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Under One Roof: Authentic Leadership As A Way of Retaining G2 Leaders in an Intergenerational Church

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

UNDER ONE ROOF: AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP AS A WAY OF RETAINING
G2 LEADERS IN AN INTERGENERATIONAL CHURCH

A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY
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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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INTRODUCTION

Harbor Community Church (HCC) recently became multi-generational. Led by fifty-year-old Pastor Kurt, the congregation had historically consisted mostly of people within 10 years of his age (and their children). This all changed when HCC hired Pastor Dan (25 years old) to be their youth pastor. For the first time, younger adults the same age as Pastor Dan started attending HCC. The congregation had become multi-generational.

At first, things went well. Young adults worshipped side by side with people their parents' age, and the church operated like a healthy multi-generational family. But before long, the young adults started suggesting changes. Dissatisfied with music they considered "old-fashioned," they introduced the congregation to more modern worship songs and styles. The older adults didn't like the new music and didn't want it to be a part of the worship service. They compromised by allowing Pastor Dan to start a separate contemporary service for the young people, while Pastor Kurt continued to lead the traditional service. Once they segregated, the different generations ceased having as many meaningful interactions.

So many new young people joined HCC and attended the contemporary service that it eventually outgrew the traditional service. Pastor Dan urged the elder board (consisting mostly of people Pastor Kurt's age) to make some expensive technological upgrades to the main meeting space to accommodate the programming of the contemporary service. Since these improvements would not benefit the traditional service, the elders rejected Pastor Dan's proposal to spend so much money on improvements they deemed unnecessary. Feeling disempowered and frustrated, Pastor

Dan eventually left HCC to serve in a younger congregation. Most of the young people left HCC soon thereafter.

G2 leaders¹ like Pastor Dan often feel disempowered in intergenerational churches and leave to plant their own churches. When other young people follow suit, the result is two generationally homogeneous churches. In order to remain intergenerational, churches need to retain G2 leaders like Pastor Dan. This dissertation will argue that authentic leadership (a theory emphasizing power sharing and reciprocity) will help intergenerational churches retain G2 leaders without disempowering the older G1 adults in the congregation.

Tension between G1 and G2 adults in an intergenerational church mirrors that of an intergenerational family. The New Testament often uses “family” metaphors to describe the church as a surrogate kinship group. Since it is an emotional system like a family, the same power struggles occurring in intergenerational families also show up in intergenerational churches. Conflicts over music, technology, the budget, and stances on social issues often aren’t really about those issues; they are about power and who is “in charge” of the church. In order to function healthily, G1 adults need to emphasize reciprocity in their relationships with G2 adults rather than top-down authority. Authentic leadership is an effective leadership style to accomplish this goal. By leading through power sharing and reciprocity, G1 adults can minimize feelings of disempowerment by both G1 and G2 adults, retain their G2 leaders, and remain intergenerational.

¹ A G2 adult is one whose parents are still living. G1 adults are the oldest living generation in their intergenerational family. G3 refers to the generation with living parents and grandparents. See below.

The Intergenerational Church: Concepts, Terminology, Benefits, and Challenges

An intergenerational church is one in which there are regular, meaningful interactions between people of different generations.² They can be distinguished from multi-generational churches: ones consisting of people of different generations but in which these people are segregated by age so that there is no regular meaningful interactions between them.³ A church with separate programs for children and youth and both traditional and contemporary services may be multi-generational, but it is not likely to be intergenerational.

When discussing intergenerational churches, it is also important to distinguish between a “birth cohort” (the year in which you were born) and a “generation” (your role in the family related to ancestors and descendants).⁴ Often, church writers use the word “generations” to refer to categories like “Builder,” “Boomer,” or “Millennial,” which are more appropriately labeled birth cohorts. Generations are better labeled by their position in the family tree. G1 adults, for example, are the oldest surviving generation in their family (G2 has living parents, G3 has living parents and grandparents, etc.).⁵ While both birth cohort and generation affect one’s identity, many sociologists consider generation to

² Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 19.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Rainer Mackensen, “Changes in Demographic Potential and Intergenerational Relationships,” in *Intergenerational Relationships*, eds. Vjenka Garms-Homolová, Erika M. Hoerning, and Doris Schaeffer (Lewiston, NY: C.J. Hogrefe, 1984), 53.

⁵ While it is possible to speak of G5, five-generation families remain rare. Most families consist of three generations and people are more likely to have no surviving kin than to be part of a five-generation family. Peter H. Rossi and Alice S. Rossi, *Of Human Bonding: Parent-Child Relations across the Life Course* (New York: A. de Gruyter, 1990), 94, 146.

be the more significant factor.⁶ Therefore, this dissertation will not emphasize “Boomers relating to Generation X,” but rather “G1 adults relating to G2 adults.” While differences between birth cohort cultures are important to consider, I will argue that the more significant challenges facing intergenerational churches relate to the generational life cycle. A three-generation family will be assumed, with G1 adults being the oldest surviving members of their family, G2 adults being their grown children, and G3 being their grandchildren.⁷

Intergenerational churches offer advantages that generationally homogeneous churches do not. In their landmark book *Intergenerational Spiritual Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community, and Worship*, Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross make a compelling case for the intergenerational church. Intergenerational churches provide a place for people of all ages to *belong*, where they can get a sense of family and their place in the story of God.⁸ They can provide *support for families*, as older members of the congregation will have been through many of the same struggles as younger ones.⁹ They make *better use of resources*, as older members with more expendable income can balance young families who are struggling to make

⁶ Claudine Attias-Donfut, “Aging and Generation: Social Structure and Cultural Dynamics,” in *Intergenerational Relationships*, eds. Vjenka Garms-Homolová, Erika M. Hoerning, and Doris Schaeffer (Lewiston, NY: C.J. Hogrefe, 1984), 161.

⁷ Great-grandparents can wield significant influence in a congregation, but they are often retired and out of formal leadership. While a 60-year-old man with grandchildren could technically be a G2 adult (with a surviving 87-year-old G1 mother), the relationship between him and his 35-year-old G3 son would be very similar to that between a 60-year-old G1 adult with a 35-year-old G2 son. To simplify, the three-generation family will be assumed.

⁸ Allen and Ross, 48–49.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 49–50.

ends meet.¹⁰ They promote *character growth*, as people are forced to love and serve people who are different than them.¹¹ Finally, they create a unique learning environment, where people can learn from others who are slightly farther down the road than they are.¹²

Beyond the advantages described by Allen and Ross, intergenerational churches may be uniquely poised to reach the emerging digital culture. I have argued elsewhere that in order to thrive in the digital world, the church needs to be like a CrossFit gym: *local, embodied, networked, tribal, and sound*.¹³ Intergenerational churches can fit this pattern.

The digitalization of our world has led to a loss of place. First the internet and now smartphones have given people access to a world of information at any time. As amazing as this access can be, it has also created a problem that Douglas Rushkoff calls *digiphrenia*: “the tension between the faux present of digital bombardment and the true now of a coherently living human.”¹⁴ The time-stamped digital world is a constant distraction from the real world. To combat digiphrenia, the first thing people need in a digital age is a *local* church—one that is a part of the story of a particular place. Churches need to be present in their community, listening to its stories, imagining the kingdom of

¹⁰ Ibid., 50–51.

¹¹ Ibid., 51–52.

¹² Ibid., 96–97.

¹³ Matthew Edwards, “Church as CrossFit” (DMin integration essay, George Fox University, 2014).

¹⁴ Douglas Rushkoff, *Present Shock: When Everything Happens Now* (New York: Current, 2013), 74.

God in its context, and reframing the story according to the gospel.¹⁵ Len Sweet writes, “We need to give people what they didn’t know they needed until that moment when Christ’s story begins to resonate within their own life story and they recognize the truth.”¹⁶ Since intergenerational relationships have become so uncommon, the intergenerational church has the opportunity to reframe a community’s local story in a way they don’t expect.

Further, as more of life moves to virtual reality, people are losing their connection to *actual* reality. Social media, video games, Netflix, online shopping, internet television, and online pornography are making more of life virtual, pulling people from face-to-face interactions. Sadly, the church has contributed to disembodiment by focusing on the “spiritual” in contrast to the “physical.” Len Sweet writes, “The decline of establishment churches and the rise of a ‘spirituality culture’ derives in part from this hunger for sensory experience. Craving for a more experiential encounter with God is what draws people to yoga, to Taizé, to Reiki, to everywhere except our rationalist churches where the primary sweet spot is a head nod over a heart skip.”¹⁷ The second key to reaching people in the digital age is to *embody* the gospel. Faith needs to be about living life together (especially with those who are different), and the intergenerational church provides a unique environment for this.

¹⁵ Paul Sparks, Tim Soerens, and Dwight J. Friesen, *The New Parish: How Neighborhood Churches Are Transforming Mission, Discipleship, and Community* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014), 120.

¹⁶ Leonard I. Sweet, *Giving Blood: A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 65.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 48.

Developments in communication technology make it easier than ever to *network* both globally and locally. People are lonelier than ever, and social media gives them the opportunity to feel connected. Sadly, their abuse of social media often disconnects them from the real people around them. The third key to the church reaching people in the digital age is to harness the networking power of technology. The intergenerational church provides a unique atmosphere for both older and younger people to network with those of a different generation.

Despite this networking, the flattening of the world through the internet and globalization has caused an identity crisis. The internet confronts people with news stories from places they have never visited, videos uploaded on to YouTube by people they will never meet, music on Pandora written in languages they don't understand. People play video games with strangers and then never interact again. This has created a longing for identity. As a local and temporal expression of a two-thousand-year-old story, the local congregation can function as an identity-giving *tribe*. This is the fourth key to reaching the emerging culture. Len Sweet writes, "When we become Christians, we participate in a faith that a community has been living long before we arrived. How I live my life has been shaped by a thought community that long precedes me."¹⁸ The intergenerational church can be a unique environment for people to encounter older people who embody the history of the local tribe's story.

Finally, people in the internet age spend more time in front of screens than ever before. In addition to the physical problems caused by a sedentary, screen-addicted

¹⁸ Leonard I. Sweet, *Aquachurch 2.0: Piloting Your Church in Today's Fluid Culture* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2008), 87.

lifestyle, there are emotional problems caused by being detached from face-to-face relationships. The anonymity of the internet has created an environment in which people can explore the otherwise taboo. The church has the opportunity to model life that is radically different than that lived purely online. Postmodern culture is less convinced by reason and more by beauty, so aesthetics can be the new apologetics. To reach the culture, the church needs to demonstrate not only that Christianity is *reasonable*, but also that it is *beautiful*. As more people find themselves displaced from their family of origin, the intergenerational church can function as a beautiful surrogate kinship group.

Despite these advantages of intergenerational churches, they also experience unique challenges. One of the biggest challenges introduced by diversity is the power struggle between competing generationally defined subcultures. When ages are grouped together, they tend to fall into a hierarchy from oldest to youngest.¹⁹ Further, people of different generations have different preferences and these different preferences can lead to conflict.²⁰ Generations differ in opinions about worship style,²¹ social issues,²² the budget,²³ and building projects.²⁴

It is natural for generationally defined subcultures to form within an intergenerational church. People tend to group with others who are like them, especially

¹⁹ Allen and Ross, 37.

²⁰ Edward H. Hammett and James R. Pierce, *Reaching People under 40 While Keeping People over 60: Being Church for All Generations* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2007), 31.

²¹ Jackson W. Carroll and Wade Clark Roof, *Bridging Divided Worlds: Generational Cultures in Congregations* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 201.

²² *Ibid.*, 11.

²³ Hammett and Pierce, 141.

²⁴ Carroll and Roof, 159.

those of similar status.²⁵ In an intergenerational church, this results in generationally defined subcultures. Further, when people form groups, they tend to overestimate differences between ingroup members and outgroup members. For example, a thirty-year-old, white, college-educated, middle class, suburban male may categorize a sixty-year-old, white, college-educated, middle class, suburban male from the same church as “traditional service” while he is “contemporary service.” Despite extensive similarities, people exaggerate differences.²⁶

Many have noted that generational diversity among a church’s leadership is necessary for creating and maintaining an intergenerational church.²⁷ Sociologists refer to the homophily principle: people like to be around others who are like them.²⁸ People join groups because of a perceived similarity to a group “prototype.”²⁹ This prototype is a mentally generated imaginary caricature of the group. The more one perceives oneself to be like the group prototype, the more one feels that he or she “belongs” to the group.³⁰

²⁵ Korie L. Edwards, *The Elusive Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial Churches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 83; Bernard M. Bass and Ruth Bass, *The Bass Handbook of Leadership: Theory, Research, and Managerial Applications* (New York: Free Press, 2008), 242.

²⁶ Henri Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories: Studies in Social Psychology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 23.

²⁷ Hammett and Pierce, 26; Allen and Ross, 265–66; Peter Menconi, *The Intergenerational Church: Understanding Congregations from WWII to WWW.Com* (Littleton, CO: Mt. Sage Publishing, 2010), 165; Gilbert R. Rendle, *The Multigenerational Congregation: Meeting the Leadership Challenge* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 2002), 92; Gary McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations: Understanding and Reaching All Ages in Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 221–22; Ross Parsley, *Messy Church: A Multigenerational Mission for God's Family* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2012), loc. 1623; Bob Whitesel and Hunter Kent R., *A House Divided: Bridging the Generation Gaps in Your Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 91.

²⁸ Edwards, *The Elusive Dream*, 83.

²⁹ Michael A. Hogg, *The Social Psychology of Group Cohesiveness: From Attraction to Social Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 94.

³⁰ Ibid.

Leaders have a weighted influence on the perceived prototype of the group, and congregations tend to be made up of people aged within 10 years of the leadership.³¹ By diversifying the ages of the leadership, churches communicate to people of all ages that there is a place for them at the table.

Not only do intergenerational churches have competing generationally based subcultures, but these subcultures differ in power. Generally, people gain social power as they age.³² A study of Austrian censuses over the last few hundred years by Thomas Held revealed that authority position in the household is generally related to age.³³ Young people do not reach autonomy until they marry and leave home. While they are under their parents' roof, they are under their parents' authority. This study demonstrates the challenge of an intergenerational church: they feature the same dynamic. Young adults who have reached autonomy in every other area of life can find themselves disempowered in the church. Today, Boomers are the leaders and the givers in most

³¹ Parsley, loc. 1623.

³² Victor W. Marshall, "Tendencies in Generational Research: From the Generation to the Cohort and Back to the Generation," in *Intergenerational Relationships*, eds. Vjenka Garms-Homolová, Erika M. Hoerning, and Doris Schaeffer (Lewiston, NY: C.J. Hogrefe, 1984), 214–15; Thomas Held, "Generational Co-Residence and the Transfer of Authority: Some Illustrations from Austrian Household Listings," in *Intergenerational Relationships*, eds. Vjenka Garms-Homolová, Erika M. Hoerning, and Doris Schaeffer (Lewiston, NY: C.J. Hogrefe, 1984), 45. The exception to this general rule is the transition to retirement—decline in power begins at age 65 in men and at age 55 in women.

³³ Held, 42, 45. Held's study showed that the idea of the extended family cohabiting in pre-industrial Europe was largely a myth and that "head of the household" status was usually conferred on someone at marriage. In instances in which three generations did cohabit, "head of the household" status was usually held by the middle generation, implying that the oldest generation was retired or widowed and had moved in with his or her children for support.

churches,³⁴ and people in their twenties typically aren't in leadership and their ideas typically aren't heeded.³⁵

These power differences don't end when children mature. Even when their children are grown, parents maintain higher power. Studies of middle generations with adult children and living parents showed that these middle generations are influenced both by their parents and by their children. Their adult children were most likely to try to influence their parents' leisure activities, and their elderly parents were most likely to try to influence their style, grooming, and religion.³⁶ Only 15% of these middle generations say that they are more influenced by their children than by their parents.³⁷ Even in retirement (when people decline in social power), religion remains a major area in which older people exert more influence than younger.

When young (G2) leaders are brought in to reach G2 adults, conflict with longtime G1 members almost inevitably arises. Churches typically respond to these conflicts in one of two ways: segregate by age or side with one group over the other. By siding with one age group over the other, the church disempowers one group and moves toward splitting into two homogenous congregations. Either G1 adults will withhold their leadership or giving,³⁸ or the G2 adults will leave to plant their own churches.³⁹ However,

³⁴ Hammett and Pierce, 39.

³⁵ Ibid., 68.

³⁶ Gunhild O. Hagestad, "Multi-Generational Families: Socialization, Support, and Strain," in *Intergenerational Relationships*, eds. Vjenka Garms-Homolová, Erika M. Hoerning, and Doris Schaeffer (Lewiston, NY: C.J. Hogrefe, 1984), 109.

³⁷ Ibid., 108.

³⁸ Hammett and Pierce, 4.

³⁹ Whitesel and Hunter, 37.

if a church segregates to keep the peace, they lose the benefits of cross-generational contact. The perennial problem of the intergenerational church is how to navigate conflict without disempowering either the G1 or G2 adults.

The power struggles in intergenerational churches are a leadership challenge. For example, one reason leaders resort to segregation is because they fail to lead congregations in valuing cross-generational relationships more than getting their own way. Further, since people are drawn to churches that “look” like them, congregations tend to look like their leaders.⁴⁰ A church with generationally homogeneous leadership is more likely to be homogeneous itself. Granted, leadership alone will not make a church intergenerational, but leaders *do* have tremendous effects on organizations (including churches).⁴¹ Since leadership and power are related, the power dynamics of an intergenerational church require special leadership.

The Intergenerational Church: Recent Approaches and Solutions

Interest in the intergenerational church is rather recent in part because homogeneous churches are a rather recent phenomenon. Several causes have been blamed for age segregation in American churches: homophily in the wider culture, education philosophies based on developmental stage theories, church growth strategies, and individualism.⁴² Others have blamed changes in society brought on by targeted advertising. Society is no longer characterized by blending but by niche.⁴³ But regardless

⁴⁰ Matthew Edwards, “Diversifying Leadership as a Key to Creating a Multi-ethnic Church” (unpublished academic essay, George Fox Evangelical Seminary, 2013).

⁴¹ Bass, 11.

⁴² Allen and Ross, 40–46.

⁴³ Rendle, 20; Whitesel and Hunter, 99; Hammett and Pierce, 56.

of the cause, many have recognized that meaningful cross-generational contact is rare in society and that most churches are generationally homogeneous.⁴⁴

Changes in the American family have birthed a renewed interest in the intergenerational church. Increased mobility and higher divorce rates mean that intergenerational families are less commonly local.⁴⁵ The nuclear family has been forced to fill in the gaps—something it is not equipped to do.⁴⁶ Many have recognized that the intergenerational church can step in and fulfill some of the roles of the intergenerational family.⁴⁷ However, the challenges associated with intergenerational churches are great, and many are not up to the task.⁴⁸

Most recent solutions to these challenges have been based on the research of William Strauss and Neil Howe. In many ways, Strauss and Howe revealed the significant cultural differences between adults of different birth cohorts. Disagreements between twenty-year-olds and fifty-year-olds are not simply due to age (“You’ll understand when you’re older”), but due to the varied ways the different birth cohorts experience the world.⁴⁹ Their research launched a barrage of church books applying it to the intergenerational church.

⁴⁴ Hammett and Pierce, 36; Menconi, 9; Carroll and Roof, 1; McIntosh, 13.

⁴⁵ Hammett and Pierce, 36.

⁴⁶ Edward A. Loper, *Building an Intergenerational Church* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 1999), 5.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 9; Menconi, 9; Carroll and Roof, 116; Whitesel and Hunter, 106–07 for instance.

⁴⁸ Bill Easum, Foreword to Hammett and Pierce, ix.

⁴⁹ William Strauss and Neil Howe, *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069* (New York: Quill, 1991), 32–34.

William Strauss and Neil Howe

While not specifically a church book, the most influential work for the intergenerational church is William Strauss and Neil Howe's *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584–2069*. Strauss and Howe argue that there is no such thing as a predictable lifecycle that applies equally to all people born at all times.⁵⁰ Instead, they argue that “youth” (roughly ages 0–22), “rising adulthood” (22–44), “midlife” (44–66), and “elderhood” (66 and above) look different for people depending upon the year in which they were born. People shape history and history shapes people, so there is a correspondence between historical events and generational affinity.

Strauss and Howe claim that generational characteristics are formed in part by social moments (eras “typically lasting about a decade, when people perceive that historic events are radically altering their social environment”).⁵¹ They see two types of social moments: secular crises in which people focus on reordering the structure of societal institutions, and spiritual awakenings in which people emphasize values and private behavior.⁵² A generation's position on the life course during such social moments influences the shape that generation takes. There are four generation types: Idealist, Reactive, Civic, and Adaptive, which usually appear in that order.⁵³ Idealists are born after a secular crisis (like Boomers born after World War 2) and come of age during a spiritual awakening (Woodstock and the 1960s). Civics are born after a spiritual

⁵⁰ Ibid., 34.

⁵¹ Ibid., 71.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 35.

awakening and come of age during a secular crisis.⁵⁴ When Strauss and Howe did their research, there were five living generations in America: The G.I.s (Civics born 1901–1924), the Silents (Adaptives born 1925–1942), the Boom (Idealists born 1943–60), 13ers (Reactives born 1961–1981), and Millennials (Civics born after 1981).

According to Strauss and Howe, each generation type proceeds through the life course differently. For instance, in childhood Idealists are indulged (due to their Adaptive parents' excitement over a recent victory in a secular crisis), Reactives are ignored (due to their Idealist parents' inner focus during a spiritual awakening), Civics are protected (due to their Reactive parents trying to right the wrongs of their childhood), and Adaptives are overprotected (due to their being raised by Civics during a secular crisis). In rising adulthood, this translates into Idealists being narcissistic, Reactives being risk-taking and alienated, Civics being heroic and overachieving, and Adaptives being risk-averse and conforming. In midlife, Idealists are moralistic, Reactives pragmatic, Civics institution-building, and Adaptives arbiters. In elderhood, Idealists are visionary, Reactives respectable, Civics defensive, and Adaptives sensitive.⁵⁵

While the validity of Strauss and Howe's categories is debatable, their work launched an interest in generations as a cultural category. History may not follow the Idealist-Reactive-Civic-Adaptive cycle, but Strauss and Howe successfully demonstrate that the life course experience is not universal and that birth cohorts possess a generational affinity that is shaped by history (and in turn shapes history).

⁵⁴ Ibid., 74.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Intergenerational churches need to be aware of the cultural differences between the generations, as each has a different interpretation of what “success” in life looks like.⁵⁶

Edward Loper

One of the first attempts to integrate the work of Strauss and Howe into church life was Edward Loper’s short work, *Building an Intergenerational Church* (1999), created for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as a model of doing older adult ministry. Loper’s thesis was that older adult ministry was actually intergenerational ministry.⁵⁷ Because of the mobility of the modern family, seniors often find themselves separated from their children and grandchildren. This is bad for all generations: the nuclear family cannot fulfill its role in value transmission without all three generations present.⁵⁸ Loper suggested that the intergenerational church could fill the void opened up by the breakdown of the extended family.⁵⁹ Seeing the problems in the church as a generational power struggle, Loper used Bowen Family Systems Theory to advocate understanding and reconciliation between the generations.⁶⁰

Bob Whitesel and Kent R. Hunter

In *A House Divided: Bridging the Generation Gaps in Your Church* (2000), Bob Whitesel and Kent Hunter combine the church-growth strategies of C. Peter Wagner and Donald McGavran with the cultural insights of Strauss and Howe. They advocate for a

⁵⁶ Ibid., 350.

⁵⁷ Loper, 3.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 5.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 9.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 30.

Tri-Gen church that ministers to Builders, Boomers, and Generation X separately as three distinct sub-cultures. Since they promote generational segregation, their model is more appropriately called multi-generational rather than intergenerational, but their work has great insights on the nature of generational conflict and why most churches are generationally homogeneous.

Whitesel and Hunter recognize the significance of disempowerment to losing younger generations in the church. “A church will not assimilate younger generations,” they write, “if it does not open leadership positions to new members. Younger members will not attain goal-ownership if they are frozen out of the planning and decision-making process. Many of these younger people are climbing the vocational ladder and are accustomed to increasing leadership responsibility in the marketplace.”⁶¹ If young people start to feel like second-class members of the congregation, they will leave to start their own congregations.⁶² They tell a great story of a young woman joining an older congregation and teaching an adult Sunday school class:

The class was comprised of many long-standing members of First Church, several of whom could trace their family heritage in the church to the mid-1800s. All looked forward to the energy and vitality this new teacher would provide. Soon, all agreed she was a gifted and enthusiastic teacher. Many class dropouts returned to share in the excitement. A significant number of the woman’s friends began to attend, as well. When the woman noticed a progressive vacuum in the leadership brought on by the rising age in the congregation, she began to actively recruit her friends for leadership positions.

Before long, the church had a burgeoning population of attendees twenty years younger than many long-standing members. The young woman’s class became the hub of this youthful influx. Regrettably, the initial enthusiasm of older members began to wane as they saw their class, as well as the church, begin to change in character. Long-standing traditions were left by the wayside, as youthful attendees sought to forge a more contemporary entity out of this dying

⁶¹ Whitesel and Hunter, 19–20.

⁶² Ibid., 34.

congregation. Young members saw their influx as the deliverance of the church. Older members saw the influx as a dilution of the principles and practices that had been the historical fountainhead of the congregation's character.

Slowly, the older generation at First Church began to feel their way of congregational life was in jeopardy. A church meeting was the forum for these simmering emotions to overflow. Battle lines were drawn. From older members came variations of "We've never done it that way before!" In addition, they voiced legitimate concerns that the practices that for years had enhanced their worship experience were now in jeopardy of being replaced by methods foreign to them. Finally, a cathartic outburst exploded with challenges that, "If they [the younger generations] want to do things that way then they should go somewhere else to do it."⁶³

To prevent young leaders like this from leaving established congregations, Whitesel and Hunter advocate a Tri-Gen church, "a holistic congregation with three distinct generational sub-congregations peacefully coexisting under one roof, one name, and one leadership core."⁶⁴ Such a church is intentionally generationally segregated; they argue that blended worship does not work.⁶⁵ Within their model, each generation needs to have: (1) its own shepherd, (2) its own leadership team, (3) its own generation-specific ministries, and (4) its own artistic expression.⁶⁶ Unity comes from each of the generational shepherds belonging to the same executive team.

While not technically presenting an intergenerational model, Whitesel and Hunter's book offers valuable insights to the intergenerational church. Attention needs to be paid to disempowerment, and all generations need to have representation on the platform, on the governing board, and in the worship style.

⁶³ Ibid., 17–18.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 83.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 167.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 90–91.

William Benke and Le Etta N. Benke

In *Church Wake-Up Call: A Ministries Management Approach That Is Purpose-Oriented and Inter-Generational in Outreach* (2001), William Benke and Le Etta N. Benke look at Strauss and Howe's work from a managerial perspective and Rick Warren's Purpose-Driven Church model. They argue that the church needs to diversify its ministry to reach younger generations and stay relevant.⁶⁷ Like Whitesel and Hunter, they recognize cultural differences between generations and advocate segregating according to age in order to better reach each generation.⁶⁸ The book does not argue for the importance of cross-generational contact and does not address the problems introduced when a church goes multi-generational.

Carl Eeman

In *Generations of Faith* (2002), Carl Eeman took Strauss and Howe's insights and applied them to the church. He argued that churches typically take on the culture of the generation that is in power (in their 40s–60s).⁶⁹ When people of other generations come to these churches, they don't find them to be answering the questions that they are asking, so they don't stick around.⁷⁰ To reach people of other generations, Eeman encourages churches to focus on the things that are important to the different generations.⁷¹ At one

⁶⁷ Le Etta Benke and William Benke, *Church Wake-up Call: A Ministries Management Approach That Is Purpose-Oriented and Inter-Generational in Outreach* (New York: Best Business Books, 2001), 5.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 94, 103, for example.

⁶⁹ Carl G. Eeman, *Generations of Faith* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 2002), 14.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 5.

⁷¹ Ibid., 78, for example.

point, he suggests churches staffing with people of different generations in order to reach people of all generations.⁷²

Eeman's work was a valuable contribution to the intergenerational church. He highlighted how people from different birth cohorts form sub-cultures within the church and how these generational differences affect whether or not a church is comfortable to people of a given birth cohort. Eeman also saw the value of leadership diversity for reaching the different generations. Eeman did not explore, however, how an intergenerational church would work, how to navigate tensions created by cultural differences between the generations, or how to maintain younger leaders from the emerging birth cohorts.

Jackson W. Carroll and Wade Clark Roof

In *Bridging Divided Worlds: Generational Cultures in Congregations* (2002), Carroll and Roof look at generational differences between Pre-Boomers, Boomers, and Generation X, how they approach the local congregation differently, and how churches can navigate tension between them. Church leaders often find themselves in the crosshairs of generational conflict.⁷³ Carroll and Roof consider three models for managing this conflict: (1) the inherited model in which the congregation holds on to the forms inherited from older members and invites the young people along for the ride, (2) the blended model in which the congregation combines the old with the new, and (3) the generationally targeted model. They examine three multi-generational churches operating according to each model.

⁷² Ibid., 150.

⁷³ Carroll and Roof, 11.

Carroll and Roof see the blended model as the best solution for the multi-generational church.⁷⁴ Young people will inevitably get frustrated with churches operating according to the inherited model and will leave to join churches that meet their needs.⁷⁵ Generationally targeted churches will quickly find themselves obsolete as rapidly changing culture will quickly turn the young into the “old guard.”⁷⁶ Blended churches provide the best environment for people of different generations to worship together.

Carroll and Roof do not distinguish between intergenerational and multi-generational churches—they include segregated congregations as successfully “blended.” They also don’t offer any advice for how to maintain a multi-generational church beyond the concept of reflexivity (the ability to stand outside of yourself and recognize your own subjective preferences).⁷⁷ They rightly note that there is not a silver bullet for getting generations to get along.⁷⁸

Gil Rendle

In *The Multigenerational Congregation: Meeting the Leadership Challenge* (2002), Gil Rendle outlines a strategy for leading a bimodal congregation (one with a distinct “old guard” and “new guard”) like an intergenerational church. Rendle argues that length of tenure in the church is more important than age in determining whether

⁷⁴ Ibid., 208–09.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 207.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 208.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 210.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 212.

someone is “old guard” or “new guard,” so a 20-year-old who was raised in the church might be “old guard,” whereas a 30-year-old newcomer would be “new guard.”⁷⁹ Often, pastors find themselves in the middle of conflicts between the old guard and the new guard. Rendle says that this is a *good* thing. A healthy congregation is one in which new members are joining and the faith is being passed on.⁸⁰ A church that experiences no conflict between old and new guards is a homogeneous church in decline.⁸¹

When caught in a conflict between old and new guards, pastors often find themselves in “double binds”: they are tasked with reaching the new group, but held accountable to doing things the old way.⁸² This is a no-win situation. He illustrates with a humorous but sadly relatable story about the reaction of the old guard when new, younger members started attending a church in a changing, but long-standing rural community:

Sides were drawn and the battle was openly engaged when the pastor included drums and guitars in the new alternative worship service established for the newcomers. The new service offered an added worship setting for the congregation, while the traditional service retained its customary time and liturgy. Nonetheless, the pastor received complaints from long-tenured members. Faced with their gripes, the pastor quickly sought a compromise. He pointed out that the complaining members weren’t required to attend the new service; they could continue to attend the regular, unchanged worship service at the usual hour. The opponents countered that they couldn’t worship in the regular service if they couldn’t avoid the sight of the large drum set, which had been placed in the chancel area next to the organ. Again seeking compromise, the pastor covered the drums with a drape that was congruent with the altar-area paraments. But the complaints continued: Long-term members stated firmly that they couldn’t worship knowing what was *under* the drape. Still committed to compromise, the pastor moved the alternative service to the adjoining Sunday school auditorium—which, in this congregation’s facility, was adjacent to, but visible from, the sanctuary. Unfortunately, the large movable partitions, originally designed to

⁷⁹ Rendle, 6, 102.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 5–6.

⁸¹ Ibid., 49.

⁸² Ibid., 27.

separate the building's two sections, had long ago stopped functioning. Reasoning that he had responded sufficiently by removing the offending musical instruments and taking the alternative service out of the established worship space, the pastor asked the governing board to call a consultant to work with the congregation. By now, he was being attacked by complainers growing even angrier with their pastor because they could "still see those damned drums over there in the other room."⁸³

This story illustrates the challenges of leading a bimodal congregation. Rendle says that the best way to lead such congregations is not to intervene in conflicts to determine "winners" and "losers." Instead, the pastor is to lead from the middle. Rendle suggests four practices: (1) moving to the balcony (looking at congregation systems rather than specific problems), (2) working descriptively (using descriptive language instead of ascribing people motives), (3) seeking common space (refusing to determine "winners" and "losers," but instead helping each group to find common ground), and (4) installing civility.⁸⁴

Rendle's valuable contribution illustrates how Bowen Family Systems Theory works in a multigenerational church. While others have noted the cultural differences between the generations and the areas in which conflicts typically arise, Rendle demonstrates that these conflicts aren't *really* about the drums—they are about the church's emotional system and the anxiety created by change. Rendle advocates diversity in the governing board,⁸⁵ but also advocates separate worship services for different generations.⁸⁶

⁸³ Ibid., 3–4.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 118–34.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 92.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 29.

Gary McIntosh

Gary McIntosh's *One Church, Four Generations: Understanding and Reaching All Generations in Your Church* (2002) combines birth cohort studies with church growth strategies. While McIntosh clearly communicates the differences between the birth cohorts and advocates for both blended worship⁸⁷ and intergenerational leadership,⁸⁸ his focus is more on *reaching* the different generations than *empowering* them. For example, he suggests Boomers trying to tailor worship services to reach Builders, rather than empowering Builders to tailor worship services for themselves.⁸⁹

Edward Hammett and James Pierce

In *Reaching People under 40 while Keeping People over 60: Being Church for All Generations* (2007), Edward Hammett and James Pierce introduce the major tension in a multi-generational church: balancing the needs and desires of those over 60 and those under 40. While others have noted the danger of catering to older members of a congregation, Hammett and Pierce point out pitfalls of ignoring them. When a church decides to “focus on young families,” the elder generation often feels neglected and disempowered. They can withhold leadership and finances in response.⁹⁰ They illustrate with a story about a woman in her sixties called “Edna.” Edna was a longstanding member of a women’s Sunday school class that was asked to merge with a men’s class when their longstanding teacher moved away. Edna and her friends didn’t like the

⁸⁷ McIntosh, 216–17.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 221–22.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 64.

⁹⁰ Hammett and Pierce, 4.

change, so Edna arranged to meet with the pastor about the possibility of teaching the women's class apart from the men:

Edna began by telling the pastor how much she loved the church, appreciated him, and wanted to help. Then she started to share some of her ideas with him. She told him that the women weren't really happy having class with the men with a men's teacher and she didn't think the men liked it too well either. She had just started to tell the pastor that she would like to teach the class when he interrupted her.

He said, "We're really not targeting your age group at this church anymore. If you really want to help, you'll get out of that Sunday school class and teach a younger group. We're focusing on families here. Let me know what you'd like to do for that age group."

His abrupt words ended the conversation. Some of her ideas did, in fact, focus on reaching a younger age group. But his dismissive tone communicated that she was really not wanted or needed. He didn't listen to her or talk with her about using her gifts in a specific way with the younger age group. He just told her the church wasn't interested in her or anyone else over sixty. Obviously this didn't work for Edna or for the "home church."⁹¹

For Hammett and Pierce, the solution lies in bridging these generational divides and creating win-win situations that both people over 60 and people under 40 can embrace. They don't think that this necessarily demands the generations worshipping together—segregation is okay.⁹² So, while Hammett and Pierce don't advocate an intergenerational model and only briefly mention leadership development,⁹³ they do surface an important piece of the intergenerational puzzle: reciprocity. To become intergenerational, churches have to empower both people over 60 and people under 40.

⁹¹ Ibid., 80–81.

⁹² Ibid., 54, 91.

⁹³ Ibid., 27.

Peter Menconi

Peter Menconi's *The Intergenerational Church: Understanding Congregations from WWII to www.com* (2010) is another application of Strauss and Howe's work to the church. Menconi clearly communicates how five birth cohorts (GIs through Millennials) differ in life experiences and faith values. He argues that problems in multi-generational churches are often the results of power struggles between generations,⁹⁴ most often contiguous generations.⁹⁵ He notes the problem of disempowerment⁹⁶ and the propensity for younger, disempowered leaders to leave to plant generationally homogeneous churches.⁹⁷ He also notes the importance of generationally diverse leadership,⁹⁸ worship style,⁹⁹ and preaching.¹⁰⁰

Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross

In *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community, and Worship* (2012), Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross make a compelling case for intergenerational relationships as a key to Christian formation. They give biblical, theological, psychological, and social scientific support for their thesis and then present plans for churches to promote cross-generational contact in their worship, education, and missions.

⁹⁴ Menconi, 4.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 141.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 4–5.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 8–9

⁹⁸ Ibid., 165.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 181.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 186.

Allen and Ross draw from Lev Vygotsky's theory of a Zone of Proximal Development for spiritual formation. People grow when they are put in an environment with people who are a little farther down the road. To illustrate, they tell the story of potty training Ross's children:

Potty training their first son, David, was an interminable process, says Holly. After locating a popular book on the subject, creating a chart for stickers and purchasing small treats as rewards, they began the arduous process. Months later they were still slogging through. When it came time to train their second son, Daniel, they reluctantly dug out the book, bleakly sought courage to tackle the task and generally dreaded the ordeal. One day as Holly walked into the laundry room/bathroom with a load of clothes, she came upon David demonstrating to a very intent younger brother the basic technique of aiming straight; David had pulled up a small stool for his little brother to stand on, and Daniel was well on his way to proficiency. Holly was delighted.

This potty training phenomenon—that second and subsequent children tend to pick up basic knowledge, skills, and understandings from older siblings—illustrates well one aspect of the learning theory that follows.¹⁰¹

Intergenerational relationships are a key to development in many areas of life, and intergenerational churches can be optimal environments in which this cross-generational contact can take place.¹⁰² Seasoned saints can share stories of the faith with the younger generations and be sounding boards for their questions. Spiritual development isn't primarily cognitive; it's relational.¹⁰³ The intergenerational church is a great environment for these important relationships.

While Allen and Ross's work is crucial for appreciating the importance of the intergenerational church, they do not address the unique challenges of leading one. They acknowledge cultural differences between the generations and suggest trying to

¹⁰¹ Allen and Ross, 98.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 47–63.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 195.

understand each other as a way forward to solving conflict.¹⁰⁴ They do not address systems at work in congregations that contribute to intergenerational conflict. They suggest multigenerational leadership as a key to a healthy intergenerational church, but they do not suggest any ways of sustaining those relationships.¹⁰⁵

Ross Parsley

In *Messy Church: A Multigenerational Mission for God's Family* (2012), Ross Parsley advocates for intergenerational worship. Parsley laments how the seeker-church movement has contributed to the consumerist mentality that many Americans have toward church.¹⁰⁶ Instead, he wants to see the church operate like a family. He uses the illustration of a meal: at a restaurant, you get the food you want how you want it, and you are served. At a family meal, you have to deal with awkward conversations, emotional outbursts, and worn-out stories of family history. But it's at the family meals (and not at restaurants) that you see life in all of its beauty: the young and the old serving one another, and everyone letting their hair down. Parsley writes, "There is a beautiful and important truth discovered when the whole family comes to the table. It's a virtue that makes these gatherings enjoyable even though they are accompanied by a tremendous amount of effort. This ethic of family values may seem obvious, but much of our niche-marketed, individualized culture has lost sight of it."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 151–53.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 265–66.

¹⁰⁶ Parsley, loc. 377.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., loc. 516.

According to Parsley, one of the reasons the church struggles to be intergenerational is that the older generations hold too tightly to positions of power.¹⁰⁸ They want young people to fight the same fights they fought and do things the way they have always done it. When young people are brought in to leadership, it is often in insignificant positions. As the church ages and the young people leave, the church will often try to regain its youth by starting a contemporary service. But, according to Parsley, this essentially equates to two separate churches.¹⁰⁹

In *Messy Church*, Parsley advocates for mentoring and leadership development of the younger generation. The church needs to do more than tailor their worship service to meet the needs of young people; it needs to invite young people into the conversation of what church should look like.¹¹⁰ Young leaders should learn on the job; they shouldn't be kept on the sideline until they "know enough."¹¹¹ However, Parsley's leadership ideas assume a top-down authority structure rather than empowerment.

John Mabry

In *Faithful Generations: Effective Ministry across Generational Lines* (2013), John Mabry applies Strauss and Howe's work to the discipline of spiritual guidance. While not about intergenerational church, the book offers great insights on the specific ways ministers from one generation can relate to people of other generations.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., loc. 831.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., loc. 1461.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., loc. 716.

¹¹¹ Ibid., loc. 1160.

F. Douglas Powe and Jasmine Smothers

In Not Safe for Church: Ten Commandments for Reaching New Generations

(2015), F. Douglas Powe and Jasmine Rose Smothers offer ten ways that existing churches can adjust their thinking to reach the post-Civil-Rights-Movement generation. Powe and Smothers offer ten ways that the existing church needs to be flexible in their ministry models to reach younger generations: (1) Be open to new ideas, (2) be authentic, (3) don't be afraid to address taboo subjects out of fear of the old guard, (4) go out and reach new people, (5) consider entry points other than Sunday morning worship, (6) empower young people for leadership, (7) become socially active, (8) don't discourage promising young leaders, (9) allow young people to make the church their own, and (10) look for young people who are already present.

While Powe and Smothers offer insights on how older congregations can adjust to reach younger people, they don't provide a framework for an intergenerational church in which there is reciprocity and give-and-take from all generations. Their emphasis on empowering emerging young leaders is commendable and necessary for an intergenerational church to function. However, their approach consistently calls for the older generation to bend to meet the needs of young people. For example, they tell the following story:

[W]e know about a congregation that faced a space dilemma because it didn't have a nursery. The good news was the congregation was experiencing growth in families with young children. The challenge was they did not have any space for the children to learn and grow. A couple of the newer mothers suggested switching places with a Sunday school class that had existed for twenty-five years and had dwindled to seven people. This particular Sunday school class had the largest classroom space, even though the actual attendance to class was small. The newer moms figured since the class had dwindled down, they did not need all that space.

You would have thought the moms told the class they were repossessing all their belongings. The class would not hear of giving up a space they had owned for twenty-five years. Like Goliath, the class was insulted by a paradigm shift that moved away from the norm. In the mind of those who were a part of the class, another solution that did not require them shifting their world-view needed to be found. While we all like to think of ourselves as the underdog like David, the reality is we are often like Goliath threatened by something that is outside our norm.¹¹²

Authentic Leadership as a Way of Retaining G2 Leaders

While Strauss and Howe's work remains important, the intergenerational church needs a corrective. Specifically, the pendulum has swung too far in emphasizing "birth cohort" over "stage in the life course" with regard to intergenerational conflict. While different generational cultures may provide the *background* for intergenerational conflict (for instance: styles of music and how to spend money), the *nature* of these conflicts relates to stage in the life course and power struggles between people playing different roles in a family system. This dissertation will contribute to the intergenerational church literature by suggesting that intergenerational conflict is a *systems* issue related to multiple generations trying to live together under one roof. The reciprocal relationship between G1 adults and their adult G2 children in a healthy intergenerational family will provide the backdrop for an effective way to lead an intergenerational church. Finally, a new leadership theory (authentic leadership) will be presented as a real-world model of how reciprocity and power sharing can work in an intergenerational church.

Chapter one will offer a biblical basis for the claim that intergenerational churches function like intergenerational families. In 1 Timothy 3:15, Paul refers to the church as

¹¹² F. Douglas Powe, Jr. and Jasmine Rose Smothers, *Not Safe for Church: Ten Commandments for Reaching New Generations*, Kindle ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2015), loc. 1431.

the “household [οἶκος] of God.” I will demonstrate that with this metaphor, Paul portrayed the church as a surrogate kinship group, with God as the *paterfamilias* and believers of all ages as brothers and sisters within that household.

Chapter two will apply Bowen Family Systems Theory to the intergenerational church. While most of the literature on intergenerational churches reduces the conflicts in them to mere disagreements over preferences, Bowen Theory suggests that there are stronger emotional currents that underlie them. By learning to balance *differentiation from* and *solidarity with* one another, G1 and G2 adults can begin to exercise reciprocal relationships and better navigate organizational anxiety.

Chapter three will explore the philosophy of Martin Buber for insights regarding reciprocal relationships between G1 and G2 adults in an intergenerational church. Buber argued that there is a difference between *experiencing* a person in what he called an *I-It* relationship and *encountering* him or her in an *I-Thou* relationship. In an I-Thou relationship, a person surrenders himself or herself to be acted upon in the relationship. He or she is self-aware, but also aware of the other. Buber considered these relationships the only way to experience God.

Finally, chapter four will introduce authentic leadership (a model based on self-awareness and power-sharing) as a way forward for intergenerational churches. The unique power struggles in intergenerational churches make conventional forms of leadership less effective. Since it does not rely on power as a motivating influence, authentic leadership can help avoid feelings of powerlessness among both G1 and G2 adults and retain G2 leaders.

But, we begin with the scriptures and Paul's description of the church as the "household of God."

CHAPTER 1: “FAMILY” METAPHOR FOR THE CHURCH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In 1 Timothy 3:14–15 ESV, the Apostle Paul writes to his disciple Timothy (whom he left in Ephesus to correct false doctrine among the Ephesian elders), “I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household [οἶκος] of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of truth.” In these verses, Paul portrays the church as a family—the “household of God.” Elsewhere, Paul refers to his fellow Christians as “brothers and sisters” and to God as “the Father.” Family metaphor for the church permeates his writings.

The biblical metaphor of “family” for the church has significant implications for leading the intergenerational church. In the chapters to come, I will argue that the tensions between G1 and G2 leaders in intergenerational churches are due to family systems rather than simple differences of opinion. Disagreements over things like worship style and the budget are some surface reasons for tension, but the deeper issues behind these conflicts pertain to people of different stages in life (grandparent and parent) learning to relate to one another as adults in an intergenerational family. In chapter 2, I will apply Bowen Family Systems Theory to the intergenerational church to show that this is the case.

But is such an application justified? The church is not a literal family and most leaders in intergenerational churches are not related by blood. Further, because it is a community of the Spirit, the workings of the church may be considered (on theological

grounds) outside the realm of social-psychological evaluation. Is it appropriate to apply systems theory to the church?

While the church is not a literal family, the early Christians' use of family metaphor for the church suggests similarities between the two. This chapter will explore the meaning of this metaphor by looking at ancient families and the ways in which the New Testament writers drew parallels between church and family. While family metaphor can be found throughout the New Testament, two uses will be emphasized: (1) Paul's use of family language in the undisputed Pauline corpus (as analyzed by Joseph Hellerman), and (2) the οἶκος metaphor in 1 Timothy. It will be demonstrated that Paul considered the church to be a surrogate kinship group like a family, and that he urged the early Christians to act like a family in four ways: (1) sharing material resources, (2) non-retaliation against one another, (3) affective solidarity, and (4) family loyalty.¹ Further, it will be shown that Paul considered the church to be like a family in that it stewarded the family inheritance: the gospel message to be handed down to the next generation. But, before these themes can be explored, it is necessary to say a few words about the meaning and function of biblical metaphors for the Christian experience.

Biblical Metaphors for the Christian Experience

By comparing the unknown to the known, metaphors communicate experience through story. The New Testament was written to communities experiencing the in-breaking of the Holy Spirit in a new and unique way, and the biblical authors used

¹ Joseph H. Hellerman, "When the Church Was a Family: Christian Communities as Surrogate Kinship Groups" (plenary session at the 66th annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, San Diego, CA, November 19–21, 2014); see also Joseph H. Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family: Recapturing Jesus' Vision for Authentic Christian Community* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2009), 78–79.

metaphors to describe and explain this new reality. For example, the church in Rome may not have known the kind of care that was fit for the new community of the Spirit, but they could understand Paul's charge to "Love one another with brotherly affection" (Rom 12:10 ESV). The familiar clarified the unknown.

Metaphors for the church in the New Testament served two purposes: (1) to explain the new reality created by the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and its indwelling of the church, and (2) to prescribe a lifestyle appropriate for the new reality. It is difficult for people to understand that of which they have no experience, and a metaphor can bridge the gap between the known and the unknown. For instance, James Geary notes that it is impossible for human beings to understand what it is like to be a bat. We cannot experience what a bat experiences. But through the power of metaphor, we can get close to understanding what it is like to be a bat. He writes:

Our resources are indeed inadequate to the task of directly knowing the quality of a bat's experience, just as they are inadequate to the task of directly knowing the dimensions of the Flalansfere or the quality of the pain someone else feels when he stubs his toe. We can never know what it *is* to be a bat.

But metaphor can always tell us what it is *like*, by providing the right analogy from our own experience. Indeed, the fact that we cannot pose such questions—What is it *like* to be a bat? What is a four-dimensional universe *like*? What must the earth be *like* if the plate tectonics theory is true?—without using the word "like" suggests analogy's central role in understanding these most recalcitrant, recondite aspects of the world.

So, what is it like to be a bat? It is like pinpointing the location of a fluttering scarf while walking blindfolded through the Grand Canyon using as a guide only the echo of your own voice reverberating from the canyon walls.

What is it like for two particles to be in a state of quantum entanglement, in which a change to one particle effects an immediate and corresponding change to the other particle even though a vast physical distance separates both? It is like one person, in Peoria, instantly catching cold when another person, on Pluto, sneezes.²

² James Geary, *I Is an Other: The Secret Life of Metaphor and How It Shapes the Way We See the World*, Kindle ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), loc. 2951.

The New Testament is full of metaphors for the church—the church is a family (1 Tim 3:15), a body (Eph 4:12), the new humanity (Col 3:9–10), and the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19) to name a few. With the coming of the Spirit, both the definition and the characteristic experience of the people of God were radically altered. No longer were the boundary markers based on ethnicity and Torah, but rather allegiance to Jesus and the indwelling of the Spirit (Gal 3:2–9). To explain these new realities, the New Testament writers used the known (body, family, temple, humanity) to describe the unknown (the church).

In addition to their descriptive function, metaphors for the church also had a prescriptive function. Metaphors have the power to frame reality and provoke a response.³ By calling the church a body, family, temple, or new humanity, the biblical writers were telling a story and evoking a lifestyle. The body metaphor in 1 Corinthians 12 not only describes the unity of the church, but it also prescribes a way of treating one another. “Body” implies system—the health of one member affects the health of the entire system (1 Cor 12:26). This implies that division is harmful. In the same way, the new humanity metaphor in Colossians 3 both describes the church as a new creation liberated from sin and death, and also prescribes a way of living characterized by compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forgiveness, and love (Col 3:1–14 ESV). Biblical metaphors are both descriptive and prescriptive.

The power of a metaphor to provoke a response correlates to that metaphor’s ability to describe reality. For instance, the metaphor “man is a wolf” is only as powerful

³ Joseph H. Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 22.

as the brain is able to draw connections between the unknown (the nature of man) and the known (the behavior of wolves).⁴ If we are able to make the connection, the metaphor has power. If we are not, it is ineffective. Thus, not any two words can be juxtaposed for a successful metaphor; they have to gel.⁵ The New Testament writers didn't have complete freedom in the metaphors they used to describe the church. In order to successfully provoke a way of living, the metaphor had to adequately describe the new realities in the Spirit. "The church is a wolf" may not have worked as a metaphor, but "the church is a family" did.

Further, by their nature, metaphors simultaneously communicate what something *is* and what it *is not*.⁶ The church is not literally a body, but it shares some of the characteristics of a body (both are one system with many members). The church is not literally a temple, but it shares some of the characteristics of a temple (both are dwelling places of a deity). In the same way, the church is not literally a family, but it shares some of the characteristics of a family. The question becomes, then, the *meaning* of the family metaphor. In what ways is the church like a family? What are the points of contact between church and family? How do they differ? Why was this an effective metaphor for the Christian experience? To answer those questions, it is necessary to understand family life in antiquity and to identify parallels in the church. To that we now turn.

⁴ Geary, loc. 2435.

⁵ Ibid., loc. 2509.

⁶ Ibid., loc. 252.

Families in Antiquity

The ancient Mediterranean family differed from that of the modern West in its kinship ties, structure, and importance to society. Unlike the modern West, where we consider “kin” those joined to us through blood or marriage, ancient Mediterranean kinship was determined solely through patrilineage.⁷ Not only were kinship ties different, but the concept of the family was also different. Greco-Roman society was not based upon the nuclear family, but upon households consisting of husband and wife, children, and slaves.⁸ Households were crucial to the ancient world, forming the backbone of the economy, ensuring a steady stream of soldiers for the army, and passing on traditions to the next generation.⁹ Understanding the nature of ancient kinship ties and the importance of the οἶκος for passing on the family tradition is crucial to understanding the family metaphor in the New Testament.

Kinship in Ancient Mediterranean Society

While modern Western families typically determine kinship based on marriage and consanguinity, ancient Mediterranean families typically determined kinship based on patrilineage. Americans typically consider parents, siblings, spouses, children, aunts and uncles, cousins, and grandchildren as “family,” but the ancients limited “family” to those

⁷ Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family*, 28–29.

⁸ Omar Coloru, “The Language of Oikos and the Language of Power in the Seleucid Kingdom,” in *Families in the Greco-Roman World*, eds. Ray Laurence and Agneta Strömberg (New York: Continuum, 2012), 85; Mark Golden, “Afterward: The Future of the Ancient Greek Family,” in *Families in the Greco-Roman World*, eds. Ray Laurence and Agneta Strömberg (New York: Continuum, 2012), 180–81.

⁹ Carolyn Osiek and David L. Balch, *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 42.

who shared the blood of the *paterfamilias* (the oldest living male head of household).¹⁰ In a patrilineal kinship group, brothers and sisters are kin because they share the blood of the same father, but spouses are not kin because their blood comes from a different *paterfamilias*. Sons and daughters are both kin, but grandchildren are only kin through sons. Grandchildren through daughters are not kin since they belong in the patrilineal kinship group of their father.¹¹

One significant implication of a patrilineal system is that the kinship ties between siblings are stronger than the kinship ties of marriage. For instance, Plutarch's *Life of Antony* recounts Octavia's predicament when caught in the middle of a war between her husband Antony and her brother Octavius. Torn between love for her husband and kinship loyalty to her brother, she ultimately returns to Rome with her brother, where she moves back in to Antony's old house, continues to carry on Antony's business, and raise Antony's children. Her actions demonstrate her continued love for her husband despite siding with her brother, and Plutarch says that her noble character unintentionally turned people against Antony.¹²

Hellerman notes that family kinship in the ancient world demanded four things from siblings: (1) sharing material resources, (2) non-retaliation against one another, (3) affective solidarity, and (4) family loyalty.¹³ One clear example of *sharing material resources* was the treaty between Judea and Sparta as described in 1 Maccabees and

¹⁰ Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family*, 28–29.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹² Plutarch, *Life of Antony*, 35:1–5; 54:2; Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family*, 43.

¹³ Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family*, 78–79.

Josephus. The high priest Jonathan sent the Spartans a letter, requesting that they renew an alliance based on their kinship. Included in his letter was a copy of an older letter written from Spartan king Arius to the former Jewish high priest Onias:

King Arius of the Spartans, to the high priest Onias, greetings. It has been found in writing concerning the Spartans and the Jews that they are brothers and are of the family of Abraham. And now that we have learned this, please write us concerning your welfare; we on our part write to you that your livestock and your property belong to us, and ours belong to you. We therefore command that our envoys report to you accordingly.¹⁴

Josephus recounts the same letter:

Areus, King of the Lacedemonians, to Onias, sendeth greeting. We have met with a certain writing, whereby we have discovered that both the Jews and the Lacedemonians are of one stock, and are derived from the kindred of Abraham. It is but just, therefore, that you, who are our brethren, should send to us about any of your concern as you please. We will also do the same thing, and esteem your concerns as our own, and will look upon our concerns as in common with yours.¹⁵

This letter from Arius to Onias argues that because the Spartans and Judeans were kin, that they should share material resources.¹⁶

Siblings were also expected *not to retaliate* against one another. Hellerman connects non-retaliation to sharing resources, “Just as one expects nothing in return when one gives to a brother in need, neither does one return in kind an injustice perpetuated by a fellow family member.”¹⁷ He cites the ending of *Joseph and Aseneth*, in which Aseneth intercedes on behalf of the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, requesting that Levi and Simeon not retaliate against them based on their kinship: “I beg you, spare your brothers and do

¹⁴ 1 Macc. 12:19–23 NRSV.

¹⁵ *Ant.* 12.226–27. Flavius Josephus, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, New updated ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987).

¹⁶ Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family*, 49.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

not do them evil for evil, because the Lord protected me against them, and shattered their swords, and they melted on the ground like wax from the presence of fire. And this is enough for them that the Lord fights against them for us. And you, spare them because they are your brothers and your father Israel's blood."¹⁸

In addition to sharing material resources and non-retaliation, siblings were also expected to have *affection* for one another. Hellerman cites numerous texts paralleling sibling affection with that between husband and wife, including Sirach 25:1 NRSV, "I take pleasure in three things, and they are beautiful in the sight of God and of mortals: agreement among brothers and sisters, friendship among neighbors, and a wife and husband who live in harmony." Hellerman notes that the order is important: the agreement between siblings is the most delightful.¹⁹

Finally, Hellerman notes several examples of the value placed on *loyalty* between siblings. Treachery between kindred was considered a grave evil. Second Maccabees comments on Jason's war against Menelaus, "But Jason kept relentlessly slaughtering his compatriots, not realizing that success at the cost of one's kindred is the greatest misfortune, but imagining that he was setting up trophies of victory over enemies and not over compatriots" (2 Macc. 5:6 NRSV). Josephus lists Cleopatra's treachery against her siblings as among her greatest crimes (*Ant.* 15.89).²⁰ On the other hand, Psalm 113:1 ESV

¹⁸ *Jos. and Asen.* 28:10–11; "Joseph and Aseneth," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983); Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family*, 50.

¹⁹ Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family*, 36.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

praises loyalty between siblings, “Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!”

The Oἶκος and the Paterfamilias

In addition to the different concepts of kinship, another difference between the ancient family and the modern western family is the basic familial unit. The ancient Mediterranean family needs to be thought of in terms of households (the Greek οἶκος and the Roman *domus*), not of nuclear families.²¹ Ancient Greek, Roman, and Second-Temple Jewish families all demonstrated similar structures: households contained husband and wife, children, and slaves.²² Households were *patrilocal*, meaning that they grouped around the husband’s patrilinear kinship group.²³ The oldest surviving male in the kinship line functioned as the *paterfamilias*—the head of the household who retained legal authority over and exercised absolute authority over his bloodline (even over life and death).²⁴ The Roman *Twelve Tables* IV.2a says, “To a father . . . shall be given over a son the power of life and death.”²⁵

²¹ Golden, 180–81.

²² Coloru, 85; Ross S. Kraemer, “Typical and Atypical Family Dynamics: The Case of Babatha and Berenice,” in *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, eds. Carolyn Osiek and David L. Balch (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 131.

²³ David W. Chapman, “Marriage and Family in Second Temple Judaism,” in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, ed. Ken M. Campbell (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 232; Daniel Block, “Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel,” in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, ed. Ken M. Campbell (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 76.

²⁴ Susan Treggiari, “Marriage and Family in Roman Society,” in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, ed. Ken M. Campbell (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 134–41; Ann-Cathrin Harders, “Beyond Oikos and Domus: Modern Kinship Studies and the Ancient Family,” in *Families in the Greco-Roman World*, eds. Ray Laurence and Agneta Strömberg (New York: Continuum, 2012), 17; Osiek and Balch, 56–57.

²⁵ Allan Chester Johnson, Paul Robinson Coleman-Norton, and Frank Card Bourne, *Ancient Roman Statutes: Translation, with Introduction, Commentary, Glossary, and Index*, ed. Clyde Pharr (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1961).

Patrilineal authority continued over children into adulthood. In *The Shepherd of Hermas* (a second-century Christian apocalypse), Hermas is rebuked by a messenger from God for his failure to correct his adult children:

Yet this is not why God is angry at you. Rather it is in order that you may convert your family, which has sinned against the Lord and against you, their parents. But you are so fond of your children that you have not corrected your family, but have allowed it to become terribly corrupt. This is why the Lord is angry at you. But he will heal all your past evil deeds that have been done by your family, for because of their sins and transgressions you have been corrupted by the care of this life.²⁶

As *paterfamilias*, Hermas was responsible for his entire household, and his failure to control his adult children brought a rebuke from the heavenly messenger.

Ancient Households and Family Continuity

One final significant aspect of family life in the ancient world was the importance of inheritance and family continuity. While households performed many crucial functions in the ancient Mediterranean world, their most crucial function was to provide heirs, enabling property and traditions to be passed on the next generation.²⁷ The family property was considered under the control of the *paterfamilias* until he died.²⁸ Since daughters would produce sons from a different bloodline (that of the sons' father), it was crucial for the *paterfamilias* to have a son to whom he could pass on the family estate.²⁹

²⁶ *The Shepherd of Hermas*, 3:1. *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, translated and edited by Michael W. Holmes.

²⁷ S. M. Baugh, "Marriage and Family in Ancient Greek Society," in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, ed. Ken M. Campbell (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 104–5; Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family*, 51–55.

²⁸ Treggiari, 144–46.

²⁹ Numbers 27:8 makes provision for family property to be passed down to daughters in Jewish society, but in *Historiae* 5.48, Herodotus says that the Greek Cleomenes died childless, even though he had a daughter. Baugh, 130.

Further, the *paterfamilias* was the religious leader over the household and was responsible for passing on religious instruction to his household. Josephus writes:

Nay, indeed, the law does not permit us to make festivals at the births of our children, and thereby afford occasion of drinking to excess; but it ordains that the very beginning of our education should be immediately directed to sobriety. It also commands us to bring those children up in learning and to exercise them in the laws, and make them acquainted with the acts of their predecessors, in order to their imitation of them, and that they may be nourished up in the laws from their infancy, and might neither transgress them, nor yet have any pretense for their ignorance of them.³⁰

Two points are important from this brief survey of ancient families: (1) since kinship in the ancient world was tied to bloodline rather than marriage, sibling loyalty was of the utmost importance, and (2) the family played a crucial role in passing on property and values to the next generation. The New Testament emphasizes both of these points in comparing the church to the family. Joseph Hellerman argues that Paul's "brothers and sisters" language portrays the church as a surrogate kinship group. I will argue that the οἶκος metaphor in 1 Timothy emphasizes the church's stewardship of the gospel as a family inheritance to be passed on to the next generation. Both of these emphases are important to understanding the workings of the intergenerational church.

Joseph Hellerman: The Church as a Surrogate Kinship Group

In his work on family metaphor for the church in the New Testament, Joseph Hellerman has demonstrated that the early Christians considered the church to be a surrogate kinship group. Hellerman focuses on the undisputed Pauline corpus and

³⁰ Josephus, *Against Apion*, 2.204; Chapman, 235; Treggiari, 146–47.

emphasizes family terminology and kinship function.³¹ The early Christians referred to God as “Father” and to one another as “brothers and sisters.”³² They also demonstrated the four characteristics of a family: (1) sharing material resources, (2) non-retaliation against one another, (3) affective solidarity, and (4) family loyalty.³³ Family language for Paul was not only descriptive, but also prescriptive. By using family language to describe the kinds of relationships the people of his churches should have for one another, Paul hoped to create a new social order of kinship.³⁴

Hellerman locates the beginning of the church as a surrogate kinship group with the teaching of Jesus. While the Old Testament does use family language to describe the people of God on occasion, it is not prevalent.³⁵ It became more common to refer to God as “Father” in the Second Temple period,³⁶ but it wasn’t until the ministry of Jesus that these themes came to the fore. Hellerman argues that Jesus’ movement considered themselves a kind of family. For instance, when Jesus was told that his mother and brothers were looking for him, he responded in Luke 8:21 ESV, “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.”³⁷ In Mark 10:29–30 ESV, Jesus

³¹ Hellerman also cites the Old Testament, intertestamental material, the Gospels, and a few second-century Christian works, but the bulk of his work is in 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans, 1 Thessalonians, Galatians, Philemon, and Philippians.

³² Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family*, 70.

³³ Hellerman, “When the Church Was a Family”; see also Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family*, 78–79.

³⁴ Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family*, 93.

³⁵ Deut 8:5, 14:1, 32:6; Psa 68:5, 82:6, 89:26, 103:13; Pro 3:12; Isa 63:16, 64:8, for instance. *Ibid.*, 60.

³⁶ *Jub.* 1:23–25; *3 Macc.* 2:21; *Wisdom of Solomon* 2:16–18, 5:15, 11:10, 12:19–21; and *Psalms of Solomon* 13:9, for instance. *Ibid.*, 63.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

responds to Peter's proclamation that the disciples have left everything to follow Jesus, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life."³⁸ Finally, Hellerman mentions Jesus' words on discipleship in Luke 14:26 ESV, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."³⁹ Jesus consistently emphasized that following him may come at the expense of family ties, but that loyalty to him created new ties.

While Hellerman traces the family metaphor for the church to Jesus, he sees it most fully developed in the writings of Paul. In all of Paul, he discovered 118 occurrences of sibling terminology, 40 occurrences of father terminology, and 14 occurrences of inheritance terminology.⁴⁰ But beyond the language of Paul is the way in which Paul encouraged the churches to treat each other: he wanted them to treat each other like brothers and sisters. For instance, the collection for the Jerusalem church in 2 Corinthians mirrors the family's *sharing of material resources*.⁴¹ Paul encourages *non-retaliation* when he urges Philemon to manumit his runaway slave Onesimus.⁴² Paul pleads with the Romans to show *affective solidarity* toward one another in 12:9–13 ESV:

³⁸ Ibid., 66.

³⁹ Ibid., 72.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 92.

⁴¹ Ibid., 110–13.

⁴² Ibid., 119–20.

“Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.”⁴³ Paul’s prohibition of lawsuits in 1 Corinthians 6 mirrors the family’s emphasis on *loyalty*—it was shameful for brother to go against brother in court.⁴⁴

Hellerman convincingly demonstrates that the early Christians (especially Paul) considered the church to be a surrogate kinship group. In the church “family,” God was the Father and Christians were brothers and sisters. This meant that they were to mimic families.

Οἶκος Metaphor in 1 Timothy: The Gospel as the Family Story

While Hellerman’s work on family metaphor for the church is excellent, he does not discuss a significant use of it: the οἶκος (*household*) metaphor in 1 Timothy. In 1 Timothy 3:14–15, Paul writes, “I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God [οἶκῳ θεοῦ], which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of truth.” Since the ancients thought of “family” in terms of οἶκος and not nuclear family,⁴⁵ this is a significant use of the metaphor. Paul extends this metaphor throughout the book, including in the infamous “household codes” of the paraenetic sections (2:1–3:13, 5:1–6:2, and 6:17–19). While the meaning of the οἶκος metaphor in 1 Timothy is slightly

⁴³ Ibid., 118.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 104–06.

⁴⁵ Golden, 180–81.

different than that of family metaphors elsewhere in Paul, it is consistent with what Hellerman has concluded about Paul's other uses. Hellerman notes the significance of inheritance to the ancient family, but he does not explore the inheritance theme in 1 Timothy.⁴⁶ Paul uses the οἶκος metaphor in 1 Timothy to compare church elders to stewards in God's house, and the gospel to the family inheritance that has been entrusted to them.

One reason Hellerman may have omitted the data from 1 Timothy is that the majority of scholars consider it a late pseudonymous work with an ecclesiology closer to 1 Clement than to the authentic Paul. According to this reading, the household codes of 1 Timothy encourage the second-century church to live quiet, inoffensive lives so that they could worship in peace (2:2). In contrast to Jesus and Paul, whose eschatological urgency created subversive ethics, the Pastoral Epistles encourage good citizenship. Dibelius and Conzelmann represent this majority reading of the household codes:

[The Pastoral Epistles] are the only documents in the canon which enjoin such a structuring under the ideal of good Christian citizenship. For a historical understanding it is not enough simply to confront this ethical ideal with the ethics of Jesus or Paul. It is necessary to consider the changed situation of the church and to interpret the Pastorals, together with contemporary writings (Luke and the *Apostolic Fathers*), in the context of a changing conceptual structure—change had to follow the reorientation toward a longer duration of life in the world. If one keeps in mind the other alternative for dealing with this reorientation—i.e., the Gnostic alternative—one can understand this “Christian citizenship” as a genuine expression of an existence in the world based on faith, although doubtless the dialectic of the eschatological existence is no longer understood in its original keenness.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family*, 51.

⁴⁷ Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles*, trans. Philip Buttolph and Adela Yarbro, *Hermeneia* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 40–41.

Contrary to Dibelius and Conzelmann, there is no need to connect the household codes to “good Christian citizenship” and every reason to connect them to mission. The codes are an application of Paul’s οἶκος metaphor that extends throughout the book. With the metaphor, Paul demonstrates the importance of right doctrine to mission by comparing the gospel to a family story that needs to be transmitted from one generation to the next. By straying from Paul’s gospel, some of the Ephesian elders had failed to pass down the family inheritance to their listeners. Understood in this way, the metaphor is consistent with Paul’s use elsewhere, with the added implication that the church has a family story to pass down.

Before getting into 1 Timothy, it is necessary to mention the approach to the letter taken in this work. In his commentary on the Pastoral Epistles, Mounce rightly observes: “More than perhaps for any book in the NT, exegesis of the PE is affected by one’s critical assumptions.”⁴⁸ The letter claims to be written by Paul to Timothy, but many scholars consider it to be a pseudonymous work from the second century. Again, Dibelius and Conzelmann’s arguments are representative: (1) its absence from early witnesses, (2) its different strategy for engaging opponents, (3) the difficulty placing it into Paul’s ministry in Acts, (4) the different style and vocabulary, (5) the late ecclesiology, and (6) the un-Pauline use of traditional material.⁴⁹

However, there *are* reasons to consider the Pastoral Epistles authentic. The strongest arguments are that pseudepigrapha were universally rejected as canonical by the

⁴⁸ William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles, Word Biblical Commentary* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 2000), xlv.

⁴⁹ Dibelius and Conzelmann, 1–5.

early church, and that no one before the 19th century questioned the Pastoral Epistles' authenticity.⁵⁰ Several recent commentators have successfully explained the differences between the Pastoral Epistles and the rest of the Pauline corpus,⁵¹ and I will assume Pauline authorship. Further, by tying the οἶκος metaphor (and the accompanying household codes) to mission, I will further reinforce the credibility of Pauline authorship.

The "household of God" image permeates 1 Timothy. Words from οἶκ- family occur 10 times in the letter: οἰκονομία once (*stewardship* in 1:4) οἶκος five times (*household* in 3:4, 5, 12, 15; 5:4), οἰκεῖος once (*members of a household* in 5:8), οἰκία once (*house* in 5:13), οἰκοδεσποτέω once (*manage one's house* in 5:14), and οἰκέω once (*to dwell* in 6:16). Paul uses οἶκ- language to argue that the elders in Ephesus functioned as *stewards* over the house of God. To exercise faithful stewardship, these elders needed to teach in accordance with Paul's gospel (1:4). Paul left Timothy in Ephesus to instruct the elders on the importance of right doctrine (1:3). If the elders were unwilling to change, Timothy was to appoint new ones (3:1–13).⁵²

⁵⁰ Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Hermeneutical and Exegetical Challenges in Interpreting the Pastoral Epistles," in *Entrusted with the Gospel: Paul's Theology in the Pastoral Epistles*, eds. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Terry L. Wilder (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010), 2; I. Howard Marshall and Philip Towner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 82; Mounce, 125; Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 21.

⁵¹ The letters are considered authentic by Luke Timothy Johnson, *Letters to Paul's Delegates: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 3; George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles, The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 51; Towner, 83–84; Mounce, 48. Marshall argues that the letters were written by Timothy and Titus themselves, with genuine Pauline material. Marshall and Towner, 84.

⁵² F. Alan Tomlinson, "The Purpose and Stewardship Theme within the Pastoral Epistles," in *Entrusted with the Gospel: Paul's Theology in the Pastoral Epistles*, eds. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Terry L. Wilder (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010), 53–54.

Rather than merely promoting responsible citizenship, three notable things tie the οἶκος metaphor to mission. First, the *background* of the metaphor lies in the early church's use of homes for missionary activity. Second, the *purpose* of the metaphor was to imply that the Ephesian elders were stewards within God's οἶκος and therefore had a responsibility to remain faithful to the gospel and mission. Finally, the *implication* of the metaphor was that the church should operate like an οἶκος, albeit with redefined roles based on unity in Christ.

Houses in the Mission of the Early Church

Houses played a crucial role in the church's mission from its inception. Jesus used homes as a basis of his evangelistic outreach (Matt 9:10–13, 12:46–50, 13:36–52, 17:24–27, 26:6–13; Mark 2:1–12, 3:20–21, 7:14–23, 9:33–37, 14:3–9; Luke 4:38–41, 5:27–32, 7:36–50, 10:38–42, 14:1–6, 19:1–10).⁵³ Simon Peter may have even functioned as a patron for Jesus, offering up his family's house in Capernaum as a missional home base (Mark 1:29).⁵⁴ Similarly, Jesus instructed his missionaries to look for homes out of which to operate (Matt 10:5–14; Mark 6:7–13; Luke 9:1–6, 10:1–12).⁵⁵

Further, both Acts and Paul's letters evidence that the early church operated out of houses. Churches met in the homes of wealthier congregation members (Acts 2:2, 8:3, 12:12; Rom 16:4–5; 1 Cor 14:24–25, 16:19; Col 4:15; Phlm 1:2; 2 John 1:10).⁵⁶

⁵³ Roger W. Gehring, *House Church and Mission: The Importance of Household Structures in Early Christianity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 46.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁵⁶ Stanley Porter, "The Church in Romans and Galatians," in *The New Testament Church: The Challenge of Developing Ecclesiologies*, eds. John P. Harrison and James D. Dvorak (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 88.

Evangelistic preaching was done in homes (Acts 5:42, 16:32–34, 18:7, 20:20).⁵⁷ Early converts may have become patrons for local missionary activity (Acts 16:14–15, 17:5–9) and eventually would have become the leaders of the house church.⁵⁸ Rather than seeing the household and house church as accidental byproducts of early Christian mission, it is important to view them as crucial to it. The household church *was* the ancient church.⁵⁹

This last note is important because the household had an existing structure that would become the structure of the church.⁶⁰ Ancient homes typically consisted of husband and wife, their children, and any slaves living in the home.⁶¹ In nascent Christianity, houses were not modified to become churches, and so church activity would have mirrored that of the home.⁶² Paul’s churches likely met in atrium-style homes, which were not private.⁶³ Business would be conducted in the home and people could come and go as they pleased (1 Cor 14:24–25).⁶⁴

⁵⁷ Gehring, 83.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 226–27; David C. Verner, *The Household of God: The Social World of the Pastoral Epistles* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 4.

⁵⁹ Andrew D. Clarke, *A Pauline Theology of Church Leadership*, *T & T Clark Library of Biblical Studies* (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 45.

⁶⁰ R. Alastair Campbell, *The Elders: Seniority within Earliest Christianity* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 153.

⁶¹ Harders, 14–15.

⁶² Monika Trümper, “Material and Social Environment of Greco-Roman Households in the East: The Case of Hellenistic Delos,” in *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, eds. Carolyn Osiek and David L. Balch (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 19.

⁶³ Osiek and Balch, 16–17.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 24–31.

Household roles probably spilled over into church roles, with the patron of the home functioning as the ἐπίσκοπος (*overseer*) of the house church.⁶⁵ House churches formed local networks, and the overseers of each house church (note the plural in Phil 1:1) were collectively known as “the elders” in accordance with Jewish usage of the term.⁶⁶ Thus, in its earliest usage, πρεσβύτερος (*elder*) was not a technical office but an informal title given to the leadership collective.⁶⁷ Paul used the terms ἐπίσκοπος and πρεσβύτερος interchangeably (Titus 1:5–7).

Houses were crucial to the mission of the early church. Patrons provided places for missionaries to stay and congregations to meet, evangelistic preaching was done within their walls, and the household structure birthed church structure. Roger Gehring writes about their importance:

The Pauline, indeed the entire early Christian movement was able to organize itself as an independent entity not “*alongside* private Christian households but, rather, exclusively *in* them.” By remaining in their οἶκοι, it became clearer there than perhaps anywhere else that the first Christians were “in the world but not of the world.” This is undoubtedly one of the more important reasons why the house church was of such great significance for early Christian missions.⁶⁸

When Paul compared the church to the οἶκος of God, this would not have been a stretch. The church met in a home. Members of the household would have made up the congregation and the *paterfamilias* would have been the overseer (ἐπίσκοπος). The

⁶⁵ Campbell, 242; Benjamin Merkle, “Ecclesiology in the Pastoral Epistles,” in *Entrusted with the Gospel: Paul's Theology in the Pastoral Epistles*, eds. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Terry L. Wilder (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010), 175–77; Gehring, 3.

⁶⁶ Campbell, 162, 21; Clarke, 76–78; Gehring, 206.

⁶⁷ Campbell, 44; Clarke, 52–53.

⁶⁸ Gehring, 228.

collection of heads of household in cities like Ephesus collectively would have been known as “the elders” (πρεσβύτερος).⁶⁹

Mission as Stewardship in 1 Timothy

Recognizing the importance of houses to the church’s mission, Paul employed the οἶκος and οἰκονομία (*stewardship*) metaphors in 1 Timothy to communicate the importance of the Ephesian elders staying faithful to Paul’s gospel. In fact, Paul’s very purpose in leaving Timothy in Ephesus was to correct the false teaching or replace the errant elders so that the churches could be faithful in carrying out the mission of God.

Two passages stand out as purpose statements of 1 Timothy: 1:3–4 ESV:

As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith [ἡ οἰκονομίαν θεοῦ τὴν ἐν πίστει].

and 3:14–16 ESV:

I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of truth. Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness [τὸ τῆς εὐσεβείας μυστήριον]: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.⁷⁰

Both statements demonstrate Paul’s concern with mission. First, 3:14–16 introduces a confession of τὸ τῆς εὐσεβείας μυστήριον (“the mystery of godliness”). In general, μυστήριον refers to “the private counsel of God,”⁷¹ but Paul sometimes uses it in

⁶⁹ Clarke, 52–53.

⁷⁰ Mounce, 214.

⁷¹ Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and William Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 662. (BDAG)

a semi-technical way related to proclamation of the gospel and the Gentile mission (Rom 16:15; 1 Cor 2:1–7, 4:1–2; Eph 3:1–10, 6:19; Col 1:24–27, 4:3). Bornkamm says that the word is “firmly connected with the *kerygma* of Christ” in Paul.⁷² The confession itself in 3:16 makes the connection to mission clear.⁷³

As in 3:14–16, there are missional concerns in the other purpose statement of 1 Timothy, 1:3–4. Paul’s objection to false teaching was that it promoted “speculations” rather than ἡ οἰκονομίαν θεοῦ τὴν ἐν πίστει. (“the stewardship of God that is by faith”). The word οἰκονομία refers to “responsibility of management”;⁷⁴ it is the work of an οἰκονόμος (*steward*).⁷⁵ In other words, Paul saw false teaching as leading to quarrels rather than faithful exercise of stewardship. This raises the question of the identity of this stewardship. In four of the five other times that Paul uses οἰκονομία, he does so in the context of his responsibility to preach the gospel (1 Cor 9:17; Eph 3:2, 9; Col 1:25). Of particular significance are Eph 3:1–10 ESV:

For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— assuming that you have heard of the stewardship [τὴν οἰκονομίαν] of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery [τὸ μυστήριον] was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery [τῷ μυστηρίῳ] of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the

⁷² Günther Bornkamm, “μυστήριον, μύεω,” *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey Bromiley, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 819.

⁷³ Both Towner and Mounce equate the “the mystery of godliness” and “the mystery of faith” (3:9) with the gospel itself. Towner, 277; Mounce, 226.

⁷⁴ BDAG, 697.

⁷⁵ Knight, 75.

Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan [ἡ οἰκονομία] of the mystery [τοῦ μυστηρίου] hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

and Col 1:24–27 ESV:

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship [τὴν οἰκονομίαν] from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery [τὸ μυστήριον] hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

In both of these passages, Paul uses both μυστήριον and οἰκονομία in the context of the mission to the Gentiles.

In addition to the stewardship theme in the purpose statements of 1 Timothy, F. Alan Tomlinson also sees parallels between the vocabulary, themes, and theology of 1 Timothy with those of the “stewardship” parables in Matthew and Luke (Matt 24:45–51, 25:14–30; Luke 12:35–48, 16:1–13).⁷⁶ Specifically, we see similar uses of the words κύριος (*lord*), οἶκος (*house*), οικονόμος/οἰκονομία/οἰκονομέω (*manager/stewardship/be a manager*), and πιστός/πιστεύω (*faithful/entrust*). Both of these stories of Jesus have similar plotlines—the *lord* goes away and entrusts his *house* to a *steward*. The *steward* has a responsibility to be *faithful* to his *stewardship* until his lord *returns*. Similarly, at the end of 1 Timothy, Paul charges Timothy to be faithful over his stewardship until the Lord returns:

I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has

⁷⁶ Tomlinson, 74.

immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.⁷⁷

Tomlinson writes, “The employment of household management terms seems to be an obvious choice by Paul to communicate to the faithful servants, as well as to the untrustworthy, at Ephesus and Crete. What a powerful metaphor to address a variety of issues within the [Pastoral Epistles] while ‘the master is away’!”⁷⁸

The οἶκος and οἰκονομία metaphors in 1 Timothy illustrate the importance of faithfulness among the elders. In the metaphor, God functions as lord over the house, and Paul, Timothy, and the elders function as stewards (1:12). Faithful exercise of that stewardship demands holding fast to the gospel (1:11; 4:6–7; 5:17; 6:20).⁷⁹ Significantly, the elders do not function as the *paterfamilias*; that role belongs to God.⁸⁰ The elders are stewards of the gospel.

The Household Codes and Mission

Having used οἶκος language to charge the elders to stay on mission, Paul extends the metaphor into the paraenetic sections of the letter. In the household codes, Paul describes how the church should live out its mission, given that it is God’s οἶκος. Further, once the link between οἶκος and mission has been established, the household codes can be read not as passive accommodation to the culture, but as a tension between the subversive re-ordering of society and the practical demands of daily life in the οἶκος.

⁷⁷ 1 Tim 6:13–16 ESV.

⁷⁸ Tomlinson, 75.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 77–80; Christopher R. Hutson, “Ecclesiology in the Pastoral Epistles,” in *The New Testament Church: The Challenge of Developing Ecclesiologies*, eds. John P. Harrison and James D. Dvorak (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 164–65.

⁸⁰ Gehring, 262.

Parallels between the household codes in 1 Timothy and those typical of the Greco-Roman world have been widely noted.⁸¹ Families were defined by patrilineage, and the oldest surviving patriarch functioned as the *paterfamilias*.⁸² The *paterfamilias* retained legal control over his children and they could not own property as long as long as he was still alive.⁸³ The *paterfamilias* had absolute authority over the family, even over life and death.⁸⁴ Roman men and women had distinct social roles, with different concepts of honor and shame, and so social equality was not a concept.⁸⁵ Men were expected to be aggressive and virile, and to protect the honor of their women.⁸⁶ Women were expected to remain sexually pure.⁸⁷

There are echoes of these values in the household codes. The elders and deacons needed to act like heads of households (3:1–13), men needed to be respectable (2:8), women needed to function like wives in the home (2:9–15), older widows needed to be provided for as widowed mothers (5:3–8), younger widows should remarry to not be a burden (5:9–16), and slaves needed to continue to serve without disrespecting their masters (6:1–2).

On the other hand, there are unexpected elements in the codes. Specifically, Timothy is charged not to let people despise him for his youth (4:12). “Despise” is

⁸¹ Osiek and Balch, 75, 247; Johnson, *Letters to Paul's Delegates*, 112; Verner, 145.

⁸² Osiek and Balch, 42.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 56–57.

⁸⁴ Harders, 17; Campbell, 89.

⁸⁵ Osiek and Balch, 41.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 38–39.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

honor/shame language: one who is “despised” is not honored. Thus Paul advocates the honoring of young Timothy over the elder men who would typically be honored. Similarly, Paul charges Timothy to honor widows (5:3), another group that would not typically be honored in Greco-Roman society.⁸⁸

The presence of both subversive and expected elements in the household codes reveals a tension in Paul between the church’s new social identity in Christ (Gal 3:28) and the practical demands of daily life in the οἶκος.⁸⁹ It is not as simple as saying that 1 Timothy encourages accommodation. Rather, there is a tension between the eschatological reality of universal brotherhood and the continuing existence of the οἶκος. Since the church is the “household of God,” then it follows that God is the *paterfamilias* and church members are brothers and sisters.⁹⁰ What then, does a proper relationship between believing husbands and wives look like? Father and son? Slave and master? These are the questions answered by the household codes.⁹¹ Healthy households were crucial to the mission of God, and the household codes kept these houses from devolving into chaos.⁹²

⁸⁸ David W. Pao, “Let No One Despise Your Youth: Church and the World in the Pastoral Epistles” (paper presented at the 66th annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, San Diego, CA, November 19–21, 2014).

⁸⁹ Gehring, 251.

⁹⁰ Clarke, 138.

⁹¹ Gehring, 262.

⁹² Ibid., 293.

Oἶκος in 1 Timothy: Some Conclusions

Far from indicating a retreat into compliant citizenship, the οἶκος metaphor in 1 Timothy is tied deeply to mission. In fact, the house was crucial to mission of the church from the beginning. Jesus preached in houses. He encouraged his missionaries to look for “men of peace”—patrons whose homes could serve as bases of missional operation. The early church met in homes and evangelized in homes, and its leadership structure rose out of typical household structure. In 1 Timothy, the Ephesian elders had drifted from Paul’s gospel and were therefore not being faithful stewards over the household of God. Paul charged Timothy with correcting or replacing them so that the mission could advance unhindered. In the paraenetic sections of the book, Paul advanced this metaphor and challenged *every* member of the church to live as a member of the household of God. Even though God was the *paterfamilias*, there were still social realities that needed to be respected. The elders were both brothers and leaders. But given these ties between οἶκος and mission, how does the οἶκος metaphor inform Pauline ecclesiology?

Family Metaphor for the Church in the New Testament

Paul envisioned the church functioning like a household. This metaphor is significant to Paul’s understanding of the church in two ways: (1) it implies strong kinship ties among believers, and (2) it suggests that church leaders are stewards of the family story, the gospel.

Kinship

In his work on οἶκος metaphor for the church, Joseph Hellerman notes four significant aspects of the metaphor for kinship ties: (1) affective solidarity, (2) family

unity, (3) material solidarity, and (4) family loyalty.⁹³ Each of these is also present in the paraenetic sections of 1 Timothy. The importance of *affective solidarity* is evident in Paul's reference to Timothy as his "true child in the faith" (1:2) and "child" (1:18). Paul had genuine affection for the young man Timothy. He also encouraged *family unity* within the Ephesian churches, as evidenced by his desire for men to pray without anger or quarrelling (2:8), for overseers to be not violent or quarrelsome (3:3), for deacons not to be double-tongued (3:8), for deaconesses not to be slanderers (3:11), and for younger widows not to become gossips or busy-bodies (5:13). He encouraged *material solidarity* by urging the church to support "true widows" in their old age (5:9–16) and the elders who ruled well (5:17). Finally, he encouraged *family loyalty* in his commitment to Hymenaeus and Alexander, and his desire to see them come back to the gospel, pointing out that he, too, was once a blasphemer (1:13, 20).

Leadership as Stewardship of the Gospel

Paul's main point in using the οἶκος metaphor in 1 Timothy was to emphasize that the Ephesian elders led from a stewardship. The parallels with Jesus' stewardship parables imply that Paul envisioned God as the κύριος over the house and the elders as mere οἰκονόμοι. While this stewardship implied authority, it was a *derived* authority from the true lord, Jesus. While it is important not to stretch the family metaphor farther than Paul intended with regard to leadership, it is significant that Paul portrays God as the

⁹³ Joseph H. Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family*, 78–79.

church's *paterfamilias* (and not the human leadership).⁹⁴ Hellerman notes that the elders were to be brothers first and leaders second.⁹⁵

Not only did Paul see the elders' authority to be a derived authority, with the οἶκος metaphor he also emphasized that this authority came with responsibility. Like stewards who would be called to account for their stewardship, the elders were responsible to watch their teaching and their behavior. Those leaders who led well would be honored for their service (3:13, 5:17–18) and would save themselves and their hearers (4:16), but those who wandered from their responsibility (either through doctrinal error or immorality) “shipwrecked their faith” (1:19) and should be rebuked publicly (5:20).

Conclusion

The household codes of 1 Timothy are of great importance to the intergenerational church. Since the 19th century, it has been common to read these codes as a second-century attempt to create an innocuous faith centered on good citizenship. This need not be the case. There are reasons to connect the household codes to mission and see them as pragmatic implications of the gospel for the house church on mission. Given Paul's tendency to reinterpret customs of his day according to the eschatological

⁹⁴ While Ignatius says to “follow the bishop as Jesus Christ followed the Father” in *Smyrn.* 8.1, this does not seem to be the position of Paul. Andrew Clarke notes that the Greek ἄρχων (*leader*) is only used of imperial and demonic leaders in Paul, never of church leaders. Instead, Paul prefers managerial titles, which fits the stewardship theme. Clarke sees a “brotherhood” emphasis in early Paul and then a movement toward Ignatius's view. But, part of Clarke's reasoning is the consensus view that the Pastorals are late and that they emphasize peaceful, institutional living. I have demonstrated that this is not necessarily the case. The ecclesiology of 1 Timothy fits comfortably alongside that of the undisputed Paulines. Clarke, 11–12, 75.

⁹⁵ Joseph Hellerman, *Embracing Shared Ministry: Power and Status in the Early Church and Why It Matters Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2013), 17.

dawning of the kingdom of God, it shouldn't be surprising that the codes evidence a tension between accommodation and subversion.

Oἶκος ecclesiology has several implications for the intergenerational church. First, the οἶκος metaphor implies kinship. This is significant for what I will argue in chapter 2 in that it justifies applying Bowen Family Systems Theory to the intergenerational church. When the New Testament writers talked about how the Spirit worked in and among the early Christian communities, they used family language to describe affection and kinship ties. It is not surprising, then, that churches are emotional systems similar to families.

Second, the οἶκος metaphor gives the church a basis for genuine Christian community. This is significant to what I will argue in chapter 3 in that it provides what Martin Buber calls a *central Thou*. Buber argues that it is only in living reciprocal relationships that genuine community can occur, but that communities form around *central Thous*.⁹⁶ To Paul, the gospel message is the church's inheritance and its *central Thou*. The gospel is the glue that holds the intergenerational family together, and it is only when members of the intergenerational church risk being acted upon in the context of the gospel that they can experience genuine community.

Finally, the οἶκος metaphor informs leadership of intergenerational churches. In 1 Timothy, Paul portrays the church as God's οἶκος and the elders as stewards of that οἶκος. In other words, the elders are not the *fathers* in the house; they are stewards of the gospel. This is significant to what I will argue in chapter 4—that authentic leadership is the best

⁹⁶ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Arnold Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), 94; Kenneth Kramer and Mechthild Gawlick, *Martin Buber's I and Thou: Practicing Living Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), 81.

model for leading an intergenerational church without disempowering either G1 or G2 adults. Just as Paul didn't want the older men to despise Timothy for his youth, established leaders need to move beyond parent/child relationships with emerging leaders to one of shared stewardship. At the same time, emerging leaders need to recognize the realities of age/power dynamics and "treat older men as fathers" (5:1).

Having established a biblical basis for the claim that intergenerational churches operate like intergenerational families, it is time to move to a social-psychological basis for this claim based on the work of Dr. Murray Bowen.

CHAPTER 2: BOWEN FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY

When leaders are asked to make changes in a church, it is often these very changes that bring them under fire.¹ Douglas Powe and Jasmine Smothers recount the experience of a G2 leader tasked with reaching young people in an aging congregation:

[A] young pastor was on staff at a church that wanted to reach out to the post-civil rights generations. The young pastor was charged with making it happen. The pastor was successful, and people started coming to church. One day the senior pastor dropped by the associate's office and told him some of the longtime members had started complaining to him that the young pastor was ruining the church. The associate was confused and asked what was meant by the comment. The senior pastor shared their response that "all these new folk are taking our parking spots and sitting in our seats. They should know better!" The young pastor had done exactly what they wanted, but was still accused of ruining the church.²

One can only imagine the frustration that this young leader must have experienced.

Charged with reaching young people, his success brought conflict and condemnation.

Conflicts like this are common in intergenerational churches. G1 adults want to reach young families, but reaching them often means unwelcomed changes to the church they love. Often the music style changes, the budget priorities shift, and parking spaces are lost. When anxiety ensues, the old guard G1 adults sometimes enlist the help of the pastor to "make things right" by returning to the way things were. Sometimes, they successfully leverage their power to get their way and G2 leaders are told to "wait their turn" for power and influence.³ Other times, the pastor sides with the young people and

¹ Mickie W. Crimone and Douglas Hester, "Across the Generations: The Training of Clergy and Congregations," in *Bringing Systems Thinking to Life: Expanding the Horizons for Bowen Family Systems Theory*, eds. Ona Cohn Bregman and Charles M. White (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2011), 203–04.

² Powe and Smothers, loc. 1093.

³ Menconi, 4–5.

the G1 adults are encouraged to “hand the baton” to the next generation. More often than not, these scenarios result in the “losing” generation leaving for another church.

In this chapter, I will apply Bowen Family Systems Theory to conflicts in intergenerational churches. In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that the writers of the New Testament considered the church a surrogate kinship group like a family. Both families and churches involve affection, unity, material solidarity, and loyalty,⁴ and the gospel functions as a “family inheritance” to be passed down from one generation to the next. Since churches are like families, Bowen Family Systems Theory can illuminate the nature of conflict in an intergenerational church and why G2 leaders often leave them. Applying Bowen Theory to the intergenerational church suggests that the conflicts between G1 and G2 are not *really* about surface issues like worship style, budget priorities, or stances on social issues. Rather, they stem from the anxiety caused by changes in the emotional system of the church. In order to retain G2 leaders, intergenerational churches need to balance differentiation and solidarity between G1 and G2 adults. A healthy intergenerational church will be characterized by differentiated, equal, and open relationships between G1 and G2 adults.⁵

Bowen Family Systems Theory

Bowen Family Systems Theory claims that families and organizations operate as systems rather than simply as groups of individuals. According to the theory, problems in organizations come from dysfunctions in *the system*, rather than in the *individuals* who

⁴ Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family*, 78–79.

⁵ Roberta M. Gilbert, *Extraordinary Leadership: Thinking Systems, Making a Difference* (Falls Church, VA: Leading Systems Press, 2006), 23.

make up the organization. The theory was first formed by Dr. Murray Bowen based on his work with families of patients with schizophrenia. It has since been expanded to describe the functioning of “normal” families, and even organizations beyond the nuclear family. The theory states that families are emotional systems in which members react to the anxieties of others, causing further reactions from other family members and creating an emotional feedback loop that reinforces roles within the system. For instance, a parent might react to an adolescent’s legal trouble by rescuing him. The adolescent then might take on the role of “person in need of rescuing” and further act out in helplessness. The parent might respond with further rescuing and taking on the role of “rescuer.” The parent and child then create a feedback loop of rescuer and rescued that can continue to reinforce itself over the life course. These roles can even extend to other emotional systems such as new families, workplaces, and churches. The adolescent may grow up to marry a “rescuer” or attend a church with an over-functioning pastor.

In his work with patients with schizophrenia in the 1950s, Dr. Murray Bowen noticed trends in the families of his patients. They all had intense, symbiotic relationships with their mothers that were reinforced by the behavior of other family members. Often they had disengaged fathers who complained about how much the mothers “babied” the patients, but who did little to stop the behavior. Bowen noticed that patients with schizophrenia had such close relationships with their mothers that he started conceptualizing them as a unit. Often their behaviors would play off of each other. The parent would worry about the patient’s symptoms and how “sick” they were, and the patient would respond to this anxiety by exaggerating the symptoms. These heightened symptoms would escalate anxiety in the parent, which in turn would further exaggerate

symptoms in the patient. Eventually, the systemic anxiety would get so high that the patient would experience psychosis.⁶

Bowen began working with the families as units in an in-patient care facility, and he noticed that the schizophrenic patient's symptoms would subside when one or both parents left the facility. He began to theorize that the patient with schizophrenia's symptoms were a result of displaced anxiety from the parents' relationship. He came up with a term to describe the functioning of the system: "undifferentiated ego mass." A family's undifferentiated ego mass is the family as a unit: the sum total of all of the roles and relationships within the family.⁷ Bowen began to see schizophrenia as a symptom of the family ego mass and not of an individual. He stopped referring to the patient as a "schizophrenic" and began talking about "families with schizophrenia."

The key concept in Bowen's theory is differentiation—the ability of an individual to think of himself or herself as outside of an emotional system. Bowen argued that human beings are not emotionally autonomous; they are part of systems that create emotional feedback loops. An individual's anxieties, thoughts, and behaviors affect those of other members in the system. These other members then respond and further affect all other members in the system.⁸ According to Bowen, a highly differentiated person is able to maintain an identity outside of the system. He or she may be comfortable in the family system, but will also be able to function outside of it. A poorly differentiated person is enmeshed in the family system and significantly affected by anxiety in other members of

⁶ Murray Bowen and Michael E. Kerr, *Family Evaluation: An Approach Based on Bowen Theory* (New York: Norton, 1988), 6–7.

⁷ Murray Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice* (New York: J. Aronson, 1978), 123.

⁸ Bowen and Kerr, *Family Evaluation*, 9.

the system.⁹ Bowen viewed schizophrenia as complete enmeshment in the system and loss of identity. Patients with schizophrenia are unable to conceive of themselves as individuals outside of the family emotional system.¹⁰

Bowen further recognized two competing forces in every family: the togetherness force and the individuality force. The togetherness force is that which presses an individual to think and act *as part* of the group, and the individuality force is that which presses the individual to think and act *apart* from the group.¹¹ Feelings of anxiety strengthen the togetherness force, so that families with high levels of anxiety have lower differentiated members.¹²

Bowen Family Systems Theory has since been demonstrated to be applicable to all families, not just those with schizophrenia. The theory has eight main tenets: differentiation of self, triangling, nuclear family emotional process, family projection process, multi-generational transmission process, sibling position, emotional cutoff, and societal emotional process.¹³

⁹ Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, 91–92.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 92.

¹¹ Michael Kerr and Murray Bowen, “Family Systems Theory and Therapy an Overview,” recorded 1979, with Michael Kerr, Center Georgetown Family, and Family Bowen Center for the Study of the, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., DVD.

¹² Daniel V. Papero, *Bowen Family Systems Theory* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1990), 43.

¹³ Bowen and Kerr, *Family Evaluation*, 13.

Differentiation of Self

Differentiation of self is the ability of an individual to maintain his or her “I” when a system is demanding “we.”¹⁴ Every family system has an undifferentiated ego mass with specific roles for each member. Family members are constantly pressured to act according to their role in the group identity (strong/weak, rescuer/rescued, rebellious/authoritarian, etc.).¹⁵ A well-differentiated person is able to maintain both his or her “I” (apart from the family emotional system) and his or her “we” (within the system). A poorly differentiated person either becomes completely enmeshed in the group identity (surrendering his or her “I”) or emotionally cuts off from the family and enmeshes in another system.¹⁶ Bowen and Kerr explain:

Family systems theory assumes the existence of an intrinsically rooted life force (differentiation or individuality) in every human being that propels the developing child to grow and be an emotionally separate person, an individual with the ability to think, feel, and act for himself. Also assumed is the existence of an intrinsically rooted life force (togetherness) that propels child and family to remain emotionally connected and to operate in reaction to one another. The togetherness force propels child and family to think, feel, and act as one. The result of these counterbalancing life forces is that no one achieves complete emotional separation from his family; the early attachment is never resolved.¹⁷

Bowen developed a scale of differentiation ranging from 0 (poorly differentiated) to 100 (highly differentiated). Both 0 and 100 are hypothetical scores and most people fall below 50 on the scale.¹⁸ People scoring between 0 to 25 on the differentiation scale

¹⁴ Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: Guilford Press, 1985), 27.

¹⁵ Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, 123.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹⁷ Bowen and Kerr, *Family Evaluation*, 95.

¹⁸ Roberta M. Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory* (Falls Church, VA: Leading Systems Press, 2006), 30.

operate more on feelings than on facts and spend a good deal of their energy finding and maintaining relationships. The primary diagnostic criterion of this range of differentiation is “the inability to differentiate between thoughts and feelings.”¹⁹ In other words, they are so enmeshed in their emotional system that they cannot imagine life outside of it. People scoring between 25 and 50 are not impaired by their lack of differentiation, but they have a poor sense of self. They look to others to define who they are and they adapt quickly to new emotional systems.²⁰ People scoring between 50 and 75 have a greater grasp of the distinction between thought and feelings. They are able to make decisions based on principles, but occasionally go with their feelings over what they know is right.²¹ Very few people score between 75 and 100, with over 95 being hypothetical. A highly differentiated person is confident in his or her beliefs without being dogmatic, and is able to hear others out without overreacting emotionally.²²

Levels of differentiation are not static. Bowen distinguished between *basic* and *functional* differentiation, basic differentiation being that which is not based on a given relationship process and functional differentiation referring to their level of enmeshment in any given emotional system. Thus, a person with a basic level of differentiation of 35 may end up in an unusually enmeshing relationship in which they function at a differentiation of 15. This same person may have less emotional ties to their workplace and function at a differentiation of 35 when at work. People of higher levels of basic

¹⁹ Bowen and Kerr, *Family Evaluation*, 101.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 102.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 106.

²² *Ibid.*, 106–07.

differentiation tend to have less discrepancy between their basic and functional differentiation.²³

Triangling

Along with differentiation of the self, triangling is one of the most important concepts in Bowen Theory. It is the process of relieving anxiety by bringing a third person into a dyad.²⁴ Bowen argued that dyads are comfortable as long as anxiety levels are low. When tension rises between two people they will always look for a third person to bring into the relationship for stability.²⁵ For instance, when a husband and wife are under stress in their relationship, they may try to triangle in a child to relieve the anxiety between them. This could look like the couple “teaming up” against a rebellious child, or one parent seeking an ally in a child in his or her conflict with the spouse. Families with more than one child become systems of interlocking emotional triangles.²⁶

In every emotional triangle, two people are in the “inside” and one person is on the “outside.” It’s always two against one. In times of low stress, the inside positions of the triangle are more desirable than the outside position. For instance, in times of low stress parents might enmesh with each other in unusual intimacy while excluding a child.

Bowen and Kerr describe what this could look like in a family:

A husband, when on the outside (in fact or fantasy) of the relationship between his wife and oldest daughter, becomes sullen. The wife predictably reacts to his sullenness by focusing more on him and attempting to cheer him up. The daughter, in reaction to being on the outside between her two parents, becomes

²³ Ibid., 98–99.

²⁴ Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, 174–75.

²⁵ Ibid., 425; Papero, 49.

²⁶ Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, 174.

overly solicitous toward her father. The mother, reacting to being on the outside between her husband and daughter, criticizes the daughter's physical appearance. The daughter responds defensively, and she and her mother engage in a long discussion to resolve differences. The system is never still. So in calm periods, the insiders are trying to preserve what they have and the outsiders are trying to break in.²⁷

However, in periods of high stress, the *outside* position of the triangle is more desirable and the insiders will try to escape. For instance, Bowen and Kerr describe how parents can try to claim the outside position of a triangle with a rebellious child:

A mother, caught in intense conflict with her son, may actively recruit the father to "deal" with the son. When he attempts to do so, conflict erupts between father and son and the mother withdraws. The son may counter this move by trying to precipitate conflict between his parents. He may plead with mother to get the "harsh" father off his back. When the anxiety subsides, mother and son again get close and father is excluded from their togetherness.²⁸

Nuclear Family Emotional Process

Emotional systems within a nuclear family create predictable roles and patterns of behavior within the family. Some members of the family learn to over-function, and the other members under-function in response. Over time, each family member becomes comfortable in the role that they have created. The original role that a child plays in the triangle with his or her parents forms the role that he or she will play for the rest of his or her life.²⁹ As long as anxiety levels in the family are low, each member of the family can function well. But when anxiety rises, people automatically retreat into the role that they

²⁷ Bowen and Kerr, *Family Evaluation*, 136.

²⁸ Ibid., 138.

²⁹ Papero, 34.

have learned to play.³⁰ Poorly differentiated people are unable to function outside of their role in the nuclear family emotional process.³¹

Family Projection Process

According to what Bowen called “family projection process,” parents project their anxieties on to their children and so levels of differentiation are passed down from one generation to another.³² Two highly differentiated parents usually end up having highly differentiated children. Two poorly differentiated parents may relieve their relationship anxiety by triangling in a child and creating a system of enmeshment. Bowen and Kerr describe how differentiation and enmeshment can be projected from one generation to the next:

[T]he projection process revolves around maternal instinct, and the way anxiety permits it to function during reproduction and the infancy of the child. The father usually plays a support role to the projection process. He is sensitive to the mother’s anxiety, and he tends to support her view and help her implement her anxious efforts at mothering. The process begins with anxiety in the mother. The child responds anxiously to mother, which she misperceives as a problem in the child. The anxious parental effort goes into sympathetic, solicitous, overprotective energy, which is directed more by the mother’s anxiety than the reality needs of the child. It establishes a pattern of infantilizing the child, who gradually becomes more impaired and more demanding. Once the process has started, it can be motivated either by anxiety in the mother, or anxiety in the child. In the average situation, there may be symptomatic episodes at stressful periods during childhood which gradually increase to major symptoms during or after adolescence; intense emotional fusion between mother and child may exist in which the mother-child relationship remains in positive, symptom-free equilibrium until the adolescent period, when the child attempts to function on his own. At that point, the child’s relationship with the mother, or with both parents, can become negative and the child develops severe symptoms. The more intense forms of the mother-child fusion may remain relatively asymptomatic until young

³⁰ Ibid., 42.

³¹ Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, 425.

³² Ibid.

adulthood and the child can collapse in psychosis when he attempts to function away from the parents.³³

Since parents interact with each of their children differently, not all of their children will be of the same level of differentiation. A couple who each scores a 35 on the differentiation scale may form an unusually enmeshing relationship that gives them a functional differentiation of 25 when they are together. If they pour their anxiety into an oldest child, the child may thus develop a basic differentiation level of 25. Other siblings may be ignored because of the intensity of the relationship between their parents and the oldest child, allowing them to distance themselves from the ego mass. They may each develop a basic differentiation level of 45.³⁴

Multi-Generational Transmission Process

Bowen argued that the family projection process continued from generation to generation, creating less and less differentiated people over time (in at least one child per generation). He called this process multi-generational transmission process and argued that it usually took about 8 to 10 generations for schizophrenia to appear in a poorly differentiated family.³⁵ Bowen claimed that people tend to marry a similarly differentiated person who plays a complementary role to theirs in their family of origin (for instance, a son who learned to be helpless in his family of origin might marry a high-achieving “rescuer” and replicate emotional system of his family of origin). As long as anxiety levels remain low, these families function normally. But when anxiety increases,

³³ Ibid., 381.

³⁴ Bowen and Kerr, *Family Evaluation*, 95.

³⁵ Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, 384.

people revert to the roles they learned in their family of origin.³⁶ The process is more intense in poorly differentiated couples.³⁷ Bowen describes how family lines descend in differentiation through the most poorly differentiated child:

The family projection process continues through multiple generations. In any nuclear family, there is one child who is the primary object of the family projection process. This child emerges with a lower level of differentiation than the parents and does less well in life. Other children, who are minimally involved with the parents, emerge with about the same level of differentiation as the parents. Those who grow up relatively outside the family emotional process develop better levels of differentiation than the parents. If we follow the most impaired child through successive generations, we will see one line of descent producing individuals with lower and lower levels of differentiation. The process may go rapidly a few generations, remain static for a generation or so, and then speed up again.³⁸

Sibling Position

While not an original part of Bowen Theory, birth order was added after Walter Toman published his work on sibling position. Families differ in which child is triangled in most significantly, but often it is the oldest child, the youngest child, or the oldest/youngest of a particular gender. Children who are triangled in less significantly will better differentiate from their families of origin.³⁹

Emotional Cut-off

Bowen used the phrases “emotional cut-off” and “pseudo-differentiation” to describe how poorly differentiated people can appear to have little involvement in the emotional system of their family of origin. When poorly differentiated people become

³⁶ Papero, 51.

³⁷ Bowen and Kerr, *Family Evaluation*, 224.

³⁸ Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, 384.

³⁹ Bowen and Kerr, *Family Evaluation*, 224.

adults, they often feel the need to “get out” of their family’s emotional system and will cut themselves off or move away. To Bowen, this was not a sign of genuine differentiation, but of pseudo-differentiation. The person who has cut himself or herself off from his or her family of origin will not automatically go on to live a healthy and productive life. He or she is more likely to enmesh into another relationship with a poorly differentiated person and create a new emotional system.⁴⁰ Bowen writes:

The person who runs away from his family of origin is as emotionally dependent as the one who never leaves home. They both need emotional closeness, but they are allergic to it. The one who remains on the scene and handles the attachment by intrapsychic mechanisms tends to have some degree of supportive contact with the parents, to have a less intense over-all process, and to develop more internalized symptoms under stress, such as physical illness and depression. An exaggerated version of this is the severely impaired person who can collapse into psychosis, isolating himself intrapsychically while living with the parents. The one who runs away geographically is more inclined to impulsive behavior. He tends to see the problem as being in the parents and running away as a method of gaining independence from the parents. The more intense the cutoff, the more he is vulnerable to duplicating the pattern with the parents with the first available other person. He can get into an impulsive marriage. When problems develop in the marriage, he tends also to run away from that. He can continue through multiple marriages, and finally resort to more temporary living together relationships. Exaggerated versions of this occur in relationship nomads, vagabonds, and hermits who either have superficial relationships or give up and live alone.⁴¹

Therefore, emotional and physical distance between people and their families of origin are not necessarily signs of differentiation. Sometimes people are so emotionally enmeshed in their families of origin that they have to cut themselves off to manage their anxiety. Emotional cut-off is often a sign of poor differentiation and usually leads to enmeshing in a new emotional system.⁴²

⁴⁰ Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, 382.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 383.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 535–36.

Societal Emotional Process

The eighth and final tenet of Bowen Theory is society emotional process (originally called “societal regression”). The multi-generational transmission process affects society as a whole so that society becomes more or less differentiated from generation to generation. Bowen saw the societal decline in the United States after World War II as a sign of a decline in differentiation in society.⁴³

Bowen Theory and Churches

Bowen Family Systems Theory applies to more than just families with schizophrenia; it also applies to “normal” families and also to organizations like churches. While churches are not families, they are like families in that they are both emotional systems.⁴⁴ Interpersonal relationships within organizations feature triangling,⁴⁵ role projection,⁴⁶ multi-generational transmission,⁴⁷ and cutoff,⁴⁸ and the effects of these

⁴³ Ibid., 439–40.

⁴⁴ Friedman, 195; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Leadership*, 19.

⁴⁵ Kathleen B. Kerr, “An Overview of Bowen Theory and Organizations,” in *Understanding Organizations: Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, eds. Ruth Riley Sagar and Kathleen Klaus Wiseman (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Family Center, 1982), 8.

⁴⁶ Bonnie Sobel, “Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory to Organizational Systems,” in *Understanding Organizations: Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, eds. Ruth Riley Sagar and Kathleen Klaus Wiseman (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Family Center, 1982), 13; Gilbert, *Extraordinary Leadership*, 45; Kerr, “An Overview of Bowen Theory and Organizations,” 4–5.

⁴⁷ Crimone and Hester, 206–07.

⁴⁸ Gilbert, *Extraordinary Leadership*, 8–9.

processes are mitigated by differentiation.⁴⁹ People bring the role that they learned in their family of origin into the organization.⁵⁰

Bowen Theory can be applied to any organization; the only necessary condition for an emotional system is people spending time together.⁵¹ The more emotional involvement there is in a church, the more it will function like family.⁵²

Emotional processes are more evident in an organization in times of high anxiety. It is easier for organizations to function well in times of low anxiety, and some organizations appear to be highly functioning simply because they have not experienced anxiety.⁵³ But when there is anxiety in the system, people will revert to their learned roles and try to alleviate anxiety through triangling. Kathleen Kerr illustrates what triangling and projection can look like in an organization:

The concept of the family projection process is the same triangling process, but specifically between parents and children. Parents focus their anxiety on their children rather than deal with the anxiety in their own relationship. In an organization, a problem between two members of the board of directors can triangle and retriangle down the hierarchy so that the problem eventually seems to reside in the janitor. And, indeed, the janitor can be fired and the organization will believe it has solved the problem. Of course, this is an extreme example, but the process operates continuously at all levels in the organization. The problem is really the degree of anxiety and the emotionally reactive ways of dealing with it. It is not the person or the issue being focused on.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Patricia H. Meyer, "Principles for Personal Definition in a Work System," in *Understanding Organizations: Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, eds. Ruth Riley Sagar and Kathleen Klaus Wiseman (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Family Center, 1982), 23.

⁵⁰ Sobel, 13.

⁵¹ Gilbert, *Extraordinary Leadership*, 20; Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory*, 21–22.

⁵² Friedman, 197; Sobel, 9.

⁵³ Sobel, 11.

⁵⁴ Kerr, "An Overview of Bowen Theory and Organizations," 7.

The application to intergenerational churches is clear. They can function well as long as there is no anxiety in the system and people play their learned roles. When the younger generation operates according to the way things have always been done, the church will experience little anxiety. But when things change (such as more resources or pastoral time being devoted to young people), anxiety in the system increases and symptoms start to manifest.

Michael Kerr compares this process of escalating anxiety in a system to titrating an acid and a base. In titration, a critical point is hit in which a precipitate forms and the mixture clouds. In the same way, when anxiety in an organization hits a certain point, people stop thinking rationally and revert back to emotional roles. Kerr writes:

An understanding of the significance of the role of anxiety in emotional systems is necessary for comprehending the operation of emotional systems. Anxiety is a phenomenon to be looked for, prepared for, and hopefully dealt with effectively. When anxiety increases in an emotional system, the functioning of the system's members is increasingly determined by the dictates of the emotional system. This is true in a family, in a work situation, or in a social system. A person may be able to maintain objectivity about relationships when anxiety is low, but predictably will lose that objectivity and perspective when the anxiety reaches a point that could be called a "critical point." We all have our "critical points." Failing to recognize them is a significant handicap.

It is analogous to titrating an acid and base. As the acid is added, drop by drop, slowly, the solution remains clear until the moment the "precipitation point" is reached. At that point, a salt precipitates and the solution becomes cloudy. Each person has a "precipitation point" in his own family system. Only so many units of anxiety can be added before thinking becomes so cloudy you cannot remember what clear thinking was like!⁵⁵

Triangling is the normal response to anxiety in a system. So, in Powe and Smothers' example above of the young pastor trying to reach the post-civil rights

⁵⁵ Michael E. Kerr, "Application of Family Systems Theory to a Work System," in *Understanding Organizations: Applications of Bowen Family Systems Theory*, eds. Ruth Riley Sagar and Kathleen Klaus Wiseman (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Family Center, 1982), 121–22.

generation, the new young people in the church added anxiety to the system. Eventually, stress from change became too much for the older people and they triangled in the senior pastor to relieve their anxiety, blaming the young associate for their problems with the young people. They made the issue “parking spaces” when it was really “change.”

Bowen Family Systems Theory can explain many of the emotional systems of a church. Edwin Friedman specializes in applying Bowen Theory to churches and synagogues. He determined that the theory applies in that: (1) churches strive for emotional homeostasis, (2) *emotional processes* are more significant to disruptions in homeostasis than the *content* of these disruptions is, (3) differentiation and the “non-anxious presence” are keys to organizational health, (4) church members or clergy will over-function as part of the emotional system, (5) church members triangle to manage their anxiety, and (6) though there may be one symptom bearer in an unhealthy system, the problem is the system, not the symptom-bearer.⁵⁶

Using Friedman’s criteria, Bowen Theory can be applied to the situation described by Powe and Smothers above. The older members of the congregation were in a homeostatic relationship with the pastor that was disrupted when the young leader started reaching young people. This disruption of homeostasis caused anxiety in the older congregation members and created tension between them and the young leader, who was identified as the source of the anxiety. The older members then triangled the pastor into their relationship with the young leader by getting him to take their side against him, much like a child might triangle in mom or dad against a rival sibling. The pastor then assumed the role of the parent and told the young leader to cease and desist.

⁵⁶ Friedman, 202.

The problem in this scenario is that the young leader now finds himself disempowered and on the “outside” position of the triangle. He will respond either by trying to triangle the pastor against the older members, triangling in another faction against both groups, or cutting himself off from the system and enmeshing with another one (leaving to lead another church). This is one of the major reasons why G2 leaders leave intergenerational churches—they feel disempowered (because they are on the outside of the emotional triangle).

Churches that are becoming intergenerational are especially prone to anxiety in the system since they are undergoing so much change. As long as a church remains generationally homogeneous or G2 adults are content at doing things like they’ve always been done, anxiety will be manageable. But when changes start being made, anxiety will increase and symptoms will manifest. This is the same thing that goes on in intergenerational families when adult children begin to have children of their own. When children have children of their own, they find themselves in two systems competing for their loyalty—their family of origin and their new nuclear family. G2 leaders in an intergenerational church experience that same tension—competing loyalty to old ways and new ideas. To determine how best to navigate anxiety created by this tension, it is necessary to see how it is best handled in families between parents and their adult children.

Parents and Their Adult Children

Having children significantly changes the nature of people’s relationship with their parents. Finding themselves in a new emotional system with spouse and child, their relationship to their parents becomes less immediate. Often, this relationship goes from

authoritarian to more reciprocal. Power roles often appear to reverse near the end of life, when people become too sick or weak to take care of themselves and children become caregivers and decision-makers. Understanding these changes within the intergenerational family system over the life course is a key to maintaining healthy relationships between G1 and G2 adults in an intergenerational church.

As people become adults, they form an identity by differentiating themselves from their parents.⁵⁷ Identity formation is a lifelong process of creating a role that evokes a response from the environment that either reinforces or challenges that role.⁵⁸ When confronting environmental feedback (including responses from family, friends, and churches), people either *assimilate* the data by imposing their perceived identity on it, or they *accommodate* it by reinterpreting their identity according to the feedback.⁵⁹ For instance, a person who perceives himself to be “successful” who then fails will either reinterpret the failure as not really a failure or redefine himself as not really that successful. Experience and identity inform each other as people fluctuate between interpreting their experience according to their identity and altering their identity according to their experience.

Having children of one’s own is perhaps the most significant step in adult identity formation and differentiation from one’s parents.⁶⁰ When people have children of their

⁵⁷ Identity is “the integration of the physical characteristics, abilities, motives, goals, attitudes, values, and social roles that the individual attributes over time as belonging to the self.” Susan Krauss Whitbourne and Comilda S. Weinstock, *Adult Development*, 2nd ed. (New York: Praeger, 1986), 179.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 20–21.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁶⁰ Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy and Geraldine M. Spark, *Invisible Loyalties: Reciprocity in Intergenerational Family Therapy* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1984), 107; Seymour Wapner and Jack Demick, “Adult Development: The Holistic, Developmental, and Systems-Oriented Perspective,” in

own, they redefine themselves as parents instead of as children. Alice Rossi illustrates the significance of parenthood to identity by recounting a story about a turbulent flight she took with a basketball team of young men in their 20s. During an exceptionally frightening moment, Rossi heard some of the young men cry out “Mama!” Rossi had her own thoughts of mortality, but hers went to her children at home who would grow up without a mother. At what point, she wondered, do we stop thinking of ourselves as a child and start thinking of ourselves as a parent?⁶¹ When people have children, they can no longer think of just themselves. They are also responsible for the well-being of their children. They enter a new emotional system in which they play a different role than before.⁶²

Despite these changes, having children does not create a clean break with one’s family of origin.⁶³ Not only do adult children differentiate themselves from their parents as they form their identity, but they also maintain solidarity with them through family loyalty obligations. Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy sees mutual indebtedness as the glue that holds intergenerational families together forever.⁶⁴ Groups intrinsically have feelings of superiority to other groups and in-group loyalty expectations, and being a part of a family implies family loyalty.⁶⁵ In other words, being a part of a family comes with obligations

Handbook of Adult Development, eds. Jack Demick and Carrie Andreoletti (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum, 2003), 70–71; Whitbourne and Weinstock, 336–37.

⁶¹ Rossi and Rossi, 3–4.

⁶² Linda Smolak, *Adult Development* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993), 159.

⁶³ Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark, 216.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

to other family members. These obligations are not always 100% reciprocal. Power imbalances may allow for asymmetric and heteromorphic reciprocity.⁶⁶ For instance, parents offer food and protection for their young children without expecting the same in return. Affection from their children and the joy of being parents are ways parents benefit from the relationship. However, the nature of this reciprocity changes as the family ages. When the parents are older, they may expect their children to care for them. This does not necessarily imply role reversal, but rather the fulfillment of filial obligations.⁶⁷ The parent always remains the parent.⁶⁸

Having children of one's own creates a tension between loyalty to one's family of origin and loyalty to the new family system, and navigating this tension is a key to satisfying intergenerational family relationships.⁶⁹ Intergenerational tensions are often a perceived justice issue—the parents feel that they have given much and that their adult children are not fulfilling relationship expectations.⁷⁰ In this case, fulfilling parental expectations is a form of “repayment” in the scales of reciprocity.⁷¹ On the other hand, marriage conflicts often come from inappropriate loyalty to one's family of origin over

⁶⁶ Homeomorphic reciprocity is “tat for tat” reciprocity in which all parties are offering exactly the same thing. Heteromorphic reciprocity is “tit for tat” reciprocity in which parties are offering different but equal things. Ibid., 58.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 224.

⁶⁸ Gloria S. Murphy, Annette Merkur Schwartz, and Phyllis Lieber, *Grown-up Children, Grown-up Parents: Opening the Door to Healthy Relationships between Parents and Adult Children* (Secaucus, NJ: Carol, 1994), 13–14.

⁶⁹ Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark, 47; Bertram J. Cohler, “The Experience of Ambivalence within the Family: Young Adults ‘Coming out’ Gay or Lesbian to Their Parents,” in *Intergenerational Ambivalences: New Perspectives on Parent-Child Relations in Later Life*, eds. Karl A. Pillemer and Kurt Lüscher (Boston: Elsevier/JAI, 2004), 260.

⁷⁰ Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark, 66–67.

⁷¹ Ibid., 354.

the nuclear family.⁷² For instance, someone raised in Catholic school may decide with his wife to send their children to public school. His parents may feel betrayed by this, as if the son is not appropriately paying them back for all of the things they did for him. However, if the son allows his parents to pressure him into sending his kids to Catholic school (against his wife's wishes), his wife may become upset based on his inappropriate loyalty to his family of origin over his nuclear family.

It can be difficult for parents to adapt to changes in their relationship with their adult children. Even though parents hope their children will become autonomous,⁷³ they continue to parent them into their old age.⁷⁴ Every major change in the family (birth, death, marriage) upsets the system and changes the nature of the relationship,⁷⁵ but it is hard for parents to let go of years of relating to their children as kids.⁷⁶ They can become frustrated if their children do not reach major milestones like financial independence, marriage, or parenthood.⁷⁷ They can also take their children's failures personally as a reflection on their ability as a parent.⁷⁸ But parenting looks different when one's children are adults. Specifically, functional solidarity changes over time. Children are dependent

⁷² Ibid., 103–04.

⁷³ Maureen E. Kenny and Catherine E. Barton, "Attachment Theory and Research: Contributions for Understanding Late Adolescent and Young Adult Development," in *Handbook of Adult Development*, eds. Jack Demick and Carrie Andreoletti (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum, 2003), 374.

⁷⁴ Smolak, 437.

⁷⁵ Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark, 4.

⁷⁶ Susan Newman, *Nobody's Baby Now: Reinventing Your Adult Relationship with Your Mother and Father* (New York: Walker & Company, 2003), 26.

⁷⁷ Kira S. Birditt et al., "Tensions in the Parent and Adult Child Relationship: Links to Solidarity and Ambivalence," *Psychology and Aging* 24, no. 2 (2009): 289.

⁷⁸ Jane Adams, *When Our Grown Kids Disappoint Us: Letting Go of Their Problems, Loving Them Anyway, and Getting on with Our Lives* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 8–9.

upon their parents until they reach adulthood, at which point the relationship becomes more reciprocal.⁷⁹ When parents over-function with their adult children, they can create under-functioning and even dependency in their adult children.⁸⁰ Parents who feel that they give more than they receive feel even more ambivalent about the relationship.⁸¹

Young adults also have difficulty with the change in relationship. They want freedom from their parents, but often they also want continued financial assistance.⁸² Such assistance can lead to feelings of being “controlled” by their parents,⁸³ as if there are strings attached. Poorer relationship quality intensifies these feelings.⁸⁴

Reciprocity is a key to maintaining a satisfying relationship between parents and their adult children. When parents and their adult children can relate to each other as peers, their relationship is happier.⁸⁵ This doesn’t mean that everything has to be equal. Parents and their adult children help each other in different ways, with parents most likely to offer financial help, and children most likely to offer care or emotional

⁷⁹ Rossi and Rossi, 224.

⁸⁰ Murphy, Schwartz, and Lieber, 11.

⁸¹ Karl A. Pillemer, “Can’t Live with ‘Em, Can’t Live without ‘Em: Older Mothers’ Ambivalence toward Their Adult Children,” in *Intergenerational Ambivalences: New Perspectives on Parent-Child Relations in Later Life*, eds. Karl A. Pillemer and Kurt Lüscher (Boston: Elsevier/JAI, 2004), 129.

⁸² Kurt Lüscher, “Conceptualizing and Uncovering Intergenerational Ambivalence,” in *Intergenerational Ambivalences: New Perspectives on Parent-Child Relations in Later Life*, eds. Karl A. Pillemer and Kurt Lüscher (Boston: Elsevier/JAI, 2004), 46–47.

⁸³ Newman, *Nobody’s Baby Now: Reinventing Your Adult Relationship with Your Mother and Father*, 136–37.

⁸⁴ Karen L. Fingerman et al., “Help with ‘Strings Attached’: Offspring Perceptions That Middle-Aged Parents Offer Conflicted Support,” *Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences* 68, no. 6 (2013): 907.

⁸⁵ Newman, ix–x.

support.⁸⁶ As long as both parties feel that they are giving and receiving, the relationship can be considered reciprocal.

In summary, the nature of intergenerational family relationships changes over the life course. When children are young, power imbalances between parent and child allow for less-than-reciprocal relationships. Parents provide food and protection for their children, and children respond with affection and loyalty. When adult children marry and have children of their own, however, they typically provide for themselves and have loyalties to their new nuclear family. While this does not absolve them from loyalty to their family of origin, it changes the nature of their relationship with their parents, making it more reciprocal. Adult children experience both differentiation from and solidarity with their family of origin. Over- or under-functioning on the part of parents or their adult children can introduce problems in the relationship.

Intergenerational Families and Intergenerational Churches

Considering that churches are emotional systems like families, and that intergenerational families experience tension between differentiation and solidarity, we can expect intergenerational churches to experience this same tension in the relationships between G1 and G2 adults. In fact, intergenerational churches *do* experience this same tension between differentiation and solidarity. While G1 and G2 adults in intergenerational families conflict over things like parenting and finances, in churches they conflict over things like worship style and the budget. G2 adults wrestle with differentiation from and solidarity with the G1 adults in the congregation. Just as

⁸⁶ Rossi and Rossi, 396.

reciprocity is a key to maintaining healthy solidarity in an intergenerational family, intergenerational churches have to balance this kind of power sharing between G1 and G2 adults.

Some of the more common areas of disagreement between G1 and G2 adults in intergenerational churches include music,⁸⁷ social issues,⁸⁸ the budget,⁸⁹ and building projects.⁹⁰ Most of the literature on intergenerational churches approaches these power struggles at a surface level (not accounting for the importance of emotional systems and the significance of disruptions to homeostasis) and thus offers surface solutions that encourage triangling. For example, Hammett and Pierce write:

One reason those over sixty leave churches that suddenly retool to reach those under forty is that a small group of leaders, usually staff and perhaps a few lay leaders, decide to radically reformat the worship service. They seem to think an announcement about this change is all that is needed.

A concrete plan of action that includes good communication can make a huge difference. The pastor can preach a series of sermons on the patriarchs about passing the faith from one generation to another, including statistics on how churchgoers and active Christianity are declining in the United States. Such impassioned sermons will leave those over sixty wanting to know what they can do to reach those under forty.⁹¹

In this example, Hammett and Pierce identify the problem as different generations having different preferences and the solution as the pastor choosing whom the church is going to “reach.” In Bowen Theory terms, the pastor has been triangled into a conflict between those over sixty and those under forty and has sided with those under forty. Contrary to

⁸⁷ Carroll and Roof, 201.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 11.

⁸⁹ Hammett and Pierce, 141.

⁹⁰ Carroll and Roof, 159.

⁹¹ Hammett and Pierce, 143.

Hammett and Pierce's predicted outcome, an impassioned sermon on the importance of "passing on the faith" will likely confirm to those over sixty that they are on the outside position of the emotional triangle ("your time has passed and it's time to focus on young people"), and it will increase their anxiety. They will likely respond by trying to demonize the young people (and triangle the pastor back to their side) or leave to find another congregation in which they can be on the inside (cut-off).

Conflicts between generations over things like music and the budget are often merely symptoms of deeper power conflicts. According to Bowen Theory, it isn't the *specific changes* that cause problems, but the shift in homeostasis that the changes represent.⁹² Changes raise questions about loyalty, power, and who gets to make the decisions.⁹³ They surface issues of differentiation and solidarity. In Hammett and Pierce's example, the sudden change to the worship style represented a change in the emotional system: the young people were now on the inside with the pastor and the older people were on the outside.

In Hammett and Pierce's example, the younger people "won," but it can just as easily go the other way. Often leaders will be criticized for solving problems when the solution disrupts emotional homeostasis.⁹⁴ Powe and Smothers give an example:

A pastor who wishes to remain anonymous told me this story about a Bible study aimed at the hip-hop generation. The pastor talked about successfully starting a Bible study that engaged younger individuals. Those responsible for starting the Bible study were even successful at getting these young adults to come to the church. Sadly, when the hip-hop generation started showing up, the drama started. Some of the more seasoned members started complaining about those kind of folk coming into the church. They "strongly encouraged" the pastor to stop the study.

⁹² Friedman, 202-03; Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory*, 51.

⁹³ Carroll and Roof, 11; Menconi, 4-5.

⁹⁴ Crimone and Hester, 203-04.

The pastor tried to reason with the seasoned members but finally gave in and stopped the study. This is not where the story ends.

The pastor happened to stop by the sanctuary one evening and saw one of the young men in the back watching choir practice. The pastor greeted the young man and asked how things were going. The young man asked the pastor, “Why don’t we have Bible study anymore?” The young man talked about how he looked forward to it. The pastor struggled to find words that would be honest and not hurtful. Finally ended up saying something like not everyone was committed to the success of the study. It was the last time the young man came to the church! The church just wrecked itself!⁹⁵

This example is similar to the one from Hammett and Pierce, only in this one the pastor was successfully triangled by the older generation and the younger generation found itself on the outside. Further, in Powe and Smothers’ example, no changes to the format of Sunday morning worship service were made. The mere presence of “those kind of folk” in the church disrupted homeostasis and introduced anxiety into the system.

The anxiety caused when a church becomes intergenerational is similar to the anxiety caused in intergenerational families when G2 adults differentiate from their families of origin. G2 adults experience both differentiation from and solidarity with G1 adults in the congregation. Differences of opinion over things like worship style and budget priorities reflect the G2 adults’ desire to make their faith their own. However, this differentiation raises questions of loyalty in the minds of the G1 adults. Statements like “That’s not how we’ve always done it” in church are similar to statements like “That’s not how I raised you” in the family.

Unfortunately, power struggles often end with the pastor being triangled in to focus on the issues. Instead of the two generations working through the tension between differentiation and solidarity, the pastor is forced to decide a winner and a loser. More

⁹⁵ Powe and Smothers, loc. 717.

often than not, the disempowered loser will leave the church. But intergenerational conflicts are deeper than the surface issues. Instead of being triangled into intergenerational conflicts, pastors need to encourage their congregations to work out their problems. By emphasizing reciprocity, pastors can ensure that no generation feels disempowered.

Conclusions

Bowen Family Systems Theory explains the nature of conflicts in an intergenerational church and offers a theoretical framework for healthier relationships. According to Bowen Theory, healthy relationships are separate, equal, and open.⁹⁶ In a healthy relationship, members of a group are able to differentiate themselves from the group while maintaining solidarity with it. They are able to treat each other as equals without feeling the need to over- or under-function. Ironically, it is only in relationships with a high level of individuality that there can also be healthy group functioning under stress.⁹⁷ Bowen Theory suggests two keys to maintaining healthy relationships in an intergenerational church: (1) leading from a place of differentiation, and (2) reciprocal relationships between G1 and G2 adults.

Leading from a Place of Differentiation

The biggest mistake that a leader in an intergenerational church can make is to allow himself or herself to be triangled into a conflict. Priscilla Friesen claims that

⁹⁶ Gilbert, *Extraordinary Leadership*, 23.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 81; Peter L. Steinke, *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1996), 85–86.

modelling differentiation of self is one of the most important roles of the leader.⁹⁸ When one group in the church comes to a leader with a grievance against another group, the leader needs the wisdom to discern that “the problem” is rarely the problem. More likely, the problem is the disruption of the emotional system. The leader needs to be able to step outside of the emotional system and encourage dialogue between feuding parties without taking sides.⁹⁹

In my fictional example of Harbor Community Church, there are several interlocking triangles in the emotional system. The primary triangles are between the younger people of the contemporary service, the older people of the traditional service, and all of the people (Pastor Dan, Pastor Kurt, and the elders) whom they triangle in to settle conflicts between them. In this scenario, the elders have been labeled as “the problem” for frustrating Pastor Dan’s goals of technological upgrades for the contemporary service, but the underlying problem is a conflict between the two generations about how money should be spent. Instead of triangling leadership in to create winners and losers, G1 and G2 adults need to create reciprocal relationships with open communication.

⁹⁸ Priscilla J. Friesen and Cheryl B. Lester, “A Systems View of the Training Program at the Bowen Center: Guiding Principles (1990–2003),” in *Bringing Systems Thinking to Life: Expanding the Horizons for Bowen Family Systems Theory*, eds. Ona Cohn Bregman and Charles M. White (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2011), 96.

⁹⁹ Randall T. Frost, “Thinking Systems in Pastoral Training,” in *Bringing Systems Thinking to Life: Expanding the Horizons for Bowen Family Systems Theory*, eds. Ona Cohn Bregman and Charles M. White (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2011), 193.

Reciprocal Relationships between G1 and G2 Adults

Once the church leaders learn how to avoid being triangled into intergenerational conflicts, G1 and G2 adults need to learn how to relate to one another with reciprocity. One of the biggest challenges to reciprocity is that G1 and G2 adults are not in the same stage of life to offer *homeomorphic* reciprocity.¹⁰⁰ G1 adults may have more money and power to contribute to the church, whereas G2 adults may offer more energy and numerical growth. For example, in the fictional example of Harbor Community Church, the older congregation members contribute the most money and hold most of the positions of power, but the contemporary service is experiencing the most growth. Older members benefit from this growth (feelings of satisfaction that they are leaving a legacy), but the benefit is not homeomorphic to what they are contributing. Further, the farther that the contemporary service drifts from the style of the traditional service, the less that the older congregation members will feel solidarity with the younger ones and the less that they will feel that they are “getting” from the relationship. Eventually they will question why they are giving so much.

Instead, reciprocal relationships between G1 and G2 adults need to be encouraged. For this to happen, there needs to be meaningful contact between G1 and G2 adults. This is hard when birth cohorts are segregated from one another. Open communication and reciprocity also need to be encouraged. If one group feels that they are giving more than they are receiving, tensions in the system will increase.

But what does this reciprocity look like? Why is it important? Social scientists claim that reciprocity is key to maintaining satisfaction in intergenerational relationships.

¹⁰⁰ Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark, 59.

But beyond that, Martin Buber argued that it is only in a reciprocal *I-Thou* relationship that we can commune with God. In chapter 3, we will explore Buber's ontology and theology of dialogue as a theological model for leadership in an intergenerational church.

CHAPTER 3: MARTIN BUBER AND RECIPROCITY

Martin Buber's philosophy of reciprocity presented in *I and Thou* provides a theological framework for relationships in the intergenerational church. But, since Buber was not Trinitarian and couched his philosophy in Hasidism (not Christianity),¹ it is necessary for me: (1) to demonstrate Buber's relevance to Christianity, and (2) to contextualize his ideas to the intergenerational church. To do that, I am going to tell a story.

The following is a fictional account of the kind of conflict common in an intergenerational church. One of the characters, Pastor Kurt, represents Martin Buber's ideas. To navigate the conflict, Kurt is going to filter Buber's ideas through the Trinitarian theology of John 17 and 1 Corinthians 12–14. While Kurt will not quote Buber directly, I will demonstrate that his positions are consistent with Buber's ideas in the footnotes. The result will be a presentation of a Trinitarian version of Buber's philosophy in the footnotes with application of those ideas to the intergenerational church in the story itself.

Scene 1—Pastor Dan's House

When Daniel Green's cell phone alarmed at 6:15 on Monday morning, he knew two things. First, his Taylor Swift ring tone needed to change. Second, this was going to be a long day.

¹ Robert E. Wood, *Martin Buber's Ontology: An Analysis of I and Thou* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 27.

Groaning as he fumbled for the phone on his bedside table, his mind was still churning over the results of last night's elder meeting. It had haunted his dreams as he tossed and turned all night. Silencing the alarm, he dropped his feet to the ground and lugged himself to the bathroom.

After showering and dressing, Dan made his way downstairs where his wife Sarah was making breakfast for the family. Five-year-old Mac was chasing three-year-old Sadie around the kitchen with a Darth Vader mask on his face and a foam lightsaber in his hand. Sarah looked up as she saw him descend the stairs. "Good morning," she said with a smile. "How did it go last night?"

Dan bit his lip and shook his head as he searched for the words. "Not good."

"I am so sorry," Sarah replied as her shoulders slumped. "What did they decide?"

"Well, officially, they want another two weeks to think about it. But I know the renovation isn't going to happen. John was passionate that the money could be spent on better things. I am pretty sure he won over the rest of the elders. He kept talking about how Jesus never envisioned churches becoming so materialistic and that we should focus instead on upping our support for missions. I support missions, but I also know Anita hates the new direction in worship."

Sarah frowned as she pictured the elder and his wife. They were a great couple, but they had consistently opposed her husband's attempts to modernize the church. She knew they loved the Lord, but their hearts were still in 1995 and what worked back then. To them, anything other than acoustic guitar just wasn't worship.

Her husband continued, "They're going to pray about it for two weeks and we'll make a decision at the next meeting. But I know their minds are made up."

“I’m sorry,” Sarah said.

“I just don’t know what to do,” Dan continued. “There is so much good at HCC.”

(This is what the locals called the congregation, Harbor Christian Church, where Dan served as an associate pastor.) “But I don’t think they’re ever going to change.”

“Well, there’s quite a history here,” Sarah said.

“I know. But God has given me a passion for reaching my generation,” Dan said.

“And HCC hired me to do just that, but it seems they only want me to do it by keeping things the way they’ve always been. I’m torn. I think HCC could be great for Mac and Sadie. But I also keep thinking about Jeff’s offer and the things we could do there.”

Sarah nodded. Dan’s former college mentor was now leading a thriving young church in Denver. The congregation was buzzing with energy and the future looked bright. Jeff had practically begged Dan to come out and join him since the two had been so close before. She knew that going to Denver would mean her husband getting to realize all of his ministry dreams, but she also shared Dan’s feelings that there was something special about HCC. There was no gray hair in Jeff’s hip church in Denver, and she loved the intergenerational experience at HCC. It was good for the kids, and for them.

“You and Jeff would make a great team,” she finally said. “But is that where you feel God calling you?”

“I don’t know,” he replied sullenly. “But I guess we have a *whole month* to decide,” he jested.

They rented their home from a family who was returning to the area next month, so they needed to be out of the house. They had considered buying a house just a block away from the church—it was a great little craftsman home with tons of potential; perfect

for a young family buying their first home. But they weren't sure about the future of HCC. The elders had consistently rejected most of Dan's ideas for change. When they did support an idea, they did so more with concession than excitement. Dan and Sarah weren't sure they had a future at HCC. They had agreed that the elders' verdict on the church renovation would be telling. Support for the renovation would also show support for Dan's ministry to the young people. Rejection of it would signal that it was time for them to move on. Jeff had agreed to give them a month to decide whether they would join him in Denver.

Scene 2—At Harbor Christian Church

Dan took a deep breath as turned off the ignition of his car and got ready to head into the office. Last night's elder meeting had gone so late that he felt like he had just left this place. He greeted the receptionist on his way in the door and then made his way to his office. After firing up his computer, he started unpacking his bag as he waited for the weekend's emails to load. When the machine chimed to indicate new messages, he looked at the inbox and his heart sank.

At the top of the list was a message from the senior pastor, Kurt. The subject line was "Can We Talk about the Renovation Today?"

"Great," he thought. "Just what I wanted to do."

He reached for his phone and dialed over to Kurt's office.

"Good morning," Kurt's cheerful voice answered on the other end. "Long time no see," he joked. Dan couldn't understand how Kurt maintained his enthusiasm. It would take at least three cups of coffee before he would be as awake as his boss.

"Good morning," Dan replied. "I got your message. Is now a good time?"

“Yes.” said Kurt. “I have something to share with you.”

“Okay. I’ll be right over.” Dan hung up the phone and made his way over to Kurt’s office. He braced himself for the bad news as he entered and sat down on the pastor’s couch.

“Hey, great job last night.” Kurt began. “I know things didn’t go as you had hoped, but I appreciate how you kept your cool despite the pushback.”

“Yeah, well, it is what it is.” Dan answered. “I mean, I get it. It’s a lot of money. But you know as well as I do that we need this.”

Kurt nodded. “Well, I think the renovation could be good for the congregation. But I also understand the hesitancies. It is a lot of money and I don’t think we should launch the project without at least *talking* about it.”

Dan thought for a second. He could see Kurt’s point. Sometimes he resented Kurt’s reluctance to stand up to the old guard, but Dan had no doubt that the man cared for him. He was thirty years his elder and had really treated him like a son. Dan recognized the tough spot Kurt was in. He had spent his whole ministry career at HCC and he wanted to see the church thrive beyond his years there. That meant a delicate balance between reaching the new and honoring the old.

“Anita Robinson emailed me last night. John told her about the elder meeting and she wants to meet with me about her concerns.”

Oh, great, Dan thought. He knew where this conversation was going.

Kurt continued, “Anita shares John’s concerns about the money. She thinks we should focus more on missions. But beyond that, she doesn’t like some of the changes we

have made over the past few years. She thinks things are becoming too much like a show.”

Dan rolled his eyes. “There are lots of ways to worship. Just because someone is playing an electric guitar doesn’t mean that their heart isn’t worshipping.”

“I know. We fought this same fight when I was your age when it was hymns versus praise songs. But let me ask you something: Why do you think Anita is reacting the way she is?”

“I don’t know,” Dan said. “Sometimes I think it’s because they have this church just the way they want it and they don’t want to change. I know they don’t like the new music. I know they don’t like change. I think they just want control.”

“Maybe so,” Kurt said. “But you have ways that you like it, too, right?”

“Of course,” Dan said. He leaned in, suddenly more engaged in the conversation. “But it’s not like that for me. I feel that God has *called* and *gifted* me to reach my generation. The elders even hired me to do that.”

“So what about John and Anita? What role do they play in your vision?”

“They are crucial to it!” Dan said. “We need their wisdom. The folks your age have time on their hands since their kids have left home. They have more expendable income. They have life experience. The younger people need that.”

Kurt was silent for a moment as he considered Dan’s ideas. Finally he responded. “It sounds like you have a lot of plans for the older generation. But let me ask you this: What if God has called them to something different? Is there room in your vision for that?”

Dan shook his head as he searched for the words. He hadn't considered that.

"Everything inside of me tells me that this is what God wants. I have to follow."

"True. But again, what about John and Anita? Are they just a means of accomplishing your vision? What if God has given them a different vision?" Kurt wasn't going to let Dan dodge the question.

Dan bit his lip in frustration.

"Dan, we have the choice to be one of two kinds of people. We can be the kind of person who treats others as means of accomplishing our goals, or we can be the kind of person who encounters others as God's creations with the freedom and power to act upon us. The choice we make forms us into a kind of person ourselves.² Does that make sense?"

"I guess." Dan was intrigued about where this was going. "But do you think it's fair to imply that I am treating John and Anita like tools?"

"Well, that depends," replied Kurt. "Do they have the freedom to reject your vision for them? Because that makes a difference. Coming to people with objectives creates a different kind of relationship than surrendering your plans in order to encounter

² The central concept to Buber's *I and Thou* is that there are two ways of being in the world: I-It relationships and I-Thou relationships. These are not merely two ways of relating things, but two ways of *being* in the world. In other words, people become a particular kind of I when they relate to something as an It or a Thou. In speaking "It," a person creates one reality, but in speaking "Thou," he or she creates a different reality. The I of an I-It relationship is an actor and the It is something to acted upon. The I of an I-Thou relationship encounters the Thou and allows the Thou to act upon him or her. The I of I-Thou is the I of encounter. He writes:

"There is no I as such but only the I of the basic word I-You and the I of the basic word I-It.

When a man says I, he means one or the other. The I he means is present when he says I. And when he says You or It, the I of one or the other basic word is also present.

Being I and saying I are the same. Saying I and saying one of the two basic words is the same.

Whoever speaks one of the basic words enters into the word and stands in it." Buber, *I and Thou*., 54; Kramer and Gawlick, 16.

them.³ I know you have a lot of dreams about the kind of church you want HCC to be, but are your dreams more important to you than your relationship with John and Anita?”

“You know I care for John and Anita.”

“Yes, I know you do. But there is a difference between having feelings for someone and genuinely *encountering* them.”⁴

“I don’t understand,” Dan said.

“Okay, we have you ever been to a concert in which people were filming the show with their cell phone instead of watching?”

“Yes. That’s super annoying. They paid all of this money to have an encounter, and then they waste it by trying to capture the moment.”

“Right,” said Kurt. “It’s like they don’t care about the moment; they just want the experience. But pursuing *experiences* can make us miss out on the *encounters* that are right in front of us.”⁵ Let me ask you this: when you consider John and Anita, are you

³ Robert Wood notes four major aspects to an I-Thou relationship in Buber’s writings: (1) totalization (I-Thou relationships require the whole being), (2) the coming-together of will and grace (there must be a decision to give and a submission to receive), (3) immediacy (I-Thou relationships only happen in the present), and (4) mutuality (I-Thou relationships require give and take). Wood, 52; Kramer and Gawlick, 18–19.

⁴ “The world as experience belongs to the basic word I-It. The basic word I-You establishes the world of relation.” Buber, *I and Thou*, 56.

Buber noted the difference between experiencing the world and relating. Relating is not an experience. When people experience something, the thing experienced is an object—the means to an end (the experience). But in relating, the person surrenders to the I-Thou relationship and encounters the world. The same is true in relationships; people can only “experience” a person from a distance. Buber writes, “The human being to whom I say You I do not experience. But I stand in relation to him, in the sacred basic word. Only when I step out of this do I experience him again. Experience is remoteness from You.” Ibid., 59–60.

⁵ “What is essential is lived in the present, objects in the past.” Ibid., 64.

I-Thou is always lived in the present. It is only when a person surrenders the past and the future and lives in the present that the I-Thou is possible. Otherwise, the other is an It. I-It is lived in the future or in the past.

willing to encounter them and their wishes, or do you just think of them in terms of your vision for the church?”

“Wow,” Dan said. “I guess I never thought of that. I think my mind has been on my own calling. Are you saying that I have been trying to *experience* them as part of my own story rather than *encountering* them as people?”

Kurt’s brow furrowed as he considered the question. “That’s not for me to say, Dan. I don’t know. But there is one thing that I want you to contemplate about your relationship with John and Anita: we have to be careful with visions and causes. If we get so caught up in our vision that we cease to encounter people—that we start to see them merely as tools of accomplishing our vision—we are missing out on what it means to be truly human.”⁶

“So, is this your way of telling me that the renovation is dead?”

“Not at all. Anita and her friends want to meet with me on Wednesday at 2:00. I think it would be good for you to be there. I’d like us to sit down and discuss our hopes, dreams, and fears for HCC.”

“Should I prepare something to convince her of the importance of the renovation?” Dan was starting to think he had misjudged Kurt’s position on the matter.

“Not necessarily. While I think it would be good for you to share your vision with Anita, I also want you to listen. I want you to encounter her and hear *her* vision for the

⁶ Buber argued that as Napoleon only saw people as means of accomplishing his cause, not only did he reduce them all to *Its*, but he himself lost his humanity. He writes:

“Indeed, this master of the age [Napoleon] evidently did not know the dimension of the *You*. The matter has been put well: all being was for him *valore*. Gently, he compared the followers who denied him after his fall with Peter; but there was nobody whom *he* could have denied, for there was nobody whom he recognized as a being. He was the demonic *You* for the millions and did not respond; to ‘*You*’ he responded by saying: *It*; he responded fictitiously on the personal level—responding only in his own sphere, that of his cause, and only with his deeds.” *Ibid.*, 117.

church. This is important. Encountering people in the present, encountering them as they are, encountering them in all of their freedom and power, is a key part of being human.⁷

We cannot bring an agenda to that kind of encounter.”

Scene 3—The Meeting

Dan was sick to his stomach all Wednesday morning as he anticipated his meeting with Kurt and the old guard. His mind went back and forth between the craftsman home a block away from the church and the prospect of working with Jeff in Denver. His gut told him that this meeting was going to decide his fate. If Kurt refused to stand up to Anita, it would show that things were never going to change. But if Kurt pushed them on the renovation, there was hope that things could work out after all. Either way, he would know.

Just before 2:00, Dan made his way to Kurt’s office where they were to meet Anita and her friends. The women were already there chatting with the pastor about his granddaughter’s soccer game the weekend before. Dan took a deep breath and made his way into the open office.

⁷ Buber considered the I-Thou relationship to be central to what it means to be human. I can only appreciate who I am when I recognize Thou. In fact, when I say “Thou,” I become “I” because it’s only when I say “Thou” that I recognize my otherness. In being other than “Thou,” I become “I.” In an I-It relationship I am not other because It is an extension of my wishes, desires, and goals. Buber’s summary of this concept was “all real living is meeting” (Smith’s translation) or “all actual life is encounter” (Kauffman’s translation). In other words, it is only when I meet Thou and allow Thou to meet me that I truly become I. He writes:

“The You encounters me by grace—it cannot be found by seeking. But that I speak the basic word to it is a deed of my whole being, it is my essential deed.

The You encounters me. But I enter into a direct relationship to it. Thus the relationship is election and electing, passive and active at once: An action of the whole being must approach passivity, for it does away with all partial actions and thus with any sense of action, which always depends on limited exertions.

The basic word of I-You can be spoken only with one’s whole being. The concentration and fusion into a whole being can never be accomplished by me, can never be accomplished without me. I require a You to become; becoming I, I say You.

All actual life is encounter.” Ibid., 62; Kramer and Gawlick, 16, 22; Wood, 39.

“Dan! Good to see you,” Anita said as she reached out for a hug. Anita was ever the hugger.

“Good to see you, too,” Dan said with a gentle but nervous smile. He hugged her and then greeted her friends Cathy and Deborah.

“Well, we’re all here. Let’s have a seat,” Kurt said. He was good at keeping meetings like this moving along. “Ladies, first I want to thank you for coming in today. I know we’ve made a lot of changes in the church of late and that not all of them have been easy. We always want you to feel free to come to talk to us about anything on your mind.”

“Thank you, Pastor,” Anita replied. “We appreciate all that you and Dan do for our body. We are lucky to have you here. I feel bad coming in here like this. I don’t want to be a complainer; I just—I’m just concerned about the direction we are headed in and my friends feel the same way.” The other two women nodded.

“Well, what’s on your mind?” asked Kurt.

“Well . . .” Anita searched for the words and then replied, “It’s not just one thing. It’s a lot of things. We’ve made a lot of changes to the worship service lately, and it feels like we are moving away from the service being worshipful to being more of a show.”

“Hmmm,” said Kurt. “What do you mean by that?”

Dan shifted in his seat uncomfortably. He knew where this was going. The old ladies were going to complain about the volume and the drums and how rock music “wasn’t worshipful.”

“I am afraid that as a church we are becoming more of a show than a church. First it was the music. I understand that the young people like different music than I do and

that people can worship in different styles. I appreciate that we started the contemporary service so that they could have the style of music they like. But I've been to that contemporary service, and I don't think the young people are engaged. No one is singing. It's just like they are there to be entertained by a band, not sing praises to God."

"Well, that's not completely fair," Dan said. "People *do* sing in the contemporary service. But a lot of people like to worship by listening and remaining silent. That can be worship, too."

Anita frowned. "I don't know. It just feels like a show. When I was there, I just didn't feel like I was worshipping. And now there's the renovation. The price tag is steep, and I think it's just going to make the contemporary service *even more* of a show. I don't think that's honoring God with our resources. If we're going to raise money for something, I would much rather see us do something good with it like support missions, not just spend it on ourselves."

Dan scowled. "I think our primary mission is to our neighbors right across the street. And these improvements to the worship space will help our church reach them."

"The contemporary service isn't my church," Anita said bluntly.

A silence hung in the air.

She continued, "I love having my kids and my grandkids in the church. But what goes on in the contemporary service doesn't feel right. It feels more about entertaining the audience than honoring God. It doesn't even feel like church." Her eyes were starting to tear as she went on. "This church means the world to me. I raised my kids here. My daughter was married here. Over the past 25 years, no matter what has been going on in my life, I have known that I could come here on Sunday and connect with God. It's the

most important part of my life, and I don't want my grandkids to miss out on that because we became a show."

Dan's shoulders slumped as he saw her tears. She had made her point. The five sat in silence as Kurt handed Anita a box of tissues. Finally, Kurt spoke up.

"I appreciate you sharing, Anita. I think others would agree with you." Anita's friends nodded. "It must have been frustrating to see so much change in the church you love. But I hope you also understand where Dan is coming from, too. His intent is not just to entertain people. He wants to *reach* people with the gospel in the same way that we were reached all those years ago."

At this, Dan perked up slightly.

"You know, I was thinking of something as you two were sharing," Kurt continued. "Would you guys mind looking at a Bible passage with me?"

"Of course not, Pastor," Anita answered. The others nodded.

"There are some verses in John 17 that teach us about worship. Dan, would you mind reading John 17:20–23?"

Dan found the passage and began to read. "John 17:20–23:

'I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.'"⁸

"Thanks, Dan." Kurt said. "The Gospel of John is about worship. It's not about *whom* to worship, but how to worship God *properly*. This passage in John 17 gives us a

⁸ ESV.

clue to how people can know God. Dan, one of the things I love about you is your passion for the lost—especially in reaching those of your generation. Let me ask you something. In verse 21, how does Jesus say that the world will believe that the Father sent the Son?”

Dan looked down at his text, read for a few seconds and then looked up. “Unity in the church,” he said at last.

“Unity in the church,” Kurt repeated. “See, here’s the problem I think we have: we’re not a very united church right now. I think by segregating the older and younger people, we’ve actually hurt our worship and our witness.”

“What do you mean?” Anita said.

“Well, do you guys remember how the Gospel of John begins? John says ‘no one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.’⁹ John makes a pretty profound statement in that verse. No one has ever seen God. It is Jesus who has made him known. When the two of you were talking about worship, you both mentioned how your preferred worship style helps you experience God. I submit that God *can’t* be experienced. He can only be encountered.”¹⁰

⁹ John 1:18 ESV.

¹⁰ Buber argues that because God by definition cannot become an It, God cannot be experienced outside of the I-Thou relationship. He writes:

“By its very nature the eternal You cannot become an It; because by its very nature it cannot be placed within measure and limit, not even within the measure of the immeasurable and the limit of the unlimited; because by its very nature it cannot be grasped as a sum of its qualities, not even as an infinite sum of qualities that have been raised to transcendence; because it is not to be found either in or outside the world; because it cannot be experienced; because it cannot be thought; because we transgress against it, against that which has being, if we say: ‘I believe that he is’—even ‘he’ is still a metaphor, while ‘you’ is not.” Buber, *I and Thou*, 160–161.

Similarly, to John, God is unknowable unless He reveals himself. Koester argues that the heart of John is “How do people know God?” God is unknowable because He is “from above” (John 3:31, 8:23, 19:11), whereas human beings are “from below” (John 8:23). But in the incarnation, Jesus made the unknown (the Word of God) become the known (flesh). John tells us that “no one has ever seen God,” but

Kurt let his words hang. Everyone else looked puzzled.

“What does that mean?” Dan finally asked.

“Well, do you remember what we talked about on Monday—the difference between experiencing someone and encountering them?”

“Yes,” Dan said. “Experiencing someone is when you treat them as a means to one of your goals; encountering them is surrendering to them as free to act.”

“Right!” Kurt said. “Do you see the parallel with worship? John says that no one has ever seen God but that Jesus has made him known. He’s reminding us that God cannot be found unless He reveals himself. We can’t initiate an ‘experience’ of God or use him as a means to an end. We can only surrender ourselves to an encounter with him.”

Dan considered the words and then spoke up sheepishly. “But what does that have to do with worship?” He was starting to wonder if perhaps Kurt wasn’t going to advocate for the renovation.

Jesus Christ “has made him known” (John 1:18). Everyone who has seen the Son has seen the Father (14:9).

In John, the Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son and awakens people to the revelation of God in Christ (John 15:26). No one can encounter God unless the Spirit first initiates the encounter (John 6:44). In the Upper Room Discourse, Jesus tells his disciples that he is leaving them, but that he is sending another helper to remind them of all things. The continuing work of the Holy Spirit is the way in which they would continue to see Jesus (John 14:19). To John, the resurrection is a past event that cannot be duplicated in the life of the believer, but the Holy Spirit alerts believers to the presence of the risen Christ in their hearts and in their communities (John 14:17, 23).

The unknown God cannot be experienced on our own terms; He is only encountered through revelation. This revelation reached its apex in the incarnation, and continues through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, who awakens God’s people to Christ’s continued presence. By the Spirit, the church continues to encounter God. Craig R. Koester, *The Word of Life: A Theology of John’s Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 25, 29, 135, 150; Paul A. Rainbow, *Johannine Theology: The Gospel, the Epistles and the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014), 75, 79, 89, 97, 260; Mark L. Appold, *The Oneness Motif in the Fourth Gospel: Motif Analysis and Exegetical Probe into the Theology of John* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1976), 37, 199.

“Well, in the Gospel of John, the Father is only knowable through the Son, and through the Spirit’s abiding testimony to the Son’s presence. Jesus told his disciples in John 14:26, ‘But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.’¹¹ We see this continuum: the Son reveals the Father, and the Spirit alerts the church to the Son’s continued presence. That means we can only worship God as the Spirit reveals him. Now, the Spirit works through religious forms like both Anita’s traditional worship and your rock ’n roll worship. We err, however, when we start to mistake the forms for formulas for experiencing God. They aren’t. Do you remember the story of the woman at the well? What were her concerns about worship?”

Anita chimed in. “She was concerned about whether it was more appropriate to worship in Jerusalem or on Mount Gerizim.”

“Right,” said Kurt. “And what did Jesus tell her?”

“True worshippers will worship in spirit and in truth,” answered Anita.

“Exactly!” Kurt said. “Jesus tells her that it isn’t the *form* of worship that is important; it’s the encounter. God is only encountered when we surrender to the Spirit.”¹²

¹¹ ESV.

¹² “Whoever knows the world as something to be utilized knows God the same way. His prayers are a way of unburdening himself—and fall into the ears of the void. He—and not the ‘atheist’ who from the night and longing of his garret window addresses the nameless—is godless.” Buber, *I and Thou*, 155–56.

Buber accused the “religious man” (who uses religion to get an experience) of being godless, since in doing so he attempts to reduce God to an It. John is also concerned about the way in which God is worshipped. Jesus’ encounter with the woman at the well illustrates. The woman’s concern is with religious forms, but Jesus tells her that genuine worship is in spirit and in truth (John 4:23–24). To John, genuine worship must accept the Spirit’s testimony about the Son. This could be equated with Buber’s insistence on the posture of listening and silence. It’s not when the worshipper seeks an experience that God is encountered, but when the worshipper surrenders and listens to the Spirit’s testimony regarding the Son.

“Huh,” Anita said. “So you’re saying that we can experience God in either the traditional or contemporary service, as long as we surrender to the Spirit?”

“Not exactly,” Kurt said. “Remember, God can’t be experienced; only encountered. The Spirit *does* reveal God in different forms. He can be encountered in the traditional service or in the contemporary. But when we elevate a worship form over the encounter, we push God out of that form.”¹³ Kurt stopped and waited for that to sink in.

Dan finally spoke up. “So, by insisting that worship only be one style, we are actually crowding God out of our worship?” He was starting to feel uneasy about where this conversation was going.

“Well, I don’t know your heart, but that’s certainly a risk.” Kurt answered. “But remember what John 17 says: God is encountered when the church is united. When you have a loving encounter with a brother or sister in Christ, you also encounter God.”¹⁴

¹³ Buber thought that God is present in religious forms unless man removes him. God can be encountered through prayer and worship, as long as these things are done as part of an I-Thou relationship. The moment they are done to experience God rather than encounter God, the forms attempt to reduce God to an It and therefore become powerless. The forms of worship that have worked in one generation must not become fixed and thought of as the only way to worship God. In that case, they become attempts at reducing God to an It. God can be present in the forms, but the worshipper must always approach God in spirit and in truth, surrendering to the encounter. He writes:

“God is close to his forms when man does not remove them from him. But when the spreading movement of religion holds down the movement of return and removes the form from God, the countenance of the form is extinguished, its lips are dead, its hands hang down, God does not know it any more, and the house of the world built around its altar, the human cosmos, crumbles.” Ibid., 167–68.

¹⁴ Buber thought that human beings caught glimpses of God (the eternal Thou) in every I-Thou relationship. In fact, the central Thou is essential for creating genuine community. He writes:

“Extended the lines of human relationships intersect in the eternal You.

Every single You is a glimpse of that. Through every single You the basic word addresses the eternal You. The mediatorship of the You of all beings accounts for the fullness of our relationships to them—and for the lack of fulfillment. The innate You is actualized each time without being perfected. It attains perfection solely in the immediate relationship to the You that in accordance with its nature cannot become an It.” Ibid., 123; Kramer and Gawlick, 81–83.

Likewise, John saw love in the church as a reflection of the mutual love between the Father and Son (John 17:23). Paul Rainbow notes that in John, the Spirit is the agent of intersubjectivity within the Godhead. He writes, “The three exist in a harmonious union of love facilitated by the Holy Spirit. Insofar as the Son is differentiated from the Father, their difference is bridged by the Spirit, who is the agent of intersubjectivity. Since the Father and Son must cooperate in granting to the Spirit to have life in himself, the very donation of self-existence to the Spirit establishes a bond between the first two.” Rainbow, 256.

“How is that?” Dan asked.

“Well, think about it.” Kurt said. “The Spirit dwells between the Father and Son and empowers their mutual love for one another. In John 17, Jesus says that this love overflows down into the church and empowers *their* love for one another. In that way, Christian unity is a creation of the Spirit. When you encounter another you also encounter God.”¹⁵

Dan thought about that. “Are you saying that if I lay aside my style preferences and in order to better love others, that I will encounter God?”

Kurt smiled. “Worship is about listening. I think that is what Jesus meant by ‘abiding.’ He just wants us to dwell in his presence. Jesus can speak to us through a variety of worship forms, but we have to approach him with open hearts and the willingness to listen.”¹⁶

In other words the Spirit allows the simultaneous distinction between and harmonious union between Father and Son. Further, the Spirit extends this mutual love of the Father and Son to the church (John 14:21, 23; 16:27). Since the church’s union is an extension of the union between Father and Son, the Spirit-enabled I-Thou encounter within the church is also an encounter with God. Ibid., 369; Richard Bauckham, *The Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 39; Appold, 12, 285.

¹⁵ “Spirit in its human manifestation is man’s response to his You. . . . Spirit is not in the I but between I and You. It is not like the blood that circulates in you but like the air in which you breathe. Man lives in the spirit when he is able to respond to his You. He is able to do that when he enters into this relation with his whole being. It is solely by virtue of his power to relate that man is able to live in the spirit.” Buber, *I and Thou*, 89.

Buber regarded spirit as dwelling between I and Thou. Similarly, John portrayed the Spirit as dwelling between Father and Son and empowering their mutual love for one another. This Spirit also dwells in the church and empowers their love for one another (John 15:4–10). In this way, to act in the Spirit is not to respond to something inside, but rather to respond to our brother in an I-Thou encounter. Rainbow, 269.

¹⁶ Buber claimed that it is only in silence that the spirit lingers. When someone encounters the Spirit, the temptation is to respond. But, the stronger the response, the more the relationship approaches I-It. It is only in complete silence that the I-Thou is maintained and the Spirit lingers. He writes:

“But it is here that the fate of the relational event rears up most powerfully. The more powerful the response, the more powerfully it ties down the You and as by a spell binds it into an object. Only silence toward the You, the silence of *all* tongues, the taciturn waiting in the unformed, undifferentiated, prelinguistic word leaves the You free and stands together with it in reserve where the spirit does not manifest itself but is. All response binds the You in into the It-world.” Buber, *I and Thou*, 89.

“That makes sense,” Dan said. The point of this meeting was starting to sink in now. There would be no renovation. Unity in the church was too important to Kurt. The old guard had won him over. Dan’s spirit sank as he realized he had lost. His thoughts began to wander to Denver and working with Jeff. There could be unity there, too. The room remained silent for a few moments until Anita spoke up.

“I think that’s what I have been feeling all along. This contemporary service just doesn’t feel right. It’s like God has been working in our church for a long time, but that we have drifted from that and we’re trying to be something we’re not. I think it’s unity I long for. I want my kids and grandkids to experience God as I have experienced him. I don’t see that in the contemporary service.”

“I understand,” said Kurt, nodding and smiling. “Unity is very important. Ladies, thank you for coming today and sharing your concerns about the renovation. The elders will be praying about this over the next few weeks and we will make a decision at our next meeting. See you on Sunday?”

“See you on Sunday!” the three women all said at once.

Dan wondered how many more Sundays he *would* see them.

Scene 4—The Sermon

Dan arrived at that Sunday’s 9:00 traditional service with his family a little late. It was tough for him to find the spring in his step that morning as he reflected on Kurt’s call

Buber’s ideas are similar to John’s theology of abiding. Since abiding involves reflecting on Jesus’ words (John 15:7, 10) and prayer (John 15:7, 16), Rainbow concludes that it has to do with personal communion. Abiding also means keeping the commandment to love one another (John 15:10–12), as exemplified in Jesus’ washing the disciples’ feet. While serving others isn’t a means of encountering God (as this would reduce the unknowable God to an It), a genuine encounter with God through the Spirit will manifest itself in sacrificial service for one’s brother. Rainbow, 324; Koester, 202.

for unity with the older women and the impending sermon that would signal the end of the renovation. His family found their seats as the congregation was finishing the first song. As they continued to worship, his eyes wandered around the room as he reflected on the years he had there. His children were born there. It was the only church they knew. The community had been good to them. It was going to be hard to start over.

When the singing ended, Dan took his seat as Kurt got up to preach. He looked unusually determined today. Dan said a silent prayer for his heart as he prepared to listen.

Kurt began, "Good morning. It's good to see you all here today. Thank you for worshipping with us. We are going to be in 1 Corinthians 12 today, so please turn there in your Bibles.

"As I was preparing for this morning, my mind went to my relationship with my son, Nick. Last weekend he was in town with his family. We had a wonderful time with him and Jennifer and the grandkids. It's shocking how quickly they grow up.

"But, while we were enjoying our time together, I was reminded that things were not always good between us. In fact, there was a time when our relationship was so bad I wondered if we would ever speak again. Nick and Jennifer had just had their oldest, Braden, and the adjustment to becoming a parent of a parent was not easy for me. Shortly after they brought their son home from the hospital, Carol and I travelled to spend a week with them and help them adjust to life with a baby.

"Well, as we were finishing dinner on the first night, Nick put Braden down to sleep, and the baby was fussy. We could hear him crying all the way downstairs. Crying babies are always painful to hear, but when it's your own grandson crying, there is no worse sound in the world."

A couple of chuckles from the older members of the congregation told Dan that this must be the case.

Kurt continued, “When I couldn’t take it anymore, I excused myself from the dinner table and snuck upstairs to check on Braden. The poor little guy was soaked in his tears. I picked him up to comfort him, and he immediately started to calm down. I brought him downstairs to his parents, but they didn’t react the way I anticipated.

“I expected them to be grateful for helping their son. Instead they were angry. They said that Braden was okay crying himself to sleep and that this was part of their parenting plan. Apparently they had read in some book that this was the best way to have a calm baby during the waking hours. I have never heard of such a thing. I informed Nick that I never let *him* cry in bed and that he turned out okay.”

The audience was motionless as Kurt spoke. Dan could see an older woman to his right wince as Kurt described the conflict with his son.

Kurt continued, “Nick and Jennifer were very upset, and Jennifer snatched the baby from my arms and headed upstairs. Nick told me he was disappointed in me. I couldn’t understand why they would follow a parenting plan that required them to leave their kid alone screaming like that—especially since it was *my* grandson!

“Well, we couldn’t seem to do anything right that week, and things were still a little awkward when we left. In fact, things remained tense for weeks after that. He wouldn’t call. When I called, they wouldn’t talk. I didn’t understand what they were doing or what had happened. How had our happy family fallen into such disunity?”

As Kurt paused to let those last questions sink in, the answers came immediately to Dan's mind. Of course Nick was hurt by being undermined by his own dad. Who wouldn't be?

Kurt looked serious as he transitioned to the topic of his sermon that day. "Well, in 1 Corinthians 12–14, we read about a church that was undergoing a similar problem. They had fallen into disunity. Part of the issue in Corinth was an unequal level of participation in the church. Some people were giving a lot to the church. They were arriving early. They were bringing their best food and their finest wine to the church meeting. One of them was even allowing the church to use his home as the meeting place.

"But there was also another group in the church. They weren't as committed. Their jobs kept them away from the church and when they finally showed up the service was already well underway. They weren't providing food for the meals. They arrived empty-handed. Their manners were questionable and they didn't seem to respect for the solemnity of the moment. Not many of them were wise or noble."

Another round of chuckles rang through the room. Dan was suddenly self-conscious of his own family arriving late.

Kurt continued describing the two groups at Corinth. "When it was time to worship, the committed were taking on all the responsibility for leading the service. The have-nothings were not bringing their gifts to the service, preferring instead to allow the committed to lead. The committed were starting to wonder how much they really needed the others. The others were starting to wonder the same thing."

Dan was starting to wonder why he had stayed at HCC so long.

Kurt continued, “The church was in trouble, and Paul wrote to them to help pull them together. Let’s read what he wrote in 1 Corinthians 12:12–26.

“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

“For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

“The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.¹⁷

“There is a lot in these verses, but I want to highlight one thing: You can’t have unity without diversity.”

Dan was puzzled at these last words. How can you be united without being the same?

Kurt continued, “Paul paints this grotesque picture of a body made of one giant member. He asks, ‘If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?’

¹⁷ ESV.

“You see, the Corinthians had a lot of ‘eyes.’ Their sense of sight was great. *Where’s Waldo* didn’t stand a chance in Corinth. But, as good as their vision was—they were blind.”

Kurt let that sink in. Then he continued, “They were blind to what the Spirit was doing in their midst.”

Dan considered that last statement. What did he mean that they were blind?

Kurt said, “The Spirit hadn’t made every member in Corinth an eye. There were some ears, too, and some feet, and some hands. But because those people weren’t eyes, the committed couldn’t see them for what they were. They thought they didn’t need them.

“But Paul says, ‘If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing?’ In order for the body to be a body, they needed diversity. You can’t have unity without diversity.”

That made sense to Dan. He could think of ways he and Kurt were different and how Kurt’s gifting had helped Dan over the years. He even thought of Anita and her friends and their faith. In fact, that had been one of the main reasons they had stayed at HCC for as long as they had. They appreciated the diversity and wanted their kids to grow up in an intergenerational community.

Kurt suddenly got very emotional. He struggled to get the next words out. “See, that’s what I didn’t get with my son when we argued over letting Braden cry. I wanted my son to do things like me. I wanted family unity. But what I didn’t realize was that by trying to force him to be like me, I was driving a wedge between us.”

Kurt let these words hang. An uncomfortable silence filled the room.

Kurt became more animated as he emphasized these next words, “Fortunately, my son had the courage to call me and talk to me about *why* he was reacting the way he was reacting. He told me that he respected me as his father and valued my input about child-raising, but that ultimately Braden was *his and Jennifer’s* responsibility. *They* would be held accountable for how they raised their children and I needed to respect their decisions as parents, even when I disagreed with them.

“In short, my son was ready to be an adult, and I was treating him like a child.”

The silence in the room was so strong Dan could feel it.

“I realized on that day that my relationship with Nick could never be the same. He was a father now, and I needed to treat him more as a friend than as a child, even though he will always be my child. I needed to give him space. I needed to let him help me sometimes instead of always needing to be in control and helping him. I needed to listen more and instruct less.”

Kurt got emotional again as he reflected on his love for his son. “And since I have made those changes, things have been better between us. We’re closer now than we have ever been.”

Dan remembered why he liked Kurt so much. He didn’t always agree with the man, but he knew he cared. He could tell that this conflict with Nick was painful for him and that he had truly changed as a result of it.

Kurt broke the silence. “Now, here’s the thing: I think the same thing is going on in our church.

“I sense a desire to be united, but I think that we confuse *unity* with *uniformity*. True unity requires *diversity*. That means we have to learn how to surrender ourselves to encounter people where they are, as they are.”

Dan wondered what that might look like.

Kurt explained, “I have been a part of this church for over thirty years. I have seen God work in amazing ways, both in my life and in the lives of our congregation. Over the years, we have been able to form our congregation and our worship services in a way that means something to us. We encounter God here.

“Now, it has also been awesome to see so many young people join our congregation over the last few years. It’s exciting to have them along in the journey. I look at these young people and I think of myself at their age: so many possibilities ahead of them. I want them to encounter God as I did.

“But here’s the thing: they *can’t* encounter God as I did. Because their story isn’t the same as my story. They have to encounter God in their own way. I’m an eye and they’re ears. When I see them acting like ears and using their gifts of hearing, it doesn’t make sense to me. I want them to be able to see better. I want to train them to be better eyes. I want unity.

“But if I want *real* unity, I can’t approach my relationship with them in a way that expects them to conform to my ways.”

Dan was struck by these words. Wasn’t that what was going on with the renovation project? Weren’t the older women trying to conform the young people to the way things had always been done? So, what did this mean? Where was Kurt going with this?

He continued, “Ultimately, our common bond with the Holy Spirit binds us together, and the Spirit is working differently in them than He is in me. I *have* to respect that. In order for us to really encounter one another, we have to learn to surrender. We have to be willing to give up our agenda and listen. We have to recognize that God has wired us differently and that the body needs ears just as much as it needs eyes.”¹⁸

Dan felt struck by these words. Had he misjudged Kurt again? Was he going to advocate for the renovation after all?

Kurt continued, “So, how do we do this? Well, reciprocity is the key. For us to have a real encounter with one another there has to be both give and take. Remember what the Corinthians were saying to those who were different? ‘I don’t need you.’ Do we need each other? Or do we feel that it’s always our responsibility to lead and help? Reciprocity means acknowledging that I am in need and that the other person has gifts and abilities to help me. It means I serve and I am served. I lead and I am led.”¹⁹

¹⁸ For Buber, the major difference between an I-It relationship and an I-Thou relationship is that in an I-Thou relationship, the actor surrenders to the Thou and allows the Thou to act on the I. In an I-It relationship, I stand outside and control. In an I-Thou relationship, I am acted upon. He writes:

“Whoever says You does not have something for his object. For wherever there is something there is also another something; every It borders on other Its; It is only by virtue of bordering on others. But where You is said there is no something. You has no borders.

Whoever says You does not have something; he has nothing. But he stands in relation.” Buber, *I and Thou*, 55.

This idea is similar to Paul’s theology of the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12–14. In the chapters, Paul is correcting a Corinthian misunderstanding of the πνευματικῶν (*spiritual things* or *spiritual gifts*). The Corinthian “haves” were overvaluing some gifts of the Spirit and despising those in the congregation who did not manifest the gifts, as summarized in their slogan “I have no need of you” (1 Corinthians 12:21). This is the epitome of Buber’s I-It relationship: the powerful faction approached the “have-nots” on the level of whether or not they “needed” them. They were valued only as a means to an experience.

Paul, on the other hand, recognized the interdependence of the community. To him, Christ was one *body* with many *members* (1 Corinthians 12:12). Not every member was the same, yet the health of the body depended on the healthy functioning of each member (1 Corinthians 12:17–20). When one member suffered, the body suffered; and when one member was honored, all rejoiced together (1 Corinthians 12:26). Kramer and Gawlick, 18; Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 183–87.

¹⁹ “Relation is reciprocity. My You acts on me as I act on it.” Buber, *I and Thou*, 67.

Dan looked around the room. The older people seemed to be considering these words.

“I think we all have feelings for one another, but that doesn’t mean we love one another. Love is not a feeling inside us, but energy between us that we dwell within.²⁰ It’s only when I surrender and risk encountering someone as they are that I dwell in love. It’s when I open myself to the Spirit working through my brother or sister that we dwell together in the Spirit.”

Pensive nods filled the room.

“Genuine community requires these encounters.²¹ The Corinthian church was full of people who loved the Lord, but wanted everyone to worship *their* way. They didn’t

Buber considered reciprocity to be inherent to I-Thou relationships. Part of the encounter is surrendering and allowing the other to act. When we maintain control of the relationship, we are in the realm of I-It. Similarly, Paul considered reciprocity as key to the health of the body of Christ. The Spirit had distributed a variety of gifts to the church, and health demanded that each gift be exercised in reciprocity (1 Corinthians 12:4–7). Tongues, for example, have little value unless there is also an interpreter (1 Corinthians 14:9–12). Likewise, prophecy has little value unless there are others to weigh what is said (1 Corinthians 14:29). When the tongue speaker says, “I don’t need you,” he speaks into the air. When the interpreter says, “I don’t need you,” there is no message to interpret. But when each acts in reciprocity, the body is built up. Kramer and Gawlick, 47; James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 557.

²⁰ “Feelings one ‘has’; love occurs. Feelings dwell in man, but man dwells in his love. This is no metaphor but actuality; love does not cling to an I, as if the You were merely its ‘content’ or object; it is between I and You. Whoever does not know this, know this with his being, does not know love, even if he should ascribe to it the feelings that he lives through, experiences, enjoys, and expresses.” Buber, *I and Thou*, 66; Kramer and Gawlick, 23–24.

²¹ To Buber, genuine community requires I-Thou relationships. Community based only upon people pursuing common interests will never be true community, as people become means to accomplish the ends (the shared interest). Neither can genuine community be created only through feelings for one another (though this is important), since a relationship based on feelings is an I-It relationship. Instead, true community only happens through listening. People can be brought together through a common interest or feelings for one another, but it is only when they engage each other in an I-Thou relationship that genuine community can form. He writes:

“True community does not come into being because people have feelings for each other (though that is required, too), but rather on two accounts: all of them have to stand in a living, reciprocal relationship to a single living center, and they have to stand in a living, reciprocal relationship to one another. The second event has its source in the first but is not immediately given with it. A living reciprocal relationship includes feelings but is not derived from them. A community is built upon a living, reciprocal relationship, but the builder is the living, active center.” Buber, *I and Thou*, 94.

feel that they needed each other. Paul told them that a healthy body demands each part doing its work. I think we need to do a better job of *encountering* one another—of surrendering our hopes, wishes, and fears and meeting people as God has created them to be. We need to learn to risk *being acted upon*. We serve one Lord and it is one Spirit who gifts us to serve one another.”

Kurt paused as he waited for an “amen.” He didn’t get it. But Dan could tell that the congregation was considering his words.

Kurt went on, “These kinds of encounters require us to recognize diversity. Not everyone is an eye. Not everyone is an ear. Not everyone is a foot. But we need them all. Just like I had to learn to trust my son—to *need* him—we need to learn to need one another for who God has created us to be. It’s only in diversity that we can truly be united.”²²

In the same way, Paul saw Christian edification as arising from a common encounter with the Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 12:4–11, Paul states that it is the “same Spirit” that empowers different members of the body to build one another up. Membership in the body means more than just being an individual in a group; it means functioning according to the Spirit for the common good. Paul urged the Corinthians to recognize the one Lord who empowered each of them and to use their gifts to create unity. Kramer and Gawlick, 76–77; Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 559–60; Fee, 178–79; N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 1353.

²² “[T]here are also many I-You relationships that by their very nature may never unfold into complete mutuality if they are to remain faithful to their nature.

Elsewhere I have characterized the relationship of a genuine educator to his pupil as being of this type. The teacher who wants to help the pupil to realize his best potentialities must intend him as this particular person, both in his potentiality and in his actuality. More precisely, he must know him not as a mere sum of qualities, aspirations and inhibitions; he must apprehend him, and affirm him, as a whole. But this he can only do if he encounters him as a partner in a bipolar situation.” Buber, *I and Thou*, 178.

Buber recognized that reciprocal relationships do not demand each member to function in exactly the same way. Teacher/pupil relationships, for example, will never mirror one another. However, they can still be I-Thou relationships. This is also the essence of 1 Corinthians 12–14. The point of Paul’s instruction to the Corinthians was *not* that they should be united (he established this previously), but rather that *diversity is essential to unity*. It’s not just that there is one body, but also that the whole body isn’t an eye, ear, foot, or hand (1 Corinthians 12:14–20). The church reflects the nature of the Trinity: unity within diversity. Carson notes that when God makes a snowstorm, He makes individual unique snowflakes. Our tendency is to create ice cubes. Kramer and Gawlick, 190–91; Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 550; Fee, 161, 177–78; D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12–14* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987), 32.

A smile started to grow on Dan's face. He knew where this was going. He started to think that this was what he was feeling all along. It wasn't so much the renovation that he needed; it was to be treated as if he was needed.

"Now, many of you are aware of a bit of controversy in our church about the renovation project. But this controversy started a long time ago, when we decided to split into traditional and contemporary services. When we did that, we stopped needing one another. There are some here who would say, 'Because we are paying the bills, we don't need you.' There are others who would say, 'Because we are experiencing numerical growth, we don't need you.' We have stopped encountering one another."

Dan was struck by these words. He *had* felt pretty good about himself since the contemporary service was growing. He hadn't thought much recently about how much he needed the older people. He looked down as he considered this, and then across the room to Anita. She was looking at the ground, as well.

Kurt sincerely pleaded with the congregation, "I want us to be united in this decision. But unity does not mean that we all have to be the same. The Spirit is always doing something new. Unity means recognizing this and recognizing our need for one another. It means reciprocity.

"So, I want to change the nature of the conversation. Some of the older people in the congregation may feel that they don't need the new technology for worship. Maybe that's true. But do they need the *people* who will worship and serve through that technology? Do they need the *Spirit* who is working through them? Some of the young people feel that they need the new technology to be able to encounter God. Maybe that's

true. But do they need the *people* who have spent their lives forming our church to be what it is today? Do they need the *Spirit* who is working through them?”

Dan felt this. He knew in his head that he needed the older people, but somehow he had forgotten it in his heart. He wanted that back.

“So, over the next few weeks, I want us to get back to needing one another. Frankly, I think the structures of our church have disempowered the younger people. It’s like we want them here, but only if they do things like us. If they want to do something different, then they have to do that in their own space and with their own resources. We don’t need them.”

Dan nodded.

“I want to change that. I want to empower the young people to have more of a voice. I want to come back together in worship in a way that honors everyone. I want the focus of our worship service not to be on the style of worship, but on the God who empowers each of us to worship in our unique way.

“I want us to need each other.”

With these last words, Kurt began to transition to the Lord’s Supper. Dan felt his eyes welling with tears as he reconsidered the future. He wanted this to work. He wanted this for his family, too. He looked over at Anita. She was also emotional. Dan got the feeling that something was changing in this moment. He exchanged glances with Sarah beside him. He could tell she was feeling it, too.

His mind went to the craftsman home down the street and when they could make their offer.

Conclusions

Martin Buber's philosophy of reciprocity can give the intergenerational church a framework with which to empower and retain G2 leaders. Specifically, Buber emphasizes: (1) there is a difference between experiencing someone as an It and encountering him or her as a Thou, (2) reciprocity is a key to encountering someone as a Thou, and (3) the I-Thou encounter is also a means of encountering God. Though Buber himself was not Trinitarian, John 17 and 1 Corinthians 12–14 show how his ideas can be applied to a Trinitarian system. The Spirit gifts each member of the body differently to serve one another and build each other up (1 Corinthians 12–14). As the body loves one another, it “abides” in the mutual love of the Father and the Son through the Spirit (John 17).

Bowen Family Systems Theory suggests that power sharing and reciprocity are keys to navigating conflict in an intergenerational church. Paul's “household” metaphor for the church justifies applying Bowen Theory to the church. Martin Buber provides a theological justification for emphasizing power sharing and reciprocity. But practically, what does that look like? How can intergenerational churches ensure that there is reciprocity and power sharing between G1 and G2 adults? To answer those questions, we turn next to the business world and a model of leadership called “authentic leadership.”

CHAPTER 4: AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP

In order to retain G2 leaders like Dan from the previous chapter, intergenerational churches need to empower them to lead according to their story and gifting, and to promote reciprocal relationships between G1 and G2 adults. Authentic leadership, theorized by Bruce Avolio and Fred Luthans and made popular by Bill George, is a leadership model that can promote such an environment. Rather than influencing followers through transaction, power, or charisma, authentic leaders model self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and an internalized moral perspective to build trust. This trust generates greater self-awareness, increased positive emotions, and overall well-being in followers. The model is fitting for an intergenerational church because it emphasizes both solidarity and differentiation between leader and follower and it encourages reciprocal relationships between them. Through authentic leadership, both G1 and G2 leaders can empower one another to lead and serve in the way that God has gifted and called them.

The Emergence of Authentic Leadership as a Theory

Authentic leadership emerged as a theory in response to several corporate scandals in the early 2000s (notably those involving Enron and Martha Stewart). Grounded in the fields of positive psychology and transformational leadership theory, authentic leadership emphasizes relational transparency and overall well-being for all company stakeholders.¹ It is considered a root theory that can be combined with other

¹ Fred Luthans and Bruce J. Avolio, "Authentic Leadership: A Positive Developmental Approach," in *Positive Organizational Scholarship : Foundations of a New Discipline*, eds. Kim S. Cameron, Jane E. Dutton and Robert E. Quinn (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2003), 243; Bruce J. Avolio, Fred O.

leadership theories such as transformational leadership, servant leadership, charismatic leadership, or spiritual leadership.²

Leadership, Power, and Transaction

One significant distinctive of authentic leadership for intergenerational churches is that it does not rely on the use of power for influence. Power is a common tool for influence, especially in so-called *transactional* forms of leadership.³ For instance, a manager might use his power over wages to reward high performers with higher salaries. In this instance, the manager's power to reward employees financially is the basis for his or her motivating influence. Influence is through transaction. However, since studies have shown a decline in legitimate power among leaders (including that of clergy),⁴ there has been a need to transition in leadership style to one not based solely on the use of power.⁵

The issues of power and leadership are especially significant for intergenerational churches. For G1 leaders leading G2 leaders, the use of power as a motivating influence runs the risk of disillusioning these G2 leaders so that they leave for other opportunities.⁶

Walumbwa, and Todd J. Weber, "Leadership: Current Theories, Research, and Future Directions," *Annual Review of Psychology* 60, no. 1 (2009): 423.

² Bruce J. Avolio et al., "Unlocking the Mask: A Look at the Process by Which Authentic Leaders Impact Follower Attitudes and Behaviors," *The Leadership Quarterly* 15, no. 6 (2004): 806.

³ Bass, 269.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 285.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 7–8.

⁶ Jimmy Long, *The Leadership Jump: Building Partnerships between Existing and Emerging Christian Leaders* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009), 149.

Further, since power increases with age, G2 leaders often have to lead from a position of less power.⁷

Transformational Leadership

Since the 1970s, new styles of leadership have emerged that emphasize vision-casting, inspiration, emotional support, and ideology rather than power and exchange.⁸ James Downton labeled these new styles *transformational* leadership since they rely on influence by transforming follower attitudes rather than by transaction.⁹ According to Downton, transformational leaders motivate by appealing to higher causes such as values shared between the leader and follower.¹⁰ They concretize a vision as worthy of the follower's devotion, even if the vision may not be in the follower's immediate self-interest.¹¹

J.M. Burns defined transformational leaders as those who: (1) appeal to the value of desired outcomes, (2) motivate followers to work for the desired outcome above their own self-interest, and (3) help followers work towards a higher level of self-actualization on Maslow's hierarchy of needs.¹² For example, a pastor might cast a vision to a multi-generational congregation about what it would look like for them to be intergenerational. He could outline all of the benefits of intergenerational spiritual formation and even

⁷ Mackensen, 45.

⁸ Avolio, Walumbwa, and Weber, "Leadership: Current Theories, Research, and Future Directions," 428.

⁹ Bass, 618.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 41–42.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 631.

¹² *Ibid.*, 619.

appeal to a sense of Christian duty to be intergenerational. The congregation may be motivated to act based on this shared vision for what is good, even if it means giving up some of their own preferences.

One popular form of transformational leadership (especially in churches) is called charismatic leadership. Max Weber coined the term charismatic leadership to describe the phenomenon of a “great man” entering the scene during a time of crisis to deliver an organization.¹³ For example, Martin Luther King, Jr. was a charismatic leader during the American civil rights movement. Weber saw five necessary elements to charismatic leadership: (1) an extraordinarily gifted leader, (2) a time of social crisis, (3) radical solutions, (4) transcendent powers, and (5) repeated success.¹⁴

Charismatic leaders lead through vision, communication, symbols, and charisma.¹⁵ The leader functions as a “hero” to followers. Followers are motivated by the leader’s charisma and their desire to be like him or her.¹⁶ Thus, charismatic leadership is considered a form of transformational leadership because the leader’s charisma influences follower decisions, not the use of power.¹⁷

Charismatic leaders often thrive in churches. A gifted pastor can cast a vision for the church, appeal to the Bible and Christian theology as a shared value, and convince congregations that his or her vision for the church is God’s will. Depending on the leader’s giftedness, he or she may be able to influence followers to action. However,

¹³ Ibid., 575.

¹⁴ Ibid., 605.

¹⁵ Ibid., 576.

¹⁶ Ibid., 588–89.

¹⁷ Ibid., 626.

some have challenged the legitimacy of charismatic and other top-down leadership styles in a church. For instance, Len Sweet writes, “We don’t need more larger-than-life leaders who conscript others to follow their vision. We need more down-to-earth followers who invite others into a life that opens into one day becoming not leaders in their own right but unflappable, outflankable followers of Jesus.”¹⁸

Further, charismatic leadership is difficult in an intergenerational church because of the esteem needed by the leader to pull it off. Part of the charismatic leader’s charisma is the *perception* among followers that he or she is charismatic,¹⁹ and charismatic leaders often have to engage in image management to maintain their influence. This is more difficult in an intergenerational church. Since charismatic leaders rely on the esteem of their follower for motivating influence,²⁰ they can struggle to lead cross-culturally (especially across a power imbalance). A thirty-year-old G2 leader may be an effective charismatic leader among other thirty-year-olds, but this tactic may not be as effective with sixty-year-olds. Similarly, a sixty-year-old G1 leader may effectively lead other G1 adults who identify with him, but struggle to gain the esteem of younger G2 adults who consider him old-fashioned.

¹⁸ Leonard Sweet, *I Am a Follower: The Way, Truth, and Life of Following Jesus* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 174.

¹⁹ Bass, 587.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 50–51.

Authentic Leadership

Authentic leadership emerged as a theory by working insights from positive psychology into the framework of transformational leadership.²¹ Like transformational leadership, authentic leadership does not rely on the use of power to motivate followers. However, authentic leaders do not necessarily rely on transformation of followers' attitudes for motivating influence. Instead, they focus on self-actualization and transparency, which creates trust between leader and follower, generates positive emotions, and leads to increased follower performance.²²

Authentic leadership developed out of criticisms of charismatic transformational leadership. Some consider charismatic leadership unethical because it encourages emotional appeals to act against one's self-interest for a "higher calling" that often benefits the charismatic leader.²³ While Martin Luther King, Jr. was a charismatic transformational leader, so was Adolf Hitler.

In response to this critique, Avolio and others theorized authentic leadership as a means of ensuring that leaders had stakeholders' well-being in mind as they led.²⁴ Thus,

²¹ Avolio, Walumbwa, and Weber, "Leadership: Current Theories, Research, and Future Directions," 423.

²² Luthans and Avolio, "Authentic Leadership: A Positive Developmental Approach," 243.

²³ C. U. Stevens, R. S. D'Intino, and B. Victor, "The Moral Quandary of Transformational Leadership: Change for Whom?" *Research in Organizational Change and Development*, vo. 8, (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press), 123–143, quoted in Bernard M. Bass and Paul Steidlmeier, "Ethics, Character, and Authentic Transformational Leadership Behavior," *Leadership Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (Summer 1999); Mats Alvesson and Andre Spicer, "Does Leadership Create Stupidity?," in *Critical Perspectives on Leadership: Emotion, Toxicity, and Dysfunction*, eds. Jeanette Lemmergaard and Sara Louise Muhr (Cheltenham: Elgar, 2013), 190.

²⁴ Stephen Schaefer and Alexander Paulsson, "The Emotional Rollercoaster: Leadership of Innovation and the Dialectical Relationship between Negative and Positive Emotions," in *Critical Perspectives on Leadership: Emotion, Toxicity, and Dysfunction*, eds. Jeanette Lemmergaard and Sara Louise Muhr (Cheltenham: Elgar, 2013), 105; Avolio, Walumbwa, and Weber, "Leadership: Current Theories, Research, and Future Directions," 424.

authentic leadership differs from other forms of transformational leadership in that it prioritizes self-actualization on the part of *both* leader *and* follower (rather than simply changing the follower).²⁵ Bill George writes, “Authentic leaders genuinely desire to serve others through their leadership. They are more interested in empowering the people they lead to make a difference than they are in power, money, or prestige for themselves. They are as guided by qualities of the heart, by passion and compassion, as they are by qualities of the mind.”²⁶

Major Themes in Authentic Leadership

Authentic leaders demonstrate excellence in four key areas: (1) self-awareness, (2) balanced processing, (3) internalized moral perspective, and (4) relational transparency.²⁷ Self-awareness refers to knowledge and openness with regard to one’s values, strengths, and weaknesses.²⁸ It means knowing who you are and what you are good at. Balanced processing refers to one’s ability to manage motivational biases in making decisions.²⁹ It means knowing yourself and why you do what you do. An internalized moral perspective refers to a commitment to the *eudaemonic* well-being of

²⁵ Bruce J. Avolio and William L. Gardner, “Authentic Leadership Development: Getting to the Root of Positive Forms of Leadership,” *Leadership Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (2005): 329.

²⁶ Bill George, *Authentic Leadership: Rediscovering the Secrets to Creating Lasting Value* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 12. See also Bernard M. Bass and Paul Steidlmeier, “Ethics, Character, and Authentic Transformational Leadership Behavior,” *Leadership Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (Summer 1999).

²⁷ Avolio, Walumbwa, and Weber, “Leadership: Current Theories, Research, and Future Directions”, 424.

²⁸ Luthans and Avolio, “Authentic Leadership: A Positive Developmental Approach,” 248; Avolio and Gardner, “Authentic Leadership Development: Getting to the Root of Positive Forms of Leadership,” 321. Authenticity should not be confused with sincerity. While sincerity refers to being honest with others, authenticity refers to being self-aware of one’s values, strengths, and weaknesses.

²⁹ William L. Gardner et al., ““Can You See the Real Me?” A Self-Based Model of Authentic Leader and Follower Development,” *Leadership Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (2005): 356.

all of the organization's stakeholders (in other words, not just looking out for the bottom line or profits for the shareholders).³⁰ Finally, relational transparency refers to revealing to others one's "true self" (as opposed to selective self-disclosure).³¹ Authentic leaders know who they are and what they value, they are open and honest with followers with regard to their own strengths and weaknesses, and they give individual attention to followers to help them achieve their potential. Nelson Mandela and Mother Teresa have been suggested as models of authentic leaders.

Authentic leaders influence their followers in five ways: (1) trust, (2) positive emotions, (3) modelling, (4) support for follower self-determination, and (5) positive social exchanges.³² Through the leader's relational transparency and commitment to followers' well-being, authentic leaders generate *trust* in followers and increase followers' personal identification with both the leader and the organization.³³ Greater self-awareness and balanced processing will produce more *positive emotions* in the leader.³⁴ These emotions are contagious to followers.³⁵ Through authentic relationships

³⁰ *Eudaemonic* well-being goes back to Aristotle's view that human happiness is based on excellence of character and virtue. Ilies, Morgeson, and Nahrgang identify six elements to this well-being: (1) self-acceptance, (2) environmental mastery, (3) purpose in life, (4) positive relationships, (5) personal growth, and (6) autonomy. R. Ilies, F. Morgeson, and J. D. Nahrgang, "Authentic Leadership and Eudaemonic Well-Being: Understanding Leader-Follower Outcomes," *Leadership Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (2005): 375.

³¹ Gardner et al., "Can You See the Real Me?," 357.

³² Ilies, Morgeson, and Nahrgang, 383.

³³ Ibid., 383; Gardner et al., "Can You See the Real Me?," 363.

³⁴ Gardner et al., "Can You See the Real Me?," 349.

³⁵ Ilies, Morgeson, and Nahrgang, "Authentic Leadership and Eudaemonic Well-Being: Understanding Leader-Follower Outcomes," 384; James B. Avey, Bruce J. Avolio, and Fred Luthans, "Experimentally Analyzing the Impact of Leader Positivity on Follower Positivity and Performance," *The Leadership Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (2011): 291; Avolio and Gardner, "Authentic Leadership Development: Getting to the Root of Positive Forms of Leadership," 326.

with followers, leaders are able to *model* self-awareness and balanced processing and promote these qualities in followers.³⁶ Leaders with high levels of self-awareness and balanced processing will *encourage followers to self-determine* and work according to their strengths. This leads to increased internal motivation.³⁷ Finally, through encouraging self-determination in followers and earning their trust, authentic leaders create positive social exchanges that increase follower well-being.³⁸

Outcomes of authentic leadership include increased positive emotions, trust, hope, and optimism among followers. Each of these has been tied to increased follower performance and well-being.³⁹

One other key to authentic leadership is the organizational environment. Leadership never occurs in a vacuum.⁴⁰ As important as the character traits in the leader are, authenticity in the relationship between leader and follower is just as important.⁴¹ In

³⁶ Gardner et al., “Can You See the Real Me?,” 358.

³⁷ Ilies, Morgeson, and Nahrgang, “Authentic Leadership and Eudaemonic Well-Being: Understanding Leader-Follower Outcomes,” 386.

³⁸ Ibid., 387.

³⁹ Gardner et al., “Can You See the Real Me?,” 367; Luthans and Avolio, “Authentic Leadership: A Positive Developmental Approach,” 252–55.

⁴⁰ Donna Ladkin and Chellie Spiller, “Authentic Leadership: Clashes, Convergences and Coalescences,” in *Authentic Leadership: Clashes, Convergences and Coalescences*, eds. Donna Ladkin and Chellie Spiller (Northampton, MA: Elgar, 2013), 1.

⁴¹ Avolio and Gardner, “Authentic Leadership Development: Getting to the Root of Positive Forms of Leadership,” 322; Luthans and Avolio, “Authentic Leadership: A Positive Developmental Approach,” 256; Owain Smolović Jones and Keith Grint, “Authentic Leadership and History,” in *Authentic Leadership: Clashes, Convergences and Coalescences*, eds. Donna Ladkin and Chellie Spiller (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2013), 34; Caroline Clarke, Clare Kelliher, and Doris Schedlitzki, “Laboring under False Pretenses? The Emotional Labor of Authentic Leadership,” in *Authentic Leadership: Clashes, Convergences and Coalescences*, eds. Donna Ladkin and Chellie Spiller (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2013), 83.

order for the model to work, there has to be shared goals between leader and follower.⁴² Organizations typically have a vision, strategy, and culture. Aligning these to the values and sense of purpose in both leaders and followers is a key to promoting the authentic leader-follower relationship.⁴³

In summary, an authentic leader is aware of his or her values, strengths, and weaknesses. He or she is committed to the well-being of his or her followers and leads through listening and identifying areas in which followers' values, strengths, and goals align with the goals of the organization. Through the trust built by such an authentic relationship, followers have a more positive experience with the organization and are motivated to perform better.

In an intergenerational church, a G1 leader can employ authentic leadership by taking inventory of his or her own story, recognizing who he or she is and what is important to him or her. Then, the G1 leader can lead G2 adults by hearing their stories—who *they* are and what is important to *them*. Through self-awareness and reciprocal, transparent relationships, G1 and G2 adults can determine together the Spirit's direction for the church and act accordingly. Significantly, the vision and the direction of the church are formed *together* by both leader and follower so that both are motivated to act.

While authentic leadership is still a nascent theory in need of more empirical validation, it is based on processes that have been proven in positive psychology and in other leadership models.⁴⁴ Further, dissertations by T.C. Gibbons and I.L. Gaston

⁴² Avolio et al., "Unlocking the Mask: A Look at the Process by Which Authentic Leaders Impact Follower Attitudes and Behaviors," 809.

⁴³ Luthans and Avolio, "Authentic Leadership: A Positive Developmental Approach," 257.

⁴⁴ Suze Wilson's critique that there is little empirical evidence supporting authentic leadership is valid. However, the theory is crafted from principles that *have* been demonstrated. Suze Wilson, "The

demonstrated that leaders who led from a place of self-actualization led more effectively, even when other conditions were not ideal.⁴⁵

Authentic Leadership, Bowen Theory, and Reciprocity

There are significant overlaps between authentic leadership, Bowen Theory, and Martin Buber's philosophy of reciprocity. For instance, Avolio's description of an authentic leader looks like Bowen's description of a highly differentiated person. Avolio defines self-awareness as "the demonstrated understanding of one's strengths, weaknesses, and the way one makes sense of the world."⁴⁶ He defines balanced processing as "objectively analyzing relevant data before making a decision."⁴⁷ He defines an internalized moral perspective as "being guided by internal moral standards, which are used to self-regulate behavior."⁴⁸ Finally, he defines relational transparency as "presenting one's authentic self through openly sharing information and feelings as appropriate for situations (i.e., avoiding inappropriate displays of emotion)."⁴⁹ These descriptors are remarkably similar to Bowen's portrayal of a highly differentiated person:

A person who functions in the 85–95 range [on the differentiation of self scale] is principle-oriented and goal-directed. He begins growing away from parents in infancy and becomes an "inner directed" adult. While always sure of his beliefs and convictions, he is not dogmatic or fixed in his thinking. Capable of hearing and evaluating the viewpoints of others, he can discard old beliefs in favor of

Authentic Leader Reconsidered: Integrating the Marvellous, Mundane and Mendacious" in *Authentic Leadership: Clashes, Convergences and Coalescences*, eds. Donna Ladkin and Chellie Spiller (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2013), 56.

⁴⁵ Bass, 183.

⁴⁶ Avolio, Walumbwa, and Weber, "Leadership: Current Theories, Research, and Future Directions," 424.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

new. He can listen without reacting and can communicate without antagonizing others. Secure within himself, functioning is not affected by praise or criticism. He can respect the identity of another without becoming critical or emotionally involved in trying to modify the life course of another. Able to assume total responsibility for self and sure of his responsibility to others, he does not become overly responsible for others. He is realistically aware of his dependence on his fellow man and free to enjoy relationships. He does not have a “need” for others that can impair functioning, and others do not feel “used.” Tolerant and respectful of differences, he is not prone to engage in polarized debates. He is realistic in his assessment of self and others and not preoccupied with his place in the hierarchy. Expectations of self and others are also realistic. Intense feelings are well tolerated and so he does not act automatically to alleviate them. His level of chronic anxiety is very low and he can adapt to most stresses without developing symptoms.⁵⁰

Just like a highly differentiated person can say “I” when the system demands “we,” the authentic leader knows himself or herself and can act from an internalized moral perspective rather than the immediate bottom-line demands of the organization.

Similarly, descriptions of the authentic relationship between leader and follower look like Martin Buber’s *I-Thou* relationships. Avolio and Gardner describe the authentic leadership development process:

[W]e do not view authentic leadership development as a program, unless we were to broadly label it as “life’s program.” To the contrary, authentic leadership development involves ongoing processes whereby leaders and followers gain self-awareness and establish open, transparent, trusting and genuine relationships, which in part may be shaped and impacted by planned interventions such as training.⁵¹

This process affects both leader and follower in a reciprocal manner:

One of the central premises of [Authentic Leadership Development] is that both leaders and followers are developed over time as the relationship between them becomes more authentic. As followers internalize values and beliefs espoused by the leader their conception of what constitutes their actual and possible selves are expected to change and develop over time. As followers come to know who they

⁵⁰ Bowen and Kerr, *Family Evaluation*, 106–07.

⁵¹ Avolio and Gardner, “Authentic Leadership Development: Getting to the Root of Positive Forms of Leadership,” 322.

are, they in turn will be more transparent with the leader, who in turn will benefit in his or her own development.⁵²

This emphasis on open, transparent, self-aware, and reciprocal relationships looks like Buber's *I-Thou* encounter. For instance, Kramer describes the difference between "mismatching" (*I-It*) and "meeting" (*I-Thou*) in Buber's statement, "all real living is meeting." He says that mismatching involves dismissing the other through labeling and misrepresenting, misrecognizing the other through stereotyping and judging, and miscommunicating with the other through distorting and misunderstanding. On the other hand, meeting involves accepting the other as a unique and co-equal person, affirming the other through addressing and responding even through tensions, and confirming the other through accepting and affirming, even while withstanding.⁵³ As in Buber's *I-Thou* encounter, the authentic leader is committed to listening to followers and working toward their well-being.

Authentic Leadership in an Intergenerational Church

Authentic leadership provides a way forward for G1 and G2 leaders as they navigate the tension between differentiation and solidarity in intergenerational churches. Leaders in intergenerational churches must maintain solidarity between the generations while simultaneously empowering each generation to differentiate according to its unique culture, story, and giftedness. Given its emphasis on self-awareness and balanced processing (differentiation) as well as internal moral perspective and relational transparency (solidarity), authentic leadership is a means of accomplishing this task.

⁵² Ibid., 327.

⁵³ Kramer and Gawlick, 47.

Authentic leaders can better manage: (1) the multiple, generationally-defined subcultures in a multi-generational church, (2) the power imbalance that frequently leads to G2 leaders leaving to plant their own churches, and (3) the difficulty in younger leaders leading older congregation members.

Authentic leaders lead from a place of self-awareness, encourage followers to be self-aware, and motivate followers through aligning the goals of the organization and followers. In intergenerational churches, this looks like G1 leaders recognizing their own stories (who they are and what they value) and encouraging G2 leaders to lead from their own stories. G1 leaders need to learn to balance solidarity with G2 leaders (through the gospel) and differentiation from them (through reciprocal relationships and by empowering them to lead from their own story). Reciprocal, authentic relationships between G1 and G2 adults should be characterized by self-awareness and listening.

An authentic leader in an intergenerational church will develop younger leaders and empower them to lead *in their way*. In other words, young leaders need not only the power to execute the vision of an older charismatic leader, but also a voice in shaping the vision itself. A healthy intergenerational church will have multiple, generationally diverse voices, each contributing to the vision of the collective and each empowering one another to self-actualize. At the macro level, this is accomplished in part by diversifying the Sunday morning worship style, the Sunday morning platform, and the governing board. At the micro level, this is accomplished through the way in which people of different generations relate to each other: respecting both differentiation and solidarity.

Macro-level Authentic Leadership: Diversity in the Worship Style

Arguably the most important factor in determining whether or not a church will be diverse is a diverse worship style.⁵⁴ The worship style of a church communicates a lot about who is really in charge.⁵⁵ Mark DeYmaz notes:

The statement, “We would welcome anyone here,” is in most cases more accurately translated, “We would welcome anyone here as long as they like who we are, what we do, and how we do it.” In other words, “We welcome anyone to join us as long as they are willing to conform to our ways but don’t expect us to conform to theirs!” And nowhere is this attitude more pronounced than in a congregation’s approach to worship.⁵⁶

If leadership is diversified but worship remains the same, then diverse people might *come*, but they won’t *stay*.⁵⁷

Churches often tailor their worship style to who they are “trying to reach.” Often the senior pastor or elder board makes this decision and passes regulations on to the worship pastor or worship team. A more authentic approach would be for the leaders to recognize their own worship style preferences, but then empower the church’s musicians to lead the congregation in a way that is meaningful to *them*. By empowering diverse voices to lead the congregation through worship, churches communicate that everyone is welcome and everyone is needed.

⁵⁴ Michael O. Emerson and Rodney M. Woo, *People of the Dream: Multiracial Congregations in the United States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 73.

⁵⁵ George A. Yancey, *One Body, One Spirit: Principles of Successful Multiracial Churches* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 37.

⁵⁶ Mark DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church: Mandate, Commitments, and Practices of a Diverse Congregation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 109.

⁵⁷ Emerson and Woo, 66.

Macro-level Authentic Leadership: Diversity on the Platform

Who is up front during the worship service communicates a lot about what a church values. In fact, Dudley Rutherford, senior pastor of Shepherd of the Hills Church (one of the most racially diverse churches in Los Angeles), claims that diversifying the Sunday morning platform is the *most* important thing that a church can do to promote diversity, ranking it higher than diversifying the governing board.⁵⁸ But diversity of the platform applies to more than just the worship team. It also means diversity in who preaches or makes announcements from the front. Jimmy Long notes, “We give a lot of lip service to the priesthood of believers; however, our church structures often describe a different view.”⁵⁹ Joseph Hellerman advocates for multiple voices from the pulpit:

In our day of dysfunctional families and increasing relational chaos, the local church needs more than a solitary preacher who talks eloquently about getting along with others but who answers to no one in his everyday ministry. A church needs a team of pastors who model people skills in their relationships with one another. Plurality leadership provides the context for just such modeling.⁶⁰

In a traditional approach to the Sunday morning platform, the senior pastor preaches the majority of the time. A more authentic approach would be to empower other voices to speak from their perspectives. Conventional wisdom says that pastors can only effectively reach people within 10 years of their age. Diversifying the voices that speak from the pulpit widens the age range of people who will feel comfortable in the church.

⁵⁸ Dudley Rutherford, “Plenary Session III” (lecture, Mosaix Multi-ethnic Church Conference, Long Beach, CA, November 5, 2013).

⁵⁹ Long, 147.

⁶⁰ Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family*, 196.

Macro-level Authentic Leadership: Diversity in the Governing Board

One final area in which churches need to diversify to remain intergenerational is the governing board. One reason that diverse leadership is important is representation. People are often concerned that the leadership has their own group in mind during decision making. Diversifying leadership can ease some of these concerns.⁶¹

Traditionally, the elder board consists of the “most spiritually mature” members of the church. Often this means little more than those with the most money or the most informal leadership authority. While these people should not be excluded from leadership, a more authentic approach would be for churches to broaden their perspectives on what spiritual maturity looks like. Further, they need to be intentional about empowering younger voices, even when there are older, “more qualified” candidates. Often, the tendency is to interpret “most like me” as “most qualified.”⁶²

Micro-level Authentic Leadership: Empowering People to Shape the Vision

One challenge facing intergenerational churches is the power struggles between generationally defined subcultures. For instance, Hammett and Pierce’s previously mentioned illustration of a pastor’s response to “Edna” talking to him about unwanted changes in her Sunday school class:

[The pastor] said, “We’re really not targeting your age group at this church anymore. If you really want to help, you’ll get out of that Sunday school class and teach a younger group. We’re focusing on families here. Let me know what you’d like to do for that age group.”

His abrupt words ended the conversation. Some of her ideas did, in fact, focus on reaching a younger age group. But his dismissive tone communicated that she was really not wanted or needed. He didn’t listen to her or talk with her about

⁶¹ Yancey, 86; Curtiss Paul DeYoung et al., *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 177; Rendle, 92.

⁶² Hogg, 128–30.

using her gifts in a specific way with the younger age group. He just told her the church wasn't interested in her or anyone else over sixty. Obviously this didn't work for Edna or for the "home church."⁶³

In this example, the pastor tried to lead by casting a vision for cross-generational contact without giving Edna a voice in shaping that vision. An authentic leader would have communicated the vision to Edna, but allowed Edna to shape her role in that vision. Instead of assuming that he knew what was best for Edna, an authentic leader would have empowered Edna to lead in her own way. He would have listened to her ideas about her class and her ideas for reaching the younger age group. Thus he could have created healthy cross-generational contact without marginalizing Edna in the process.

This reciprocity is essential in a church—especially in an intergenerational one.

Len Sweet writes about the inability of traditional top-down leadership strategies to promote reciprocity:

A fellowship of followers negates top-down relationships, which are actually not relationships at all but mere arrangements. It is impossible to maintain the category of leader and simultaneously engender the leader-follower dynamic. In a leadership culture the leaders are typically in the "leader ship," and the rest are in the "fellow ship." From time to time they dock at port. But when the steak and ale are finished, each person embarks on his own ship.

Jesus had one ship: discipleship. All the disciples are in the same boat. And Jesus is the captain, the one and only Leader.⁶⁴

Micro-level Authentic Leadership: Empowering G2 Leaders

A second challenge facing intergenerational churches is keeping young leaders. Young leaders need to be empowered to lead, or they will "fly off" to lead elsewhere,

⁶³ Hammett and Pierce, 80–81.

⁶⁴ Sweet, *I Am a Follower*, 84–85.

taking the young people with them. The most frequent reason young leaders cite for leaving a church is controlling leaders.⁶⁵ Larry Osborne notes:

Young eagles are born to fly. It's their nature. It's how God made them. If they can't fly high in your church, they'll bolt and fly elsewhere. And sadly, if and when they do, they'll take most of the life, vitality, and the future of the church with them.

So, honestly now, how are you and your church responding to young eagles? Are they written off, tolerated, or celebrated? Are they encouraged to fly or asked to clip their wings?

I guarantee you, your answer will determine your church's future.⁶⁶

Authentic leaders empower younger leaders to lead in *their way* instead of forcing them to conform to the vision of those with greater power and status.⁶⁷ Young people are usually willing to “wait their turn” if they feel that the system is working.⁶⁸ To return to Larry Osborne's metaphor, if young eagles can fly in an intergenerational church, they won't feel the draw to fly in their own generationally homogeneous church.⁶⁹

Micro-level Authentic Leadership: Leading “Up”

A third challenge facing intergenerational churches is the difficulty for younger leaders to lead those older than them. Authentic leadership can help younger leaders with this. The value placed on people according to their position within a society or organization is referred to as “status.” The value placed on people *apart from* their role in

⁶⁵ Long, 149.

⁶⁶ Larry Osborne, *Sticky Teams: Keeping Your Leadership Team and Staff on the Same Page* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 115.

⁶⁷ Long, 21.

⁶⁸ Anne Foner, “The Issues of Age Conflict in Political Life,” in *Intergenerational Relationships*, eds. Vjenka Garms-Homolová, Erika M. Hoerning, and Doris Schaeffer (Lewiston, NY: C.J. Hogrefe, 1984), 171.

⁶⁹ See also Hammett and Pierce, 26.

a society or organization is referred to as “esteem.” Conflict within an organization often erupts when someone’s status does not match their esteem—when a lowly esteemed person attains a position of high status, or a highly esteemed person is kept in a position of low status.⁷⁰ Due to the power imbalance inherent in age, younger people are not as esteemed by older people. When a young person is put in a high-status position in an intergenerational church, older people can be conflicted as their low esteem for that leader does not match the leader’s high status.

One of the reasons authentic leadership “works” for younger leaders is that it does not rely on status power as a motivating influence. As long as both younger leaders and older followers have a voice in contributing to the vision for the church, then that vision can be the motivating influence for the younger leader, rather than power of position or charismatic esteem.

Case Study: Believers Fellowship

Located in Gig Harbor, Washington, Believers Fellowship is an intergenerational church implementing the concepts of authentic leadership. They have intentionally tried to remain intergenerational through diversifying the worship style, the elder board, and the Sunday morning platform. The church is a 37-year-old non-denominational congregation whose average attendance in October 2015 was 398 adults and 127 children. The founding pastor (Gary Albert, a G1 adult born in 1952) is still an elder and on staff. While certainly not the only model for intergenerational church, their strategy is effective.

⁷⁰ Bass, 241.

Formal leadership at Believers Fellowship is by a plurality of elders and deacons.⁷¹ One significant distinction of Believers Fellowship is that there is (by design) no senior pastor. Both decision-making power and preaching duties are shared by the elders. This board is intentionally generationally diverse. In October 2015, five of the nine elders were G1 adults and the other four were G2 adults. Other informal leadership at the church consists of the staff,⁷² small group leaders, wives of the elders and deacons,⁷³ and ministry team leaders.

In addition to the elder board, the Sunday-morning platform at Believers Fellowship is also generationally diverse. Two of the elders, Gary Albert and Matthew Edwards (a G2 leader born in 1979), share most of the preaching duty on a 50/50 basis. While the elders are formally equal in the decision-making process, the prominence of these two elders' ministries gives them significant informal authority. Further, the Worship Director, Walker Sherman (a G2 leader born in 1982), is a significant informal leader. He leads an intergenerational worship team of approximately 50 musicians with rotating Sunday-morning duties.

The worship "style" at Believers Fellowship emphasizes power sharing and reciprocity and therefore fluctuates. Instead of being determined by the formal leadership, the worship style varies from Sunday to Sunday depending on the band members.

⁷¹ Elders and deacons are distinguished by a teaching ministry. Elders teach from the pulpit, in a class, or in a small group. Deacons do not necessarily teach. Formally, the elder and deacon positions are limited to men, but informally their wives fulfill significant leadership roles.

⁷² The staff are the employees of the church. Since Believers Fellowship considers this a practical but not biblical role, it is more of an informal leadership position than a formal one. Staff members may also serve as elders or deacons.

⁷³ Formally, elders and deacons are all male, but informally their wives function with as much or more leadership authority as they do.

Sometimes it is led by a G1 adult from the piano, sometimes it is acoustic folk music led by a G2 adult, and sometimes it is electric-guitar-led rock music led by an emerging G3 leader. Sometimes it is even country or bluegrass music. Key to this strategy is the philosophy that the Spirit works through artists in the church and that the elders need not control their style.

In February–October 2015, I conducted two waves of surveys in the church exploring issues such as frequency of intergenerational contact, level of identification with leaders in the church, adjustment to change, and feelings of powerlessness. In the first wave of interviews, I asked open-ended questions of eighteen G1 leaders (nine married couples) and sixteen G2 leaders (eight married couples) about family closeness, closeness to the church, areas and levels of frustration, and feelings of powerlessness. The interviews lasted between one and two hours, with most lasting about ninety minutes. Interviewees were chosen based on them either filling a formal or informal leadership position in the church.⁷⁴ Questions asked of G1 leaders are included in Appendix A, and questions asked of G2 leaders are included in Appendix B.

In the second wave of interviews, I took the most common answers given to the open-ended questions in the first wave and created a multiple-choice survey for the entire church. The survey was created on [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com) and links were published on the church Facebook page, website, and printed bulletin. It was mentioned from the front during the worship service for six weeks and a printed version was made available on the

⁷⁴ G1 interviewees included five elders and their wives, one deacon and his wife, and three small-group-leading couples. G2 interviewees included two elders and their wives, four staff members and their spouses, one small-group-leading couple, and one elder's daughter with her husband. I grouped interviewees according to whether or not their parents or grown children attended the church. Twenty interviewees had parents or grown children in the church; fourteen did not.

sixth week. Average attendance over the six weeks was 409 adults and 120 children, and I received 242 responses. Questions asked in the second wave are included in Appendix C.

Insights from Survey One: G1 and G2 Leaders

The first significant insight of the first survey was the perception that Believers Fellowship was an intergenerational church. When asked, “Would you describe Believers Fellowship as intergenerational?” not a single person responded “no.” A follow-up question was asked about whether the respondent had any meaningful cross-generational contact through the church, and 33 out of 34 identified something.⁷⁵ An open-ended question about the locus of this contact revealed the Sunday morning worship service, small groups, ministry teams, special events, and friends of parents/children as key places. One G1 elder noted the importance of groups: “On Sunday morning I tend to gravitate toward people my age (which I think is okay), so I appreciate that there are younger guys at the elder meetings.”

The second most significant insight of the first survey was the areas in which intergenerational conflict were perceived to have occurred. The most common answers were: (1) changes in the worship style, (2) changes in the teaching, and (3) how to spend money. These mirror areas reported in other studies: worship,⁷⁶ social issues (especially

⁷⁵ Meaningful cross-generational contact is the hallmark of an intergenerational church. Allen and Ross, 19.

⁷⁶ Carroll and Roof, 201.

homosexuality),⁷⁷ the budget,⁷⁸ and building projects.⁷⁹ In most churches these problems are solved with a “wait your turn” attitude toward G2 adults,⁸⁰ but no respondents reported these feelings of powerlessness. This result probably evidences selection bias since everyone interviewed was either a leader in the church or the spouse of a leader in the church. Still, it is significant that there were not widespread reports of powerlessness among G2 leaders.⁸¹ When asked how intergenerational conflict is resolved at Believers Fellowship, not a single respondent said anything close to “wait your turn.”

The third most significant insight of the first survey was that the presence of one’s family in the church made changes less stressful. According to Bowen Family Systems Theory, people with a lower degree of differentiation from their parents and a higher degree of attachment to the church should be more disturbed by changes in the church.⁸² I expected most of the intergenerational families to have ambivalent relationships with the church characterized by both closeness and conflict, and for these families to be more stressed by changes in the church.⁸³ This was not the case. Most of the intergenerational

⁷⁷ Ibid., 11.

⁷⁸ Hammett and Pierce, 141.

⁷⁹ Carroll and Roof, 159.

⁸⁰ Menconi, 4–5.

⁸¹ Five out of eighteen G1 respondents and six out of sixteen G2 respondents reported feelings of powerlessness. The most common answers in the open-ended question about instances of powerlessness were: (1) the change in worship style, and (2) the change in the format of the Lord’s Supper on Sunday morning.

⁸² Friedman, 197.

⁸³ Kurt Lüscher and Karl A. Pillemer, “Intergenerational Ambivalence. A New Approach to the Study of Parent-Child Relations in Later Life,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 60 no. 2 (1998): 414.

families reported close relationships, few conflicts, and little dissatisfaction with changes in the church.

Insights from Survey Two: Entire Congregation

In the second survey, I expanded the base to the entire congregation. By doing this I was able to confirm the finds of the first survey and compare the experiences of different kinds of people. By asking people their age, I was able to compare the experiences of people within 10 years of the two main teachers with those outside of that window. By asking whether they had children and grandchildren, I was able to compare experiences of G1 and G2 adults. By asking how long people had attended the church, I was able to compare the experiences of people who had been with the church through tough transitions and those who had joined the church after the transitions. I could also analyze how the church has changed since the transitions.

Significantly, respondents overwhelmingly considered Believers Fellowship to be intergenerational. Over 93% of respondents considered Believers Fellowship to be intergenerational, and over 89% identified at least occasional meaningful contact with people of another generation (6.44% claimed no meaningful contact and 3.86% claimed “other”). The Sunday morning worship service was overwhelmingly the most likely place to have meaningful intergenerational contact (84%), followed by special events (56%) and small groups (53%).⁸⁴

⁸⁴ This probably reflects levels of commitment to the church, since the Sunday morning worship service is the most likely connection point for all members of the church. When filtered for people who spend 20 hours per month or more at the church, 91% listed the Sunday morning service, 69% small groups, 69% friendships, 65% special events, and 57% ministry teams.

The second survey confirmed that the changes to the Sunday morning worship service were the most stressful events in the church's recent history. The most stressful event was the change in worship style (43% at least somewhat stressful), followed by the change in teaching schedule (27% at least somewhat stressful). The addition of the young elders and the renovation project were not very stressful (4% and 17% at least somewhat stressful).

The second survey confirmed the importance of representation on the platform. First, 198 of 242 respondents (81.82%) were either 26–46 or 53–73 (within 10 years of the two primary teachers). Only 9 respondents (3.72%) were more than 10 years older than Albert. Further, the survey demonstrated a significant change in the age makeup of the church after Edwards was hired. When filtered for people attending 10 years or more (Edwards' hire date), 43% identified as G1 adults and 57% as G2 adults. When filtered for people attending 10 years or less, 27% identified as G1 adults and 73% as G2 adults. Seventy-five of 94 (79.79%) G2 adults aged 26–45 (within 10 years of Edwards' age) were new to the church within the last 10 years.⁸⁵ The change in worship style affected the demographic less. When filtered for people attending less than 5 years (Sherman's hire date), 29% identified as G1 adults and 71% as G2 adults.

One possible area for concern revealed by the survey is the level of feelings of powerlessness among G1 adults. Forty-four percent of G1 adults reported having felt powerlessness compared to 37% of G2 adults. When asked if people like them were considered in the decision making process, 37% of G1 adults said that they were

⁸⁵ Granted, people who have been a part of the church for more than 10 years or more likely to be older and thus grandparents.

considered at least somewhat and 32% said that they were not considered very much or at all. Asked the same question, 51% of G2 adults said that they were considered at least somewhat and only 15% said that they were not considered very much or at all. Twenty-five percent of G1 adults said that they could affect change at Believers Fellowship at least somewhat, whereas 38% reported that they could not affect change very easily or at all. Forty percent of G2 adults reported that they could affect change at least somewhat and only 25% claimed not to be able to affect change very much or at all.

There are two possible explanations for the discrepancies: (1) G1 adults are disempowered at Believers Fellowship, or (2) G1 adults are used to having more power than they do at Believers Fellowship. Interestingly, G3 respondents⁸⁶ (arguably the most disempowered since they have no representation on the elder board and less representation on the platform) responded as being the *most* empowered generation. Only 12% reported feelings of powerlessness; only 19% reported being unable to affect change. This may suggest that reciprocity creates more feelings of empowerment in younger people and powerlessness in older people.

Conclusion

A healthy intergenerational church needs to hear the voices of every generation.⁸⁷ In her plenary lecture at Inhabit 2014, Christena Cleveland noted that the two keys to leading from a place of privilege are solidarity and emptying.⁸⁸ In an intergenerational

⁸⁶ Filtered for answering “no” to having children and being either under 18, 18–25, or 26–45.

⁸⁷ Allen and Ross, 265–66.

⁸⁸ Christena Cleveland, “Power and Place,” (plenary lecture at Inhabit 2014, Seattle, WA, April 25–26, 2014).

church, older leaders need to listen and identify with younger people (solidarity). They also need to be aware of the power imbalance and empower younger leaders (emptying). Because it emphasizes self-awareness and empowerment, authentic leadership is an effective model for leading an intergenerational church. At Believers Fellowship, diversifying the worship style, Sunday morning platform, and elder board has created an environment with low levels of reported feelings of disempowerment from both G1 and G2 adults. While obviously a small sample size, these results are encouraging.

CONCLUSION

In the opening pages of this work, I recounted the story of Pastors Dan and Kurt at Harbor Christian Church. Though fictional, the story hits close to home for many intergenerational churches. Generationally diverse leadership is one key to maintaining an intergenerational congregation. However, diversity brings friction and misunderstandings, and often it leads to power struggles. Churches typically resolve these power struggles with segregation. They create a traditional service for the older people and a contemporary service for the young people. When this happens, the church loses the benefit of intergenerational contact.

Eventually, there is a conflict that cannot be resolved with segregation, and the leadership is called upon to determine a winner and a loser. Either the younger people are told “that’s not how we’ve always done it,” or the older people are told “you had your time.” When there are winners and losers, the losing generation feels disempowered and is more likely to leave the church for another congregation (resulting in two generationally homogeneous churches).

Authentic leadership is a way to avoid this cycle. G1 adults in intergenerational churches need to learn to empower G2 leaders to lead in their way. By being aware of each generation’s gifts, stories, and values, by uniting behind the common gospel story, and by relating to each other as equals, G1 and G2 leaders can prevent each other from feeling disempowered. This works because an intergenerational church functions like an intergenerational family.

It is not surprising that intergenerational churches function like intergenerational families because Paul called it an οἶκος. To Paul, the church was a surrogate kinship

group like a family. God functioned as *paterfamilias* over his household, and church elders functioned as stewards over that household. This meant that the elders were more like brothers and sisters to the congregation, and that relationships should be characterized by loyalty and reciprocity. Within Paul's οἶκος metaphor, the gospel functioned as the story that gave the family *solidarity* as it was handed down from one generation to the next. However, within this solidarity there was freedom for each generation to *differentiate* from their elders and make the story their own.

Conflicts often arise in intergenerational families and intergenerational churches as they try to balance this tension between differentiation and solidarity. According to Bowen Family Systems Theory, this is because both families and churches are emotional systems. In any emotional system, people experience both a togetherness force and an individuality force. A person's level of differentiation is their ability to say "I" when the system is demanding "we."

In intergenerational families, anxiety is often caused by the competing loyalties between G2 adults' family of origin and their nuclear family. When G2 family members do things differently than the way they were raised, it creates anxiety in the system and pushes people back to roles and behaviors they learned in their family of origin. The same thing can happen when churches become intergenerational and G2 adults want to do things differently. In order to avoid these kinds of conflicts, both G1 and G2 adults need to differentiate themselves from the system and operate in reciprocal relationships.

Martin Buber's philosophy provides a model of what reciprocal relationships between G1 and G2 adults should look like. Buber stressed the difference between *experiencing* something or someone (*I-It* relationships) and *encountering* them (*I-Thou*

relationships). In an I-Thou encounter, a person surrenders to another and allows himself or herself to be acted upon. Each person in the relationship is aware of who they are and open to both acting and being acted upon. Buber saw these relationships as the key to encountering God.

While Buber was not Trinitarian, his ideas are consistent with those found in John 17 and 1 Corinthians 12–14. In John 17, Jesus says that through the Spirit, the love of the Father for the Son overflows into the church's love for one another. Thus, every act of love in the church is an encounter with the Spirit. Further, in 1 Corinthians 12–14, Paul emphasizes that true Christian unity demands diversity. The Spirit does not gift everyone alike, and members of the body must learn to be aware of their own giftedness and to need and empower one another.

Since it promotes influence through self-awareness and empowerment, authentic leadership is a promising model for leaders in an intergenerational church. Given the decline in power in the workforce and the need for ethical leadership not based on transaction, authentic leadership has emerged as an encouraging theory for influencing others apart from power and transaction. By being self-aware and committed to stakeholder well-being, authentic leaders can lead through transparent relationships and build positive emotions in followers. While still in a nascent stage, the theory is grounded in principles proven in positive psychology and other leadership models.

In intergenerational churches, authentic leadership looks like both G1 and G2 adults being aware of their gifts and weaknesses and being willing to listen to the stories of others. It means empowering one another, especially in the areas of worship style, the

Sunday morning platform, and the decision-making board. Since G1 adults typically have more power, this may require more effort on their part.

The story I wrote for chapter 3 had a happy ending. Real conflicts in real intergenerational churches can also have happy endings. When people learn to encounter one another through self-awareness, listening, and mutual empowerment, there can be both differentiation and solidarity between the generations. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12:12 ESV, “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.”

APPENDIX A: SURVEY ONE QUESTIONS FOR G1 LEADERS

- How many siblings do you have? Are your parents still living? What number are you?
- How do you and your siblings interact within your family?
- What do you feel like your parents' expectations of you were?
- How many children do you have? Grandchildren?
- How close are you to your family now? (Both parents and children)
- How has your relationship to your parents changed over the years?
- How has your relationship with your children changed over time?
- How often do you talk to your children?
- What are the major areas of disagreement that you have with your children?
- What are some things that you do to help your children now? Do they ever ask you for advice?
- What are some ways that your children help you now? What are the areas in which you ask for advice?
- How long have you been a part of the church? What roles do you have at the church?
- How many hours per week would you say that you are involved in church activities?
- What is most satisfying about Believers Fellowship?
- What is most frustrating about Believers Fellowship?
- On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being highest), how well do you feel that you belong at Believers Fellowship?
- What is the one time when you were the most uncomfortable with what was going at BF?
- Would you describe Believers Fellowship as intergenerational?

- If so, what makes it intergenerational?
- How much contact do you have with people of other generations?
- In what context is intergenerational most likely to happen?
- When you have intergenerational contact, what does that contact look like? What role are you in?
- How much do you feel like you can effect change at Believers Fellowship? What is one example?
- Have you ever felt powerless to effect change? What is one example in which you felt powerless?
- How would you describe the music at Believers Fellowship?
- What do you like best about the music at Believers Fellowship?
- What would you change about the music?
- How would you describe the teaching at Believers Fellowship?
- What do you like best about the teaching at Believers Fellowship?
- What would you change about the teaching at Believers Fellowship?
- How would you describe the elder board at Believers Fellowship?
- In what areas do you think people at BF are most likely to divide on generational lines?
- When Believers Fellowship divides on generational lines, how do you feel these conflicts are resolved?

APPENDIX B: SURVEY ONE QUESTIONS FOR G2 LEADERS

- How many siblings do you have? What number are you?
- How do you and your siblings interact within your family?
- What do you feel like your parents' expectations of you were?
- How close are you to your family now?
- How has your relationship to your parents changed over the years?
- Compared to your siblings, how close are you to our parents?
- How often do you talk to your parents?
- What are the major areas of disagreement that you have with your parents?
- What are some things that you do to help your parents now? Do they ever ask you for advice?
- What are some ways that your parents help you now? What are the areas in which you ask for advice?
- How long have you been a part of the church? What roles do you have at the church?
- How many hours per week would you say that you are involved in church activities?
- What is most satisfying about Believers Fellowship?
- What is most frustrating about Believers Fellowship?
- On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being highest), how well do you feel that you belong at Believers Fellowship?
- What is the one time when you were the most uncomfortable with what was going at BF?
- Would you describe Believers Fellowship as intergenerational?
- If so, what makes it intergenerational?
- How much contact do you have with people of other generations?

- In what context is intergenerational most likely to happen?
- When you have intergenerational contact, what does that contact look like? What role are you in?
- How much do you feel like you can effect change at Believers Fellowship?
- What is one example of you effecting change?
- Have you ever felt powerless to effect change?
- What is one example in which you felt powerless?
- How would you describe the music at Believers Fellowship?
- What do you like best about the music at Believers Fellowship?
- What would you change about the music?
- How would you describe the teaching at Believers Fellowship?
- What do you like best about the teaching at Believers Fellowship?
- What would you change about the teaching at Believers Fellowship?
- How would you describe the elder board at Believers Fellowship?
- In what areas do you think people at BF are most likely to divide on generational lines?
- When Believers Fellowship divides on generational lines, how do you feel these conflicts are resolved?

APPENDIX C: SURVEY TWO QUESTIONS FOR ENTIRE CONGREGATION

Do you have children?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Do you have grandchildren?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

What is your age?

- ☐ Under 18
- ☐ 18–25
- ☐ 26–45
- ☐ 46–52
- ☐ 53–73
- ☐ Over 73

How long have you been a part of Believers Fellowship?

- ☐ Less than 1 year
- ☐ 1–5 years
- ☐ 5–10 years
- ☐ More than 10 years

How well would you say that you feel that you “belong” at Believers Fellowship (like you feel at home at church)?

- ☐ I belong very well
- ☐ I belong somewhat well
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ I feel somewhat out of place at Believers Fellowship
- ☐ I feel very out of place at Believers Fellowship
- ☐ Other (please specify) _____

How many hours per month would you say that you are involved in church-related activities? (This includes social activities with friends from church.)

- ☐ 4 hours per month or less (attend on Sunday morning)
- ☐ 5–12 hours per month (rarely miss a Sunday, also involved in other activities)
- ☐ 12–20 hours per month (rarely miss a Sunday, active member of a weekly Bible study or group)
- ☐ More than 20 hours per month (rarely miss a Sunday, very involved in many activities)

Would you describe Believers Fellowship as intergenerational?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If so, why do you consider Believers Fellowship intergenerational?

In church activities, how much meaningful contact do you have with people of another generation?

- ☐ Frequent meaningful contact with people of another generation
- ☐ Occasional meaningful contact with people of another generation
- ☐ No meaningful contact with people of another generation
- ☐ Other (please specify) _____

In what kinds of church activity do you come into contact with people of another generation? (Check all that apply)

- ☐ The Sunday morning worship service
- ☐ Small group or Bible study
- ☐ Ministry team
- ☐ Special events
- ☐ Friendships outside of official church functions

How well would you say you identify with the musicians at Believers Fellowship (Walker Sherman and the band)?

- ☐ I identify with them very well
- ☐ I identify with them somewhat
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ I do not identify with them very well
- ☐ I do not identify with them at all
- ☐ I do not know or I do not care

How well would you say you identify with the teachers at Believers Fellowship (Matt Edwards and Gary Albert)?

- ☐ I identify with them very well
- ☐ I identify with them somewhat
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ I do not identify with them very well
- ☐ I do not identify with them at all
- ☐ I do not know or I do not care

How well would you say that you identify with the elders at Believers Fellowship?

- ☐ I identify with them very well
- ☐ I identify with them somewhat
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ I do not identify with them very well
- ☐ I do not identify with them at all
- ☐ I do not know or I do not care

In 2006–2012, the teaching at Believers Fellowship changed (from Gary Albert 100% of the time to 50/50 Gary Albert and Matt Edwards). How stressful was this change for you?

- ☐ Very stressful
- ☐ Somewhat stressful
- ☐ Not stressful at all
- ☐ I wasn't here for the change or I have not noticed the change

In 2011–2013, the style of worship changed (Walker Sherman was hired, the format of the service was changed, and response time was added). How stressful were these changes for you?

- ☐ Very stressful
- ☐ Somewhat stressful
- ☐ Not stressful at all
- ☐ I wasn't here for the change or I have not noticed the change

In 2010–2014, we added four young elders (Matt Edwards, Johnny Pearson, Davey Bentler, and Tim Owen). How stressful was this change for you?

- ☐ Very stressful
- ☐ Somewhat stressful
- ☐ Not stressful at all
- ☐ I wasn't here for the change or I have not noticed the change

In 2015, we spent \$350,000 renovating the worship space and foyer. How stressful was this change for you?

- ☐ Very stressful
- ☐ Somewhat stressful
- ☐ Not stressful at all
- ☐ I wasn't here for the change or I have not noticed the change

How much do you feel that you can affect change at Believers Fellowship?

- ☐ I can easily affect change at Believers Fellowship
- ☐ I can somewhat affect change at Believers Fellowship
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ I cannot easily affect change at Believers Fellowship
- ☐ I cannot affect change at Believers Fellowship at all
- ☐ I do not care about affecting change at Believers Fellowship

Have you ever felt powerless to effect change at Believers Fellowship?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

When changes are made, how well do you feel that people like you are considered in the decision-making process?

- People like me are considered a lot in the decision-making process
- People like me are considered somewhat in the decision-making process
- Neutral
- People like me are not considered very much in the decision-making process
- People like me are not considered at all in the decision-making process
- I do not care if people like me are considered in the decision-making process

When you are unhappy with a change, how free do you feel to voice your concerns?

- When I am unhappy with a change, I feel very free to voice my concerns
- When I am unhappy with a change, I feel somewhat free to voice my concerns
- Neutral
- When I am unhappy with a change, I do not feel very free to voice my concerns
- When I am unhappy with a change, I do not feel any freedom to voice my concerns
- I have never been unhappy with change or I do not wish to voice my concerns

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