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OBSERVATIONS ON YOUNG ADULT MINISTRY AND RECOMMENDATIONS VIA GENERATIONAL THEOLOGY

A SENIOR THESIS SUBMITTED

TO THE FACULTY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

BACHELOR OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

For many years I have been an active participant in the church, youth group, and other religiously affiliated groups and organizations. My participation began in childhood, continued through my youth, and extends today into young adulthood. While my engagement in spirituality has remained fairly constant, the attitudes and values that I bring to each commitment are not so steadfast or unchanging Instead, the experiences that I endured, the education that I have been privileged to receive, and the times and culture in which I have lived have all contributed to the shaping of my character. Additionally, there are some who say that each of those stages in life has a profound impact on spiritual development. It is for this reason that I decided to research the developmental stage that I currently claim: young adulthood. I had hoped to learn what influences may be present in young adulthood that shape one's faith and religious identity. Fairly quickly, I learned that young adulthood might be linked to more than just an numerical age in the growth timeline. Throughout my faith development, I have continued to notice a decrease in the number of my peers who are engaged in any religious institution. This observation also increased my desire to look at the mechanisms and motivations present in young adulthood that might influence an individual one way or the other when religious affiliation and commitment are evaluated. I must admit that there are two possibilities from writing about a topic in which one is native: either an intelligent perspective that is able to see what outsiders cannot, or one that is blinded by his or her own participation in that subject. I hope my contribution will be something closer to the former.

Young adults: they are typically named as the individuals who are between the ages of 18 and 30. More specifically, for the purposes of this paper, young adults are the post-high school, pre-family group. Marketing and research teams struggle to understand them for their presence in the US economy, political analysts attempt to decipher with which movements they will side, educators will continue to seek new ways to teach and reach them. Young adults are the perpetual future leaders of the world, the ones who will continue to shape and carry out the destiny of human kind. They are important to the old because that is who they came from and they are important to the young because they are today's role models. The young adult demographic has one of the most powerful positions in the demographic group because of their potential. They are limited merely by the attachment of "young" to "adults." Not only is this age group important to society as a whole, but this age is one that is important to the individual: it is a time of formation, of growth, of emerging. The young adult that one sees today is a reflection, or at least a beginning, of the full adult that one sees tomorrow. It is because of this formative period that one institution is undoubtedly interested in the young adult demographic: that institution is the church.

It is impossible to ignore the absence of young adult participation in church. Even before considering the numerical presence of young adults in churches one must acknowledge the glaring hole in young adult participation as compared to the children/youth demographic group, the elderly demographic group, and the married, adult demographic. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America may serve as one case study in the lack of a young adult presence in congregations. The following figures are from the ELCA Department for Research and Evaluation:

- About 9% of the United States population is aged 15-19, yet only 5% of the ELCA population is aged 15-19;
- About 8.5% of the United States population is aged 20-24, yet less that 2% of the ELCA population is aged 20-24;
- About 8% of the United States population is aged 25-29, yet only 2.5% of the ELCA population is aged 25729.[1]

Up until age 40, no age group has a matching participation level in the ELCA as compared with its comparative United States age group. The ideal situation, one would suppose, would include a replication of the age group percentages for the United States (e.g. If 8% of the population were aged 25-29, then 8% of the congregation should be aged 25-29). However, after age 40, every age group (40-44, 45-49, etc.) meets or beats the comparative demographic statistic. This means that the clear majority of the members of the ELCA congregations are in the adult demographic group. The loss of the young adult age group is not limited to the Lutheran church, but is part of a "decline in the number of young faces" in religious institutions, "irrespective of whether the venue is a church, synagogue, or mosque." [2]

The church will always have a marked interest in the young adult demographic group. As stated earlier, the young adult age is a time of formation for an individual. As an ethical and moral leader, the church has a responsibility to want to be involved with individuals in that particular stage of their growth. By helping in their growth, the church assures the promulgation of wise, ethically-bound, and Christ-centered leaders in the

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[1] "Comparing the Age of ELCA Attendees and the US Population," from *ELCA Department for Research and Evaluation,* http://www.elca.org/re/USCongs/age.pdf , visited 2 November 2005.
[2] Anna Greenberg, "OMG: How Generation Y is Redefming Faith in the iPod Era," from *Rebooters. net,* www.rebooters.net/poll.html, visited 6 November 2005.

world. Yet, as one can easily see, the church is often unable to retain this age group. Why this lack of retention? Why this fall from church involvement? How can the church be a moral leader if it is unable to bring in these students and future leaders?

Some may say that this time in life is needed by the young adult to step back from the church, to reconsider one's approach to life before continuing on with a faith that is applicable and heartfelt, that one must find oneself in this world of chaos before being able to find oneself in the body of Christ. Yet there are also many who believe that to accept this drop off as a natural phenomenon would be a waste of an opportunity to minister to the impressionable young adult mind and to waste the ability to harness the energy, strength, and creative thinking power of the young adult generation. This paper is written for those people and from the perspective of one who agrees.

This paper contains two parts. Firstly, it deals with a study on young adult life and religiosity in general, from its expressions in fashion to the way young adults communicate in everyday life. Secondly, the paper will move to a more specific lens — that of the Lutheran faith and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America's response to the theories of young adult ministry. By setting up the background of the contemporary young adult and moving into the Lutheran tradition, I wish to show how young adult ministry can be improved both in the ELCA and other Christian groups.

To begin with, it will be most beneficial to define who young adults are and address a key topic that will continue to inform and guide this journey into the young adult faith walk: generational difference.

CHAPTER TWO

DEFINING GENERATIONS

The validity of categorizing people based upon the period in which they were born is not an unquestioned science. When William Strauss and Neil Howe presented their ideas on generations and eras in 1991, they were certainly not the first. However, they are often cited with popularizing the concept of identifying groups based on birth periods. Though thinking in terms of generations was and is still not completely accepted, it did encourage marketing gurus to begin to focus on generations with a lens of social/political/economical/racial/etc. perspective. Many writers have come to embrace the idea of generations, though the specific period that each generation encapsulates is debated. 20th century generations include the G.I. Generation (from 1901 to 1924), the Silent Generation (from 1925 to 1945), the Baby Boom Generation (from 1946 to 1960), Generation X (from 1961 to 1981), and Generation Y (from 1982 to 2002).[4] Many of these groups have additional names. It would be presumptuous to decide that those estimated dates for each generation are set officially. While Strauss and Howe make a point to base their ideas on numerical values, many skeptics debate the inclusion/exclusion of those who are on the edge of each generation. For example, a better approximation of Generation Y is something like the late 1970s to somewhere around the turn of the century. The Baby Boom Generation is perhaps a little easier to define, as the demarcation of that group is based upon the birth rate numbers (at least in

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Many of my sources (Beaudoin, Long, Flory, Cherry, etc.) mentioned Howe and Strauss in passing, though not under the pretense that either author *invented* the concept of generations. It might be most accurate to say that Howe and Strauss represent a popularized version of generation theory. In other words, it is difficult to engage in conversation about generations without at least glossing Strauss and Howe. ' Wikipedia, "G.I. Generation," "Silent Generation," "Generation X," and "Generation Y," www.wikipedia.com, visited 4 November 2005.

the United States). It is for these reasons, and more, that some demographics experts protest the use of generation divisions.

In 1994, Richard Morin wrote an article about the senselessness of assuming that people within a different societal age will think differently and have varying opinions, compared to other societal ages.[5] Morin uses data from a survey done by the Roper Center for Public Opinions Research which shows that there may be "no significant national or personal mood differences separating the young and the old."[6] Morin presents statistical data that shows that the national percentages of dissatisfaction with "the overall direction of the country" by Generation Xers is comparable to that of their elders (18% of those aged 18-29, 22% of those aged 30-49, and 19% of those aged 50 and older). Additionally, Morin says that the national percentage of dissatisfaction with financial positions is similarly parallel (31% of those aged 18-29, 42% of those aged 30-44, and 38% of those aged 45-59). This trend is continued in the subjects of dissatisfaction with the "overall direction of the country," distrust in the United States government, and expectation of government figures.[8] Unfortunately, Morin's article only focuses on the idea of "disaffection or displacement"[9] or dissatisfaction within age groupings and does not delve into general beliefs, attitudes, and opinions of young adults. Also, Morin does not have the data to make a side-by-side comparison of the views of today's young adults with the young adults of, for instance, the G.I. Generation. In this way, Morin is missing out on a general outlook of young adults. This broader viewpoint is an integral part of

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[5] Richard Morin, "Much Ado about Twentysomethings," *(Washington Post* National Weekly Edition, 31 January 1994), 27.
[6] Ibid.
Ibid.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid

this paper's later presentation of a four-part generational theology: young adults should first be understood as children of God, then as a specific young adult grouping, then as young adults split into generations, and finally as generations split into "sub-generations."[10]

The concept of a "generation" is a tool from the area of demography, or the study of population statistics or population dynamics. Interestingly enough, demographics was originally intended to study only the "size, structure and distribution of populations, and how populations change over time due to births, deaths, migration and ageing."[11] Gradually, generation terminology has branched out beyond the identification of specific periods of high/low numbers of births/death/etc. to also include attitudes and identities. This change is why Generation Baby Boom is considered an "authentic generation:" its demarcation is based upon birth rates and not social, political, or economical influences. For this paper, the use of generation differences will be continued. Perhaps the best reason to do so is because many individuals are familiar with describing and articulating general generational values and trends, though the specifics may be debated. The chapter is not intent on `proving' why Generation Y is so different from Generation X, but instead offers the idea that political, social, economical, etc., factors affect the formulation of young adult personalities, both nationally and individually. In this respect, there should be a revisable approach to young adult ministry just as there is an adaptable interpretation of generation `differences.'

For the purposes of this paper, the pre-marriage, post-high school young adult demographic group includes those individuals from age 18 to age 30. If Generation X is

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[10] See the section of this paper titled "Conclusions"

[11] "Demography," from Reference.com, www.reference.com/browse/wiki/demography, visited 11 Nov 2005.

accepted as the group from 1961 to 1981 and Generation Y from 1982 to 2002, then the young adult Gen Xers are currently ages 24 to 30 and the young adult Generation Yers are ages 18 to 23. More specifically, the young adults from age 18 to 22 are *most probably* from Generation Y and the young adults from age 27 to 30 are *most probably* from Generation X, while those from about age 23 to 26 are somewhat in the middle and may align with either generation. Highlighting this division in the young adult category acknowledges that, in order to fully study the young adult age group, one must consider both Generation X and Generation Y and the cultures in which each exists.

One major problem with analyzing the current situation with young adults and Christianity is the difficulty in defining a generation while it is still emerging. How should one propose to categorize Generation Y in its young adult stage when barely one quarter of it has passed through into the adult stage? While the problem is an understandable one, it is still leaving some church administration leaders without many options. Another concern in many Christian congregations is the issue of a widening gap in the "pre-marriage, post-high school" group. This stage, in turn, is contributing to a greater drop in young adult populations in churches. While it may be impossible to compare young adults of today with young adults from 30 years back, there is a growing sentiment, if an unpublished one, that this young adult "hole" in congregations is stretching to reach older age groups. Instead of 35- and 30-year-olds finding themselves in committed relationships, possibly with children, and perhaps turning back to the church, these older young adults are continuing their separation from Christian institutions. Now, church leaders are facing a decline in young adult participation *and a* growth of what this paper will call the "post-family, pre-family" stage. Studies show that

the age for marrying is rising[12] but young adults are still leaving their own families at the same age as before, hence the stretching of the "post-family, pre-family" gap.

Churches are, for the most part, forced to be reactionary rather than visionary. Instead of preparing a church to accept young adults, the church must instead adapt as the time progresses. In such a complex matter as identifying with a generation, that problem can often be one that is insurmountable. Today, it is possible to look back at young adult participation in churches during the times of the Baby Boomer Generation and say, "Yes, this is what Christian ministers should have done." Hindsight is 20/20. Now it is better understood who the Baby Boomers were, what they were seeking, and what values were considered important to them. Doing the same sort of analysis concurrently as the Baby Boomers were developing was much more complex and complicated.

Yet as difficult as predicting the future is, certain industries have found success in learning to early identify and categorize a market type. This is not to say that churches should change as often as a market index, but to say that literature and methodology for identifying those changes should be available. Yet when one looks at the bookshelves lining the Christian sociology sections of a bookstore, these resources are not widely available in great numbers. Books on addressing the "Postmodern Generation" or guides for developing relationships and ministry with Generation Y are in short supply, even though the inability to recruit and retain young adult congregation members may be one of the most difficult challenges for church leaders, at least in terms of congregation population numbers. There does seem to be some study of Generation X and the

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'2 Jennifer Roback Morse, Stephanie Coontz, "The Marrying Kinds" from transcript *of Uncommon Knowledge: Love and Marriage* (San Jose, CA: produced by the Hoover Institute, 18 April 2005), http://www.uncommonknowledge.org/900/937.html, visited 24 November 2005.

church,[13] but this is solving only one part of this paper's proposal for generational theology.

By studying Generation X and Generation Y in a general sense, it will be more possible to understand how the members of this young adult demographic group approach religiosity, and will therefore inform conclusions and recommendations for ministering to current young adults in Christian churches.

[13] Which should be some indication of why a majority of my sources that deal directly with a specific generation and young adult ministry are written within the constrains of Generation X.

CHAPTER THREE

WHO ARE THESE YOUNG ADULTS?

This paper does not have the means to include every description of Generation X and Generation Y. Indeed, even the sources used in this paper are not numerous enough to provide conclusive evidence for the identity of an entire generation, if such a claim is even possible. Because the beginning and end of young adulthood is not so easily defined, this paper attempts to include ages 18 through 30. Also, the decline in age groups for church congregations seems to continue up through 30 years of age, so this paper shall continue to include this expanded timeline of young adulthood. This section of the paper shall start with the older section of the young adult demographic group, Generation X, move into a prognosis of the younger half, Generation Y, and include a combined evaluation of both groups before moving onto a study of the movements within young adulthood.

Précis of Generation X

Sarah Hinlicky, editorial assistant at *First Things: The Journal of Religion, Culture, and Public Life* summarizes the plight of Generation X succinctly with the following passage:

> We've never been proud to be Americans—our political memory stretches back only as far as Vietnam, Watergate, and Reaganomics. Our parents left religion and, perhaps not coincidentally, each other in unprecedented numbers. Failed ideologies were mother's milk to us: love didn't save the world, the Age of Aquarius brought no peace, sexual liberation brought us AIDS and legions of fatherless children, Marxism collapsed. We can't even imagine a world of cultural or national unity; our world is more like a tattered patchwork quilt. We have every little inconsequential thing,

> Nintendo 64s and homepages and cell phones, but not one important thing to believe in. We are the much–maligned Generation X: your mission is to get us back to church.[14]

This description is unique in one particular aspect: it describes Gen X in terms of `we' – many people who have births that fall into the years of Generation X are far from eager to participate in labeling this group. Because of this lack of generation ownership, much literature on the subject is given in terms of `they' instead of `us.' Of course, this would support claims that Generation X is an alienated one, an abandoned one, and individual one, and a realist one: indeed, it is often a `one,' and not a `many.' Generation X is often given a reputation for being slackers, though it is from these people that the dot-corn economic boom was birthed. In this.light, it follows that some consider Generation X as purportedly complex and self-contradictory.[15]

Says Donald Miller, "Religion is still alive and well in this country...but the medium that communicates the message of [church, temple, and synagogue] traditions has changed radically,"[16] highlighting the idea that it is "no mystery that the mainline denominational church has done a terrible job of holding on to these GenX youth in the 1990s."[17] So, instead of looking in traditional churches to root out the spirituality of young adults, Miller turns to venues other than churches, such as spiritual tattoo parlors and gothic meeting places. *GenX Religion* investigates young adult worship and decides that it is found in "music videos, interviews, and original sound tracks"[18] that are integrated into

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[14] Sarah Hinlicky, "Talking to Generation X," in *First Things,* (February 1999, Vol 90), 10-11.
[15] Hinlicky, 10.
[16] Richard Flory, ed., and Donald E. Miller, ed., *GenX Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 2.
[17] Flory, 2.
[i8] Ibid, 10.

worship that do not occur in churches. This is apparently the same "juxtaposition of elements that will mark the maturing forms of GenX religion."[19]

In this specific lens of religiosity, Generation X is sometimes thought to reject the values and institutions of the Baby Boom Generation that came before it. However, "failure to commit to traditional religious and denominational structures does not signal [Gen Xers'] lack of interest in questions of meaning and values. Instead, it signals that new institutions are being birthed and that current ones must be reinvented if they are to survive within this environment."[20] If Generation X needs a transformation of religious life and institutions, will their need for change find a similar desire in Generation Y's ideas on religiosity?

Précis of Generation Y

It may seem odd to begin to describe Generation Y by talking about Baby Boomers, but there may be one shared characteristic that connects the two generations more than any other. This characteristic is not some sort of philosophy, idea, value, social condition, or other overarching generation perspective, but in the numerical size of both generations. One of the reasons that the years of the Baby Boom generation are not so heavily debated is due to the fact that their generation is marked because of census numbers. For that reason, Generation Y may also be separated more easily that other groups. Depending on the years one considers to apply to this generation of "Baby Boomlets," Generation Y may encompass as much as 70 million individuals.[21]

Beyond this high numerical composition, Generation Y faces several stereotypes. These young adults are considered more diverse than other groups: in 1976, it was estimated that 85 percent of the teens in the United States were white; in 1998, it was

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[19] Ibid, 11.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Stephanie Armour, "Generation Y: They've arrived at work with a new attitude" from *USA Today (6* Nov 2005).

estimated that 67 percent of teens were white; and in 2008, it is estimated that it will drop to 62 percent and continue this downward trend until white teenagers no longer such a clear cut majority.[22] Generation Yers may be some of the most technologically advanced young adults. Technology guru Bill Gates stated that young people born after the years 1995 should be called Generation I due to the fact that these youth will have never known a world without the presence of the Internet.[23] Generation Yers are identified as a generation that is more "wanted, precious, planned for and protected" than any other previous generation.[24] Because of this description, individuals like Nathan Cobb of the *Boston Globe* anticipate that Generation Y will be more willing to turn to its parents for advice, respect, and love. In this vein of thought, Generation Y may also be less likely to rebel against its parents and authority.[25] If this fact holds true, perhaps demographers will see a slight rise in church attendance and a greater adherence to religious values, if that Generation Yers do not so adamantly reject religious truth and spiritual guidance from elders.

The descriptions of Generation Y abound. It is a generation looking further and harder for "quality relationships."[26] It is a generation that "values choice, informality, and personal expression."[27] It is a generation that "lives for now and finds meaning in the moment[s28] It is a generation full of individuals who "do not know how to shut up."[29]

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[22] Nathan Cobb, "Generations 2000: Meet Tomorrow's Teens," from *The Boston Globe,* (28 April 1998).
[23] Andrew Careaga, *eMinistry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2001), 45.
[24] Buckeridge
[25] Cobb
[26] Buckeridge
[27] Cheryl Wetzstein, "Generation Y Embraces Choice, Redefines Religion," in *The Washington Times, (12* April 2005).
[28] Buckeridge
[29] Stephanie Armour, "Generation Y: They've Arrived at Work with a New Attitude," in *USA Today, (6* Nov 2005).

However, by looking at all the commentary on Generation Y, one might assume that it is the researchers of this generation who are truly inclined to keep talking.

Together: X + Y = Young Adults

Instead of agreeing with demographers who label generations or aligning with critics of all generational characteristics, perhaps the best approach is to use such characteristics as starting points and guidelines. In this way, onlookers to the young adult world may learn something of the young adult population without blindly following what may be no less than stereotypes of a generation. Generation X and Y do not have a Vietnam, but they do have a war in Iraq. They lived the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on New York's World Trade Center and the Pentagon, witnessed an international tsunami disaster, and experienced Hurricane Katrina. Yet so did many other millions of people, regardless of age. Much of the debate centers on how much emphasis one can place on this "formative stage" that marks young adulthood. And, of course, one may also consider how certain alleged characteristics of a generation may cause the people involved to respond in a particular way, particularly on a religious or spiritual level. Primarily, the sections on Generation X and Generation Y, as well as the sections that follow, may only hope to record observations from young adult experts rather than conclusive or definitive traits and attributes.

In the end, much of the characteristics that make Generation X or Generation Y "distinct" are also characteristics that unite the two groupings. It is that blurring of distinction that makes a conjoined study worthwhile. While a 30-year-old born in 1975

may not be affected by the same culture influences of an 18-year-old born in 1987 (and both can be grouped in the same generation), neither do two 18-year-olds from the same birth year experience the same influences. However, the movement and growth of an individual can be informed by the growth and movement of a larger collective. For that reason, and others listed before, this paper will continue to look at the young adult group and how its interactions with multiple facets of everyday life contribute to the way that young adults approach religion. Given the blurring between the generations in start and end dates, the near equal composition of Gen Xers and Gen Yers in the young adult demographic group, and the lack of concretely varying generation characteristics, commentary on either generation should contribute to the study of young adult ministry and how church leaders can learn more about their young adult population in order to more effectively minister to this group. Later in the section dealing with conclusions, this paper will deal specifically with the proposition of generation theology and its implications for young adult ministry.

Young Adults and Pop Culture

In order to understand young adults and their expressions of faith, one might first have to understand young adult pop culture. Culture, or as *Gen X Religion* would say, "life," informs the faith of an individual. This idea of pop culture as an expression of life may be a recent development. In fact, many contemporary scholars say that Generation X is the first group of people to be so focused on the idea of popular culture informing cultural life.

There is much debate surrounding the issue of pop culture and the church. How much should the culture of modem times influence the teachings of the church? How should culture influence the method of ministering, influence Christology, influence how a pastor or minister will approach his/her duties? It seems as if the debate is never-ending. An example of this is interpretation of the Bible. There will always be those who argue for contemporary application and those who argue for timelessness. Some may argue that Jesus of 2000 years ago is the same Jesus of today, and all that he said applies just as fully to the people of biblical Jerusalem and modem day Minneapolis. Others see the laws, messages, and stories of the Bible as adaptable to present day life. Considering the fierce rivalry in the world of biblical interpretation, it might seem dangerous to choose a side regarding how pop culture should influence the church. In reality, the true danger is forgetting that pop culture has already decided for itself how it views the church. Relinquishing the opportunity to respond in kind only weakens the church's position, no matter what that stance is.

1 Corinthians 9:22 says, "To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some." All things to all men? Not only does the idea seem difficult to execute, but there are many who say that being all things to all people makes the church become nothing to anybody. It seems that most of the scholars and writings studied for this paper argue in favor of (at the minimum) reacting in some way to pop culture. Finding a way to link culture and religion must occur if a ministry is to be successful, says *GenX Religion.* This is because this author sees culture as a reflection of real life, so the church must acknowledge where

the members will be coming from in their own life journeys so that church leaders can respond to members.

According to Jimmy Long, there are five types of responses that the church can take to pop culture: the assimilating church, the protecting church, the unchanging church, the battling church, and the influencing church.[30] The assimilating church could have the most success by being most accessible for modern generations, but could "end up being seduced and then being assimilated by the culture."[31] The protecting church keeps `sinful' culture out of any church arena, but could isolate the flock it attempts to protect. The unchanging church has "stability," but the "church does not change to meet people where they are.s[32] The battling church has a sense of purpose in its fight against culture, but may have "spent so much time winning political wars that they will have neglected the spiritual battle for people's souls."[33] Finally, the influencing church is able to see the world as a fertile "mission field" and tries to see all people as "created by God and in need of God, not as the enemies of God.s[34] Many of these scenarios are easy to pick out today. Long argues that only the influencing church will be able to win over modern generations "by befriending them, providing a place to belong and offering hope to counter their despair."[35]

While Long does not describe problems in the influencing church, some still exist. The issue of focusing on dialogue and on `asking the big questions' is much in vogue, emphasized by churches, universities, and other important institutions. While most

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30 Jimmy Long, "Five Points: the Church's Critical Choice," in *Generating Hope: A Strategy for Reaching the Postmodern Generation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 19-35.
31 Long, 20.
31 Ibid, 27.
33 Ibid, 31.
34 Ibid, 35.
35 Ibid

conversations can be productive and stimulating, one must be sure that focusing on influencing, rather than acting, does not just act as an excuse not to get involved. Talking politics is great, but movers are sometimes needed as much as thinkers. Perhaps an even better method would be to find a combination of all five types of churches to draw out most of the benefits – or would this only lead to even more faults?

The expression of pop culture in a generation can be most easily identified by what the people are wearing. In this way, fashion can be indicative toward the life views of a particular people, thereby making fashion an instrument for church leaders to read and recognize trends and needs of church members. Tom Beaudoin, author of *Virtual Faith* refers to the early ripped fashions of Generation X as an example: ripped shirts suggested being "torn up about... identity" and how GenXers feel "ripped off ... as a generation."[36] Beaudoin may take fashion interpretation too far, noting that the popularity of jeans is related to the symbolic quality of jeans to represent "early and plainspoken qualities since they became identified with Western laborers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" and therefore reflects the "go-it-alone-if-wemust, renegade mentality" of Generation X people.

Certainly fashion *can* mean something, but deciding if it reflects the temperament of the young adult demographic, and therefore analyzing its application to young adult ministry, is perhaps stretching clothing trends a little far. Comparatively, one might consider Nathan Cobb's idea that young adults are moving more toward "no-brand," generic clothing because young adults "feel like they don't have time to make

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[36] Tom Beaudoin, "Ambiguity is Central to Faith," in *Virtual Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1998), 133.

decisions."[37] This claim starkly contrasts with the idea that young adults are seeking ways to express their individuality. Steve Rosen of *The Kansas City Star* used the results of a market and research survey for young adults done by Cary Silvers of GfK NOP Consumer Trends to say that young adults are looking for even more ways to showcase their uniqueness.[38] Given this information, how can one fully accept that young adults would turn to generic dress? Regardless, opinions of blandness versus individuality might best be sidelined to consider the idea that fashion trends may only be an minor indication of modem young adult mood and cultural climate.

Young Adults and Media

Young adults of today are faced with exposure through two media, the Internet and television, that seem to pervade all aspects of life. Through those devices, the media has been able to reach a large portion of American young men and women. By considering how young adults affect the media and vice versa, one may view the way young adults see themselves and the world around them, including the world of faith.

In *Virtual Faith,* Tom Beaudoin makes observations on some mid-1990s music videos for their aspects of religiosity. "Crucifixion" by Tori Amos is the first video that Beaudoin investigates, and the first one that he begins to misunderstand young adults and their search for what Beaudoin calls fragmented religiosity.[39] Certainly Amos uses the crucifix as a religious and political symbol, but suggesting that a close-up of a swinging

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[37] Cobb

[38] Steve Rosen, "Kids: New Wave of Consumers" in *The News Sentinel* of FortWayne.com (originally published in *The Kansas City Star* 10 November 2005). [9] Ibid, 45.

cross "represents the Church's gilded fetishization of religious truth[s40] reads too far into Amos' artistic vision and alleged attack on the Church. Is Tori Amos inspired by religious symbols? Undoubtedly, but she is not led by only one facet of the young adult world.

Church leaders might consider, for instance, the boom of popularity for reality television shows. Much of the American population cannot tear itself away from this voyeuristic activity and a chance to see how other people live their lives. Might not a church utilize this desire to see the "other half' and create programming to support the less fortunate? Surveyors of the television world have long debated the effect of conditioning young minds to respond to 30-second television commercials. The abbreviated structure of advertising and television programs may even lead to tendencies of fractured identity and, subsequently, fractured spirituality.[41] There is even the popular opinion that today's young adults are growing up with more and more violence in the news. How will young adults respond? Self-induced apathy as a form of protection? A better sense of one's position in the world? Some forms of mass media are aligning with the religious front. Mel Gibson's movie, *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), is one such example that might appeal to young adults for its cinematic formatting of the suffering of Jesus. Religious movies have been around for a long time, though, and young adults are not the appreciative audience. *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975) is very popular

ao 'bid, 53.

[41] There seems to be many divides in today's spiritual society. The church may preach a message of love, but a condemnation of certain peoples based upon sexual preference. There is a gravitation toward individuality in relationships with God, but a denial of individual rights when it comes to decisions such as abortion. These are called wedge issues for a reason. We live in a world of liberals and conservatives, of Christian denominations and categorizations, of divides in congregations and personal beliefs. It seems valid then, in some aspects, to include the idea that the variety of messages, ideals, morals, and practices that are present in television and the media should contribute to this fractured lifestyle and spirituality.

for its mocking and satirical humor with religious topics and remains one of the longest standing cult classics for Gen Yers, Gen Xers, and Baby Boomers.

Young Adults and Technology

Technology is a part of the current wave of young adults that may not be denied. In fact, the need for renewing ministry for young adults of the present generation has been called eMinistry in an attempt to identify the talents of and dependencies on the Internet of the young adult demographic. Young adults of today are considered to know their way around the Internet so well that some generation scholars wish to call Generation Y the Net Generation. The Internet is not an invention dispensed solely to Generation X or Generation Y. There is, however, a large population of young adults that handle the gadgets and devices connected to the Internet as easily as a child plays with small, wooden blocks. Cell phones are no longer a voice-driven technology, but are instead tablets for a newer wave of instant communication: text messaging. Studies have shown an incredible increase in the use of text messaging, known as Short Message Services (SMS) in the telecommunications world.[42] In June of 2001, US residents sent approximately 30 million text messages. In June of 2002, US residents sent 1 billion text messages.[43] Laptops are able to connect to the Internet wirelessly, but not just in schools and libraries. Sandwich cafes, hair salons, bars, coffee shops, and many other venues are reacting to this "hip" and mobile culture of connectability. The PSP, the new Playstation

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[42] Surprising, Americans are not generally counted among the top users of SMS. Only recently have Americans begun to catch up to their international communications partners, falling far behind much of Europe and Asia ("SMS Statistics," http://www.funsms.net/sms_in_statistics.htm, visited 25 November 2005)

[43] Clickatell Mobile Messaging Services, "SMS Statistics," **http://www.clickatell.com/brochure/sms_industry/statistics.php,** visited 25 November 2005.

portable gaming unit and the Nintendo's DS, which utilizes dual touch screen interfacing, can both communicate wirelessly with other gaming devices. Give a PSP to a 7-year-old and she'll be entertained for hours, navigating through virtual worlds and sending messages to her friends. Hand a DS to a 50-year-old and watch him wither with confusion as well as shudder at the prospect of using so much scientific advancement for entertainment. This example would not occur every time these separate age groups were handed a PSP, but target market demographic does not include the 50+ age group.

Speaking about technology and the Internet can be like speaking another language. Older generations often feel this language gap more than others. For example, some individuals carry personal digital assistants (commonly known as PDAs) to keep themselves organized. These units may utilize Wireless Fidelity (WiFi) technology at "hotspots" (centers for Wi-Fi access) or Bluetooth (a similarly wireless networking connection, but with limited range, except when coupled with a cellular phone) technology to upload music, movies, photos, calendars, contact information, work documents, shopping lists, etc. – the list goes on and on. All of this technological gear is not reserved for young adults. Many older individuals ride the tech wave as well. In fact, Baby Boomers have nearly the same household Internet usage as Generation Xers, as told by the Global Generations Policy Institute.[44] The difference may lie within the fact that young adults today use them freely in almost any facet of every day life. They are growing up as technology grows up. Young adults can listen to the radio, but they often choose a portable MP3 player. They might borrow a music CD or multi-media DVD, but they often decide to "burn" it (e.g. copy it). They might carry a homework paper over to

[44] Paul Hodge, "2005 White House Conference on Aging Policy Committee Hearing," www.genpolicy.com, visited 25 November 2005.

a friend's house, but they often just save it on a portable USB pen drive (a small, pen-sized digital storage device capable of storing massive amounts of data and often attached to a key ring or lanyard). They might take a picture on 35mm film or, as a joke, with a Polaroid camera, but they could instead use a digital camera compact enough to fit in their pockets.

All age groups are seeing the world adapt to an inundation of technology. Laptop use is skyrocketing. For example, Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney has recently proposed to spend at least $54 million to provide laptops for every student in middle school and high school in his state.[45] Global positioning systems are installed in many automobiles and can be purchased to monitor the whereabouts of one's children.[46] Adults who can spend the money are purchasing technology and children, youth, and young adults are either contributing to the spending trend or are reaping the benefits.

Young adults are more inclined to accept the rise of Internet virtual communities. While virtual communities began as emails, chat rooms, and web "boards" and forums, instant messaging as fast become the preferred method of communicating from one's desk. Enid Bums of *ClickZ Stats* reports that "all instant messaging client users equaled 81.7 million in July, down from just short of 82 million in June of 2005.[47] One popular, though personal, method for community building is "blog" use. Created from the phrase "web blog," blogging is an activity akin to a diary entry that is published on the Internet. Some sources like BlogPulse number the amount of blogs[48] at 10 million worldwide

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[45] AppleInsider, "$100 Laptop Project Draws Apple's Interest," *(AppleInsider.com,* 14 November 2005), **http://www.appleinsider.com/article.php?id**=1370, visited 25 November 2005.

[46] See "Traveleyes" and "Shadow Tracker" technology on www.alltrack.com, visited 23 November 2005.

[47] Enid Burns, "Instant Messenger Servies Brace for Google's Entry," from "Trends and Statistics: The Web's Richest Source," *(ClickZ Stats,* 24 August 2005, http://www.clickz.com/stats/sectors/software/article.php/3529796) visited 25 November 2005.

[48] BlogPulse counts only public blogs (those which can be viewed by anyone on the Internet).

while others like Perseus Development Corporation has reported[49] 31.6 million blogs.[50] Podcasting is a similar tool to blogging, but is an audio tool akin to radio shows. Each can be freely subscribed to and downloaded via tools like Apple's iTunes. Podcast authorship varies from National Public Radio's daily show to any amateur submission.

Facebook.com is an example of one enormously popular online community that links college students across the country. It is estimated that over 85% of students from the 900 schools connected utilize the site.[51] There are similar such communities called MySpace.com and LiveJournal.com, though these are not limited to college students. While these resources may seem impenetrable to some church leaders, it may be of some relief to know that some of the "groups" formed online include religiously-affiliated ones.

Young Adults and Subcultures

The compilation of essays collected and edited by Richard Flory and Donald Miller offer good insight to the adult and young adult crowd that have grouped into subcultures underneath the broader label of "Generation X." Only a few sweeping generalizations of this group are made by *GenX Religion,* such as the claim that Gen Xers express themselves through body adornment like tattoos and piercings. In general, *GenX Religion* makes a good attempt at understanding the young adult crowd that is "leading a

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[49] Perseus Development Corp. counts public and private blogs (blogs which give only restricted access via password). ° Carl Bialik, "Measuring the Impact of Blogs Requires More Than Counting," from *The Numbers Guy (Wall Street Journal,* 26 May 2005), http://online.wsj.com/public/article/SB11168559390364 0572- DoCm_P_b1HHSoXRla2QEob6bw8w_20060525.html?mod=rss_free, visited 25 November 2005.

[51] Alorie Gilbert, "Harvard Newspaper Subpoenaed in Facebook Suit," from CNET News.com (23 November 2005), **http://news.com.com/Harvard+newspaper+subpoenaed+in+Facebook+suit/**[21]0[0]-[1032]_[3]-5969533.html, visited 25 November 2005.

global revolution, and doing it with style."[52] While direct correlation between all young adults of today and the young adults of *GenX Religion* might be impossible due to Flory and Miller's specific address of the Generation X crowd, the essays still offer good insight for understanding current challenges in youth adult faith life.

GenX Religion investigates the lifestyle of spiritual tattooing as a subculture of Generation X. While this subculture may not apply to all young adults, the paper "Marked for Jesus"[53] does summarize the desire to get tattooed in the following manner: for group identity, individual expression, and mutual attraction. These reasons express the universal attributes of a community that will attract young adults. The fact that individual expression seems to conflict with group identity only enhances the attraction to such a community, as young adult culture often seems to exist within this opposition. For instance, general marketing techniques promote individualism, and individualism on a corporate level often results in grouping, yet this does not often seem to bother the `individuals' involved.

In the second paper[54] on young adult subcultures[55] in *GenX Religion,* writer Julia Fey compares Gothic culture with Joachim Wach's theory that it is human nature to give expression to that which one experiences.[56] This theory is a successful application in that involves the theoretical, the practical, and the sociological. The theoretical is the sharing

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[52] Flory, 1.
[53] Lori Jensen, Richard Flory, and Donald Miller, "Marked for Jesus: Sacred Tattooing among Evangelical GenXers," in *GenX Religion,* ed. Richard W. Flory and Donald Miller (New York: Routledge, 2000), 15-30.
[54] Julia Winden Fey, "Spirituality Bites: Xers and the Gothic Culture," in *GenX Religion,* ed. Richard W. Flory and Donald Miller (New York: Routledge, 2000), 31-53.
[55] **Though** perhaps the identification of Gothic life as a subculture is inadequate as it "includes much more than just its adherents' **behavior**" (Fey, 50).
[56] Fey, 45.

of ideas about a (religious) experience,[57] the practical involves the ritualistic aspect of religion,[58] and the sociological focuses on the way that a religion shows itself though social organizations.[59] Fey's investigation into Gothic lifestyles helps the outsiders understand that fashion emphasizing "death, decay, and darkness[s60] is only a signal for sharing ideological concerns and that ornamental piercing and tattooing is a sign of practical expression. Perhaps looking to these same types of expressions will guide observers of the general young adult demographic group.

Pop culture, subcultures, the media, and technology all resonate nearly equally with Generation X and Generation Y. These shared attributes seem to accentuate the blurring of the two generations — not only are Gen Xers and Gen Yers melded together because of a lack of conclusive start and end points, but also because of a shared backgrounds, cultures, and influences. For these reasons, this paper will look at a variety of sources that deal with young adults in general and young adults according to generation group. Through these studies, this paper will hope to understand the resources that are available for young adult ministry today and how those resources may assist or resist an informed consideration of spirituality in young adulthood.

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[57] Ibid, 46.
[58] Ibid, 48.
[59] Ibid, 49.
[60] Ibid, 39.

CHAPTER FOUR

WHAT TO DO?

With all of the differing interpretations of who young adults of today really are, it is no surprise that there are so many varying responses to the question that asks, "How should ministers best approach religiosity with the young adult crowd?" Each of the main authors has a different perspective and a different angle for approaching young adult ministry, yet it seems as through so common themes develop. By first analyzing each of the author's recommendations in his/her book, it will be possible to come to a conclusion about the state of young adult religious life and strategies for reaching this vital demographic group.

From Generating Hope

Jimmy Long begins by commenting on the difficulties inherent in changing ministry styles after a long professional career of established ministry. Yet, Long says, religious leaders need to learn to adapt if they are to "minister effectively in the postmodern era."[61] For Jimmy Long, this change begins in the form of community.

The present and emerging young adult generation "craves intimate community"[62] says Long, and so smaller community groups will be the "key factor" in approaching young adults ministry, and these smaller units must uphold the integrity of a personal and intimate relationship. The small group phenomenon is nothing new: for years, smaller Bible studies, self-help groups, recovery groups, 12-step groups, etc., have existed to

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61 Jimmy Long, *Generating Hope: A Strategy for Reaching the Postmodern Generation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 133.
62 Long, 137.

provide "comfort, healing, and direction" that larger groups may not be able to. Long supports the premise that small groups may be the most underdeveloped resource that churches can offer their congregations.. This recommendation by Long is not just a psycho-social explanation — it is Biblically-based as well. There are two easily-found examples of small group use. The first comes during the Exodus when God instructs Moses to separate his people into smaller, more manageable groups of 10s and 50s. The second example is in the book of Acts[63] when the growing Jerusalem church is divided into both large communities to construct a "corporate identity" and also to separate into smaller units so that so they could share the breaking of bread in their homes.[64] Long sees five beneficial aspects of these smaller groups of old (and new): community, nurture, worship, and prayer, and outreach,[65] but he labels community as the most important factor because of the need for support that has been a driving force behind the development of young adults.

In order for these groups to be successful, Long advocates that they be based on a commonality that the group members share. Otherwise, says he, "Gen Xers will walk away from the group.s[66] Another integral though difficult part of building these types of community is the balance of commitment (to contribute toward ownership) and loose affiliation (to avoid alienating or discouraging or scaring members away from a group). This trend often seems to be an issue in many types of groups. Ownership comes at a price — the young adults need to feel their needs being met while at the same time contributing enough to feel a sense of accomplishment at watching the group succeed.

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63 Acts 2:41-47
64 Long, 140.
65 Ibid, 141.
66 Ibid, 144.

Long also writes that ministers to the newer young adult crowds must recognize that Baby Boomers had to deal with guilt because they had done something wrong, but Generation Xers feel shame for being bad people. Instead of suffering from a result of their own decisions, Long feels that Gen X is suffering from the decisions of other people.[67] Ministers must help young adults to break the bonds of shame by helping them to recognize that it is God who lifts shame from oneself.

Long's continuation of his recommendations is that ministers present Christianity as a spiritual journey instead of any type of solution. Stressing the journey helps today's young adults realize that the process is indeed the most important part. This is because of the need for young adults to authenticate their own spirituality. Taking a `page from the book' of other's journeys will not do for a Generation Xer or Yer — this cuts short the process. No matter who much the Baby Boomer generation attempted to create a solution for the problems that their generation faced, Generation Xers will not respond to any type of recommendation and will insist on taking the journey themselves. By following in the journey of small group development, young adults will eventually fulfill their need for God, their partnership in the community, encountering difficulties along the way, but also finally recognizing the freedom that small group ministry gives them to explore their relationship with God, and then recognizing the love that flows in the community.[68]

As a final recommendation on ministry, Long states that young adults of today feel like they have less of everything, at least in comparison to their Baby Boomer parents. Instead of being the rich man who needs to lighten himself of extra burdens,

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[67] Ibid, 164.
[68] Ibid, 176-183.

young adults are looking to be fulfilled from things they lack and so need to oft hear a message of hope, for that will be what fills them. Community supports them to encounter the gaps of what they lack and also helps them to build them back up again while hearing the message of God's love and hope.[69] Additionally, Long mentions some specific areas that may need attention by these small faith groups. These issues include: "overcoming shame through God's love and acceptance, appreciating family in the light of our new family in Christ, understanding our sexuality by seeing God's design for us, accepting our self-image by seeing that we are created in God's image, obtaining an overview of Scripture to appreciate God's story, finding opportunities to serve in order to feel a part of the community, and providing eternal hope in the midst of pain and suffering.s[70]

From Virtual Faith

Tom Beaudoin is another author who has recommendations to offer ministers, pastors, and preachers in regards to understanding and interpreting the culture of young adults that pervades society today. But instead of having specific criticisms for ministry to young adults, Beaudoin offers a glimpse into Generation X spirituality so that many may come to better understand the world in which young adults live. The first four "primary theological themes" exist in Generation X popular culture — they are suspicion of institutions, experience, suffering, and ambiguity. Each of these is an element which contributes to a better understanding of ministry to young adults.[71]

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[69]1bid, 184.
[70] Ibid, 184-185.
[71] Ibid 177.

Beaudoin maintains that young adults are deeply suspicious of religious institutions. In fact, Beaudoin claims that Gen Xers are suspicious of most institutions, religious or not, but the Catholic Church is one example that he targets. In order to deal with this suspicion, religious leaders must construct a ministry that does not suffer the same rules and regulations that an erected institution may have, and must also be sure to avoid making any promises of solutions or answers once a faith community is construed. The turn of Gen X away from structure to fragmented pop culture is a reminder of where young adult interests and associations lie.[72]

According to Beaudoin, young adults are not interested in prepared answers, prepared paths, or even prepared ideas. For the young adults of today, experience is the bigger key in understanding religiosity for the younger generation. This "fascination with experience at the nexus of the human and divine"[73] is what informs the religiosity of the young adult demographic. The "canned" approach or "proven" answers do not work for this group. Ministries must be careful to incorporate a journey in faith life so that the young adults may experience faith as they grow.

Beaudoin also spends time investigating the suffering that Generation X has endured. He attributes this suffering to the "latchkey" culture, the high rate of divorce, the unsteady home life, and early maturation. But more than their own suffering, young adults wish to share in the suffering of others. Beaudoin quotes Thomas Merton as saying, "Peace, true peace, is only to be found through suffering.[s74] In suffering alongside each other, young adults grow closer together and learn to share their suffering and find love instead. Ministry leaders need to be prepared to help young adults

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[2] Ibid, 177.
[73] Ibid.
[7a] Ibid, 119.

understand the suffering that goes on in the world at large as well as being equipped to examine the suffering that young adults may be experiencing within themselves.

Ambiguity is one of the most prevalent theological themes that Beaudoin claims has resonance with Generation X. Swaying between faithfulness and faithlessness marks only the forefront of spiritual ambiguity of young adults. The combination of secular and religious realms point toward this ambiguity, as does the instability of a young adult's identity in the cyber age on the internet. Wanting community while avoiding established ones, accepting guidance on a path while avoiding a specific set of answers — these traits also mark the ambiguity and uncertainty of the young adult crowd. Ministry leaders have no choice but to exist in this realm of uncertainty with the young adult crowd. Being comfortable with loosely defined boundaries is a necessity to successful ministry to young adults.[75]

Just as young adults are not interested in canned responses, neither are they interested in stagnant traditionalism. Tradition, on the other hand, is different from traditionalism. Some young adults avoid even the word "tradition," just as they may avoid being labeled "religious," often preferring to call themselves "spiritual" instead.[76] Young adults struggling with tradition are not separated therein, but instead more involved in the process of its formation, says Beaudoin. He also says that church leaders must reclaim tradition and assist young adults with interpretation and transforming that tradition. In this way, tradition may be kept alive. Instead of fearing the loss of tradition, Beaudoin suggests that preservation shall come with the embrace of transformation.

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[75] Ibid, 178.
[76] "The Spiritual Life of College Students," from *Spirituality in Higher Education* and *Higher Education Research Institute,* (Los Angeles: University of California), www.spirituality.ucla.edu, visited 11 November 2005.

Beyond this stance on ideological themes for young adults, Beaudoin creates a list of three recommendations for church leaders. These suggestions are based on the premise that young adults have a suspicion of church institutions. Firstly, he suggests that young adult ministry move forward with humility. The inherent questioning of truth in many young adults' lives requires that churches embrace the postmodern idea that there is no final truth, but a journey toward knowledge. Secondly, churches must take advantage of the silver lining of young adults' cloud of institutional suspicion, which is to say that shunning establishment has produced a variety of places for exploration of religiosity and spirituality. This variety gives church leaders a multitude of environments to interact with young adults. Beaudoin calls this the ability to "go virtual."[77] Lastly, Beaudoin calls for a renewal of mystical practices and spiritual disciplines. His studies indicate that young adults may wish for a retreat from the flashy temporariness of pop culture. This sentiment is echoed persuasively by Gen X writer Sarah Hinlicky, who says the following:

> Mystery works up to a point, but it's addictive, and once we get hooked on it, the Church won't be able to provide enough to support our habit. We'll turn instead (many of us already have) to Eastern gurus and ancient pagan pantheons to satisfy all the esoteric delights our souls might desire. The human lust for secret knowledge should not be underestimated and certainly not encouraged. The Church has fought against that gnostic impulse from the start: Christianity is explosively non—secretive, God enfleshed for everyone to see, the light shining in the darkness. We're much too comfortable alone in the dark; we need the light to shake us up. [78]

Hinlicky agrees with Beaudoin in calling for an occasional retreat to a substitutive or alternative reality, but also acknowledges that this "habit" is both needed and not needed,

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[77] Beaudoin, 163.
[78] Hinlicky, 11.

wanted and unwanted. In this regard, a church environment must be alternative and realistic, reflective of youth culture and rejecting at the same time.

From GenX Religion

Because *GenXReligion* is a collection of essays from different case studies in young adult ministry, it has valuable feedback to give this scholarly community due to the width and breadth of its studies and the coordination of multiple authors steeped within young adult culture. Richard Flory, as editor of *GenXReligion,* pulls five characteristics of Generation X religion from these studies, which should help to inform the greater young adult persona in religious institutions across US Christian churches.

The first characteristic is that religion of Generation X "emphasizes the sensual and experiential, combining the sacred and the profane and incorporating text, image, music, dance, and the body"[79] to fully express young adult beliefs. This characteristic becomes apparent in worship styles of young adults, especially music. Flory does not try to explain that music must be contemporary or classical, but that it should resonate within each young adult group's individuality. Secondly, *GenX Religion* continues this theme of individuality and says that young adults will try to find "cultural and institutional"[80] space which allows them, in essence, to be themselves. Just as the flower children of the sixties pushed away from mainstream society and corporate identity to find "peace and love," so do young adults of the 1990s and 2000s who are involved in the gothic scene separate from those who "generally favor the day over the night, or the light over

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[79] Flory, 234.
so Ibid.

shadows[s81] to find an identity their own community. The third characteristic is an explicit statement of young adults desire to discover religious identity especially in community. In his fourth observation, Flory repeats the idea that "race, ethnic, and gender diversity and inclusiveness is an explicit goal of Generation X religion.[s82] Lastly, *GenX Religion* expresses the general need of all young adults to find authenticity in the religious institution and practice to which they belong. This characteristic is true of all worshippers — no individual worships that which he/she believes is false, but instead looks for a church that will acknowledge the "ambiguities, trials, and successes in life."[83]

Flory and the other writers construct a number of other values throughout *GenX Religion* in an attempt to help others better minister to young adults. This book believes firmly in finding a way to link culture and life with religious expression in order for ministry to be successful. This idea of incorporating all aspects of life, including pop culture, is something that is seen repeatedly in this paper's young adult studies. Religious leaders must decide "where" young adults are coming from, how to meet them "where they are at," and how they will form a connection with that particular church. Additionally, *GenX Religion* recognizes that "rationalistic apologetics are largely irrelevant to GenXers." Pastors must instead learn to tell stories, understand stories of pop culture, "appreciate the resonance of these stories in Xers' lives," and teach members how to tell their own stories in "religiously relevant terms."[84] Another recommendation for Flory et al. is the premise that church leaders must *trust* the young adults to find their own religious expression and identity, even if an outside perspective cannot quite

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[81] Ibid, 51.
[82] 'bid, 235.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid. 236.

understand where that young adult is headed in his/her religious quest. Experimentation with religious identity will not kill faith, but will help young adults find a method to validate life and the experience in religion. Furthermore, church leaders should help young adults with *doing* and *making* in religious identity. Many young adults will reject what is already decided and formed, but will delight in self-formation.

From eMinistry

Considering the title of this resource, it is no surprise that the author of *eMinistry,* Andrew Careaga, focuses on the young adult ministry with an Internet and technology emphasis. Says Careaga, there are three things that church leaders must do to reach out to young adults of today:

1) Church leaders must "enter the world of these cyber-seekers[s85] and learn how the young adult `lives' in this electronic medium;
2) Ministers should work to understand the Internet and its place and influence on society; and
3) Church leaders need to decide how the church should react to the growing importance of the Internet.

To enter this new world, church leaders would do well to first recognize that Generation Y is sometimes called the "Net Generation" or "N-Geners" because of its members' comfortableness with utilizing a technology so central to today's society. Careaga quotes Dan Tapscott, the author of *Growing Up Digital: The Rise of the Net Generation,* as saying that, "for the first time in history, children are more comfortable,

85 Careaga, 23-24.

knowledgeable, and literate than their parents about an innovation central to society.[s86] Because of this literacy, Careaga feel that church leaders should contemplate the influence that youth and young adults will have on life during this technological revolution. Additionally, church ministers should note the frequency with which Christians use the Internet: up to 40% percent of users are Christian, according to one online survey.[87] Even though young adults are thought to dominate the Internet population, there are no figures to correlate that percentage directly to young adults. *eMinistry* goes as far as saying that "Christians meet online to pray, discuss their faith, seek spiritual guidance, and study the bible[s88] but offers no statistical usage of the Internet for faith reasons besides citing several "case studies" with Internet sites. Bible study materials do exist in high numbers on the Internet, as do queries on matters of spirituality occur in large numbers. Careaga writes that many Christians are involved with praying and discussing their faith online, but those two topics seem disconnected with seeking spiritual guidance and biblical studies because of the fact that praying and discussing must be expressed, posted, written, published, etc. Such efforts require more work than simply querying a search engine for examples of bible studies, so one might do better to assume that praying and discussion will be tools utilized by more evangelical Christians who are connecting online.

It is admitted by some critics, such as Nathan Cobb,[89] that technology is emphasized too much for its impact on society. However, to comprehend the Internet's "place and influence on society," especially for the young adult demographic, one should

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86 Ibid, 45.
[87] Ibid, 22.
88 Ibid, 19.
89 Cobb

know that a study taken in 2000 indicated that 70% of American teens surf the net regularly. This made that group "the most wired demographic in the world.[s90] By the year 2005, those teens are entering the young adult demographic. Even if the impact of the Internet is less than anticipated, such large use by young adults is important for this paper's study.

Careaga evaluates Christian sociologist George Barna's contention that the United States will soon encounter the growth of a "cyber-church" that would not include face-to-face interaction, but prayer, liturgy, and homiletics presented through an electronic medium.[91] *eMinistry* does not completely agree with Barna's presentation, but does support the idea that the church must be redesigned. According to Careaga, the church has been transformed previously when it had to commit to a more global approach to the community of believers. Now, it may again be necessary to redefine the church based on the fact that the internet is providing an alternative concept of community[92]

From The Basic Guide to Young Adult Ministry

John Cusick and Katherin DeVries write about young adult ministry more practically than ideologically, so it is no surprise that some of their most valuable points are directed at how to organize the activities of young adult group effectively. Cusick and DeVries make these six important and concise points:

1) "Less is more" when planning the number of social gatherings.

2) Don't require the involved individuals to invest much right away.

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[90] Careaga, 20.
[91] Careaga 33.
[92] The online population of the United States and Canada is quickly approaching 50% (Careaga, 18).

3) The less that individuals are *required* to attend, the more they shall *want* to attend.

4) Activities should be greatly varied among the four types of gatherings: social activities, serious activities (like hosting a speaker), spiritual activities, and service activities.

5) Planning should be done with originality. Or, as *The Basic Guide to Young Adult Ministry* says, "do the ordinary differently."

6) Church leaders must decide if they want to create a young adult "group" or host young adult activities. As Cusick and DeVries suggest, a "group" may, in fact, suggest a "club" and be followed by expectations and commitment, though hosting may require more of the church leaders themselves.

The approach taken by *The Basic Guide to Young Adult Ministry* is not one that attempts to further understand the motivation and value behind any specific young adult movement, but to offer direction for approaching activities in ministry. One may infer from these recommendation, though, that young adults are looking for little commitment before increased involvement, variety and creativity in all planning, and little or no pressure to join a "club" atmosphere. By not looking too specifically at contemporary young adult groups, Cusick and DeVries are able to give a general yet relevant plan for general young adult ministry.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION IN YOUNG ADULT MINISTRY

Attempting to understand the young adult demographic group now prompts the question, "So what?" In fact, what does one do with a conglomeration of data regarding young adults as a whole and also the set of information regarding the generational subsets within young adults? There is a type of payoff after having done this research, but it is not given within the constrains of a definitive answer for solving the lack of young adult participation in and ownership of church communities. Instead, this paper attempts to offer a structure with which church leaders may use to address their concerns for the young adult population in a church congregation. In this aspect, I offer a four-part generational theology. None of the parts is greater than any other, but each serves to help inform the whole for a greater appreciation and understanding of young adult culture and religiosity.

Generation Theology

After contemplating general studies of young adults, specific studies of generation groups, and reviewing recommendations for formulating the best young adult ministry theology and programming, this four-part generational theology may be useful for guiding, though not commanding some aspects of young adult ministry. This concept of generational theology is based initially on what I believe to be two basic truths when it comes to developing within the Christian faith. Firstly, every Christian needs the love of God and the humble recognition that Jesus Christ died for her/his sins. A more basic way to say this is that every person is approached by God in the same exact way: God loves

each of God's children the same. The second truth is that no one approaches God in the same way for herself or himself. While the path from God to humanity is direct, eternal, and unchanging, the path from an individual to God is exactly that: individual. Unfortunately, church leaders do not have the ability to adapt their ministry for every individual in the church, for that would be too infinitely fractured. Instead, the church leader must primarily approach ministry from the perspective of God's equal love. This is the first part of the four-part generational theology. Young adults are certainly part of this group and therefore have some of the same needs and requirements as others in God's community. Regretfully, this paper does not have the space, research, or intention to pursue an optimal universal approach to ministry. Other studies must be utilized in this absence. Additionally, each church must evaluate for itself in what manner and method it will approach spirituality and the role of the institution in supporting the movement that is Christianity.

This level of thinking is necessary within the church, but the universal approach does not make any efforts to target any individual groups in the congregation. To be encompass a full community, church leaders must often design their ministry to specifically reach out to different groups of people. Subsequently, it will serve well this theory of theology to further divide the young adult demographic group. While all young adults are loved by God regardless of time period or generation, church ministers must recognize that young adult ministry is unlike that youth ministry or adult ministry. Sources used in this paper such as the *Basic Guide to Young Adult Ministry* attempt to prove this statement. For example, varying community-building activities will not have the same level of appeal for separate age groups. As another example, certain types of

liturgy and worship may have a vastly different attraction for variable demographic groups. While it may be impossible to list the innumerable reasons that young adult preferences may differ from the tastes of other groups, it is possible to acknowledge that there are some inherent dissimilarities.

Yet even this level of separating young adults from the other segments of congregation begs for another division, as young adults from the year 2000 are generally thought to be different than young adults from the year 1950. This third division is the demarcation of young adults into different time periods and eras. For instance, books like *Gen X Religion* attempt to show that, in some specific ways, young adults may be separated from other young adults from different time periods. Much of this paper's focus has been on this exact topic: the differences between generations. There has been an intentional reflection on Generation X and Generation Y because each has ownership of the young adult demographic group.

The research involving contemporary media, technology, subcultures, and general alleged characteristics of each generation should assist church leaders begin to understand the emotional, social, psychological, and developmental baggage that many young adults carry. Here is a crucial element of this level of generational theology: these characteristics must be considered, studied, understood, and finally, thrown away. While it is important to have a substantial knowledge base to more fully comprehend the "whole picture" in regards to young adult ministry, that knowledge cannot supersede the experience. In other words, knowledge that comes from working with young adults is always more valuable than that which one has garnered from books. From the wisdom of Pastor Kyle Habers of Mercy Seat Church in northeastern Minneapolis, working models

concept. In short, I propose that generations must be split up into one more subset of a four year period. The closest term to cover this smaller grouping within the generational spread is the idea of a "quadrennial," which may mean either occurring once every four years or lasting the length of four years. This paper will take the latter definition, of course.

When attempting to draw yet another boundary within an age group, critiques are not hard to find. After all, so many parts of the definitions of a generation are questioned as well. The reasoning for further division within the generations came after discussing young adult ministry with Pastor Greg Meyer of Bethlehem Lutheran Church of Minneapolis and Pastor Rob Weber of Spirit Garage Church of Minneapolis. Additionally, this concept is grounded within my second truth of Christian faith: faith must be individual. Because ministering to an entire congregation on a individual level would be too faceted and because analyzing a generation may be too broad, I propose that the quadrennial distinction within generations might be considered.

Young adults are, in fact, encouraged to develop within a four-year cycle. Just prior to their entrance into young adulthood, youth are engaged in the high school education system that lasts four years. Many young adults enter into a post-secondary education system that also lasts four years. As a high school graduate and as an undergraduate student in my fourth year of a post-secondary institution, I can see in myself and have witnessed those around me develop substantially from first year to fourth year. Rarely does one find an individual who considers himself or herself the same person as when they began schooling. In this manner, United States society is classically conditioning young adults to develop within a four-year timeline.

Furthermore, I believe that many capable of and interested in deeply reconsidering their mission and purpose on four-year terms. For a marketing firm to transform their business approach every four years would seem too stagnant; for a school system to completely reengineer its design every four years might seem to hurried. I believe certain aspects of the church exist in both worlds. Redefining programming for the elderly every four years might seem like overkill, but evaluating young adult ministry on this timeline seems equitable given the transformations in young adult culture portrayed in this paper. Similar to this program differentiation within congregations, I feel it is appropriate to bring up the issue of a related topic:. steadfastness of institutions within the ebbing and flowing current of Christianity.

In all truthfulness, the exact amount of years defining the generational subset may not be so integral to the fourth part of generational theology. The necessary part of this discussion is to question how the church may withhold its timeless values, unchanging truths, and educational solidity within such a fluid and transforming culture. For instance, Lutherans uphold a theology of the cross which expresses the brokenness of humanity actively seeking grace and love that is offered through Jesus Christ.[94] This theology is eternal. The movement and message of Christ Jesus is eternal. The need for an institution behind this movement is also eternal. Churches must question for themselves, however, how eternal may a specific institution be? Should it not transform and be transformed to continue to further the message of Christ's redemptive power throughout the world? Generational.theology offers no sure answer, but addresses the need to considerate of that question.

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[9]' **Consider 1 Corinthians 18-28.**

This paper has said that four categories exist in the structure of young adults religious categorization. Additionally, it has already stipulated that not one of the labels is dominant over the rest. Indeed, in the third premise of generational theology which deals with generations within young adulthood, I have tried to show that characterization is at once both relevant and irrelevant, a starting point but certainly not an ending point. This argumentation is both polar and unifying: in order to minister to young adults effectively, one must be willing to engage relevant generation studies but also able to adapt, transform, and even disregard some of that knowledge in order to create something relevant and honest. This push and pull applies not only within a category, but also to the whole of young adult generational theology. Each of the four parts must be considered and internalized yet each of the those parts must not be deemed conclusive or final. Generational theology can only offer a launching point[95] for young adult ministries; it can offer a substantial portion of knowledge about the status of young adult culture, ideas, values, and practices; it can offer hints but not answers, questions but not solutions, directions but not destinations.

Many people have grown up with the "stand up, sit down, turn the page service and hated it."[96] When young adults receive their initial taste of freedom, many separate from that which they have not found complete identity. "Post-college, pre-family, `this is the population we lose,"'[97] says J. Liora Gubkin of *GenX Religion.*[98] How does a church

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[95] It can offer a starting point, but only after a church has decided on its identity. Generational theology is not meant to be a foundation but a lens or a tool to reach out to young adults and to engage young adult religiosity.

[96] Flory, 200.

[97] Ibid, 201.

[98] That "post-college" stipulation is one small word that translates into a large problem from young adult ministry. Too many churches assume that colleges are taking complete care of their students so that churches do not need to reach out to the 18- to 22-year-old crowd. Despite the obvious rejection of the young adults who do not go to college in these years, the fact is that many school institutions are content to

minister to a lost population? What sort of loose or tight organization, high or low church, energy or relaxed atmosphere will be able to unify a community that thrives on varied energy, high and low commitment, intense and relaxed community, authenticity,[99] basic but powerful themes, and strong peer leadership as well as mentoring from other, even older, personable and intelligent people? There is no benefit from attempting to conclude that "this answer" for Generation X will work or "that method" for Generation Y will produce effective ministry or that "this consideration" will solve every complexity of young adult ministry.[100] Young adults must be approached firstly as people of a loving God, secondly as a distinct group within those people, thirdly as generationally distinctive within the constrains of that group, and finally as transformative and fluid on the smaller, more individualized scale of the quadrennial. It is this "everything and nothing" approach that will let church leaders approach young adults with an intent to understand, to support, but not to produce "solutions" for this ministry. By entering this conversation with an open and educated mind, church leaders will find that young adults continue that educate as well as further open the minds of who are willing to listen, explore, and engage in young adult ministry.

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let their students go out to congregations outside of a school context (even if it is offered at a private institution). As a result, neither institution is actively seeking out young adults who may be at an in-between stage. This problem is yet one more part of the considerations that must be given to young adult ministry.

99 Lory, 197-210.

1°0 It is not within the ability of this study to address all the workings of technology in ministry, but this may be one asset worth future consideration for its resounding influence in the culture of the United States, both within young adult ministry and outside it.

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