose rules and values to follow. When groups disagree or ask us to violate our own internal rules and values, how do we choose? When do we ‘go along to get along?’ When do we stand firm and accept the consequences? When do we fight to change things? When do we leave?

First Half Churches give us an authoritative set of rules and values by clarifying and teaching what God expects of us. When things get confusing, we can turn to our churches to know divinely ordained values, perspectives, beliefs, and practices.

First Half Churches may and do disagree on the right rules and values. But while in the First Half of Life, we can and do, by the millions, join one church and agree to its rules and values.

We may and do violate the rules and values of our First Half Churches, but we usually know when we are doing so. And our churches show us how to confess, repent, and be restored.

- When in the First Half of Life we learn to submit to imposed rules and values while building a healthy, strong ego. This is an incredible challenge.

In the First Half of Life we are building our self-esteem, self-respect, self-image, and self-confidence. At the same time, we are learning to esteem, respect, honor, and trust others enough to humble ourselves.

We must learn to abide by their rules and values in such a way that does not diminish and demean ourselves.

Effective First Half Churches help. They are better than most groups at “building up one another.” They teach us to submit to group norms and expectations while committed to building up us as we submit.

Do they always get it right? Not at all. First Half Churches are all too often led by either those with weak or inflated egos, sometimes by both. But churches seem to get it right often enough to help us grow healthy, strong egos AND learn and live by complex, conflicting, and confusing rules and values.

First Half Churches attract, engage, and hold us while we live in the First Half of Life. They enable us to learn and submit to an empowering set of values and rules.

As long as we continue to need the stability and clarity of developed and taught rules and values, we resonate with and remain engaged in our First Half Churches.

When we transition into the Second Half of Life, however, we increasingly lose resonance with this emphasis in our First Half Churches.

We are increasingly attracted to openness and acceptance of other values, perspectives, beliefs, and practices. Our moral compass comes more and more

from our inner life. We live from who we are and the still small voice we have come to know, trust, and follow.

Our churches remain oriented toward clarity, simplicity, and boundaries. The First Half of Life members they serve and their First Half of Life leaders do good work. It just doesn't fit who we are.

Someone gave me a valuable metaphor: **One must live in the confinement of a strong vessel before breaking it.**

The author likened a full span of life to a butterfly. First, one lives in a cocoon; then one can live as a butterfly. First, we live within more rigid, protective rules and values; only then can we experience the freedom of living from an internal guidance system.

It doesn't resonate with us when a First Half Church is trying to help us by building a cocoon of its rules and values around us, while we are in the Second Half of Life. That was needed earlier in our life; now it feels and is confining.

Two Concluding Notes

First, **First Half Church characteristics are meant to be descriptive, rather than evaluative.** We at *People Leaving Churches* don't see First Half Church characteristics as either up or down, in or out, good or bad, right or wrong. They simply *are*.

Second, **we are committed to develop and hold a gentle and gracious way of thinking about the First Half Churches we are leaving.**

- That's why we choose words like "resonance" and "lack of resonance."
- We acknowledge that we no longer resonate with their values, perspectives, and beliefs as we once did. At the same time, we celebrate when we did resonate.
- We affirm and seek to build them up as they continue to resonate with so many in the First Half of Life.
- We will explore what a Whole Church, one that resonates with both Halves of Life, might look and be like. We hope to do so, not with a goal of "fixing" First Half Churches. Instead we hope to find ways to expand their vision.

What Are You Thinking and Feeling?

This is a lot to digest in one post. We will add posts over time to flesh things out more fully.

Please let us know what you are thinking and feeling. You can leave a comment below or use the Contact tab at the top of the page to contact us privately.

If it helps, use one or more of these prompts:

1. What are you thinking? What makes sense and what doesn't? What questions does this raise in your mind?
2. What are you feeling? Did something prompt relief, anger, a smile, a frown?
3. How does this fit with your experience? From what you know of churches that have been important to you, are they First Half Churches?
4. In what ways do you continue to resonate with your First Half Church?
5. In what ways have you lost resonance with your church because you are in the Second Half of Life while they are oriented to the First Half of Life?

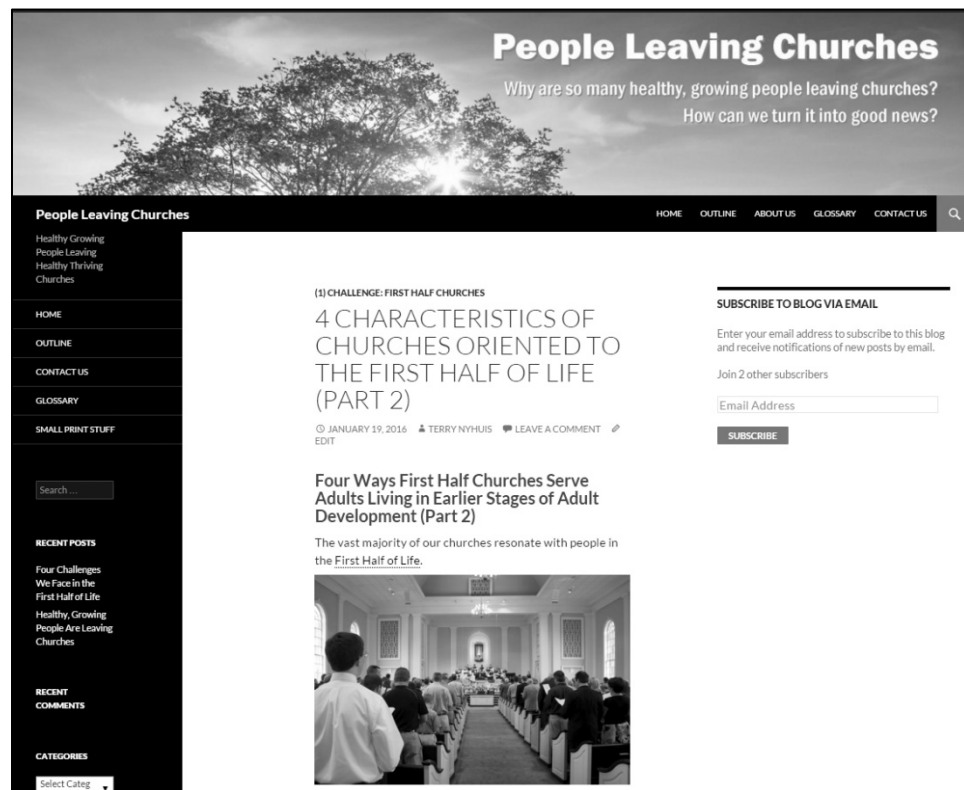
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Article 9

Posted January 19, 2016

4 CHARACTERISTICS OF CHURCHES ORIENTED TO THE FIRST HALF OF LIFE (PART 2)



4 CHARACTERISTICS OF CHURCHES ORIENTED TO THE FIRST HALF OF LIFE (PART 2)

Four Ways First Half Churches Serve Adults Living in Earlier Stages of Adult Development (Part 2)

The vast majority of our churches resonate with people in the First Half of Life.

This makes sense because the vast majority of people who start, lead, teach, support, and attend our churches are in earlier stages of development.

That's why so many of us who are in the Second Half of Life have lost resonance and left our churches. We are no longer singing the same tune.

The previous post (Part 1) described two of four indications that a church is doing valuable work as a First Half Church. This post describes two more.

3) First Half Churches Focus on Building and Accumulating

When we live in the First Half of Life, we build, accumulate, and establish elements in our lives we need to survive and thrive. First Half Churches reflect and help us meet this need.

- When in the First Half of Life, we work hard to establish a home and family,

I remember the excitement in the faces of people when I would introduce them as the newest members of the church. They were so excited.

Membership came with very few tangible privileges and some explicit expectations. Yet it meant a lot to them. They belonged. Without realizing the importance of the language, I liberally used terms like "our church family" and "their church home."

In the First Half of Life, we yearn for a place to belong where we can be assured of acceptance and care. We seek to establish a family and home of our own. That sometimes works out well and other times does not.

First Half Churches provide an extended home and family, one which is founded on such principles as love, care, forgiveness, building up one another, and mutual respect.

- When in the First Half of Life, we build our skills and knowledge. We need to feel like we have something to give, something valuable. We hope to become gifted and skilled in the sight of others and ourselves.

Our First Half Churches help us build a satisfying identity, skills and knowledge. They teach us that we are gifted and have a vital part to fill in the church.

They educate us, invite us to fill roles in community life, and help us feel like we are making a difference in the lives of people, the church community, and the world.

Be it as a volunteer parking lot host, an usher, a nursery attendant, or a praise team member, we have skills and knowledge to share. We have something to give, something valuable.

With skilled church leadership support, we find a setting in which to feel good about what we have to offer. It gives us the courage and curiosity to dare to try to believe the same about ourselves in other settings as well.

- When in the First Half of Life, we accumulate material goods and wealth. We work hard to earn a nice place to live, a good car to drive, attractive clothes, and money in the bank.

A core value of the earlier stages of development is “more.” Much of this priority in our lives is a real need. We often do need to accumulate skills, a place to live, a secure income, some money for future needs, and enough to be respected

Our First Half Churches reflect this need and help us meet it. They engage and energize us in building and accumulating their membership, donations, programs, staff, facilities, and influence. We give generously, serve faithfully, and take deep satisfaction in beautiful facilities and furnishings. We rejoice in increasing membership, attendance, and giving.

Our churches reflect our need for more and better. These in turn enable the church to extend its mission and ministry effectiveness.

First Half Churches throughout my First Half of Life helped me to build and accumulate everything I needed to thrive, succeed, and feel good about myself. I gained degrees, positions, skills, influence, and relative financial success.

I, in turn, applied my skills and passion to help churches grow, build, and accumulate. Our relationship was mutually beneficial and productive for decades.

Then, when I shifted into the Second Half of Life, my built-in drive to build and accumulate waned. My heart and life no longer resonated with my church's and other participants' continued drive for building and accumulating.

Shortly before retiring, I was asked to participate in another round of strategic planning for Crystal Cathedral Ministries. At one time I would have loved it. This time I had no energy for it. While the “more” factor

of strategic planning had energized me for decades, it didn't connect with me as it once did. I retired soon after.

First Half Churches attract, engage, and hold us while we live in earlier stages of adult development. They enable us to build and accumulate alongside and with the support of others, all done in the context of meaningful service.

As long as we have passion and drive to build and accumulate, we resonate with and remain engaged in our First Half Churches committed to more and better.

When we transition into the Second Half of Life, however, we increasingly lose resonance with this emphasis in our First Half Churches. We are learning contentment, yearn for simplicity, and are no longer as motivated by building and accumulating.

4) First Half Churches Label and Sort

When we live in the First Half of Life, we label and sort actions, people, groups, beliefs, and pretty much everything else. This is called “categorizing dualism.” We have a built-in and practical need to categorize things as either A or B.

We learn and use such categories as:

- Good or bad
- In or out
- Right or wrong
- Friend or foe
- Righteous or evil

We label and sort things because we are not ready to cope with too much risky ambiguity, doubts, mystery, troubling paradox, and loss of control.

We need clarity, therefore we label and sort things to make our world simpler and less uncertain.

Generally, this makes our world simpler than it really is and more certain than it can be. At the same time, it makes it livable.

I liken it to my experience in math and science. Things were relatively simple and knowable until I hit college. Then Einstein and others messed me up with things like $E=MC^2$. Now I hear of quantum theory. They even teach an Uncertainty Principle.

We all start there at first. We learn math and science that is much simpler and certain than it really is. We do the same with ethics, relationships, politics, and religion. Only later, when we are ready for it, we accept that things are not that simple. Our world is permeated by mystery, paradox, and uncertainty.

First Half Churches resonate with our need for simplicity and certainty:

- **They define labels and categories useful for sorting things.**

They apologetically use words like truth and error, righteous and unrighteousness, good and evil, and godly and sinful.

- **They clarify who is good and who is bad, what is praiseworthy and what is not, what is righteous and what is unrighteous.**

Our culture is increasingly pluralistic and confusing. We hear different answers to questions that seem to have clear answers before. Is same-sex marriage acceptable or not? Are all enduring, world religions valid? When is divorce and remarriage okay? Are we fatally harming our planet? What about abortion, end of life issues, war, wealth inequality, guns, and the poor?

First Half Churches give us relief by taking complex issues, making decision about them, and categorizing them as one way or another.

- **They resist risky ambiguity, mystery, and troubling paradox.**

I heard, applied, and often quoted the following definition of leadership:

“Strong leadership is the ability to make a 57% decision with 100% certainty. Later, if required, it is the ability to chose the other option, again with 100% certainty.” I was a First Half Leader in a First Half Church.

I taught theology, ethics, biblical courses, and leadership development with this same kind of certainty.

My students and I craved solid moral, biblical, and psychological ground on which to stand. My church, denomination, and culture gave it to me and through me to those I influenced.

We focused on the knowable, sure, and clear. We ignored, pushed aside, and minimized ambiguity, mystery, and troubling paradox. Our First Half Churches helped us do so.

- **They give certainty to their version of categorizing dualism by backing it with divine revelation.**

While in the First Half of Life, we find security and comfort when we believe our values, perspectives, and beliefs are God-given. Those with other views might be just as sure, but they are wrong.

First Half Churches give us confidence in our way of categorizing. They provide biblical backing, assurance of group “spiritual discernment” processes, and church tradition. They grow our certainty through liturgy and teaching.

First Half Churches attract, engage, and hold us while we live in earlier stages of adult development. They provide us with labels, teach us the *right* way to sort, and reinforce the correctness their version of categorizing dualism.

We resonate with and remain engaged in our First Half Churches as long as we continue to need more simplicity than risky ambiguity, more clarity than mystery, and more absolutes than paradox.

When we transition into the Second Half of Life, however, we increasingly lose resonance with this emphasis in our First Half Churches. We experience a transformation whereby we come to embrace the very risky ambiguity, mystery, and troubling paradox that we once resisted. The old labels and ways of sorting no longer make sense.

A Confession and a Second Half of Life Perspective on First Half Churches

I am sorely tempted to use the First Half of Life characteristic of categorizing dualism when I consider these two ways First Half Churches function. I want to sort them into what is good and bad, biblical and unbiblical, helpful and harmful.

Instead, I’ ll resist and live into the Second Half of Life characteristic of post-dualism. It’ s still a decision to do so at times. I have several decades of practice in First Half thinking.

Here’ s what I’ m thinking:

1. Accumulating and Categorizing Dualism are characteristics of people in the First Half of Life and, therefore, of First Half Churches. They meet deep needs in us when we are in earlier stages of development.
2. First Half Churches help us develop skills in accumulating and sorting. When done wisely, they guide us responsibly and lovingly.
3. Unchecked accumulating can lead to abuse and imbalance. “More” and “better,” without wise restraint, leads to burn out and neglect. First Half Churches are as susceptible to this as are individuals. People are seen in terms of how they can help us build and grow. Those who cannot do so, are set aside. Generosity and compassion are sacrificed for more and better.
4. Categorizing Dualism, when applied to complex, mysterious, and paradoxical areas of life, can lead to distortion and harm. It divides us from one another, writes people off, and blinds us to a “whole” faith and life.
5. **Rather than calling First Half Churches right or wrong, I choose to think of First Half Churches as Not Whole Churches.** The First Half of Life is just that, a half. So too with the Second Half of Life. To be whole requires both halves.
6. **As many of us in the Second Half of Life leave our First Half Churches, churches lose those who could make them more whole. We who are leaving lose the completeness made possible by those in the First Half of Life.**
7. Over the next months we will consider the challenges created when healthy, growing people in the Second Half of Life leave healthy, vital First Half Churches. We will explore ways to experience life as a Whole Church.
8. **We at People Leaving Churches don’ t have sure answers, but we are curious and eager to discover, challenge, and explore.**

What Are You Thinking and Feeling?

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4. In what ways do you resonate with your First Half Church?
5. In what ways have you lost resonance with your church because you are in the Second Half of Life while they are oriented to the First Half of Life?
6. In what ways do you resonate with my eight perspectives at the end of the article? Would you add a ninth or delete one or more?

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