Finding Meaning in Organized Religion:

A Practical Theology for the Church's Mission with Millennials

by

Timothy Andrew Mentzer

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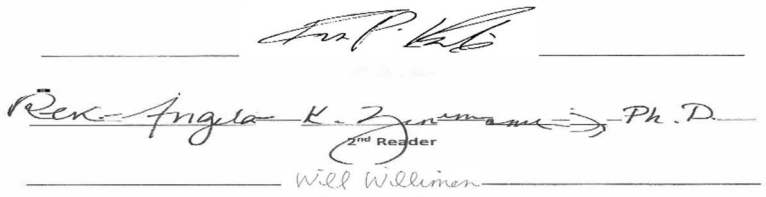

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry

in the Divinity School of Duke University.

2020

ABSTRACT

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ABSTRACT

This thesis develops a practical theology for mission with Millennials. This theology engages in an Empirical Task as it gathers data; engages in an Interpretive Task as it reviews the multi-disciplinary conclusions drawn for that data; engages in a Normative Task of identifying theological norms; and engages in a Pragmatic Task of shaping a practical theological response. The method used for this task is described by Richard Osmer in his book “Practical Theology: An Introduction.” Millennials who are unaffiliated with the church are the subject of this project. The project answers the question, “How does the church engage in frontier mission with Millennials who are unaffiliated with mainline congregational ministry?” Three threads will be used in answering this question: the common narrative used by Millennials to describe their lives; the spiritual condition of “not being enough;” and the journey to adulthood.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the Reverend Frank Gross, Jr.,

friend and mentor,

who taught me the importance of words,

the importance of thinking, and

the importance of thinking about thinking.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NSYR	National Survey of Youth and Religion

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I am deeply indebted to my advisor, Professor Fred Edie of Duke University Divinity School, who has walked with me throughout the entire journey of completing this project. His wisdom guided and challenged me while his deep faith inspired me. I am grateful to Professor Angela Zimmann who served as my second reader. In the midst of serving as the Interim President of United Lutheran Seminary, she made time to read my thesis and offered me encouragement and challenge. As a result, the thesis is better. My friend Pastor Rob Myallis is richly blessed with the skills of analysis and strategic thinking. Our many lunches were filled with camaraderie and reflection. Dr. Dorrell Briscoe, is a friend and confidant. He was the first in our doctoral cohort to finish his thesis, while I am the last. My colleagues, Pastor Adam Morton and Pastor Tasha Genck Morton allowed me to process ideas with them. For all the staff at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Andrea, Anna Marie, Geoff, and Rob, I am thankful for their affirmation and encouragement. The Vestry, Trustees, and congregation of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church encouraged me throughout the process. Lastly, I am a blessed man to be married to the Rev. Dr. Connie Mentzer. She, along with our son Andrew, gave me space and time to write and think while encouraging me in the process.

Introduction

The Grove United Methodist Church in Cottage Grove, Minnesota received national attention in January 2020. The congregation was designated for a ministry "restart." The purpose of a restart is to "reverse shrinking numbers and breathe new life into congregations."[1] Regular worshippers at the Woodbury campus of this congregation were asked to attend worship services at other churches for up to eighteen months. By asking the mainly older/long-term members to leave, leaders desired to make room for a "new vision and worship style." With the restart, the hope was that young adults would gather for worship and engage in ministry at that campus. This led to immediate feelings of disenfranchisement from the regular members. The restart approach is rooted in the belief that long-term members of a congregation set a tone and culture within a congregation. This tone and culture focus on maintaining a "community of the faithful," which may stand in opposition to a culture where the congregation sees itself as "a missions organization for outreach."[2]

The church has numerous institutional expressions, of which mainline Protestantism is one. The situation in Grove United Methodist Church is not unique. Most mainline Protestant congregations are in decline. When facing this decline, congregations and their leaders experience high levels of anxiety. High anxiety can lead people to be

[1] Emily McFarlan Miller, "Minnesota Methodists say rebooting churches can be helpful but comes with peril," Religion News Service, January 31, 2020, https://religionnews.com/2020/01/31/lets-try-this-again-minnesota-church-at-center-of-controversy-is-one-of-many-attempting-a-restart/.
[2] Ibid., 6.

attracted to techniques, tactics, and immediate solutions to the problem. Questions start with "How do we…" There are prognosticators who offer the quick fix and step by step solutions to answer the question. Many of the solutions are based on speculation by the self-professed expert, with little theological reflection. Without theological reflection, it is unlikely that congregations will draw upon their rich tradition of wisdom as it reflects on the current mission field.

Wisdom and reflection in the church come from doing practical theology. A practical theology engages in an Empirical Task as it gathers data; engages in an Interpretive Task as it reviews the multi-disciplinary conclusions drawn from that data; engages in a Normative Task of identifying theological norms; and engages in a Pragmatic Task of shaping a practical theological response.[3]

Congregations can be composed of various populations; however, most mainline congregations are composed primarily of older, long-term members. This group of long-term members are the core group of a congregation. For the core group, doing church in the way it has normally been done is the most attractive approach. The worship, pastoral care, fellowship events, and programs are based on a traditional model that was successful in the 1950's and 1060's.

There is another population in congregations. This population exists on the congregation's periphery. People comprising this population typically have an advanced degree or trade certificate, have a stable and reliable job, are married, and have

[3] Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), vii.

children. They find many of the traditional aspects of a congregation attractive but are likely to become more engaged if programs are planned and implemented that help them to grow in their own faith and that help their children grow in faith. This population has a love for Jesus and wants their children to have that same love. With minor adjustments, the core group and the peripheral group can do ministry together.

There is a third group worthy of consideration. This group is neither part of the core group nor the peripheral group. The third group are those who are unaffiliated with the church. They may have had some experience with a congregation, but currently they are unattached to a congregation. The largest portion of those who are unaffiliated with congregations are the Millennials.

This thesis will use the process outlined by Richard Osmer in his book *Practical Theology: An Introduction* to reflect on the mission opportunities the church has in ministry with Millennials. To develop a practical theology of ministry with Millennials, church leaders must be about gathering data, interpreting the data, applying norms, and outlining practical responses.

The process will be applied to the question, "How does the church engage in frontier mission with Millennials who are unaffiliated with mainline congregational ministry?" Three threads will be used to bring the pieces of this reflection together. First, the common narrative used by Millennials will be explored. Second, the spiritual condition of "not being enough," or the problem of "enoughness," will be considered. Finally, the

journey to adulthood will receive attention. From this exploration, the church will have a foundation upon which to build its ministry with Millennials.

CHAPTER 1—An Empirical Overview—Listening

An Empirical Approach

The ministry of a congregation is, in part, a priestly ministry. The purposes of priestly ministry are "mutual support, care, and edification."[1] Leaders of congregations work to equip all members of the congregation to engage in priestly ministry. A significant part of this ministry is listening. Listening is attending to those who are part of the congregation and attending to those with whom the congregation wants to engage in ministry.[2] In its frontier ministry with Millennials, the church must listen. Listening honors the integrity of Millennials, helps to identify the common narratives that define them, and encourages them in their process of reaching adulthood.

Richard Osmer, in his book *Practical Theology*, places the practice of listening on a continuum. At one end of the continuum is Informal Attending while at the other end is Formal Attending. There are various degrees of attending within that continuum.[3] For the purposes of this thesis, the practice of Formal Attending will be used. According to Osmer, "*Formal* attending is investigating particular episodes, situations, and contexts through empirical research."[4] This type of attending is "systematic and intentional."[5]

[1] Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 35.
[2] Ibid., 37.
[3] Ibid., 37.
[4] Ibid., 38.
[5] Ibid., 39.

When a systematic and intentional way of attending to the lives of Millennials is employed, facts can be used to draw conclusions. Robert Wuthnow states, "In the absence of solid information, speculation…runs rampant."[6] Conclusions drawn from conjecture become "the product of someone's imagination, rather than being grounded in any systematic research."[7]

The statistics presented in this chapter will look at the similarities and differences among age groups. Age group differences "can be the result of three overlapping processes."[8] The Pew Research Center identifies these three processes as Life Cycle Effects, Period Effects, and Cohort Effects. Life Cycle Effects: While Millennials may be different than other generations at this moment, when they reach the age of the comparison group, there may not be a significant difference. Period Effects: Significant events in history will have an impact on all generations, but one generation may be more impacted than others. Cohort Effects: The lasting impact of significant events in history on an age group of people.[9]

The Need for an Operational Definition

An operational definition of the term Millennial is important prior to reviewing the statistics. Operational definitions name the population to be studied, clarify the qualities

[6] Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 2.
[7] Osmer, *Practical Theology,* 2.
[8] Pew Research Center, *Millennials: A Portrait of Generation Next*, ed. Paul Taylor and Scott Keeter (Washington DC: Pew Research Center, 2010), i.
[9] Ibid., ii.

of that population, and demonstrate how that population is defined in comparison to other populations. The Pew Research Center published a report entitled, "Millennials: A Portrait of Generation Next" in February 2010. In that study, Millennials are defined as the generation of people that were "born after 1980" and were "the first generation to come of age in the new millennium."[10] The age range for those called Millennials is 18 to 29 years.[11] In 2010, 50 million people fell into the Millennial age group. By 2020, one in three adults will be a Millennial. By 2025, three of four workers will be from the Millennial age group.[12]

Identity

When looking at the identity, priorities, and outlook of Millennials, one sees how the group is similar to and different from other age groups. The data provided by the Pew Research Center is a compilation of the responses of those being studied, not necessarily what has been observed and measured.

Of Millennials, 61% of them "say they think of their own age group as unique and distinct from other generations."[13] This is not unusual, for each generation from Millennials, to Xers, Boomers, and Silents believe the same thing about their

[10] Ibid., 4.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Chip Espinoza and Mick Ukleja, *Managing the Millennials: Discover the Core Competencies for Managing Today's Workforce (*Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2016), 4.
[13] Pew Research Center, *Millennials,* 13.

generation.[14] When asking Millennials to list what is unique and distinct about their age group, 25% say that the use of technology sets them apart. This is the most commonly occurring answer.[15] In addition to use of technology, Millennials name "their music, pop culture and style, and their liberalism and tolerance" as identifying traits.[16] Differences in values and attitudes is also named by Millennials as unique to their generation.

Generation Gap

The belief that a generation gap exists between Millennials and other generations is commonly held by 79% of Americans. This is a five point increase from 1969 to 2009.[17] Seventy four percent of those surveyed believe that the way computers are used and the use of new technologies are the largest difference among generations.[18] Other perceived areas of difference between the generations include work ethic, moral values, and the respect shown to others. Over 50% of those polled acknowledge these distinctions.[19] When asked which generation is superior in these categories, 66% of people believe "that compared with the younger generation, older Americans have better moral values, have a better work ethic and are more respectful of others."[20] While older Americans come out highest in moral values, work ethic and respect, young

[14] Ibid., 14.
[15] Ibid., 13.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., 15.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.

people come out higher in racial tolerance.[21] Regardless of the differences in use of computers and technology, work ethic, moral values, respect shown to others, and racial tolerance, there is little perceived conflict between the generations. Only 26% say that there are strong conflicts between young people and old people today." And when there is a conflict, "68% say that the conflict is either not very strong or nonexistent."[22]

When polled about the specific relationship of Millennials to their elders, Millennials believe that their elders have better work ethics and morals. They also take seriously the responsibility of caring for their elderly parents.[23] Millennials will nuance the belief of caring for their elderly parents by saying that it is the parents' choice to live with them. Gen Xers share this viewpoint. Boomers are evenly split on the obligation of caring for parents. Only 38% of Silents believe it is their responsibility to have an elderly parent live with them.[24] The generations were more consistent with each other in the areas of responsibility such as "parents paying for a child's college education, parents allowing an adult child to live with them, parents saving money for their children's inheritance, and grandparents helping with childcare for the grandchildren."[25]

Family

[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid., 16.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid., 16-17.

When Millennials were polled for what they want out of life, they ranked family higher than other aspirations. This is not unique to Millennials, for family seems to matter most for all generations. Fifty percent of the public names this as the most important thing in life.[26] It is fascinating that Millennials list having a family as the most important aspiration, yet only 34% of Millennials have children.[27] On the topic of marriage, 30% of Millennials name a successful marriage as what they want in life.[28] Compared to Gen Xers and Boomers, where 59% and 64% respectively are married, a quarter of Millennials say they are married.[29]

Homeownership, Religion, High Paying Careers, Free Time, and Fame

All the generations rate home ownership, religion, high paying career, free time, and fame as priorities. Helping others is listed as important for 20% of all age groups.[30] All age groups say owning one's own home is important.[31] Only 15% of Millennials "say living a very religious life is one of their most important goals."[32] Living a religious life is a bit more important to those over the age of 30.[33] "Millennials place more importance on being successful in a high paying career than they do on living a religious life."[34]

[26] Ibid., 17.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid., 18.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.

Fifteen percent of Millennials will say that "being successful in their career is one of the most important things in their life."[35] Free time is not named as a high priority for any generation.[36] A minimal number of Millennials say that being famous is important.[37]

The Economic Outlook of Millennials.

"Young people who are employed are mostly dissatisfied with the amount of money they make," with only 31% saying they "earn enough money to lead the kind of life they want."[38] While earning less money than they want, Millennials show optimism about future income. Eighty eight percent see a time when they will earn enough money.[39] One third of Millennials are unemployed, yet they remain optimistic about employment and higher pay.[40]

Nation and Politics

Of the generations, Millennials are the most optimistic about how things are going in the nation. The older a person is, the less satisfied that person appears to be with the condition of the nation.[41] While it is customary for the younger generation of a given

[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid., 19.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., 20.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid., 21.

historical period to be more satisfied with the condition of the nation than their older counter parts, the gap is growing. The greatest dissatisfaction with the state of the country is among those 65 and older.[42] For Millennials over the age of 30, the partisan gap is larger.[43] There is a division in feelings among generations about contentment with the nation. Satisfaction levels with the local community in which one lives are consistent among the generations.[44]

Contentment

A large percentage of Millennials say they are happy or somewhat happy.[45] Research to determine what brings about that happiness reveals that income, marital status, and church attendance are connected to happiness.[46] Consistent across the generations is a skepticism about the trustworthiness of others. "In recent years, there has been a larger gap in trust across age groups. Younger people have consistently been less trusting."[47] Trust is "correlated with socioeconomic factors such as income and education."[48]

Technology and Social Media

[42] Ibid., 22.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid., 23.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid., 24

As stated under the category of identity, Millennials say that their use of technology identifies them as distinct from other generations. Millennials lead the way in the use of technology.[49] Technology and social media are "a bottomless source of information and entertainment, and more than a new ecosystem for their social lives."[50] Technology is seen as making life easier, helping people to be better stewards of their time, and bringing people closer to family and friends.[51] When measuring the regular use of e-mail and the internet, 90% of Millennials use both.[52] Three quarters of Millennials say they "have created a social networking profile."[53] The younger and more educated the Millennial, the higher the use of technology and social media.[54] Among all the age groups, Millennials are more likely to use wireless connections (62% of Millennial, compared to 48% of Gen Xers, 35% of Boomers, and 11% of Silents).[55] Millennials are "far more likely than other age groups to rely only on a cell phone for their communication needs,"[56] and 83% of Millennials will keep their cell phones next to their beds.[57] Eighty eight percent of Millennials send and receive texts.[58] The median number of texts sent by a Millennial in a 24 hour time period is 20, which is almost double that of the older generations.[59] While Millennials are no more likely to speak on the cell

[49] Ibid., 25.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid., 26.
[52] Ibid., 27.
[53] Ibid., 28.
[54] Ibid., 29.
[55] Ibid. 30.
[56] Ibid., 32
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid., 33
[59] Ibid.

phone while driving than other generations, 64% of them are likely to text while driving.[60] "Among Millennials, 65% say television and 59% cite the internet as their main source for news,"[61] while 24% use newspapers and 18% use radio.[62] When Millennials were asked to name what they have done in the previous 24 hours, they named activities such as watching videos, posting to an online profile, and playing video games.[63]

Work and Education

In 2010, 41% of Millennials reported that they were working full time. This is a nine-point decline from four years prior. In addition, Millennials are "more likely than older Americans to report they recently lost a job."[64] Sixty six percent of Millennials are likely to say that they will change careers during their lifetime.[65] MidAmerica Nazarene University compiled data from various generational studies, examined that data, and identified generational gaps. For managers supervising Millennials, 75% of them agree that leading multigenerational teams is a challenge. Fifty five percent of Millennials describe their generation as 'most productive,' yet only 16 percent of Generation X and 6 percent of Baby Boomers would describe Millennials that way. Forty nine percent of

[60] Ibid., 34.
[61] Ibid., 35
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid., 36.
[64] Ibid., 39.
[65] Ibid., 46.

Generation X describe their generation as 'most creative,' yet only 15 percent of Millennials would describe Generation X that way. Sixty one percent of Baby Boomers describe their generation as 'most friendly/helpful,' yet only 22 percent of Generation X and 12 percent of Millennials would describe Baby Boomers that way."[66]

Related to the economy and the workplace, Millennials are both the nation's and the world's largest generation. They now make up the largest portion of the work force. With 63 percent having bachelor's degrees, they are the "most educated generation ever." Seventy percent will trend toward working independently instead of in the traditional workforce. By the end of the 2020 calendar year, 66 percent will leave the organizations for which they currently work. When replacing a Millennial in a company, it cost the company between $15,000 to $25,000 to replace that employee. The estimated spending capacity of Millennials in the nation is anticipated to be 41.4 trillion annually by 2020.[67]

Fifty five percent of Millennials keep a strict eye on their finances and 77% of them continue to worry that they are not saving enough.[68] One of the causes of financial hardship is that Millennials are "least likely of any generation to be covered by health insurance."[69] Typically Millennials will rely on parents to provide additional cash beyond a paycheck, with 36% of Millennials reporting this dependency.[70]

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[66] Ryan Jenkins, *The Millennial Manual* (Atlanta, GA: Ryan Jenkins LLC, 2017), 6.
[67] Ibid., 12.
[68] Pew Research Center, *Millennials,* 48.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid., 39.

Family Values

"Millennials are more receptive than their elders to…newer patterns of behavior."[71] This is consistent with the belief of Millennials that they are more tolerant than other generations. They are the only generation to favor the legalization of gay marriage, with over half of them indicating support for gay marriage.[72] Fifty four percent "say that they have a close friend or family member who is gay."[73] This is higher than the other generations. Tolerance of gay marriage doesn't necessarily translate into approval. Only 34% of Millennials would say that gay marriage is good for society.[74] Compared to 71% of Gen Xers, 85% of Boomers, and 87% of Silents, only 62% of Millennials report that their parents were married to each other during their growing up years.[75]

Lifestyle

There are ways that Millennials are like other generations in lifestyle choices. In other areas, they find unique ways to express themselves. One of these unique ways is the use of technology.[76] Body art is another part of the Millennial self-expression with 38%

[71] Ibid., 51.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid., 53.
[76] Ibid., 57.

report having tattoos.[77] Nearly one quarter of Millennials have at least one body piercing.[78] Millennials lag behind older generations in practicing recycling.[79] Among the acts of buying green and buying organic, the proportion of Millennials doing such is similar to other generations.[80] When asked about gun ownership, 28% say they own a gun, rifle, or pistol. This is slightly lower than the general population where 34% say they own either a gun, rifle, or pistol.[81]

Politics, Ideology and Civic Engagement

"Millennials remain significantly more liberal than members of other generations."[82] Of the Millennial age group, 53% of them report that they want the government to be more active in solving problems. There is stronger support for a more "activist government" among Millennials than other generations.[83] In the Democrat/Republican split, 37% of Millennials say they are Democrat, 22% say they are Republican, and 38% claim they are independent.[84]

Health

[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid., 58.
[79] Ibid., 59.
[80] Ibid., 59.
[81] Ibid., 61.
[82] Ibid., 63.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid., 67.

In addition to the Pew Research information, Blue Cross Blue Shield has looked specifically at the health of Millennials. Exercise is a high priority for Millennials, with 56% saying they have a vigorous exercise regimen.[85] The report on the health of Millennials by Blue Cross Blue Shield uses data from 2017. The Health Index used in the study measures optimal health. The number yielded in the index reveals the extent to which people are living up to their optimal health. Millennials had a Health Index of 95.1%.[86] The data also shows that older Millennials (34-36 years of age) "Have higher rates for the top ten medical conditions that people encounter" than their Gen X peers.[87] The largest increases in observed medical conditions were in Major Depression, Hyperactivity, and Type II Diabetes.[88] When comparing the numbers with Gen Xers, Alcohol Use Disorder and Psychotic conditions saw remarkable growth among Millennials.[89] In summary, "millennial Americans are experiencing a double-digit increase in prevalence for eight of the top ten health conditions than "their Gen X counterparts at the same age."[90] Indications drawn from this data suggest that there are longer term health issues that will have an impact on workplace productivity and healthcare costs.

[85] Ibid., 70.
[86] Blue Cross Blue Shield, *The Health of Millennials*, April 24, 2019, https://www.bcbs.com/the-health-of-america/reports/the-health-of-millennials, 1
[87] Ibid., 1.
[88] Ibid., 2.
[89] Ibid., 3.
[90] Ibid., 4.

Religious Beliefs and Behaviors—Adolescence and Young Adulthood

A study called the National Survey of Youth and Religion (NSYR) spoke about the religious activity of adolescents (13 to 17-years old) in 2002-2003. Those adolescents comprise the group now called Millennials.[91]

Seventy five percent of those studied were Christians. An additional 16% "consider themselves to be not religious." Among that group of 16%, many said they believe in God, attend church, and pray.[92] Three observations were made by Smith. First, this population of youth stayed involved in traditional faith communities as compared "to 'alternative' religions and spiritualities like paganism and Wicca."[93] Second, most of the teens were "Christian or not-religious."[94] Third, few teens participated in more than one religion at a time. (only 2.8% of those surveyed)[95]

Based on the NYSR study, 75% of teens thought that their beliefs were the same or similar to their parents.[96] Of the teens surveyed, only 18% of them reported never attending a worship service. This means that 71% of the age group reported attending worship weekly or a few times a year.[97] When asked the question, "If it were totally up

[91] Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 31.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid., 32.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid., 34.
[97] Ibid., 37

to you, how often would you attend religious services," 45% of teens wanted to attend more regularly.[98]

The character of adolescent faith was also studied in the NSYR. This data showed the importance of faith for them, as well as how faith influenced daily life and decision making.[99] Faith was important among 50% of teens.[100] When asked about closeness to God, researchers noted that "35% report feeling somewhat close to God; 25% feel some degree of distance from God; and 3% do not believe in any God."[101] In addition to looking at the character of the teen faith life and the importance of faith, teens were also asked if they had doubts about their faith. With 50% claiming to have no doubts and nearly 30% stating they had a few doubts, nearly 80% claimed to be sure in their faith.[102]

Objects of faith were studied in the NSYR. Over 80% of the adolescents believed in God.[103] When asked, "What do you believe about God," around 33% believed "in God as a personal being involved in the lives of people."[104] An additional 13% had a more deist view of God as one who puts the world in order and then removes the divine self from that creation.[105] Finally, 14% perceived God as a "cosmic life force."[106]

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[98] Ibid., 38.
[99] Ibid., 39
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid., 40.
[103] Ibid., 41.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid.
[106] ibid.

Over 70% of those studied held on to the notion that there is a coming day of judgment and that day of judgment will include rewards and punishments.[107] When looking at "specific belief items," the existence of angels, divine miracles, life after death, and demons were most commonly accepted.[108]

Religious practices were also studied in the NSYR. The operational definition of religious practices used by the NSYR was "specific actions in which religious believers engaged over time that embody spiritual meaning and foster personal formation toward excellence in religious faith and works."[109] The most common religious practices of the time included meditation, acolyte, religious group at school, taught Sunday School, burned candles, fasted, and participated in a study group.[110] When looking at the prayer practices, 40% said daily prayer was part of their religious life while the remaining teens prayed a handful of times per week (30%) and sporadically (20%).[111]

Participation in rite of passage moments was common among 46% of all teens—with mainline church teens showing more participation than Catholic teens.[112] Along with rite of passage moments, teens participated in religious activities outside of regular worship attendance. Among all teenagers, 38% participated in a church group and 69% had been or were involved in these activities.[113] A large majority of teens had an interaction with a

[107] Ibid., 42.
[108] Ibid., 44.
[109] Ibid., 45.
[110] Ibid., 47.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid., 48.
[113] Ibid., 50.

church youth group at some point in their teen aged years.[114] Being connected to a worshipping community went hand in hand with attending a youth group as 85% "of teens who attend religious services belong to a congregation with a youth group. Among teens, when asked about regularity in attending youth group, 32% stated they attended regularly. When looking at attendance at and participation in retreats, youth gatherings, church camp, and mission trips, it appeared that over 60% of youth in America had been part of at least one of these activities."[115]

The NSYR looked at "how religion connected through and interacted with" the personal ties of family, friends, school, and adults. When looking at families that talked with each other about God, there were three levels of engagement—high engagement at 34%, medium at 28%, and low at 38%.[116] Among the teenagers, 41% claimed that their parents prayed out loud with them at times and places other than in worship.[117] There was a clear correlation between the level of engagement the parents had with religious actions and the level of engagement the teen had with religious actions. This is not surprising, as strong ongoing relationships with parents were an identifying quality of the Millennial identity. When surveying teens whose faith was high, 67% of them had parents whose participation in religious actions was high. When surveying the five closest friends of religious teens, 50% of the friends had the same investment in religious actions. The NYSR looked at faith being openly expressed at school. Sixty five

[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid., 54.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid., 55.

percent of teens did so minimally, 12% did so a lot, and 23% did not do so at all.[118] It should be noted that only 9% of students reported that they had been teased in school about their religious actions and beliefs. [119] Finally, the research looked at the importance of the interactions between worship going teens and adults other than their parents. Among the teens attending worship, 79% said they "have adults in the congregation, other than family members, who they enjoy talking with and who give lots of encouragement."[120] Among that same group of teens, 61% said that they would like to have that kind of engagement with people who are not family members in the congregation.[121]

Teens were surveyed in the NYSR about "the appeal and effectiveness of their own religious congregations."[122] When asked, 61% of teens stated that being part of their congregation made them think. There was some acknowledgment that what happened in the congregation was boring. Most of the teens found their "congregation to be a warm and welcoming place for youth."[123] It appears that teens found their experience with their congregations as positive.[124] Another factor that contributes to the contentment that 82% of teens found with their congregations was the opportunity youth were given to be part of the worship service. Teens did not find hypocrisy among other teens in the congregation. Of all the teens, only 12% did not like youth group.

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[118] Ibid., 59.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid., 60.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid., 61.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid.

They were "even less likely to view adults in their congregation as hypocrites than they were to view other teens as hypocrites."[125] Nineteen percent of the teens surveyed said they had a conversation with a minister about personal concerns. Almost none of 19% of teens who had approached a minister reported the experience as bad.[126] A question was asked about the helpfulness of congregations. The question was, do you "think that [your congregation] is a good or not good place…to go to talk about serious issues like family problems, alcohol, or troubles at school?"[127] Teens were also asked about the effectiveness of their congregations in helping them understand human sexuality and sexual morality.[128] Over 80% stated their congregation were meeting that need.

The NYSR asked about future congregational participation. In particular, teens were asked ," What kind of religious congregation, if any, [will you] attend when [you] are 25 years old?"[129] In answering the question, 77% said they thought they would be worshipping at the same congregation they currently attended.[130]

Based on the data from the NYSR, the personal relationships that come with a congregation played a pivotal role in the religiosity of teens in the study. First and most important, the role that parents play in the religiosity of teens was significant. This is consistent with data from Pew Research that shows a high commitment to family among Millennials. In addition, faith communities have played an important role in the

[125] Ibid., 63.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid., 65.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid., 66.
[130] Ibid., 67.

lives of teens. Whether it is worship participation, assisting in leading worship, attending youth group, participating in retreats, or talking with minister, the teens found these programs and relationships to be positive. Finally, the teens claim that they are likely to continue attending the congregations of which they were already a part. While the structure and programs of congregations receive much time, attention, and financial support, the relationships that are present in congregational life were more important.

Young Adulthood

The research of the NYSR was conducted on those who were teenagers at the time. Those in the study are part of the generation called Millennials. This allows for a longitudinal comparison of the data when they were teens to when they are adults. Religiosity is one area that is compared.

In 2014, Pew Forum conducted a study on the religious beliefs and practices of adults in the United States. Based on the data from the research, Americans overall were becoming less religious, and Millennials were significantly less religious than the rest of the population.[131] The data shows that Millennials "are much less likely than older Americans to pray or attend church regularly or to consider religion as an important part of their lives."[132] Of those unaffiliated with religion, they self-describe as atheists,

[131] David Masci," Why Millennials are less religious than older Americans," accessed November, 2019, http://pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/01/08/qa-why-millennials-are -less-religious-than-older-americans.
[132] Ibid.

agnostics, or "nothing in particular."[133] Consistent with the data from the NSYR, most Americans who said they were unaffiliated with a religious community also said they believed in God.[134] Those who are unaffiliated with a congregation continued to believe in God, but they are less observant of religious practices.

Among Millennials, 27% report attending religious services on a regular basis, and 40% report praying every day.[135] When asked about the importance of religion in their lives, 40% claim that religion is important.[136] When looking at the intersection of religion and political party, those unaffiliated with religious groups are more likely to be Democrat than Republican yet, there is a slow growth in the number of unaffiliated who are part of the Republican party.[137]

The 2014 Pew Forum refers to the concept of "generational replacement." This means "the gradual supplanting of older generations by newer ones."[138] Generational replacement is a source of great anxiety in congregations. There are many congregational meetings that are filled with worry over the future of the congregation, funding of the ministry, and the congregation's viability. Clergy are pressured and criticized for not making their congregations grow. Numbers—particularly—income and worship attendance—are declining. Well-intentioned congregants hope that there is a tactic that can be used to reverse the trends. A question asked repeatedly is, "Where

[133] Pew Research Center, "U.S. Public Becoming Less Religious," accessed November 19, 2019, http://www.pewforum.org/2015/11/03/u-s-public-becoming-less-religious.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid.

are the young people?" There is a generation gap between people who are affiliated with a congregation and those who are unaffiliated.

Among the religiously affiliated, the largest percentage of them say religion is important in their lives, prayer practices remain consistent, and attendance in religious services remains consistent. There is growth among the affiliated population in the practice of telling others about their faith, reading scripture outside of religious services, and participation in prayer or study groups.[139]

Compared to the affiliated, the unaffiliated population appears to be moving in the direction of secularization. The size of the unaffiliated group has grown, and it has become less religious.[140] Statistically, the number of unaffiliated people who say religion is important has declined, while the number of those who say religion is not important has increased. Engaging in prayer and attending religious services has decreased[141]

The report of the Pew Forum draws this conclusion, "the United States is growing less religious (in percentage terms) not because there are fewer highly religious people but rather because, as the overall U.S. population has grown, there are now many more nonreligious people than was the case just a few years ago."[142] The largest portion of the population who are unaffiliated are Millennials.

Conclusion

[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid.

The purpose of Chapter One was to use an empirical approach to draw a portrait of the Millennial population. Millennials see themselves as different from other generations, particularly in the use of technology, social media, and computers. The technology provides entertainment, information, and settings for interpersonal relationships. As is common in most generations, Millennials think that their music, pop culture, and style set them apart. They see older generations as having better moral values, a better work ethic, and are better at showing respect to others. Having said that, Millennials see themselves as more liberal, more tolerant, and more supportive of gay marriage. Family is of high importance to Millennials, and they want to have a successful marriage themselves. In holding family as important, Millennials genuinely like their parents and feel they have a responsibility to care for their elderly parents. As teen-angers, Millennials were significantly influenced by their parents in being active in religious organizations. As Millennials moved beyond their teen-aged years, they were less involved in religious groups. Economically, Millennials are dissatisfied with their current income. Getting a higher paying job has become more important than being involved in religion. Optimism is part of the outlook of Millennials. This optimism applies to their perspective on how things are going in the nation. Combining the positive feelings they have for their parents with an optimistic view of the nation, Millennials desire other people, especially the government, to work on solving problems for them.

Chapter 2: Interpretation of Data—Knowing

Introduction

Chapter One provided data that provides a general overview of the beliefs, attitudes, and practices of Millennials. Beliefs are claims that are perceived as true and provide the foundation for attitudes and practices. Attitudes, based on beliefs, are a person's perceptions of actions, institutions, events, and objects as either negative, neutral, or positive. They are held on a continuum with varying degrees of negative and positive perception. Practices are the actions taken upon one's beliefs and attitudes. Based on the initial review of data, some common beliefs of Millennials include a liberal view of others—including those of other races and members of the LGBTQ+ community. A second belief of Millennials is that of optimism which sees families, job status, and life in the nation in a favorable light. Third, Millennials believe that family is important. From these three beliefs, Millennials perceive family as good. They perceive the job market as a system that can lead to progress. Finally, there is a positive view of the government's ability to solve problems. From these beliefs and attitudes, Millennials will be supportive of gay marriage, will be advocates for those who are victims of racial discrimination, will not stay in one job for a long period of time as they look for a move to a job with a higher income, and will be more passive when it comes to acting on societal issues.

This chapter takes the data presented in Chapter One, explores additional research, and interprets the data and research through various disciplinary approaches.

Wuthnow—A Social Science Approach

Robert Wuthnow, in his book *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion,* wrote, "Religious organizations and the young adults who choose to participate—or not participate—in them are changing."[1] For Wuthnow, religious leaders have a mandate to take younger adults more seriously. He contends that "the future of American religion is in doubt."[2] The understanding of authority and access to authority, participation in the worship life of the congregation, and engaging in the program ministry of a congregation are different for young adults than for G Xers and Boomers. Wuthnow describes the young adult population as characterized by "uncertainty, diversity, fluidity, searching, tinkering."[3] These words allude to a generation that defies the standard place of authority, worship, and programs in religious life. Indeed, even the use of the word religion can become a stumbling block.

Wuthnow operationally defines Millennials as young adults between the ages of 21 and 35 years old,[4] and stresses the importance of identifying the similarities and differences between Millennials and other generations. He claims that there may not be as many differences between Boomers and Millennials as assumed.[5] The importance of identifying similarities is to avoid the trap of thinking of young adults as unique. It is also

[1] Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), xvi.
[2] Ibid., 17.
[3] Ibid., xvi.
[4] Ibid., 6.
[5] Ibid.

important to identify similarities between generations in order to identify continuity with the past and present. He challenges the notion that the perceived uniqueness of young adults is rooted in "their coming of age and developments in the wider world."[6] Wuthnow contends that the current beliefs, attitudes, and practices of young adults have "more to do with family dynamics."[7] For example, the qualities of one's family, one's employment, where one dwells, the presence of children in one's life, and peer groups have a significant impact on young adults and their religious practices.[8]

Millennials can simultaneously be orthodox and heterodox.[9] Orthodoxy is holding fast to right belief as articulated in the dogma of an institution. Congregations can insist that a member hold onto a religious claim and the way that claim is expressed in dogma. For many Millennials, the reason behind a religious claim is more important than the specific language expressing itself in a dogmatic statement. In accepting the claim but not the dogma, Millennials take a step back than the religious body and its dogma. For them, the truth that is behind the dogma of the church is important. In taking this step back from the institutional claim, a person can accept the truth without accepting the institutions interpretation of the truth as articulated in dogma. The Millennial can glean insights from numerous religions and disciplines to gather a set of beliefs for their own use. They become tinkerers who engage in a heterodoxic orthodoxy that includes,

[6] Ibid., 4.
[7] Ibid., xvi.
[8] Ibid., xvi.
[9] Ibid., xvii.

"Science, philosophy, other religions, and the arts"[10] Wuthnow goes on to say, "The religion and spirituality of young adults is a cultural bricolage, constructed improvisationally from the increasingly diverse materials at hand."[11]

Young adults "make up more than a third of the United States population,"[12] yet have not fully attained the traditional markers of adulthood. The traditional markers of adulthood articulated by Wuthnow are marriage, becoming parents, and becoming established in a career. "The maturational tasks of marrying, becoming parents, and becoming established in a career are taking longer now than in the past."[13] Accomplishing these maturational tasks now takes a person until their mid-thirties to achieve.[14] In their maturational years, young adults experience uncertainties related to job and financial security, national security, climate security, and even threats to physical safety.[15] There are additional influences on the lives of young adults, such as social media, technology, "immigration, and globalization."[16]

This extended maturational process is important to consider, especially when compared to the structure of a congregation's programmatic ministry, which is based on the traditional maturational process. The program ministry of a congregation is based on movement from Cradle Roll, to Sunday School, to Confirmation Class, to Youth Ministry,

[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid., xvi
[13] Ibid., 6.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid., xvi.

ministry to College Students, marriage upon graduation, accompanied by a secure job and children. This pattern does not fit today's young adults, for the midpoint of life has moved, and Millennials "are taking longer to reach the maturational milestones.[17] "Whereas it may have seemed urgent at one time to start a family at age 18 if one were to see one's children grow to maturity by the time one died, people can now wait longer to start families. They can also take longer to decide on a line of work, and it may in fact take them longer to achieve financial independence.'"[18] "Comparing data in 2000 with data from 1960, researchers found, for instance, that completing all the major transitions (leaving home, finishing school, become financially independent, getting married, and having children) was achieved by only 46 percent of women and 31 percent of men aged 30 in 2000, compared with 77 percent of women and 65 percent of men of the same age in 1960."[19]

This data and observations made about the data by Wuthnow are significant. The traditional connecting points between a congregation and a person are based upon traditional markers of adulthood. When those markers are delayed in being accomplished, the connecting points between a traditional congregation and Millennials are reduced. For that reason, a congregation's engagement with Millennials as unaffiliated is to recognize the delay in achieving traditional maturational goals, the

[17] Ibid., 9.
[18] Ibid., 10
[19] Ibid., 11.

spiritual impact of that delay, and the iconoclastic process of asking if these markers for maturity are even beneficial for Millennials.

Congregations find themselves in unchartered territory. For young adults who are married and have children, the likelihood of being involved in a congregation is higher.[20] In addition, religious involvement is higher when young adults have stable, long-term employment, and when they are involved in their local communities.[21] Based on the standard structure of program ministry outlined earlier, there is now a gap in programming from college graduation until full achievement of the maturational markers. Society has believed that it is important that institutions exist to support and socialize those not yet considered adults."[22] The challenge to society is that support and socialization extends well into a person's 30's. Without age specific and need specific programming for young adults, the institutions available for socialization and support come to an end when a person hits 21 or 22 years old.[23] This leaves Millennials to their own devices when negotiating the traditional markers of adulthood. The tinkerers mentioned earlier in relationship with religion are also tinkering to achieve an adult identity. Decisions such as dating, when to have children, how to raise children, where to live, and types of career are made "on an improvisational basis."[24] It is this approach to institution-free maturation that leads young adults to heterodoxy. They will, when

[20] Ibid., 17.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid., 12.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., 13.

needing expert help, search for it, yet will "not rely on only one way of obtaining things." Bricolage is shaped by improvising and piecing things together. It is a type of approach necessary when the "structure [context] provided by schooling, teachers, and the regimen of adolescent cliques is gone."[25] The young adult pulls from numerous sources for a framework to understand the world.[26] For example, a senior pastor in her 50's can be taking part in a staff meeting with colleagues in their late 20's, early 30's. The senior pastor is accustomed to making a claim that she expects the staff to simply accept. In contrast, when that claim arises at staff meetings, the young adult staff members pick up their phones and search the internet for information which may or may not be consistent with what the senior pastor offered.

There is a significant change in church activity by young adults as "there has been a decline in the percentage of younger adults who attend religious services regularly, and a corresponding increase in the percentage of younger adults who seldom or never attend religious services."[27] Six percent of young adults say they attend religious services more than once a week, while 20% of them—an increase from 14 percent previously-- say they never attend.[28] Wuthnow looks at the intersection of Marital Status, Having Children, Employment Patterns, Education, and Community Life with religious participation.

[25] Ibid., 14.
[26] Ibid., 13.
[27] Ibid., 52.
[28] Ibid.

1. Marital Status. Women are more likely to attend than men. When married, men may attend more often.[29] Why is this? Wuthnow asserts, "Marriage is a significant form of settling down."[30] When the traditional social roles are being played out--marriage, children, job, etc.-- a person is more likely to go to church. As noted previously, if traditional church programs are geared for a standard progression of maturation, the people will find a home in church community. "Almost all of the decline in religious attendance mentioned earlier has taken place among those younger adults who have not married."[31] "It suggests, for instance, that single adults age 21 through 45 apparently do not feel as comfortable or interested in attending religious services as they did a generation ago. It also points to something even more important; married couples may be attending religious services at the same rate now as a generation ago, but there are significantly fewer of them."[32]
2. Children. Young adults are getting married later. As a result, they are having children later. When they do have children, they are having fewer children than previous generations.[33] When young adults have children out of wedlock or are a single parent, participation in church services decreases.[34] So, while "being

[29] Ibid., 54.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid., 55.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid., 56.
[34] Ibid., 57.

married or unmarried has a stronger effect on church attendance than anything else, having children also makes a difference."[35]

3. Employment Patterns. The decrease in participation in religion may in part be due to "more women are working full time and have less time to devote to religion."[36] Full time employment has an impact on one's self-identity. It can also mean that there is another institution—the employer—that has just as much, if not more impact on the identity of a person. It may also mean that "one's social relationships form more through the workplace than in other settings, such as one's congregation."[37]
4. Education. There is a complex interaction between education and religious participation. "Studies of the relationships between levels of education and religious participation in the general public have usually shown that more education in itself does not dampen religious participation."[38] While a negative influence may not be observed, one must acknowledge that the process of obtaining a higher education has an impact on beliefs and attitudes. Also, one should note that having "higher levels of education also appear to encourage people to be more active in their communities."[39]
5. Communities. Younger adults are spending less time with their neighbors. Comparing those who regularly engage with their neighbors and those who do

[35] Ibid., 62.
[36] Ibid., 58.
[37] Ibid., 60.
[38] Ibid., 60.
[39] Ibid.

not, there is not a statistical difference in the likelihood that they will attend religious services.[40] "Church attendance may not be as deeply rooted in neighborhoods as it was during earlier periods in American history."[41] Where a young adult lives has an impact on attendance at religious services. "In the surveys conducted between 1998 and 2002, the proportion of younger adults living in cities had declined from 54 percent to 47 percent, the proportion living in suburbs had risen from 23 percent to 38 percent, and the proportion living in small towns or rural areas had dropped from 23 percent to 15 percent."[42] These numbers are important to note, as religious life in rural areas was stronger than in urban areas.[43] The trend of a decline in the number of younger adults living in the city is reversing. City living for single and married young adults without children is increasing. In the city of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, young adults live in the cities until they have children. Once the children reach school age, the families move to the suburbs. Once their children leave home for college and careers, couples return to living in the city.

6. Finally, after looking closely at those who are not participating in religious life, it is important to look at the regular church goer. "Church attenders age 21 through 45 are disproportionately female."[44] "Infrequent attenders are evenly

[40] Ibid., 65.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid., 66.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid., 68.

divided male and female."[45] "Young adults in their twenties are poorly represented among regular church attenders."[46] Finally, "a majority of regular church attenders are married (60%)."[47]

HARRIS—A Social Psychological View

Malcolm Harris uses the term "Millennial" to refer to "Americans born between 1980 and 2000."[48] He offers a social psychological analysis of the data. Instead of comparing young adulthood from generation to generation, Harris claims that "When we're born into a society has a large impact on our personality."[49] The moment into which a person is born will shape that person's beliefs, attitudes, and practices—all of which are part of the character of a person. Harris wants to identify what shapes the character of a Millennial[50] because that which shapes the character of a Millennial is that which organizes society. In his book, *Kids These Days: Human Capital and the Making of Millennials,* Harris asks the question, "what is the dominant mode of organizing society?" in order to understand the character of Millennials. He answers the question, "capitalism emerged as the single dominant mode of organizing society."[51] Once naming the mode of organizing society, Harris describes the outcome on the character of the

[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Malcolm Harris, *Kids These Days: Human Capital and the Making of Millennials* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2017), 4.
[49] Ibid., 199
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid., 4.

Millennial. “Millennials can be described as a cohort of super effective workers who are too competitive, isolated, and scared to organize for something better.”[52]

Harris writes of generational variations as “when a quantitative change (birth year) comes to refer to a qualitative change.”[53] While there is no definitive moment when the end of one generation and beginning of another occurs, one can describe a point when a generational shift happens. Harris strives to articulate the historic reason for that generational shift.[54] A person has no influence on the historical moment in which they are born, however, historical trends shape those who experience the events.[55]

For Harris, the primary historical trend that has an impact on Millennials is the moment when “capitalism emerged as the single dominant mode of organizing society.”[56] Capitalism considers Millennials “as investments, productive machinery, ‘human capital.’”[57] For a person to survive under capitalism, they must always be adjusting their “abilities, skills, emotions, and even sleep schedules” to “their role in the economy.”[58]

A person’s survival is dependent upon adapting to capitalism.[59] Each and every part of a person’s life—”parenting, schools, the criminal justice system, higher education, and the job market”[60]—has been impacted by the force of capitalism. It is worthy to note that

[52] Ibid., 199.
[53] Ibid., 3.
[54] Ibid., 4.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid., 4.
[57] Ibid., 5.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid., 4.
[60] Ibid., 11.

the parts of life named by Harris resemble the markers of adulthood outlined by Wuthnow. In addition, it is necessary to look "at the changes in technology, psychology, sexuality, and other elements of social life" to understand what has shaped Millennials.[61]

Capitalism is dependent upon performance. Performance standards measure the rate by which one can produce a product, the quantity of the product produced, the quality of the product produced, and the the cost of producing a product. Those most successful at meeting the performance standards of rate, quantity, quality, and cost are perceived as having higher value. Harris calls this group of high performers the "elite." Being part of the elite becomes equated with maturity. The markers of adulthood listed by Harris (similar to those outlined by Wuthnow) are better jobs, better income, and better status. Success in the system of capitalism can become the equivalent to maturity. Harris thinks that Millennials will need to face their preference for elitism, and to determine if they want capitalism to remain as the glue of social order.

Harris explores the impact of capitalism on the character of Millennials.

First, Harris contends that there has been a drastic change in the character of childhood.[62] The trait of childhood for middle and upper class families that comes from capitalism is "an anxious frenzy that surrounds the future."[63] This anxiety has changed the decisions that adults make about child-rearing, parenting styles, and the purpose of

[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid., 14.
[63] Ibid.

education. These changes have been made so that children, at a certain point in their lives, can "meet the demands of a changing world."[64] "Between 1981 and 1997, elementary schoolers aged six to eight recorded a 146 percent gain in time spent studying, and another 32 percent gain in study time between 1997 and 2003."[65] In addition, homework levels have increased by 30 percent and in-class time has increased by 14 percent.[66] This increase in school work is based on the belief that work completed by a young person in their school years is an investment that will pay off when that person has a job. The original purpose of education was to shape the lives of people to become better citizens of the nation. For Millennials, the purpose of working hard in school is to make a student a better candidate for the labor market—making them worth more.

With the progression of capitalism, the burden of "training employees" shifts from the corporation to the state. The state passes this burden to schools through state regulations. Parents are expected to hold their children accountable, in partnership with the schools, to meet the state standards.[67] The statewide testing of students in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is called the PSSA. This test is administered in various grades. It is not uncommon, when waiting at the bus stop in the morning, to hear students singing the PSSA song as the bus goes along its route. In high school, orientation to the freshman class stresses the importance of maintaining a strong GPA

[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid., 20.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid., 26.

and class rank—where GPA and rank are almost seen as stock futures. All of these, it is contended, will guarantee better college placement and increase job acquisition.

The role of parenting is shaped by capitalism. Children can find themselves unwittingly viewed by their parents as "appreciating assets."[68] If the children are assets, then parents are their investment brokers. As with any investment broker, parents must become risk managers so that their assets appreciate. When risk is at play, then the issue of safety arises. Parents are constantly coached through the news, peers, and school messaging to ask fundamental safety questions such as, "Where are safe places? Who are safe people? What are safe practices?" Tim Gill writes, there is "growing adult intervention to minimize risk at the expense of childhood experience."[69] When parents adopt the role of risk manager, anxiety and fear reinforces "'a norm of parenting that equates being a good parent with being a controlling parent, and that sees the granting of independence as a sign of indifference, if not outright neglect, even though the benefits of giving children a degree of freedom to play, especially outside, are increasingly well documented.'"[70]The research shows that the physical and social challenges that come from play equips a child to be self-directed and self-controlled.[71]

Harris shares that having parents who are risk managers for their children leads to "two complementary forms [of parenting]: helicopter parents and zero tolerance policies."[72]

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[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid., 29.
[70] Ibid., 30.
[71] Ibid., 31.
[72] Ibid., 32.

Also called "intensive parenting" by Bernstein and Triger, helicopter parenting can be characterized by overuse of hand sanitizer, always serving as a school chaperon, and an increase in school to parent technology.[73] These are all ways to make sure "nothing bad happens."[74] Zero tolerance policies have been implemented in institutions, such as schools, and find their roots first in in-school violence.[75] Zero tolerance policies are morally and ethically lazy,[76] for they do not take the factors of the situation into account when meting out justice. Zero Tolerance policies, in their moral and ethical laxity, cloud the barrier between school discipline and the juvenile justice system. As more misbehavior in schools is treated as a criminal offense, schools can quickly find themselves as part of the pipeline to prison for students.[77] Schools that have school resource officers—full time police officers assigned to a school—have clouded the line between school discipline and criminal citations.

In measuring the happiness levels of children, "American kids and teens, across race, gender, and class lines, are spending less time doing things that make them happy…and more time doing things that make them especially unhappy."[78]

As children are raised in low risk environments, it is necessary for a child to stay eligible for employment. Ironically, Harris writes, "Millennials' extra work hasn't earned them

[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid., 37.
[76] This quote is from a statement made by Fred Craddock in a sermon at the Chautauqua Institute, Chautauqua, New York.
[77] Harris, *Kids These Days,* 37.
[78] Ibid., 38.

the promised high standard of living. By every metric, this generation is the most educated in American history, yet Millennials are worse off economically than their parents, grandparents, and even great-grandparents…The market has not held up its side of the bargain."[79] Millennials will internalize this thinking, leading to questioning themselves about being good enough for life.

Second, Harris addresses the role of higher education. "Between 1979 and 2014, the price of tuition and fees at four-year nonprofit US colleges, adjusted for inflation, has jumped 197 percent at private schools and 280 percent at public ones, accelerating faster than housing prices or the cost of medical care."[80] Students continue to tout the importance of a college education and are willing to absorb significant debt to get a college education, however, "wages for college-educated workers outside of the inflated finance industry have stagnated or diminished with real wages for young graduates down 8.5 percent between 2000 and 2012. Un-and underemployment have hit recent graduates especially hard, nearly doubling post-2007."[81] Harris concludes, the Millennials are "the most indebted generation in history…without the dependable jobs it needs to escape."[82] While in college, 70 percent of students are working (20 percent full time) compared to 25 percent working in 1960. Food insecurity is not uncommon among students.[83] Food banks exist on college campuses, not as an outreach to the

[79] Ibid., 40.
[80] Ibid., 42.
[81] Ibid., 43.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid., 45.

larger community, but to feed the students. Under the influence of capitalism and the belief that humans are capital, "the prevailing logic is that investment in one's own working credentials [degrees] are almost always good investments."[84] Schools have assumed the roles of training employees for companies, in order that the company does not have to invest in the expense of training their employees. Also, when companies are not making investments in the training of employees, they also do not have the same level of commitment to keeping those employees employed. Companies save money in job skills training by insisting that prospective employees come with training.

Third, coming out of a specific understanding of primary, secondary, and higher education, employers treat workers as capital. "As Millennials enter the workforce, we've faced a set of conditions that are permanently different than what previous generations have experienced."[85]Primarily, there is an ever growing chasm between good- and bad-quality jobs."[86] Harris writes, "[The relation between employers and workers] controls not only the access to income, the ability to pay back educational debts, and the ability to rent a room, buy a house, or start a family, but also public good like Medicare and retirement support."[87] A financial advisor was at a meeting of downtown merchants for the City of Lancaster. When it was his turn to share what his business is doing, he spoke about 401ks and annuities. After he finished his comments, a Millennial business owner stated, "That sounds like financial stuff that we Millennials

[84] Ibid., 43.
[85] Ibid., 67.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.

know nothing about, nor will ever be able to have." The very quality of life and what comes with a quality of life is in the hands of owners—mostly motivated by profit. The "consequences of career success and failure are growing heavier as time goes on. Work is intensifying across the board, abetted by communications technology that erases the distinction between work time and the rest of life."[88] The agreement that is supposed to be in place is that as "the population gets more educated, more effective, and better skilled, in return, it's rewarded with high paying postindustrial jobs…Despite all the preparatory work, all the new college degrees, all the investment in human capital, the rewards haven't kept up with the costs for most."[89] Statistically, "Being under 35 is now correlated with poverty."[90] "Since young workers represent both a jump in productivity and a decrease in labor costs, this means we're generating novel levels of 'surplus value'—productivity beyond what workers receive in compensation."[91] "Millennials are growing up highly attuned to the needs of capital markets."[92] When Millennials ask themselves if they have enough, they don't necessarily mean financial resources. It may mean that they do not feel they will be worth enough for the elusive promises made by corporations.

Harris writes that a "culture in which children are taught that their main objective while young is to become the best job applicant they can be…[is also a culture where]

[88] Ibid., 69.
[89] Ibid., 74
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid., 76.

employers and colleges have convinced young people that work itself is a privilege of which they are probably unworthy…[and is a culture that] teaches people to be servile, anxious, and afraid."[93] It is important to pay attention to the telos of employment for Millennials by asking, "What is really at the end of the road for Millennials who do everything right?"[94] "Millennials are so well trained to excel and follow directions that many of us don't know how to separate our own interest from a boss's or a company's."[95]

Fourth, "The role of the United States government in its citizen's lives has changed significantly over the past decade, and this change has had a large impact on the development of young Americans."[96] There is a growing federal deficit and a decrease in the number of governmental jobs, "providing dependable middle-class careers. Since Americans are working longer, this is disproportionately affecting young people. In 1973, over 19 percent of full time civilian federal employees were under thirty years of age; by 2013, that number was down to 7 percent."[97] Harris writes about the federal deficit. In addition to growing federal deficits and decreasing numbers of governmental jobs available, "'We may have gone from conceiving of government as an entity that builds roads, dams, and airports, provides shared services like schooling, policing and national parks, and wages wars, into the world's largest insurance brokers.'

[93] Ibid., 95.
[94] Ibid., 102.
[95] Ibid., 103.
[96] Ibid., 102.
[97] Ibid., 107.

A common adjective used for Millennials is 'entitled,' but the entitlement system wasn't built for us."[98] In 1960, there were five workers per beneficiary in social security. When last Baby Boomer retires, there will be two workers per beneficiary.[99] Only six percent of Millennials believe they will receive the full Social Security benefit."[100] Fifty one percent believe they will receive no benefits at all.[101] The nation is seeing the juvenilization of poverty. This is the reversal of fortunes from the old to the young, where older generations have more wealth than younger generations.[102] The period of five to eighteen years of age is believed to serve the purpose of job training. "The American public education system is a rapidly rationalizing factory for producing human capital."[103] Standardization is part of the government's role in education. There are deleterious effects of standardization. "We can draw a straight line between the standardization of children in educational reform and the expulsion, arrest, and even murder of the kids who won't' adapt."[104] Students are expected to be manageable. They must be teachable up to the minimum common standards, display adequate progress, and not interfere with anyone else's learning. If a student cannot do this, the school must act, and the school's tolerance for disruption has diminished. Disruptions are managed by discipline and school resource officers in place of teachers and principals.[105]

[98] Ibid., 107.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid., 108.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid., 110.
[103] Ibid., 119.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid., 120.

Suspensions are used to separate those students.[106] The commonly used word for misbehavior in the classroom is disruption. Schools are doing two things. They are increasing the production of human capital and increasing the production of future prisoners who do not fall in the standardized system of training.[107]Students must remain eligible in order to succeed.[108] As the most policed modern generation, not surprising that they are "cagey and anxious," for the state reinforces the notion of zero-risk childhoods."[109] "Police officers interact with Millennials more than they have with kids in the past. America is an insurance company and an occupying army."[110]

Fifth, the "trends that affect the quality of young people's work also affect the quality of their mental health and social trust."[111]"Autonomy gets in the way of labor development."[112] The quality of work also has an impact on the behavior of Millennials. "The costs of producing human capital have passed on to workers over the past few years. The Millennial character is a "product of life spent investing in your own potential and being managed like a risk."[113] High school athletes can have a contract with an on-line managing agency. The role the agency plays is to push the marketability of the athlete. Athletes who are best marketed receive the best scholarships and have the best potential for a successful career. There is a cost to the person who is being shaped to be

[106] Ibid., 121.
[107] Ibid., 124.
[108] Ibid., 126.
[109] Ibid., 128.
[110] Ibid., 130.
[111] Ibid., 132.
[112] Ibid., 139.
[113] Ibid., 164.

human capital. That cost can be seen in mental health and social trust.[114] Only 19 percent of Millennials in 2012 believed that other people can be trusted.[115]For those for whom stakes are not high, trust is more probable. Believing that over 80 percent of the people find most others untrustworthy has an impact on the mental health of the people who hold that belief.[116] "Along with a generationally accepted air of mistrust, American kids and young adults endure an unprecedented level of day-to-day agitation…Their lives center around production, competition, surveillance, and achievement that were totally exceptional only a few decades ago."[117] The characteristics of Millennial life are worry, sadness, and dissatisfaction.[118] Millennials as a group "are trending on these pathological behaviors, and for good reason."[119] "Under all the concerned rhetoric about young people abusing medication, there's no way to be sure that Americans can maintain the necessary level of production without it."[120] There has been an increase in depression.[121] Between 1994 and 2001, "American teens doubled both their antidepressant and stimulant prescription rates."[122]

The use of social media plays a significant role in both the situation and the character of Millennials. For Millennials, a portion of their interactions with others is mediated by algorithms and scored by metrics in social media. Opting out of social media is treated

[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid., 165.
[116] Ibid., 166.
[117] Ibid., 167.
[118] Ibid., 169.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid., 172.
[121] Ibid., 173.
[122] Ibid., 174.

like a deviant lifestyle.[123] The concept of followers and fans has changed. It used to be that famous personalities, especially movie and television stars, had followers and fans. Now, with social media, any average person can have followers and fans. In addition, it is possible to monitor the exact number of people who are following a person. According to Harris, this has made Millennials "producers in the attention economy."[124] Each person becomes a talent to which people should attend. Being on a social media platform increases the chances of a person being "discovered." In addition, the person is committing time, talent, and other resources to create the product. Thus businesses—I.e., social media platforms—do not have to incur the cost of production. People strive to make themselves into a brand.[125] "Social media is a great low-cost way to generate, corral, measure, and monetize the attending we pay each other as we go about our affairs. With users serving as producers of the product, platforms have seen that it is cheaper to host than to employ."[126] The use of a patron's product creates what Harris calls a "sharing economy." "The sharing economy's rise is a reflection of capitalism's need to find new profit opportunities in every aspect of social life once shielded from the market, in leisure time once withdrawn from waged labor, in space and affective resources once withheld from becoming a kind of capital."[127]

[123] Ibid., 178.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid., 180.
[126] Ibid., 181.
[127] Ibid., 182.

Finding a safe space is a challenge for Millennials. “Driven from public spaces like parks and malls, teens have found refuge online, where their flirting, fighting, and friending can be monitored and sold to investors and advertisers.”[128] When asked why they use social media, teens responded that ‘they would far rather meet up in person, but the hectic and heavily scheduled nature of their day-to-day lives, their lack of physical mobility, and the fears of their parents have made such face-to-face interactions increasingly impossible.”[129] Millennials are not building social ties that aren’t related to their productivity.[130] Millennials “have always been online, and their social world has always been actively mediated by corporations.”[131]

Finally, Harris reflects upon the habits of Millennials. From early on, Millennials have learned to watch what others are noticing, changing and editing ones’ presentation. “When it comes to sex, most illegal drugs, and crime, Millennials are significantly better-behaved than earlier birth cohorts.”[132] Interestingly enough, “The overdose rate for the fifty-five-to-seventy-four cohort quintupled between 2001 and 2013.[133]

Christian Smith and Melinda Denton—Sociology of Religion Approach

[128] Ibid., 184.
[129] Ibid., 183-84.
[130] Ibid., 185.
[131] Ibid., 187.
[132] Ibid., 188.
[133] Ibid., 191.

Teenagers are a frequently studied group. These studies are done in order to provide data and conclusions that help people understand and help teen-agers. With all the studies of teenagers, there is very little research on the "religious and spiritual lives" of teen-agers.[134] Efforts to understand and help teen-agers rarely or seriously take into consideration "their religious faith and spiritual practices."[135] Based on the research of the National Study of Youth and Religion, Smith and Denton wrote *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual lives of American Teenagers.* The research was conducted from July 2002 to March 2003 on teenagers between the ages of 13-17. The teenagers studied from 2002 thru 2003 comprise the current generation that is called Millennials. Smith and Denton make "an attempt to describe and evaluate the shape and texture of American religion broadly by viewing it through the lens of the religious and spiritual practices of religious and nonreligious American youth."[136]

Drawing conclusions about "the religious and spiritual identities, affiliations, beliefs, experiences, and practices of U.S. adolescents"[137] can be accomplished by looking at the composition and defining features of adolescents—now Millennials.[138]

The first group studied were the Spiritual Seekers. Spiritual Seekers "are described as people who have an interest in spiritual matters but who are not devoted to one particular historical faith or denomination and in fact may be hostile to traditional or

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[134] Christian Smith with Melinda Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid., 7.
[138] Ibid.

organized religion per se."[139] Seekers are sorting through various faiths and practices and gathering a variety of meaning systems and practices. The purpose is to find something that works for them. They are open to many truths and will mix and match various beliefs and practices. They are also suspicious of committing to a specific congregation. They rarely see proselytizing as appropriate.[140] They operate "as religious and spiritual consumers by defining themselves as individual seekers, the authoritative judges of truth and relevance in faith according to how things subjectively feel to them."[141] The seeker personality is most commonly shown forth in Boomers.

Once the qualities of a seeker are outlined, Smith and Denton compare those qualities to the teens in their study—now Millennials. Twenty-nine percent report that they believe there is only one true religion. Sixty percent report believing in more than one religion as being true. They find themselves supportive of "an open and inclusive religious pluralism on the matter of religions' truth claims. Fifty one percent believe that it is acceptable for a person to "practice multiple faiths simultaneously."[142] The other half think "people should practice one faith."[143] Around 54% of teens think it is ok to try to convert another person, while 43% think that other people should be left to their own beliefs. Regarding religious traditions, 52% think that people should not pick and choose their religious beliefs but should accept the entire teaching of their faith. Forty

[139] Ibid., 73.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid., 75.
[143] Ibid.

six percent believe the opposite."[144] Finally, two/thirds say that believers do not have to be part of congregations."[145] This means that about half of this population "appear to be a potential market for a seeking spirituality."[146] Based on these observations, and self-reporting on being "spiritual but not religious" Smith and Denton claim that spiritual seeking, as defined above, "exits only among a very small fraction of American teenagers and that its influence on teens has been greatly overstated."[147] For teens, spiritual but not religious most likely means emphasizing "the importance of a personally meaningful faith that I practiced in the context of organized religion."[148] A very small group of teens are making attempts to incorporate non-Christian practices into their spirituality.[149] From this data, there are three important observations:

1. Very few teenagers from the dominant religion of Christianity are spiritually seeking—that is experimenting with religious or spiritual practices from other faiths.
2. Seekers are most found in non-Mormon religious minorities.
3. "In the U.S. marketplace of spiritual practices, the religious option that is actually having the greatest influence on teen experimenter with faiths is not an exotic faith or spirituality, but Christianity."[150] In observing the trends of

[144] Ibid., 75-76.
[145] Ibid., 76.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid., 78.
[148] Ibid., 81.
[149] Ibid., 82.
[150] Ibid., 82.

> Teens/Millennials, the direction of spiritual seeking is of non-Christian teens seeking out Christianity.[151]

The second group studied are the Religiously Disengaged Teenagers. Religiously Disengaged Teenagers are those "American teenagers who never attend religious services and who self-identify as non-religious."[152]Interestingly, "the non-religious teens have just as many doubts about being not religious…as religious teens have about their religious beliefs. When asked why they fell away from religion, thirty-two percent answered that it was because of "intellectual skepticism or disbelief."[153] This disbelief was characterized as not understanding, that some beliefs were hard to accept, there was no proof, and many unanswered questions. There were also thirteen percent who had a general lack of interest in religion. Ten percent referred to life disruptions and troubles. So half of American non-religious teens were raised in the faith, but "lost their faith or dropped out of religion for fairly passive reasons: for lack of interest, for reasons unknown or vague, because they just stopped attending religious services, for lack of parental support."[154] Forty percent of the teens who were raised in the faith but dropped out of religion claimed "more substantive reasons, such as intellectual disbelief and skepticism or some kind of active dislike of their church or religion."[155] Ten percent left due to a life disruption. There are also teens who are religiously disengaged and may not attend religious services yet hold a minimal religious identity. Of those who never

[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid., 86.
[153] Ibid., 89.
[154] Ibid., 90.
[155] Ibid.

attend a religious service, forty three percent of them think of themselves as part of a religious tradition. They do not believe that being religious requires attending a religious service. Nearly twenty five percent of them "report that if it were totally up to them, they would like to attend religious services regularly."[156] Another ten percent report that they would attend once a month. Sixty percent say they also would like to attend a few times a year."[157] When asked why they are currently not attending religious services, forty percent said they couldn't think of a reason why they stopped attending, and stated that they were just simply disinterested or bored."[158] Five percent say their parents stopped taking them. Four percent reported availability problems. Three percent said that they felt no religious need to attend a religious service. "Only seventeen percent of these teens reported a religiously skeptical or hostile reason for reducing their service attendance to a few times a year or less often. Eleven percent said they stopped believing or had never believed the teaching of the congregation, and six percent reported some bad experience or a personal and genuine dislike for religion as their explanation for stopping attending religious service regularly.[159]

The third group researched were the Religiously Devoted Teenagers. Religiously devoted teenagers are "highly religiously active."[160] There are factors that correlate with higher teenage religiosity. First, the factors of more frequent religious service attendance,

[156] Ibid., 103.
[157] Ibid.
[158] Ibid., 105
[159] Ibid.
[160] Ibid., 108.

greater importance of faith, teens' personal desire to attend religious services, and youth group participation interact with each other. Parental religious service attendance and importance of faith has an impact on teenage religiosity.[161] "The more religious parents are, the more religious their teens tend to be."[162] Second, "Teens who are involved in more organized activities, programs, and groups are also more likely to attend religious services more often and to participate in religious youth groups. Teens who say that their parents love, accept, and understand them are also more likely to have faith be important in their daily lives and to be part of a religious youth group. And teens whose parents monitor their lives more closely are also more likely to score higher on service attendance and importance of faith."[163] Third, girls are more likely than boys, older teens more likely than younger teems, having parents who are married more likely than single parent households, having highly educated parents, and youth in other areas of the country other than the Northeast are more likely to be religiously active.[164]

Based on the analysis of the data describing teenagers who are seekers, who are religiously disengaged, and who are religiously devoted, "the majority of U. S. teenagers are not rebellious toward religion."[165] In fact, they "are generally rather positive about and conventional in living out religion."[166] Smith and Denton frame these observations by speaking of the importance of religion. Teenagers are not nearly as non-religious as

[161] Ibid.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Ibid.
[164] Ibid., 109-110.
[165] Ibid., 129.
[166] Ibid.

thought, and they are not exploring other religions for the sake of adopting religious practices of those religions but more so out of curiosity. “Religious faith and practices are quite sociologically important in shaping many of the assumptions, values, lifestyles, and outcomes of the majority of adolescents in the United States. Religion really does matter in the lives of teenagers.”[167] Those studied seem to take the existence of religion for granted, or that religion “mostly *operates in the background* of their lives.”[168] Many teens, not thinking about the role religion plays in their lives, will underestimate the importance of religion.

Kenda Creasy Dean: Educational and Cultural Approach

Kenda Creasy Dean bases her book, *Almost Christian*: *What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church*, on the same data as used by Smith and Denton. The data comes from a study conducted in 2003 through 2005. The study was called the National Study of Youth and Religion. Those studied during that time period were teenagers, but now, in 2020, are those who comprise the Millennial generation.[169] The study does more than tell people about teens. The study places the practice of youth ministry into the context of the church.[170] From that perspective, Dean observes that the teens studied “are perfectly content with their religious worldviews; it is churches that are—

[167] Ibid.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 3.
[170] Ibid.,

rightly—concerned."[171] With that concern in mind, Dean states the need of the church is to model a "mature, passionate faith,"[172] instead of an impostor faith that "poses as Christianity, but that in fact lacks the holy desire and missional clarity necessary for Christian discipleship."[173]

Dean observes a fascinating paradox in the study of teenagers who are now Millennials. She has observed that the teens interviewed in the National Study of Youth and Religion have both a positive perception of Christianity yet are apathetic about religious practice. Overall, the church has placed an emphasis on being religious for the sake of becoming a good person. Yet, religious life has become part of a larger toolkit that a young person needs to be well-rounded and successful in life. Instead of playing the role of integrating all other parts of life, religion is one helpful exercise along with sports, theater, and community service.[174] While the church has succeeded in having a reputation of being one important way of making a good person, the church has been less able to instill faith.[175] In making a distinction between practice and faith, Douglas John Hall states that faith is a "dialogue with doubt, a person reckoning with God's involvement in the world and investment in our own lives."[176] Dean goes on to write, "faith means cleaving to the

[171] Ibid.
[172] Ibid.
[173] Ibid., 6.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Ibid.
[176] Ibid., 7.

person, the God-man, of Jesus Christ, joining a pilgrim journey with other lovers and following him into the world."[177]

Instead of guiding people to become followers of Jesus into the world and having faith in his love and goodness, the church has built its mission on what the National Study on Youth and Religion calls "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism."[178] This is a loveless faith. This type of deism is comprised of "a hodgepodge of banal, self-serving, feel-good beliefs" and "yields a default spirituality that bears little resemblance to the historic teaching of Christianity." Smith and Denton, when writing about Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, state that the deism has been "converting believers in the old faiths to its alternative religious vision of divinely underwritten personal happiness, and interpersonal niceness."[179]

Dean asserts that the National Study of Youth and Religion gives a glimpse of the source of this type of deism for young people. Pulling no punches, Dean states it is American churches who have served this fare to young people. "We provide coaching and opportunities for youth to develop and improve their pitches and their SAT scores, but we blithely assume that religious identity will happen by osmosis. We simply have not given teenagers the soul-strength necessary to recognize, wrestle, and resist the symbiotes in our minds—probably because we lack this soul-strength ourselves."[180] And thus, as the title of Dean's book suggests, we end up with a community of almost Christians.

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[177] Ibid.
[178] Ibid.
[179] Ibid.,14.
[180] Ibid., 15.

Dean does not lay blame on teenaged-now adult Millennials-but faults the church. For Dean, the church became guilty of syncretism by articulating the gospel into a fascinating cocktail of "consumer-driven therapeutic individualism and religious pragmatism."[181] This syncretism has weakened the identity of the church to the point where the sacrificial love of Jesus which brings about forgiveness and new life is displaced by a uniquely "American gospel of self-fulfillment and self-actualization."[182] When the gospel is reduced to a call for self-actualization, then the elitism touted by capitalism can easily connect its purpose with the purpose of the church. Harris and Dean find agreement on the impact of capitalism on determining identity. Dean, however, use theology to speak to that address the damage done by capitalism.

The fundamental questions of identity are answered by faith. Dean, from the story of Jacob and Esau, names three fundamental questions for identity development. The questions are "Who are my people? Why am I here? What gives my life meaning and coherence?"[183] Whether a person claims to be religious or not, they will be answering these questions as part of their growth.[184]

When considering growth, It is important to consider the role adolescence plays. Adolescence is not a universal concept, in that every generation has encountered this formative part of life. Adolescence came into being as part of the move from an agrarian

[181] Ibid., 5.
[182] Ibid.
[183] Ibid., 8.
[184] Ibid.

society to an industrial one. It was "a social pattern devised to keep young workers out of the factories so as not to displace older employees."[185] Under the influence of public education, adolescence come to be understood as a process that is experienced during a particular age. It is important to note that the starting time and conclusion of adolescence have changed since the early 20th century. "Puberty starts sooner, and adulthood starts later"[186] In addition, a new phase of life has been proposed by developmental theorists. This phase is called emerging adulthood, which means that "the developmental tasks once associated with identity exploration are increasingly postponed."[187] As noted earlier with Wuthnow, adulthood now is more likely to be achieved by the end of one's 30's.

After describing the situation and naming the problem, Dean calls the church, out of genuine concern for young people, to encounter and embody the self-giving love of Jesus. A different question should be asked of the church. Churches will no longer ask, "How do we get young people into the church?" Instead, churches will ask, "Does the church matter?" For Dean, the answer is a resounding, "Yes." If the church matters, then the church will strive to be disciples of Jesus by encountering his love and by engaging with one another in answering the fundamental questions of "Who are my people? Why am I here? What gives my life meaning and coherence?" Writing specifically about young people committed to Christianity but apathetic about religion,

[185] Ibid., 9.
[186] Ibid.
[187] Ibid.

Dean identifies four qualities. The qualities are: "They could tell a personal and powerful story about God; they belonged to a significant faith community; they exhibited a sense of vocation; and they possessed a profound sense of hope."[188]

Dean outlines Five Findings from the data provided by the NSYR.

1. "Most American teenagers have a positive view of religion but otherwise don't give it much thought." That is, they are not "hostile toward religion."[189] The expected adolescent rebellion against the church does not show up in the data.[190] While it can be taken as a positive that young people do not report a rebellion against religion, they are apathetic about religion.[191] As one young person once said, "Church is not a thing for me." If religion is not of importance to young people, it will not be discussed, it will not be argued about, it will not be engaged by young people.
2. "Most U.S. teenagers mirror their parents' religious faith."[192] Once again, as in the case of rebellion, the notion of young people not conforming to their parent's religion is not in evidence. In fact, based on the data, "Parents matter most" in the religious formation of their children.[193]
3. "Teenagers lack a theological language with which to express their faith or interpret their experience of the world."[194] Young people will have a general idea

[188] Ibid., 10.
[189] Ibid., 17.
[190] Ibid.
[191] Ibid.
[192] Ibid., 18.
[193] Ibid.
[194] Ibid.

about religion, its beliefs and practices, but are limited in their capacity to articulate the what, how, and why of beliefs and practices. Young people in the study spoke well of religion. They had a lack of language to articulate what they believe. This is not a rejection of religion, but that "no one had taught them how to talk about their faith or provided opportunities to practice using a faith vocabulary."[195]

4. "A minority of American teenagers—but a significant minority—say religious faith is important, and that it makes a difference in their lives. These teenagers are doing better in life on a number of scales, compared to their less religious peers."[196] "Forty percent of all young people deem religion important enough to practice regularly."[197] The indicators for doing well in life, such as succeeding in school, maintaining good relationships with family members, have a better outlook about life, and do things like wear their seatbelts.[198] One must note, that these indicators of well-being are not peculiar to religious young people, but pertain to any young person who is part of an "identity-being community."[199]
5. "Many teenagers enact and espouse a religious outlook that is distinct from traditional teachings of most world religions—an outlook called Moralistic

[195] Ibid., 19.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Ibid.
[198] Ibid., 20.
[199] Ibid.

Therapeutic Deism."[200] This outlook basically "helps people be nice, feel good, and leaves God in the background."[201]

From these findings, Dean asks this fundamental question, "How can the twenty first-century church better prepare young people steeped in Moralistic Therapeutic Deism for the trust-walk of Christian faith?"[202] This question is answered in three sections by Dean.

First, "Worshipping at the Church of Benign Whatever-ism" looks at how the church is being replaced by an outlook that is commonly held by most young people.[203] At the heart of this outlook is the notion of niceness. God wants people to get along. Dean wonders if "a personal decision to be an agreeable neighbor" constitutes Christian identity. As one young person stated in an interview with Dean, "Do I believe that God wants people to be nice and fair to each other? Yeah, I'd stake my life on it."[204] The issue of Christian identity is at the heart of this outlook. Dean observes that "American teenagers may engage in substantial amounts of youth ministry and Christian education, but they do not seem to be spending much time in communities where a language of faith is spoken, or where historically orthodox Christian doctrines and practices are talked about or taught."[205] This lack of an orthodox faith language leads to the credo, God wants us to be nice. "Young people see religion as a "Very Nice Thing—meaning

[200] Ibid., 21.
[201] Ibid.
[202] Ibid., 22.
[203] Ibid.
[204] Ibid., 27.
[205] Ibid., 28.

that religion may be beneficial, even pleasant, but it does not ask much of them or even concern them greatly, and as far as they can tell it wields very little influence in their lives."[206]

Why do young people practice Moralistic Therapeutic Deism? It is "Not because they have misunderstood what we have taught them in church. *They practice it because this is what we have taught them in church*."[207] This adjustment in teaching has moved us from the specificity of God as Jesus, active in the world to a general gleaning of what appears to be good values to live by.[208] It also does not provide the personal integrity of encountering the otherness of another person. Instead, in each relationship, a person tries to avoid any uncomfortable or difficult conversation. Christianity is a faith of the specific and otherness.

Second, "Claiming a Peculiar God-Story" looks at the practices of highly devoted young people that make faith meaningful for them.[209] "Highly devoted young people seem adept at using a least four cultural tools in ways that mark them as members of their traditions: (1) they confess their tradition's creed, or God-story; (2) they belong to a community that enacts the God-story; (3) they feel called by this story to contribute to a larger purpose; and (4) they have hope for the future promised by this story."[210] Having said this, "the mere presence of such cultural tools does not guarantee faith. Every

[206] Ibid., 33.
[207] Ibid., 29.
[208] Ibid., 30.
[209] Ibid., 22.
[210] Ibid., 49.

teenager needs a governing Ideology, a significant community, a life purpose, and a source of hope—religious or not—since these tools help young people construct stable ego-identities."[211]

Third, "Cultivating Consequential Faith"[212] "explores broad sets of practices that help congregations cultivate mature faith in young people."[213] This mature faith is described by Dean as a "faith that is so infused with desire for God and love of others that it becomes generative." To define what it means to be generative, Dean writes about the practices of translation, testimony, and detachment. [214] In a conversation with a long time and participating church member, the member told her pastor she could not understand why her adult children would not come to church. It would seem, based on Dean's conclusion, that parents matter most. Yet, the next Sunday, the pastor watched the member's behavior and non-verbal cues during his sermon. The member was not engaged at all in the sermon but was on her phone. Week in and week out, the pastor noticed the same behavior. Perhaps, the non-verbal communication sent a message to her children. They came with her each week, but saw that mom was not interested in the message. In addition, this mother repeatedly claimed that she only comes to church to sing in the choir. For her children, then, coming to church was singing in the choir, which their mother did. As the sons did not sing in the choir, there was no parentally demonstrated connecting point between young person and their church.

[211] Ibid.
[212] Ibid., 23.
[213] Ibid.
[214] Ibid.

Ryan Jenkins, Adam Brooks, Javier Montes—Business Management Approach to Understanding the Millennial

Jenkins writes that "The Millennial Generation is the most scrutinized of all time."[215] He gives the following reasons for his conclusion:

- "They are the largest generation on the planet.
- They make up a majority of the labor force.
- They approach work much differently than did previous generations.
- They have different buying habits.
- They represent future change and disruption.
- They have skills and knowledge that previous generations don't possess.
- They have begun to step into decision-making roles.
- They have been largely misunderstood and mislabeled.
- They are underprepared in fundamental workplace behavior and etiquette."[216]

The disruption Millennials bring to the workforce--due to different beliefs, values, and practices-- has created a challenge for leaders in the business community. Books with titles like *The Millennial Manual, Understanding Millennials, Millennial Workforce, Not Everyone gets a Trophy, and Managing the Millennials* strive to offer insight into the identity and behaviors of Millennials for the purpose of being their leaders in the

[215] Ryan Jenkins, *The Millennial Manual* (Atlanta, GA: Ryan Jenkins LLC, 2017), xv.
[216] Ibid.

business community. As Jenkins writes, “so learning how to manage, develop, and engage them [Millennials] will positively position you and your organization in tomorrow’s in-flux workplace.”[217] According to the work of William Strauss and Neil Howe, age cohorts share three commonalities: First, they share a common location in history while being in the same developmental stage of life. Second, they share beliefs and behaviors that are shaped by what they experience in childhood and adolescence. Third, they perceive themselves to be part of the same cohort and the behaviors that go with that cohort.[218]

An awareness of a dramatic shift in work habits brought about Millennials is at the heart of many books about managing Millennials. Jenkins observes that right now Millennials are moving into their “prime working and spending years.”[219] They “have grown up in a time of rapid change, giving them a set of priorities and expectations sharply different from those of previous generations. Technology, a turbulent economic climate, and globalization have given the Millennials a new set of perspectives, experiences, and behaviors related to work and life. Millennials are waiting to get married and move out on their own. They have a new approach to ownership, which has birthed the ‘sharing economy.’ Being raised in a digital age, Millennials’ affinity for technology has influenced how they shop. They value instant access to product information, peer reviews, and price comparisons.”[220]

[217] Ibid., xvii.
[218] Ibid., 3-4.
[219] Ibid., 11.
[220] Ibid., 12.

When looking at Millennials in the workforce, Jenkins calls the reader's attention to five reasons to pay attention to Millennials as they enter the prime of their work life and spending capacity. First, Millennials have been shaped by connectivity. Their "values and behaviors are fundamentally different because they have been connected to the world's information and the world' largest amassed network of humans, all the while being empowered and encouraged to contribute."[221] As a result, those who perceive themselves in positions of authority such as owners and managers, will not simply have their observations accepted as authoritative. The conclusions drawn by leaders will be double-checked by Millennials—most often by using the internet. As the internet is accessible to all people, Millennials will not only take information from the internet, they will provide information. For example, look at how Wikipedia has developed.[222] Second, generations applying for a job prior to the Millennials would be asked if they had been trained in the basics of computer use. Millennials from lifelong usage of computers, are assumed to already have that talent in place. Third, as the Millennial population is the largest in the nation and the world, paying attending to the trends of the Millennials will allow a person to have a finger on the pulse of what will be happening next in the workplace and marketplace.[223] Fourth, the Millennial generation is not only large, but as the youngest people fully involved in the workforce and marketplace, they have a long period of worth to the workforce and marketplace in

[221] Ibid., 13.
[222] Ibid.
[223] Ibid., 15.

front of them. As a result, businesses will strive to maintain long-term loyalty from the Millennial.[224] Finally, Millennials bring with them what Jenkins calls "elevated expectations." Millennials are the users of an unending source of information. They are used to the regular improvement of technology being better and faster. "Every time technology makes a process or procedure more frictionless, it becomes the new expectation or standard for the generations who never experienced what it was like before the innovation."[225]

In his book, *Understanding Millennials*, Adam Brooks, outlines a set of qualities of Millennials. First, he states that Millennials were raised by helicopter parents. This type of "parenting is best described as the parents of the child being so concerned with the child's well-being that they literally 'hover' over all aspects of the child's life to make sure that he doesn't get hurt or make bad decisions."[226] Brooks believes that this behavior by parents makes Millennials uncomfortable being told no or that they are wrong. This behavior by parents can lead to learned helplessness and limit socioemotional growth. "The long-term effects of restricted socioemotional growth appear to be the inability to work through tough situations on their own, a tendency to struggle to gain and hold down employment, and the continuous pursuit of the helicopter parent to fix most, if not all of their problems."[227] Second, Millennials hold equality as an important value. This is not the type of equality that older generations

[224] Ibid.
[225] Ibid., 16.
[226] Adam Brooks, *Understanding Millennials* (Middletown, DE: Brooks Books, 2016), 6.
[227] Ibid., 8.

had to fight for, such as in the Civil Rights Movement. This is an equality that the Millennials already have. "To their way of thinking, there is no such thing as tiers or levels in jobs or life. Because they want something just as much as the people above them, they believe they should have equal access to it."[228] Third, Millennials, according to Brooks, do not "understand the concept of appropriate self-disclosure…Knowing what, where, and when to disclose personal information."[229] Appropriate boundaries in work and personal life become a challenge. Fourth, the current marketplace is based on customization—phones, clothes of the month, food of the month, cars, etc. Millennial desires are oriented toward personal preferences which can at times conflict with the culture and workplace environment.[230] Fifth, "millennials are considered the most philanthropic generation we have ever had…Their sense of equality makes Millennials extremely passionate about current social justice issues all over the globe."[231] With complete access to information and the ability to join forces virtually, Millennials become the largest giving and most generous generation in this age.[232] They will believe that all innovation and inventing should be done for the betterment of society. Sixth, Millennials "understand they need money to achieve certain tasks, but they also understand the power of how, and where they spend their money."[233] Finally, Brooks

[228] Ibid., 9.
[229] Ibid., 12.
[230] Ibid., 15.
[231] Ibid., 16.
[232] Ibid.
[233] Ibid., 19.

points out that as of 2018, "Millennials will have the most spending power of any generation."[234]

Montes, in his book *Millennial Workforce*, articulates what he thinks influenced the lives of Millennials as they were growing up. He makes the following observations. First, participation was enough. As Millennials were growing up, the concern for a child's self-esteem was heightened among parents. So, when Millennials, as children, participated in sports or arts, or other activities, the purpose of engaging in those activities was for the development of skills. Participating was enough to be rewarded. Not wanting to harm the esteem of a child, then, every child who participated was awarded for their participation.[235] Second, with the development of portable music players, leading to listening of music thru one's mobile phone, music was listened to more and in more locations. Music as a basso continuo—in the background of every moment--is an assumption made by Millennials. Third, with immediate access to information making the attainment of information less time consuming and available 24 hours a day, to shopping online, having a product delivered overnight or immediately downloading music and books, Millennials are accustomed to an immediate satisfaction to their needs.[236] Fourth, Montes, as did Brooks, writes about helicopter parenting. There is a strong bond that continues to exist between Millennials and their parents. In adulthood, the relationship between parent and child becomes more of friends. This equal footing

[234] Ibid., 20.
[235] Javier Montes, *Millennial Workforce: Cracking the Code to Generation Y in Your Company* (n.p.: Lulu Publishing Services, 2017), 8-9.
[236] Ibid., 9-10.

between Millennials and adults is demonstrated in the comfort that Millennials have in their calling out culture. They do not simply accept the dictum of an authority but will research the veracity of the claim. There is an innate curiosity in Millennials as they feel free to explore ideas without accepting them at face value.[237] Fifth, Millennials are "instinctively optimistic."[238] Coming of age just after the recession, Millennials saw the damage done by the recession, but also, being in the process of rebuilding, saw the capacity of people to turn things around and make things better. Millennials will be convinced that things will improve, and progress is being made toward something that is better.[239] Sixth, Montes shares that Millennials prefer experiences over possessions. Coming out of the recession, Millennials saw the losses that came with the economic downfall—foreclosures on homes, loss of retirement income. This can lead to a belief that one should hold onto what cannot be taken away. Experiences cannot be taken away. Seventh, "entrepreneurism is a very hot topic for millennials."[240] Ironically, Millennials are starting businesses at record low levels. Millennials will draw a distinction between starting a business and being an entrepreneur. Having seen the start-ups of Facebook, Tesla, Google, and the larger than life leaders of those enterprises, Millennials are enthralled with entrepreneurial spirit. These leaders, many times, have celebrity status. Millennials are attracted to that success.[241] Eighth, Millennials do not make a clear distinction between their personal lives and their

[237] Ibid., 12.
[238] Ibid., 13.
[239] Ibid.
[240] Ibid., 15.
[241] Ibid., 16-17.

careers. They "want to love being at work just as much as they love being at home."[242] Having watched previous generations work for 30 years, to only have 10-12 years to do what they really want, Millennials don't want to wait that long. They want the positive experience in the present.[243] Ninth, Millennials are very tech dependent. Businesses do not have to educate them on how to use technology. In addition, they are regularly experimenting with new uses for their technology.[244]

Daniel Rubin and Nathan Rubin—Political Model

As Millennials come fully into the workforce, generating income, and engaging in community work, there is a necessity for Baby Boomers to pass the torch to the Millennials.[245] Rubin and Rubin write of the concept of "next generation political space."[246] This refers to organizations that are grass root and sponsor events. Rubin found that many of his Millennial friends did not attend the events, because they did not know about them. Only when he had invited them had they shown excitement about participating. This led Rubin to conclude that "there wasn't an enthusiasm gap amongst millennials, there was an awareness gap."[247] He asks, how do Millennials become more involved in political leadership. The rationale for organizing Millennials for

[242] Ibid., 17.
[243] Ibid., 18-19.
[244] Ibid., 20.
[245] Daniel R. Rubin and Nathan H. Rubin, *Boomers to Millennials: Moving America Forward* (Sarasota, FL: Bardolf & Company, 2018), 11.
[246] Ibid., 13.
[247] Ibid.

political activity is important for several reasons. First, there is much misinformation packaged as fact that creates "Fear, anxiety, and racism."[248] Second, the current president, President Trump, is media savvy to the point where other political movements have a difficult time being heard. It is important to realize, however, that the Millennials are masters of digital media and have access to this media. Rubin describes them as "digital natives, tech-savvy, comfortable with diversity, embracing of change, and enthusiastic about building a better world."[249] In addition, Millennials are "more embracing of social and cultural developments…including progressive changes like gay marriage, LGBTQ+ rights, religious tolerance and freedom, marijuana legalization, common-sense Constitutional gun regulation, and Medicare for all."[250]

For Rubin and Rubin, Millennials have been named the villain by older generations. On Facebook, there are regular posts by Boomers and older. The posts show some tool used in the 1950's and 1960's. The heading on the post normally reads, "I bet Millennials won't know what this is." Seen as villains, the Millennials are accused of being "too young and inexperienced; too cynical and unwilling to get involved; too poorly educated; too radical in their demands,"[251] and too sensitive to criticism.

As Millennials strive to gain roles of leadership, especially political leadership, they will be drawn to a progressive agenda. Rubin describes this progressive agenda as rooted in

[248] Ibid.
[249] Ibid., 14.
[250] Ibid.
[251] Ibid., 20.

the founders of the nation and framers of the constitution. As the ages passed in the history of America, the ideas of progressivism were seen in programs from "Presidents Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Lyndon B. Johnson."[252] Rubin quickly points out that to have a progressive agenda is not to be socialists or not to be anti-capitalism. A progressive agenda is based on the concepts of "Lockean Capitalism."[253] This type of capitalism "blends wealth building with the responsibility to share both the risks and benefits with all citizens, not just those that ruled society."[254] "Locke not only illustrated a utopian system of governance, but also one that would eventually and uniquely fit the new American economy and government as well."[255] In essence, capitalism has three bottom lines: financial, human, and environmental. "Although these notions have been embedded in America's foundation, they are often lost in the confusion about how the term Socialism is applied."[256] When Millennials are being accused of being socialists, those leveling the accusation "ignore the important role that collective sharing of risk and rewards has had in the formation of our country."[257] Rubin concludes, "America was established using Locke's theories that no one can create wealth without some support from the community and, therefore, the individual also has a responsibility to support the stability and safety of the community in return."[258]

[252] Ibid., 25.
[253] Ibid.
[254] Ibid.
[255] Ibid.
[256] Ibid., 26.
[257] Ibid., 27.
[258] Ibid.

The pieces of the progressive agenda outlined by Rubin are issues around free speech, climate change, equal protection under law, religious freedom, common sense gun reform, women's' rights, protection of those in the LGBTQ+ population, student loans, news and social media, cybersecurity and privacy, social security and Medicare, immigration, and voting rights.

Conclusion

Chapter one of this thesis painted a broad-brush portrait of the Millennial generation. This broad-brush portrait provided a set of qualities that describes Millennials. These qualities are a liberal view of others, especially of other races and members of the LGBTQ+ community; optimism about job status and income; and a genuine love and appreciation for family. Based on the groundwork established in Chapter One, this chapter looks at additional research and offers an interpretation of that data through the use of various sociological and psychological disciplines. These disciplines offer an interpretation of the Millennial generation based on the maturation process, the influence of capitalism, the presence and activity of parents and faith community, the workplace practices where Millennials are employed, and the political and societal issues Millennials face. Three threads become clear in looking at the interpretation of the research. These threads include the delay in maturation for Millennials; the despair of not being enough; and identifying a narrative that is restorative.

Chapter 3: The Theological and Normative Task—Framing

Introduction.

Chapter One compiled a list of observations of Millennials and outlined core beliefs for them. These core beliefs include a liberal view of others, optimism for life, family, and career, and the importance of family.

The observations and the core beliefs of Millennials were interpreted through various disciplines in Chapter Two and identified three threads describing challenges Millennials face. The threads are the maturation process, enoughness, and an overarching narrative of restoration.

The purpose of Chapter Three is to perform a theological and normative task. The theological norms will be brought into dialogue with the beliefs identified in Chapter One. In addition, the norms will be distilled through various disciplines used for interpretation of the research and the emerging themes from that interpretation. In places where there is a divergence between the norms and the disciplinary interpretations, an effort will be made to find places of coherence. These attempts for coherence can lead to practical applications for ministry between Millennials and the church.

To accomplish the theological and normative task, it is necessary to humanize Millennials so leaders and members of congregations will see them as good and will be led to establish a relationship with them. There are several theological norms that the church teaches about God and humanity. These norms will be applied to what has been

learned about Millennials, their beliefs, attitudes, and practices, and the central themes in their lives. The central themes of enoughness, maturation, and a narrative of restoration can be examined as spiritual needs as they involve all of body, mind, and spirit. With what has been learned by Millennials, these three spiritual needs will be put into conversation with the theological claims of: the ultimacy of God, the encounter with God through God's Word, experiencing God as authoritative, reading Scripture as the inspired Word of God, what brings the church into being, Christian character and integrity, and the qualities of faithful community.

Humanizing Those Who Are Millennials

The theological and normative tasks do not serve the purpose of building a case to either accept or reject those who are part of the Millennial population. Instead, they strive to describe and understand a unique, talented, sensitive, and forward-looking group in relation to God's missional intent. In the book *Rehumanizing Leadership: Putting Purpose Back into Business,* the authors describe a conclusion drawn by Arianna Huffington in her *book The Fourth Instinct*. The "first three human impulses for survival, sex, and power" must be expanded "to include our communities and the world around us."[1] It is necessary for the church to humanize those unaffiliated with them, see them as declared good by God, and strive to be in relationship with them. All that God declares good has an integrity—physically, emotionally, and cognitively—that is not to

[1] Sudhanshu Palsule and Michael Chavez, *Rehumanizing Leadership: Putting Purpose Back into Business* (London, UK: LID Publishing Limited, 2020), 5.

be violated by ageism, classism, racism, gender or, indeed, generational discrimination. A full-hearted effort will be made to honor the belief that Millennials are good in God's eyes. To do so, this chapter will use the threads of Enoughness, Narrative, and Markers of Maturity. Enoughness refers to the message that bombards Millennials from the market system in which they live, telling them that they must be the most valuable commodity they can be. Narrative refers to the one story that serves as an umbrella for all people and determining what is right and what is wrong. Markers of Maturity capture the reality of Millennials who do not attain the common markers of maturity in the same time span as generations before them did.

God Is Ultimate

God is ultimate in that God has the power to transcend death.

God is ultimate. Death is universal. God's work is a work that defeats the power of death. For a person who is 95 years old, humans can accept death with the justification that their life was full and long lived. When death hits the young, death is harder to justify. One need only witness the profound grief of a parent kissing their child goodbye as the casket is closed to see the gut-wrenching pain of that death. Millennials have been raised with the pall of the death draped upon them. Since the Columbine shooting on April 20, 1999, there have been over 240 school shootings. Not only have Millennials heard and seen about the school shootings, they have been trained to respond to the threat of school shooters. Regular drills in schools for students of all ages are standard

practice in schools. The threat of death is real to Millennials in ways that it was not for those who attended schools prior to 1999. In addition, for the first time in many generations, the predicted life span of Millennials has become shorter than the generation preceding them.

Death will serve as the measuring rod for a person's life. As a measuring rod, death will lead a person to ruminate on the amount of good they have done in life. Death will lead a person to ruminate about the wrong a person has done in life. A person's belief about what happens after death shapes a person's faith life. For those who believe in heaven after death, the goal is do what is right to get into heaven. Others may be more oriented to the present and ask what difference can be made now before death rears its ugly head. Similarly, taking action to keep death at bay can be seen as a moral good.

While accepting the universal nature of death, Christians make the claim that while death is universal, it is not ultimate. There is one who is more powerful than death. Christians call that which is more powerful than death, God. God is ultimate in that God has the power to transcend death. This capacity to transcend death is shown to us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In Jesus being raised from the dead, humans see that God has power over death. Humans, through baptism, are united with Christ in his death, and as Christ was raised from the dead, so too are humans given the gift of resurrection.

The ultimate narrative for all of humanity is the story of Jesus Christ, his death, and his resurrection. This narrative serves as the ultimate arbiter of human life. If God is

ultimate, death is not. Death is not the final measuring rod determining the goodness of humanity. God is the final arbiter.

As God is the final arbiter who takes delight in humanity and creation, the other voices in the world are tested against God's claim. The claim of a market system where people are a commodity for the well-being of the system will ring hollow against the beautiful claim God makes on each person. The narrative of generation—which one is superior to the others—is challenged by a narrative that is universal and blesses and challenges each generation. Finally, Christian maturity is not measured in acquisition of a spouse, house, job, and child but by living into the faith that comes from hearing God's Word.

God as Word

The Word of God is the Son of God. This indicates a process of hearing. St. Paul writes, "So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ."[2] In the process of hearing, a person hears about God, learns of God's qualities—chiefly mercy and kindness- and is brought to understand what God has done for each person. The Word of God is also an encounter. In the description of God, we learn that through God, Jesus Christ had both divine and human nature. He was born of the virgin Mary, suffered, was crucified, died, and was buried. This Christ descended into hell, was risen three days later, and ascended into heaven. The Christ will return to judge the

[2] Romans 10: 17.

living and the dead. This description of God through Jesus Christ reveals an encounter between God and humanity.

Initiated by God, the encounter of God with humanity reconciles human beings to God. It reveals the outcome of the work of Christ. This reconciliation restores a right relationship between God and humanity. Reconciliation sets humanity in a right relationship with God both by addressing the original condition under which people live, called original sin, and by forgiving people for their sins. This is necessary, for people cannot restore their relationship with God through their own power or merits. Finally, it shows the impact of the Word of God on humans. It is God, through Jesus Christ, who sets the relationship right. As the Apostle Paul writes, humans "are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."[3]

The encounter with God is a moment of hearing and of experiencing God. An experience is a moment where various factors intersect. This encounter is a moment because one can identify a time of occurrence. There is an activity that is processed through all the senses. It is done within the context of emotions. The senses are filtered through the prisms through which people view and organize life. The encounter with the word of God is an experience that encompasses the entire person.

Millennials are oriented toward sensitive participation. Sensitive participation is positive engagement with others that treasures equal participation by all involved despite age, life experience, race, or education/training. Millennials will give older adults the benefit

[3] Romans 3:25.

of the doubt for their work ethic and morals. They treasure the presence of family and believe caring for family members is important. While older generations are seen by Millennials as more moral and ethical, Millennials see themselves as more tolerant. They grew up with trophies for participation. It is a type of participation that honors people solely for participating whether they exceed the capacity and performance of others or not. They were protected lovingly by their parents. Being safe and being risk averse has shaped their identity from an early age. All these qualities of sensitive participation will shape the prism through which Millennials will see an encounter with God and will determine the believability of that encounter. Tenderness, positivity, equality, benefit of the doubt, good intentions, and tolerance will be the expectations that Millennials have of God and their encounter with God.

Christians face an evangelical task. The evangelical task is to share the belief that Jesus, who was raised from the dead, is God. This task can best be performed not only or chiefly in making a logical argument for doctrines about Jesus or in threats of condemnation to Hell but by finding the moments when people encounter Christ. Faith comes not from coercion and threat, but from hearing and experiencing.

The Word of God as Authority.

For Millennials, that which is authoritative are a series of narratives held in common by the person's group of reference. Robert Wuthnow describes Millennials as those

engaged in the practice of bricolage or tinkering.[4] When living in a time of uncertainty, tinkering becomes necessary. There are not cookie cutter shaped solutions that understand each problem and offer a solution to each problem. Thus, it becomes necessary to "piece together our thoughts about religion and our interest in spirituality from the material at hand."[5] This practice includes the gathering of ideas from various philosophies and traditions. Millennials will create a mosaic of thoughts from various traditions, world religions, and lifestyle coaching. The purpose the mosaic serves is to give Millennials a framework through which to live their lives. The mosaic is consistently inconsistent. The consistency is found in the practice of gathering ideas. The inconsistency is found in the acceptance of multiple traditions that may or may not agree with each other.[6]

Tinkering does not have a clear universal narrative that always applies to all people. In the act of spiritual and ethical bricolage, there is not one power that determines right and wrong, good or bad, or beautiful or ugly. A collection of narratives is gathered and woven together. When the collection of narratives lacks an ultimate narrative, utilitarianism takes its place.

The Word of God is an ultimate narrative, and it is a particular narrative. Christians claim that the Word of God is authoritative for faith and life. It is authoritative for faith in that it calls humanity to believe in the only one who can transcend death. It is authoritative

[4] Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007)*, 14.*
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid., 15.

for life in that it sets humanity in a right relationship with God. The actions of the faithful are rooted in being in a right relationship with God.

To better understand difference between the Word of God as ultimate and particular narrative and the holding of multiple narratives, it is helpful to look at what has assumed the role of authority throughout the last century. In his book, *Whatever Became of Sin?,* Karl Menninger proposes that authority has been ceded from one institution to another. Menninger does this by asking what institution "assumed the responsibility for identifying and dealing with many offenses."[7] For a period, the church was that institution. Offenses in society were labeled sins. The person who committed the sins was called a sinner. The sinner was answerable to the priest, the church, and God."[8] The church, through priest or religious leader, handed out the penance/penalty for the sin. Spiritual conviction, penance, repentance, and forgiveness of sin were used to set things right. Eventually, for Menninger, the bearer of authority shifts from religion—specifically Christianity—to civil law. When this happens, wrong actions are no longer called sins, but are labeled crimes. "It became the civilized custom to attempt to legislate morality and to coerce virtue by law."[9] This change in authority is reflected in an interesting use of vocabulary, where the word penance--outcome from wrongdoing--is replaced by time spent in a penitentiary. The arbiters of right and wrong are police officers, judges, prison guards, and parole officers. After some time, judging people solely by wrong action began to be seen as harsh. People knew that there were some

[7] Karl Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1973), 50.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid., 67.

people who broke the law due to mental illness. Symptoms and diagnosis contributed to the conversation of determining a person's guilt. Penitentiary shifted to therapy. Treatment became an option to be considered instead of imprisonment.[10] More recently, science has assumed a powerful role in determining right and wrong. What was once seen as wrong, under science becomes understandable. Understandability becomes the grounds for acceptability.

The cognitive process of knowing is different for Millennials. "America has been shedding many of the core presumptions of its foundational past as the first modern society, struggling through a cultural transition between ruling common senses a century in the making."[11] In other words, the ways people make sense of the world has changed. Bosworth attributes this change to use of electronic devices and social networking sites. He concludes that these tools and ways of engaging one another have revised "our expectations as to what seems natural, right, and delightful to behold."[12] The methods used to know about ideas and objects have shifted from a traditional empirical approach of study to what Bosworth calls "knowing with" or "conscientious knowing."[13] What people know together and agree upon is perceived as a criteria for rightness. The focus is not on the individual and the accomplishment of the individual but is on people in a situation together. Consensus, empathy, attentiveness, and

[10] Ibid., 75.
[11] David Bosworth, "Knowing Together: The Emergence of the Hive Mind," *The Hedgehog Review* 19, no. 1 (2017): 18-31.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.

acknowledgment of differences are among the many factors that contribute to conclusions about what is right or wrong, good or bad, beautiful or ugly.

Andrew Root, in *Exploding Stars, Dead Dinosaurs, and Zombies,* proposes that among young people, science is seen as the sign of maturity, and faith is seen as childishness.[14] When science is perceived as maturity, Root asserts that science becomes a "comprehensive social practice"[15] Science as a social practice is different than seeing science as a method of examining something and sharing one's scientific findings. When science is seen as a social practice, people move from mystery of origins to knowing "the source of everything."[16] For some, there is a controversy over whether science or religion offers the most believable world view.[17] Among Millennials, who are engaged in an extended process of maturation and whose "goal is to grow up,"[18] science is offered as a characteristic of maturity. Root writes, "The comprehensive social practice of 'science' proclaims itself fit for just such a process of growing up because it most fully embraces empirical explanations for the sake of usefulness."[19]

In the research outlined in previous chapters, it was asserted that Millennials are shaped by capitalism to see themselves as a commodity invested into the market system. Their training for work—also called education—dictates what is necessary for one to have worth. Those who do not abide by these constructs are labelled as disruptive. In the

[14] Andy Root, *Exploding Stars, Dead Dinosaurs, and Zombies: Youth Ministry in the Age of Science* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018), 33.
[15] Ibid., 38.
[16] Ibid., 41.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid., 44.
[19] Ibid., 45.

self-understanding as commodity, maintaining one's worth through compliance is authoritative.

Among Millennials, there is an attraction to the highly successful entrepreneur. Millennials came of age in the tech boom. Millennials are not only influenced by what they see as positive like entrepreneurs, but they are also influenced by negative perceptions of others. For example, in the exposure of priests, scout leaders, and coaches such as the case with the Roman Church and with Jerry Sandusky of Penn State University, Millennials have seen the failure of some to do the right thing and the harm that was done to others. For this reason, Millennials are less likely to unequivocally accept the teachings and mandates of authorities like clergy, professors, or managers. They have, at their fingertips, an extraordinary amount of information accessible through the internet. Going to the internet for information, Millennials can draw upon posts, podcasts, and blogs written by their peers, as well as Ted Talks, and YouTube videos.

Millennials have a set of narratives that shape what they believe, their attitudes, and practices. Depending upon the issue at hand, a different narrative is chosen that will be at the forefront of their decision making. In making decisions about education, Millennials will be influenced by the market system and their role in that system. Exposure to both highly successful people-especially entrepreneurs—will influence the energy and time they invest in ideas. Exposure to negative actions by adults will create an aversion to the institutions represented by the adults who brought harm to others. Millennials will not naturally defer to people in high status positions in life such as

clergy, professors, teachers and supervisors. How information is gathered and processed is shaped by commonly held values. Science as a value system for daily life is seen as the more mature lifestyle. This brief list of the ways that Millennials determine right and wrong shows that they do not have an ultimate narrative to determine right and wrong. Their decisions are made outside of the context of one narrative. The relationship between Millennials and the church may be the most adversarial on the topic of authority.

There are first steps that can be taken to find common ground on authority. First, the idea of an "accusing voice" may resonate with most people. The accusing voice is that which tells people that they are not doing what is right, not doing what is good, and/or not doing what they are doing as well as they could. The accusing voice is judgment. When one does not have God as the judge in one's life, then everything in that person's life becomes their judge. This runs the gamut from not getting into the right school, not having the right technology, not being able to cover all of one's living expenses, not having a house or wife or children. Millennials have a multitude of judges in their lives. The increase in the cases of depression, anxiety, and use of prescribed medication can reveal the emotional and cognitive battle the Millennial is fighting.

For the church, the accusing voice is the law. The word of God is normative for daily life. As the authoritative narrative, a person's life is measured against a standard of right living and relationships commonly called righteousness. The voice convicts a person for each failure to live up to that perfection. Also, the voice reveals the improbability of

ever fulfilling the law perfectly. Using the language of accusing voice can be a starting point for conversation with Millennials.

Second, the Christian teaching of "at the same time saint and sinner" can be common ground. Christians can live with the tension of having the capacity to accomplish good and amazing things while admitting their propensity to fail. Millennials are fascinated by entrepreneurs and simultaneously appalled at the brokenness of other leaders such as priests, doctors, and coaches. They are aware of their ongoing drive to be a worthwhile commodity and also of the moments when they fail. Christians and Millennials may find common ground in knowing humans can be both good and broken simultaneously.

Third, communities of discernment can lead both Christians and Millennials to test the veracity of information and claims and to test ethical conclusions. Communities of discernment are communities in which people can test their beliefs and convictions, engage in moral deliberation, and determine the veracity of claims within a group of trusted others. Such communities are also consistent with the new way of knowing where the methodology of the traditional empirical approach has been replaced with "knowing together."

Finally, the church must challenge itself on the role of science in knowing and understanding life and the world. Ian Barbour presents "four options in relating faith

and science."[20] Andrew Root lists those options as conflict, independence, dialogue, integration. To describe how faith and science relate.[21]

Scripture as Inspired Word of God

Scripture is the inspired Word of God. God speaks to human beings through revelation. The moment of revelation is an encounter with God. The ancestors of Judeo-Christian faith were Inspired by their revelation and encounter with the Divine. Accounts of that encounter were transferred by word of mouth for generations. At a certain point in time, the oral record was put into writing. This writing is called Scripture in the Christian tradition. Scripture is the account of that interaction—revelation and encounter—between the Divine and humanity.

Each part of Scripture is said to have truth within it. That truth points to God and shows God interacting with humanity. To get at the truth within scripture, the text is engaged by examining the language, history, culture, narrative style, and beliefs of the people in the text. This process is called exegesis. Exegesis is about gaining insight into what Scripture is saying instead of wanting scripture to say what a person wants it to say. In addition to the study of language, history, culture, narrative style, and historical beliefs, the Lutheran tradition uses three hermeneutics to interpret scripture. First, there is a Canon within a Canon. This means that there are specific parts of Scripture that carry

[20] Ibid., 90.
[21] Ibid.

more weight than others. For example, the Gospel John, chapter 3, verse 16[22], carries more weight than the Leviticus admonition of isolating men who are losing their hair. Second, there is the hermeneutic that Scripture Interprets Scripture. This means one section of Scripture is better understood by connecting it with another section of Scripture. For example, Jesus states in the Gospel of John, "As just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up."[23] It is helpful to read the Book of Exodus and the story of the murmuring of God's people which led them to be bitten by poisonous snakes to understand the image of Moses lifting up the serpent. Third, there is the hermeneutic of Binding and Loosing. This practice comes first from the practice of the Pharisees. They had the authority to determine what was right or wrong. At one time an action may have been forbidden. At another time, the action may be permitted. Jesus, in appearing to his disciples after his resurrection, gives them the power of Binding and Loosing.[24]

Seeing Scripture as the inspired Word of God, engaging in the study of Scripture, and using the hermeneutics of Canon with a Canon, Scripture Interprets Scripture, and Binding and Loosing shows that Scripture is dynamic. A Scripture that is dynamic avoids the pitfalls of a static text which leads to fundamentalism and legalism. Christians and the church have been accused frequently of legalism. Legalism, judgmentalism, and holier than thou-ism can be stumbling blocks to Millennials who may see themselves

[22] John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."
[23] John 3:14.
[24] John 20:23.

being judged severely or target groups like the LGBTQ+ being condemned. For a generation that lives under the pall of being judged as worthy capital and a generation that self-describes as more tolerant of those who are different, a static approach to the Word of God is troublesome.

Word of God as Transformative.

The Word of God is transformative. Throughout Scripture, each time a person encounters God, that person is changed. God speaks, and world comes into being. God calls Abraham and Sarah, and their lives are changed. God calls Moses, and he starts his ministry. God speaks to the valley of the dry bones, and bones live. God calls to the prophets and they speak to God's people. Jesus commands the dead Lazarus, "Lazarus, come out," and he is brought back to life. Something happens when God speaks. A transformation occurs in the very nature /condition of a person to whom the Word is spoken.

Humans are understood to be sinners. This means that there are actions performed that are wrong, but it also means there is a quality of the human condition which will be a barrier to doing freely the will of God. Paul captures this dilemma when he writes, "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do."[25] A generation such as Millennials who are deeply sensitive to feedback and are afraid of being seen as failures may find the concept of sin troubling. In addition, Millennials may find the

[25] Romans 7:19.

traditional approach of law and gospel—where a person's sin is named, and the assurance of forgiveness is offered—to be uncomfortable. In addition, the word evil is used in the quote from Paul. That which is evil is the force that is at work in the world undoing the good and order of the world so that people suffer and creation groans in anguish. Millennials are more likely to resonate with the concept of evil, especially when articulated as a power at work in the world, undoing all that is good and right.

The work of Paul Tillich offers an approach to speaking about sin that may be received by Millennials. Paul Tillich, in *The Courage to Be,* writes that people are faced with the power of non-being. Their very existence is threatened by this power. This power looms large over human lives and leads to three fundamental fears or anxieties as Tillich calls them. There is the fear of death, the fear of guilt, and the fear of shame. The fear of death is the basic fear that one's life will be brought to an end, and a person's existence ceases. The fear of guilt is rooted in being convicted of one's wrongful acts, the damage those acts have caused to others, to oneself, and to one's relationship with creation. The fear of shame is rooted in the fear that even after doing everything right, it will not bring about the results one wants. In fact, one can work hard at doing what is right, and in the end those actions make no difference. From the fear of shame comes the dread of meaninglessness. Each fear or anxiety is addressed with a self-oriented and corresponding action. With the fear of death comes the activity of self-preservation.

With the fear of guilt comes the activity of self-justification. With the fear of shame comes the activity of self-righteousness.[26]

Humans, at one time or another, will encounter all three fears. It is possible that generations perceive these three fears differently. In each generation, one of the fears may have more power over a person. In the Christian community, older members face their deaths and wonder if they have done something wrong that will keep them from getting eternal life. The proclamation of forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life are words of hope for them. Millennials, groomed from an early age to be good capital, may be overwhelmed by meaninglessness. They do everything right from an early age. They have not been disruptive in the educational/job training programs in which they found themselves. They have been affirmed for each accomplishment from an early age. They, on the surface, appear to do everything right. Yet, at some point, Millennials will encounter failure or disease or loss. Having done everything right, and yet encountering the failure, disease, and loss, they will ask at some point, "What's the use?" "What's the use" is the acknowledgement of meaninglessness. The church uses language that speaks to the hearts of those who fear and face death. The church is being called to use a language to speak to those confronted with meaninglessness.

Succeeding in the corporate world has commonly been described as "climbing the ladder" which is an analogy that Gerhard Forde uses in understanding the theology of creation. Forde compares a "theology based on the picture of the ladder" to a "theology

[26] Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 38ff.

of the cross" where humans are saved "absolutely by grace alone."[27] A person cannot ascend the ladder to God through work or merit of their own, therefore, human work does not establish a relationship with God. Instead, the relationship between God and humanity is built through the grace of God. There is a trap here. It would appear that believing in "grace *alone* we are forced to push man down to absolutely the lowest possible position on the ladder."[28] Many Christians, in order to lift up the power of God to save, find it necessary to demean human beings to the lowest possible level.[29] To do so, as Forde writes, would be the same as "saying that God may be pretty good at salvation but was really something of a flop at creation!"[30] To make this claim of the depravity of humanity—as well as all creation--is tantamount to "a blasphemy against creation."[31] Forde, then, proposes the option of rejecting the notion of climbing a ladder completely. Going up and down the ladder, depending on one's goodness or failures, is to presume that the ladder is authoritative in determining one's worth. God declares, through God's Word, that all creatures are set right with God, and made good in God's eyes. Humans have been declared good by God.

With God's pronouncement of humanity as good. God's Word establishes what is good. God declares a person to be good, worthwhile, creative, life-giving, sustaining, and having integrity. God's Word challenges the idea that people are only good when they

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[27] Gerhard Forde, *Where God Meets Man: Luther's Down-to-Earth Approach to the Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972), 46.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid., 47.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.

are highly productive. It challenges the notion that a person's worth is determined by their usefulness to a corporation. God's Word inspires the capacity for creativity by removing the burden of despair from a person. God's Word gives power to anything that gives life and brings life out of death. God's Word provides all that a person needs. Finally, God's Word both sets a person right with God and calls people to be right with each other.

People see themselves as obliged to perform certain actions to maintain a certain order in life for their well-being. They find themselves bound to these actions to keep order in place. They place their trust in these actions to accomplish their purpose. In the broad sense of the word, religion is that obligation to certain actions and practices to maintain order in life and to achieve well-being. Millennials are quoted as saying they are "spiritual but not religious." Religion is more broadly defined as that to which one is bound. Millennials find themselves bound to a set of beliefs, attitudes, and actions that will direct and order their lives for success. While they may reject institutional religious practices—most often of the church—they are religiously bound to beliefs, attitudes, and practices. That to which they are bound will fail them. Announcing they are forgiven and promised eternal life does not speak directly to their spiritual need. In fact, announcing forgiveness to people who have done everything right may be received as offensive. The message of the church is a message to a group of people who are trying to find justice in situations where there is no justice—that is, where good has been rewarded and the bad has been punished. This means the very act of proclamation may take on a different look, feel, and sound as it proposes a different narrative as

authoritative over human life. The proclamation, as it claims authority over all other narratives, also calls into question any acts of works righteousness. For Millennials, gripped by the lure of being part of the elite to be a valuable commodity, proclamation of the good news names elitism as a false god to whom they are bound. In its place, the proclamation removes the bonds that weigh heavily upon Millennials.

Church

Written by Martin Luther, the Small Catechism explains the third article of the Apostles' Creed. The explanation reads, "I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith."[32] God, through the Holy Spirit, brings a person to faith as God reveals God's self. This encounter with God changes a person. As Gerhard Forde writes, people come to faith when "God does God" to them.[33]

The proclamation of the Word of God, being performative, is an event at a particular time and place. According to the Augsburg Confession, the church comes into being

[32] *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2006), 1162.
[33] Forde, *Where God Meets Man,* 72.

when "the Gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly."[34] The understanding of Church as event at a particular time and place broadens the understanding of church. The church is brought into being at a particular time and place, however, the church is not limited to that specific time and place, nor is it obligated to a certain institutional structure. As the church is not obligated to time, place, or structure, the church has remarkable freedom for where and when it gathers. As God has acted upon human beings in that moment and place, human beings are transformed. Therefore, the qualities of the gathered community are specific to the will of God. These qualities are commonly called the fruits of the Spirt and include: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.[35] It is possible that Millennials would be drawn to a community that manifests these qualities.

Christian Character and Integrity

The encounter with God changes a person. As Gerard Forde writes, "God does something to" people. Forde describes the performative task when, through the Word of God, a person comes to faith. To capture the before and after condition of a person, Forde uses the language of "old and new person."[36] This transformation is captured by Paul in Romans, "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did

[34] Leif Grane, *The Augsburg Confession: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959), 89.
[35] Galatians 5:22-23.
[36] Forde, *Where God Meets Man,* 38ff.

not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption."[37] (Romans 8: 14-15a)

The old way of living is a life of fear. The old way of living is a life of godlessness. The old way of living is characterized by being less than human. Life in this way is a life of perpetual threat. Life lived at this level is a win/lose proposition. Fighting this battle, other people are seen as products or commodities that exist for the purpose of consumption. People are either useful or disposable. In its most extreme form, people will control others or perpetrate acts of violence against them. This old way of living is characterized by faithlessness—lived out in a lack of hope, desperation, and a deficit mentality.[38]

The new way of living is a life of hope. This new way of being is characterized by living into the fullness of one's humanity and living up to one's fullest capacity as a human being. This way of living uses all that is unique to humanity—logic, intelligence, wisdom, compassion, creativity, morality, self-control, and self-awareness. It also allows room for the existence of other human beings in the world and allows room for their unique qualities no matter how different the person may be. This new way of living allows for a common good. As a new person, others are not seen as a threat. Others are not seen as capital to be controlled and invested. The new way of being is a life of abundance and hope.[39]

[37] Romans 8:14-15a.
[38] Forde, *Where God Meets Man,* 56-57.
[39] Ibid.

The transformed human life is marked with character and integrity.

Those transformed are imbued with a Christ-like character. One can be tempted to ask, "How can we gain that type of character?" Martin Luther contended that doing ethics in the way of Aristotle was wrong. The Aristotelean approach speaks of character as habit. The adage is "One becomes what one does." For Luther, character is divinely bestowed upon humans from the start. This is based on the notion that one's relationship with God is a settled matter. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is a once and for all event of salvation. Jeremiah states, "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."[40] The Christ event changes human life and gives humanity a Christ-like character. According to Paul, then, people are "to lead a lifeworthy of the calling to which you have been called."[41]

N.T. Wright asks the next question, "Why does Christian character matter?"[42] He answers his own question, "The key to it all, though, is that the Christian vision of virtue, of character that has become second nature, is precisely all about discovering what it means to be truly human—human in a way most of us never imagine."[43] For early Christians, Wright states, "that in and through Jesus they had discovered both a totally

[40] Jeremiah 31:33.
[41] Ephesians 4:1.
[42] N.T. Wright, *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters* (New York: Harper-Collins, 2010), 7.
[43] Ibid., 42.

different way of being human and a way which scooped up the best that the ancient wisdom had to offer and placed it in a framework where it could, at last make sense."[44] Resolutely Wright asserts, "We need people of character."[45]

The Lutheran tradition of Christianity speaks of the law. In general, the law is the standard to which one is to conform in living out one's life. The law continually accuses a person for the lack of adherence to these standards. Lutherans speak of three uses of the law. The first use of the law is "Restriction through Government." In this use, governments establish codes of conduct that protect people and create the possibility for people to live in relationship with each other. The second use of the law is "Conviction through Conscience." With this use of the law, people are convicted of their failure to live as God commands them to live, confronted with the judgment for that failure, and calls people to repent and amend their lives. The third use of the law is "Direction through Discipline." After one is converted, a person is given a set of disciplines that directs them how to live as the new creation God has made them.[46]

God imputes a Christ-like character on a person. Having received that character, a person is asked to live into that character. In the Rite of Holy Baptism in the worship book, Evangelical Lutheran Worship, a charge is given to the parents and sponsors of the baptismal candidate. The charge asks parents "to live with their child among God's faithful people; bring the child to the word of God and the holy supper, teach the child

[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Eric W. Gritsch and Robert W. Jenson, *Lutheranism: The Theological Movement and Its Confessional Writings* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1946), 63.

the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments, place in their child's hands the holy scriptures; and to nurture their child in faith and prayer, so that their child may learn to trust God, proclaim Christ through word and deed, care for others and the world God made, and work for justice and peace."[47] This begins the process of living into a Christ-like character. The practices of discipleship include regular worship attendance, engaging in God's Word, serving thru the church, giving of one's financial resources, and sharing one's faith with others. It is thought that these practices will lead one to maturity in the faith.

Millennials, describing themselves as spiritual but not religious, are genuinely concerned and committed to growing as faithful people. Millennials are also concerned about the process of maturation.

Spiritual practices can play an important role in growth in faith and in maturation. Traditionally, spiritual practices are the process of internalizing the impact of encountering God. The internalization process disciplines a person's desires so that God can be at work within the person. There are particular disciplines that are peculiar to Christianity—worship, learning, giving, serving, and witnessing.

Millennials, being engaged in the process of bricolage, may draw from the Christian practices, but they will also draw from practices of other religious and disciplines. Spiritual disciplines may play a different role than that of internalizing one's faith. For many, lowering one's stress levels, reducing anxiety, and loving others becomes the role

[47] Evangelical Lutheran Worship, 228.

of spiritual disciplines. Mindfulness and yoga are two examples of disciplines borrowed from other traditions. There is room for disciplines outside of the Christian tradition because the purpose of the disciplines has changed. While the spiritual disciplines of Christianity serve the purpose of internalizing the impact of encountering God, pulling together an eclectic gathering of practices serves a therapeutic purpose. Living under the strain of elitism, Millennials find themselves under great pressure to perform. Anxiety levels are high. The attraction to spiritual practices is rooted in finding a way to diminish the stress and anxiety. Traditional spiritual practices make a demand on the person, while the bricolage process of practices puts the burden of performance on the practice. Practices can quickly and easily be rejected as a person moves to another practice hoping for a better result. The temptation will be to do away with certain practices. Doing so may lead a person to miss the depth and significance of those practices. A better choice would be to look at the depth and meaning of each practice. Instead of tossing a practice out the window, leaders and congregations can explore the meaning behind the practice.

In addition to gaining a Christ-like character through the encounter with God, a person's character is marked with integrity. The Psalmist cries out, "Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the LORD without wavering."[48] Integrity is a way of living that is rooted in the trust of the LORD. That trust in the Lord leads people into following the Lord's commandments.

[48] Psalm 26:1.

Walter Brueggemann unpacks the notion of integrity in his book, "An Unsettling God." He writes of two obligations or commands for God's people. First, there is an obligation to listen to God and to do justice. Second, there is an obligation to be holy so that they can stand in the presence of God. The two obligations live in tension with each other.[49]

Under the obligation to justice, "Israel is to 'listen' to the command of YHWH and respond in obedience." In describing these commands, Brueggemann writes, "some are conservative in order to maintain social equilibrium, and some are downright reactionary to protect the status quo advantage."[50] Performing these acts of justice to those who are outcast and undesirable puts Israel in contact with those who are considered impure.

Under the obligation to stand in Gods' presence, "…Israel is invited to gaze on a vision of YHWH's presence, holiness, and beauty…" They are brought into "the presence of God, to see God, to submit to the unutterable overwhelmingness that is the very character of God."[51] In reading Levitical law, purity is necessary to stand before God in the Holy of Holies.

Being with those who are impure and needing to be pure to be in the presence of God place the two commands in tension with each other. Obedience to God, then, "concerns the demanding practice of neighborliness and rigorous discipline of presence with

[49] Walter Brueggemann, *An Unsettling God: The Heart of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 34.
[50] Ibid., 26f.
[51] Ibid., 30f.

God."[52] "One cannot reconcile the differences between these two, but one can let the two live in tension with one another."[53] Bruggeman call this tension integrity. "The term means to be whole, complete, coherent, innocent, unimpaired, sound."[54] It "is, to live a life that is undivided, to be altogether unified in loyalty and intention." It is "to live for the well-being of the world."[55]

As with character, integrity can be a concept that is attractive to Millennials. Integrity indicates a wholeness, goodness, and living for the sake of others. The worth of a human being is honored by those with character and integrity. The integrity of a person is not to be violated because of their gender, age, class, etc. Millennials yearn to be recognized and honored and do what is right for others. Character and integrity become the foundation for community.

Community

Character and integrity shape public life for Christians. The community that is shaped by those with character and integrity is an authentic community. Authentic community is a community in which its members honor the integrity of each other, know when to assume high or low status, who are fully engaged with one another, and allows its members to test perceptions. In doing so, its members are open to having their minds

[52] Ibid., 34.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.

and lives changed. This level of engagement is more than tolerance. Suzanna Danuta Walters writes, "Tolerance does sometimes tolerate difference, but it can never celebrate it; nor can it allow the difference of others to jolt is own certitudes."[56] Tolerance, according to Walters, is a default activity that restricts the capacity for a society to face the complex challenges it encounters. She quotes political theorist Wendy Brown, "Tolerance, in her view, signals a 'retreat from more substantive visions of justice.'"[57] In her words, Walters writes, "Tolerance undercuts the potential for citizens to reckon with conflict productively and 'be transformed by their participation.'"[58] Communication among those with character and integrity is communication between those that anticipate their lives will be transformed by being engaged with others.

The story of Jesus Christ is none other than the story of salvation. God is the author of life. In the story, humans become a new creation. Death no longer has the final word on human life. People are forgiven for the ways they have rebelled against the source of life and brought harm upon others, creation, and themselves. People are blessed to freely do what is right, whether it brings the desired results or not. Encountering God in Word and Sacrament, people gain a Christ-like character and gain integrity. Christian life is defined not in membership in an institution but defined by God's activity in the person's life.

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[56] Suzanna Danuta Walters, *The Tolerance Trap: How God, Genes, and Good Intentions are Sabotaging Gay Equality* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 14.
[57] Ibid., 11.
[58] Ibid.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the qualities and beliefs of Millennials, along with their spiritual needs such as maturity, enoughness, and a narrative of restoration are placed in dialogue with theological norms of the church. In doing so, the church sees that it is called to view Millennials as good in God's sight. This can reduce the negative propaganda that is offered in describing Millennials. Along with humanizing Millennials, the ultimacy of God is lifted up as the only power in this world that can overcome the power of death. Being the generation that was raised with the rise of school shooting, Millennials live with the pall of death hanging over them. People encounter God through the Word of God. This encounter is a moment and experience as much as it is espousing doctrine. Millennials are described by Wuthnow as tinkerers as they pull together a way to understand life. To this, the Word of God is announced as authoritative—the story above all other stories. Scripture is described as the Inspired Word of God, showing that God's Word is dynamic. Seeing the dynamism of God's Word, the church can avoid the pitfalls of fundamentalism and legalism. The Word of God—one's encounter with God-is transformative. A person is changed upon coming to faith by hearing the Word of God. From this encounter with God, a person gains Christ's character and is shown to have integrity to worship God and to obey God's commandments. Finally, being a Christian places a person into community. This community is a good place to be spiritually. The qualities of that community are a key component in developing ministry with

Millennials. With these theological themes, Chapter Four will take on the practical task of shaping ministry.

Chapter 4—Praxis—Engaging

Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to develop a Practical Theology for congregational ministry with Millennials. This thesis is using the process for developing a practical theology outlined by Richard Osmer in his book, *Practical Theology: An introduction.* Chapters One explored the research on Millennials and provided a set of qualities to be used to describe Millennials as well as a list of their beliefs, attitudes, and practices. Chapter Two offered an analysis of that research through various disciplines. In doing so, three common threads of maturation, enoughness, and a narrative of restoration were identified. Chapter Three offered a theological and normative interpretation of the qualities of Millennials, their beliefs, attitudes, and practices, and their spiritual needs.

The purpose of Chapter Four is to provide the "models of practice and rules of art for ministry."[1] When speaking of Models of Practice, Osmer refers to the process of outlining actions that can be taken.[2] Speaking about Rules of Art, Osmer refers to "more specific guidelines about how to carry out particular actions or practices."[3] First, the models of practice and rules of art for ministry to Millennials include the leadership required for this ministry, including the character, skills, and activity of that leader. Second, the ministry will be inspired and shaped by love. God loves humanity which

[1] Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction,* 176.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.

inspires people to love one another. This love is at the heart of ministry with Millennials. Third, in its mission to be in ministry with Millennials, leaders and congregations will need to determine what practices and beliefs are necessary and which ones are adiaphora and can be set aside for the sake of mission. Fourth, the ministry with Millennials takes root in the faith community. Faith communities, however, are required to move from the preferences of the faith community to the purpose of the faith community. Fifth, leaders and congregations will be expected to articulate their mission and their identity. Sixth, it is important for long term leaders and members to understand why Millennials have either left the church or have not been involved in the church. Seventh, Millennials are tinkerers and possess a gathering of narratives that shape their lives. The church in its ministry with Millennials will propose a narrative above all other narratives. The narrative the church proposes is a narrative of restoration. Eighth, achieving maturity is a process that takes 10 to 15 years longer than previous generations. To be engaged in ministry with Millennials, the church may be able to help them in that maturational process. Finally, to accomplish the pieces of ministry outlined here, leaders and congregations will need to consider both what they hope to accomplish (function) and the structure (form) of the ministry.

Leadership

The longer a pastor serves a congregation, the more like the pastor the congregation becomes. A long-time staff member of a congregation which was served by a long-term

pastorate once said to the pastor, “We are more like you than you are.” Leadership shapes a congregation. If a congregation is to engage in ministry with those who are unaffiliated with the congregation, faithful leadership is required.

Being a faithful leader requires character. As shared earlier, in the Lutheran tradition, character is given by God. Character comes from an encounter with the divine through the power of the Word of God. A leader nurtures that character through a worship and devotional life, study of God’s Word in Scripture, and serving others in God’s name. From this encounter with the divine and acting upon one’s Christian character, the leader of a congregation honors the integrity of each person in the community, speaks the truth in love to others, and sits with others in holy moments of grief and pain.

A leader maintains an appropriate balance between mission and maintenance. Mission is the work to be accomplished. The mission may include researching a topic, asking strategic questions, generating solutions, listing the objectives to be completed, setting a timeline for the completion of a project, and determining who is handling each part of the task. Maintenance is tending to the relationships among the people in the community. Maintenance includes tending to the well-being of others, allowing room for play during task orientation, making sure everyone is able to participate in the process, and striving to maintain a decision-making process that has clear lines of accountability. There are times when a group will be primarily task oriented, and there will times when the group will be focused mainly on tending to each other’s well-being. Most times, in gatherings, both mission and maintenance are at work simultaneously.

To be able to attend to both, leaders with a high-capacity for accomplishment will also have a high-capacity for relationship building.

A leader is authentic. Words such as real, vulnerable, and approachable are commonly attached to the notion of being authentic. It is also to be noted that Millennials desire authenticity in their relationships. The word authentic shares the same root as the word for author. Being authentic is closely attached to having a story. Each person has a unique story and is shaped by the story. The person's strengths and weaknesses are part of the story. The way a person lives is consistent with the person's story. Millennials appear to have radar for authenticity. Posing and posturing is not received well. Trying to impress is seen as false. Instead, as people come together in a relationship, they bring their story with them. Relationships are dynamic in that the sharing of stories happen within that relationship, and a person is changed by sharing one's story and hearing the story of another. There is a word of caution. Being authentic is different than making inappropriate self-disclosure. There can be too much information disclosed that calls attention to that person. An authentic leader intentionally listens to the story of another person. A leader also shares their story in a way that makes them approachable, vulnerable, and sincere.

A leader understands status. Sam Wells, in his book, *Improvisation,* addresses the concept of status. In general terms, status is seen as high or low—that is "superiority or inferiority."[4] With this understanding, status becomes an either/or situation. Wells,

[4] Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), 88.

when writing about character, notes that in life there are times that high status is required, and there are times when low status is required. There is not a universal rightness of high or low status.[5] A leader chooses which status is required in the situation in which the leader finds themselves.[6] There are times when a leader assumes a high status position, such as leading worship and preaching. There are times when a leader assumes a low status, allowing another person from the group to take charge and lead a meeting or event. Leaders with an understanding of status have an uncanny ability to move back and forth at will. This capacity is important in relationships with Millennials, who will assume an equal status with others—including leaders, managers, and bosses. In these relationships, the leader allows others to claim status. In doing so, the other person's insights, knowledge, and proposals are honored. Honoring one another as having integrity, being worthwhile, and having a gift to offer the interaction creates a dynamic environment for people to do ministry.

A leader attends to the process of decision making and action of an organization. Process is the how of the decision-making process. It takes into consideration the environment where the decision is being made, the participants, how the participants are treated, the lines of accountability, and the communication during the process. Leaders can fall into the authoritarian trap of thinking they make all decisions unilaterally. By understanding process, a leader makes sure that the decisions are made for the well-being of the congregation/organization. There is a difference between

[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid., 89.

control and freedom. Control is rooted in the desire to manage what another person thinks, feels, and does. The need for control is rooted in the fear of failure. A leader will strive to control others because they fear what will happen when a mistake is made. This is a personal feeling of shame. It is a fear of other people being angry or upset. Feelings of self-worth are attached to the need for control. Giving freedom as a leader means that the leader trusts others, trusts their capacity to act and to complete a task, and trusts the commitment of others to do the best they can. The leader, in giving freedom, also trusts their capacity to handle the situation if there is failure at some point. Freedom is accompanied with accountability. A leader gives another person freedom to think, feel, and act, but will also hold that person accountable if something goes wrong. Freedom and accountability allow others to grow. They allow for failure knowing that failure leads to growth. The capacity of a leader to allow freedom in tension with accountability can guide Millennials toward personal and professional growth. This is a different way of leading than the environment where everyone gets a trophy. Under the right conditions, allowing a person to sit with their failures and concomitant feelings of guilt or shame forms a stronger person.

A leader can cope with conflict. Offering freedom in tension with accountability helps a person grow. It also means that a leader can handle times of conflict. In congregations it is not “if” conflict will happen, but “when” it will happen. St. Paul is not unaware of conflict in the church. We see that in his epistles—especially in First Corinthians. He

regularly addresses conflict within a congregation.[7] Conflict in a congregation can be rooted in the need for one person to have more control than another. It can be rooted in the emotional neediness and insecurities of a person in a congregation. The more fear and anxiety there are, the more likely that there will be conflict. Secrecy leads to conflict.[8] Conflict can be the displacement of anger from the real source of pain to a safer target. For example, an elderly church member, whose son was dying of brain cancer becomes angry at the pastor of her congregation who is the same age as her son. Congregations and their leaders are perceived as a safe place to displace and direct their anger. A leader knows that conflict is unavoidable. The leader knows that the higher the level of anxiety in a person, the more likely the person "resorts to either/or, yes/no, or black/white thinking.[9] Anxiety loves company, so leaders know that highly anxious people will form groups of commiseration. With high levels of anxiety, most people will not have a conversation with the source of the problem. Therefore, Jesus teaches in Matthew 18 that conflict is best resolved at the lowest level—I.e., face to face and one on one.[10] Leaders will allow people to sit with their feelings while encouraging conversations rooted in truth and love. They will allow room for people to feel what they feel and will encourage a good process that builds up the congregation instead of tearing it apart. Leaders will not avoid finding themselves in a bad situation. The

[7] First Corinthians, chapter 13.
[8] An often-quoted statement from Bishop Marcus Miller, who served as the bishop of the Northeastern Ohio Synod and president of Lutheran Southern Seminary.
[9] Peter Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute Publication, 1993), 21.
[10] Matthew 18:15-20.

question becomes, "Will the leader make the situation better or worse?"[11] This capacity to guide conflict is important in the life of congregations that are in decline, and it is beneficial to congregations who are taking a serious look at their ministry and determine what is necessary to be missionaries.

A leader has good communication skills. A seasoned pastor once observed, "I can tell how a person leads by watching how that person preaches."[12] There is truth in that claim. In watching a person preach, one sees the person's assumed status, authenticity, intelligence, stature, command of vocabulary, thinking process, use of rhetoric, and non-verbal communication. The capacity to speak with clarity shows their ability to understand a situation, what is happening, and what the next step will be. At the same time, a leader has the capacity for taciturnity. Taciturnity is named as an outcome of periods of extended silence by Mary Margaret Funk, in her book, *Thoughts Matter.* She writes about the monastic discipline of silence and contends that the greatest gift of observing times of silence is taciturnity. She defines taciturnity as "not having the need to comment on everything."[13] Being able to be silent, leaders grow in their capacity to listen. In work with Millennials, the capacity to listen is paramount. The capacity to listen honors others, allows room to learn from others, and in the process, allows the possibility of being changed themselves in that encounter.

[11] This statement was regularly made by the Reverend Frank Gross, Jr., who served as the mentor to the author of this thesis.
[12] Statement made to his mentee by the Reverend Frank Gross, Jr.
[13] Mary Margaret Funk, *Thoughts Matter: The Practice of Spiritual Life* (New York: A & C Black, 1998).

A leader with their capacity to balance mission and maintenance, to be authentic, having the ability to discern status, encouraging good process, leading in the midst of conflict, and effectively communicating can create an environment in which others can be honored and be fruitful. This environment is safe, allows creativity, takes an honest look at issues, tests each other's assumptions, and honors the integrity of others. A congregation that has this type of environment can faithfully take on the challenge of mission to Millennials, and it will be attractive to Millennials who are yearning for such a community.

Being in Love

God is in love with humanity. This love is revealed to humanity through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus gave his life out of love for humanity. This love brings God and humanity together. This love brings life out of death. This love restores human relationships with each other. This love is self-giving to others. No power or principality can separate us from this love. The aorist verb tense in Koine Greek is a tense that captures past, present, and future. This verb tense means that something happened in the past, is active in the present, and it will continue. The description of God's love uses this tense.

When God is in love with humans and humans in love with God, humans will fall into love with each other. Jesus, in teaching his disciples at the Last Supper about love,

commands them to show the same love to one another that he shows to them.[14] The love with which humans are to show one another does not come naturally. Paul, in the descriptors of love in First Corinthians, describes love in a way that does not come naturally.[15] If the love does not come naturally to humans, then it must be revealed to humanity. The love of God is revealed to humans in the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is Christ's self-giving love on the cross that makes it possible for people to love each other.

Congregations consist of people who have had God's love revealed to them in Word and Sacrament. It is this group of people who are called to mission by Jesus. The mission is to love others with the love with which God first loved them. In considering mission with those who are unaffiliated with the church, especially Millennials, the people of God are called to fall in love with them. The markers of this love are the markers given by Paul in First Corinthians. They are patience and kindness. This love is not envious, boastful, rude, does not insist on its own way, nor is it irritable or resentful. More so, this love "does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."[16]

While the first step in developing a model for ministry with Millennials is demonstrating leadership that sets the tone for the congregation, the second step is to fall in love with those who are part of the Millennial generation. The practical application of being love

[14] John 13:34.
[15] 1 Corinthians 13:1-13.
[16] Ibid.

with Millennials can be found in the work of Martin Luther in his explanation of the Eighth Commandment. After stating the commandment, he then answers the question, "What does this mean?" Luther defines the meaning of the eighth commandment as saying that people do not tell lies about our neighbors, betray or slander them, or destroy their reputations. Instead we are to come to their defense, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light."[17]

The Early Church and Mission to Those Unaffiliated

The mission of the church in the 21st century can find inspiration and guidance from the stories of the first century church. The Apostle Paul and Barnabas were on their way to Jerusalem. On the journey, they encountered Gentiles in the area of Phoenicia and Samaria. The Gentiles were converted. This conversion brought great joy to Paul and Barnabas.[18] When reaching Jerusalem, the church received them with hospitality. To their brothers and sisters in faith in Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas shared with them the conversions of which they were part. Among the group of people to whom Paul and Barnabas were speaking, some Insisted that Gentiles were required to be circumcised and to observe dietary restrictions to become a believer. This debate is mentioned In Acts 15: 6, where Luke writes "The apostles and the elders met together to consider this matter."[19] After a long debate, Paul spoke to the group. Paul believed that the

[17] *Evangelical Lutheran Worship,* 1161.
[18] Acts 15.
[19] Acts 15:6.

conversion he witnessed was brought about by the Holy Spirit. The purifying work of the Holy Spirit accomplished the same effect as circumcision. The Gentiles were saved by the grace of God, not circumcision and dietary restrictions.[20] At the conclusion of Paul's speech, James speaks. He asserts that God had indeed converted the Gentiles, and they should not be "troubled" with circumcision.[21] In essence, James asserts that the church would suspend what they thought was necessary for the sake of bringing the Gentiles into the fold of the church. This is a significant moment. It teaches the church about mission. For the work of mission, the church has and can suspend perceived necessities for the sake of welcoming the convert. After James' speech, a letter is drafted to the Gentiles. The letter conveyed the action of the church to set aside the requirement of circumcision. The letter, did however, ask the newly converted to follow the religious practice of dietary restrictions. This section of Acts makes a clear statement about the church in its mission to those who are unaffiliated with a congregation. The church, for the sake of the convert, may suspend some of its requirements for the spiritual well-being of the convert. Yet, the church will also hold fast to what is deeply important to them and a practice that they desire converts to adhere to as well.[22]

The practice of binding and loosing is important to hold in mind as congregations consider their mission to Millennials. First, there are beliefs and practices that can be suspended for the well-being of the convert. Second, there are beliefs and practices that

[20] Acts 15:12-15.
[21] Acts 15:19.
[22] This interpretation of the story in Acts 15 was taught by Andy Stanley at the 2018 Orange Leaders Conference in Atlanta, Georgia.

are important to the community that those entering a relationship with the community will be asked to follow. Third, the criteria for what is necessary will be offered to Millennials. Along with explaining the criteria, a conversation can be held with Millennials that allows for their feedback and critique. This conversation with feedback and critique is also beneficial to leaders and congregations as they ask themselves what is essential and what is not.

The Anomaly of the Church of the 1950's and 1960's

Many congregations have a King David pastor whose memory is authoritative to the identity and practices of a congregation. Typically, the King David pastor would have presided over a congregation during the 1950's and 1960's. There are fond memories among congregants of that time. These memories and the shadow of the King David pastor are part of a picture a congregation holds of itself. There are unique qualities of ministry from the 1950's and 1960's that Gil Rendle captures in his book *Quietly Courageous: Leading the Church in a Changing World.* He writes of the strengths of the congregation at that time, saying, "The strength of Christianity in this era rested on a foundation of swift demographic growth, as the steady, linear increase to which most American churches were accustomed gave way to a surge in membership and attendance that left denominations and parishes struggling to match supply to the newfound demand."[23] The number of people in congregations skyrocketed. This

[23] Gil Rendle, *Quietly Courageous: Leading the Church in a Changing World* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 19-20.

increased the demand for pastors and filled the seminaries. Pews and Sunday School programs were filled. Building campaigns were necessary to meet demands for space.[24] The narrative of the church included a pastor, a building, and strong financial resources. This memory is strong for Baby Boomers. Yet, by 1965, losses of church members started to become the trend.[25]

Rendle sees the purpose of a faith community in tension with the preferences of a faith community.[26] In seeing this tension, one can recognize the times when the call to congregations is "steadfastness to the purpose as faith communities (not the preference of those already in faith communities.)"[27] The preference of the faith community is commonly anchored during the reign of the King David pastor. Based on their experience in the 1950's and 1960's, congregational members may assume that the size and the activity of the congregation at that time is the norm for future generations. The desire of congregational members, then, is to carry on those traditions. The belief behind the desire is that the congregation will grow to the size it had been previously. Rendle writes about the situation of the church in the 1950's and 60's as an "aberrant time."[28] Leaders and members of congregations are called to recognize that the significant growth of the church through the late 60's was an anomaly, not the norm for congregations.[29]

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[24] Ibid., 20.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid., 21.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid., 22.

When the condition of the church in the 1950's and 1960's is recognized as an anomaly, the future of the congregation is not based on solving the problem of being like they used to be, but recognizes the "changed environment" and takes on the challenges of that new situation.[30] The current situation of the church is different than what it was in the previous generation. Having named the change in the situation, Rendle next asks a question. He asks, "What then is required of leaders and congregants?" and answers that question by saying, "you need to change your perspective and learn how to live with it."[31] Rendle offers a description of what living with the situation means. He writes, living with the new situation requires new questions instead of lifting up answers that used to work, and it requires leaders to move from asking if "things are being done right…[but] asks if we are doing the right things."[32] Rendle calls this "learning from ignorance."[33]

For leaders and congregants, it is important to acknowledge the anomaly that is recalled the "glory days" of the church. Instead of assuming that the norm for the church is captured in what the church was in the 1950's and 1960's, leaders and congregants are called to recognize that time as a unique moment in the life in the church. Striving to understand where the church finds itself now is much different and requires leaders and congregations to be what Rendle calls "quietly courageous."[34]

[30] Ibid., 28.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid., 31.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.

Identify, Implement, and Articulate the Congregation's Mission

It is necessary for the church to define itself. When describing itself, the church uses as many descriptions as there are participants in church. Church can be a universal body that transcends a specific place and time. The church can be an international body of believers living under a specific understanding of God's Word, with a set theology and dogma, and a polity that governs the body. There are typically national, regional, and local expressions of the body. The local expression of the church is commonly called a congregation. It is in the congregation that relationships are built with groups and individuals in the community. Building these relationships is a grass roots process.

Congregations have an identity. The identity consists of where the congregation is located, the building/space where its members meet to worship, and the role the congregation plays in the community. On a broader scale, the congregation has an identity that is based on the experience others have of the congregation. For example, a funeral will draw those who aren't members of a congregation to the congregation for a specific event. The experience that visitor has shapes that person's perception of the congregation. The practices and actions of other congregations can shape the perception of someone who is unaffiliated with the congregation has about that church. Clergy malpractice in one church can influence the perception one has of other congregations.

Mission includes the work in which the congregation seeks to establish a relationship with people who aren't members of the congregation for the sake of the gospel. The work of mission requires that a congregation has a clear picture of who they are. This identity of a congregation includes the core belief that they have about God, the theology used to express life in relationship with God, the practical ways the core belief is lived out within and outside of the congregation, and the demographics of the people who comprise the congregation. Building relationships—a key component of mission work—requires articulating one's identity.

A Mission Statement is the internal identifying statement. It articulates the mission of the congregation to its members. Typically, the Mission Statement uses internal language that those within the congregation will understand. The language is typically biblical and theological in nature. A Position Statement is an external statement. It articulates to those unfamiliar with the congregation the beliefs, attitudes, and practices of the congregation. The language used is less religious and more understandable to those less versed in religious and theological terms and concepts. Finally, there is the use of a tag Lines. Mission Statements and Position Statements are usually longer and not easily memorized. A Tag Line is a four to six-word statement that captures the heart of the congregation and quickly captures the attention and imagination of those outside of the congregation. It is easily memorized.[35]

[35] The definitions of mission statement, position statement and tag line were provided by Adair Witmer, Founding Partner of The W Partners. Her agency specializes in marketing.

Millennials are used to establishing self-identifying descriptions. They commonly build profiles on various social media sites. They are used to reading the profiles of others. These profiles are an instrumental way of sharing one's identity with another. Using social media, one can "get to know" another person without having a face to face conversation. Organizations can find themselves in the same situation. Who they are will be assessed prior to meeting anyone from the organization. In addition, Millennials desire authenticity. Millennials see themselves as one among equals, and they don't see others as having higher status or as authoritative. Millennials, even though they are not drawn to those who present themselves as authoritative or those presenting themselves with high status, have a desire to have those in authority—such as the government—to make decisions that will solve problems for them. Millennials anticipate attention.

The need for a congregation to establish an identity to build relationships with those unaffiliated with them stands in tension with the desired methods of Millennials use to consider, establish, and maintain relationships. This means that congregations must consider the preferences of Millennials in striving to establish a relationship with them. This will include the following.

1. The use of social media to share one's identity as a congregation is important. To do this effectively, congregations should determine the kinds of social media used by Millennials. Too many times, leaders in congregations assume that the social media format they prefer is the same one used by others. The use of social media to build relationships leads to picking relationships through similarity and

compatibility. It is less likely that one person will have a relationship with another person if there is a perceived incompatibility.

2. Authenticity is the quality of a relationship for which a Millennial long. The qualities pf authenticity include honesty, openness, empathy, sharing of weakness, asking for the opinion of another without judging the response, and vulnerability.
3. Millennials approach relationships as a gathering of equals. The Senior Pastor of a congregation was walking down the street of the city where she served. She runs into a young man—aged around 25 years old—who attends worship at her church occasionally. The young man, shortly into the conversation, provides an evaluation of the church's website, worship schedule, and then makes recommendations. Subsequently, the young man offers to meet with the pastor and talk about how the marketing company for which he works can help with the congregation's website development. This interaction is an example of how those who are Millennials will assume the same status as another but will also offer feedback and critique of others. There is an assumption that their opinion is worth hearing.
4. Millennials can be a paradox. They will assume the same status as others, expecting their opinions to carry the same weight as those who are authoritative. At the same time, Millennials have an expectation that others—such as government or other institutions—will solve the significant problems for them. Having been raised with helicoptering parents, Millennials have been

affirmed for each contribution they make and at the same time have had parents walk them through every step of life. Some businesspeople, anecdotally, have shared that it is not uncommon for a parent to join a Millennial for a job interview. This paradox is challenging to a person's feelings of self-worth. It will be challenging to church leaders and members. A person is expected to listen and honor the opinion/expertise of a Millennial and expected to take actions that are helpful and affirming of Millennials, without the Millennial offering recognition and affirmation to the other person—especially if that person is from an older generation.

5. Millennials expect attention. The influences of social media with its ongoing register of likes and dislikes has shaped the pattern of affirmation required by Millennials. A congregational climate of process over product can strengthen the relationships between Millennials and members of the congregation. To be focused on process is to watch relationships play out naturally. It means hearing something painful and not needing to react. It honors the opinions of others, even while disagreeing with them.

Religion and Spirituality

From the data collected by the NYCM, Christian Smith writes about Millennials when they were teenagers. At that point, most Millennials were affiliated with a congregation. In fact, many teenagers expressed an interest in being more involved with the church.

When that data is compared to data on Millennials post high school, their affiliation with congregations has decreased. Dean argues that the church's decision to move from the gospel to a moral, therapeutic theism is the factor that led Millennials to leave the church.[36] Millennials are not the first generation to leave the church as they enter their 20's. Generation X'ers and Boomers did the same, however, they eventually returned to the church.

There are others who have proposed a different reason that Millennials have left the church. David Zahl is one of those authors. His book, *Seculosity: How Career, Parenting, Technology, Food, Politics, and Romance Became Our New Religion and What to Do about It,* offers that differing perspective. He makes note of the significant decline both in the number of people attending worship and in the number of people who claim a belief in God.[37] Zahl believes that people make a common assumption in reviewing the data. The assumption Zahl believes that people make is "that more and more people are abandoning faith and making their own meaning."[38] People see an end to religion and its traditional narrative. There may be another interpretation, Zahl proposes. It is possible that religion has not come to an end, but that there are numerous "replacement" religions available.[39] Religious activity has not declined, but it has "migrated."[40] This migration is the key factor in the decline in affiliation of people with

[36] See Chapter 2 for the data that supports these conclusions.
[37] David Zahl, *Seculosity: How Career, Parenting, Technology, Food, Politics, and Romance Became Our New Religion and What to Do about It* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2019), xii.
[38] Ibid., xii.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.

traditional religious communities. While the formal and traditional expressions of religion are in decline, other disciplines are seeing a growing number of adherents. For example, as Zahl points out, Millennials "are increasingly enamored of astrology."[41]

Religion can refer to the traditional main-line Christian practices. Religion can also refer to a broader collection of beliefs and practices that may or may not be Christian. Zahl looks at the broader terms that may define religion. When defined in broader terms, he believes that religion is the "controlling story" and "the lens through which you sort the data of your days, rank your priorities, and focus your desires."[42] Zahl goes on to describe the broader definition of religion as "what we lean on to tell us we're okay, that our lives matter…[It is] our preferred guilt-management system."[43] Religion, in providing an emotional crutch, affirmation, and acknowledging meaning, provides what is needed to satisfy a person's need to be declared enough.[44]

The spiritual pilgrimage on which many Millennials find themselves is the search for enoughness. Enoughness, which is a term used by David Zahl, is the belief that "were we to reach some benchmark in our minds, then value, vindication, and love would be ours."[45] There is a flaw inherent in the hope derived from enoughness. Whether people accomplish and get what they want or get close to it, a person never believes that they

[41] Ibid., xiii.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] "Enoughness" is a term that David Zahl uses in his book *Seculosity* (ibid., xiv).
[45] Ibid., xiv.

have enough. There is not a threshold over which a person can step into enoughness. In addition, human life has finitude. There is a limited time to achieve enough.[46]

The common parlance in mainline Christian theological circles uses the word righteousness to label the human ability to get life right within the limited time available to them. At times, religious words, while having a significant depth of meaning that is necessary, can become a stumbling block to speaking theologically. Recognizing that stumbling block, Zahl notes the similarities between the theological term righteousness and the word enoughness. He believes both to be "spiritual treadmills."[47] Both are rooted in the human desire "to validate your existence."[48]

There are practices that can help a person to identify what they use to validate their existence. One criterion is to ask people to identify the place where they are the most tired. In doing so, says Zahl, a person will identify their spiritual treadmill. The treadmill is an "oppressive spirit" in any religious activity where a person tries to meet the threshold of being good enough.[49] Mental, emotional, and spiritual energy is consumed in this effort. The energy and activity in which a person invests to meet that threshold can be called self-justification. When a person fails to attain the threshold, they seek out a place to go for absolution. The church had been the "place to go with our guilt and shame."[50] The church may not be seen by some generations as the place to go for

[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid., xvi.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid., xviii.
[50] Ibid.

absolution from their fear, guilt, and shame.[51] Earlier, the framework of Paul Tillich was used to refer to the three spiritual struggles of fear of death, fear of guilt, and fear of shame. With the church removed from the equation, people have significant spiritual struggles, but no longer find churches as the place or the community in which they can hear a comforting and assuring word in the face of those fears.

Where then, does a person go for absolution? Absolution is the act of validation of a person's enoughness. Humans invest a large amount of spiritual energy into finding and receiving absolution. If that energy is not directed to the church, it must go somewhere.[52] Zahl offers some options. The energy can go "from the kitchen to the gym to the computer screen to the bedroom."[53] Millennials, in their tinkering are searching for options. Millennials, in their striving for elitism from an early age, are engaged in an exhausting effort to meet the threshold of enoughness, fearing the failure of achieving that level, and have invested in various options to alleviate the guilt and shame. A commonality between those affiliated with a congregation and those unaffiliated is the spiritual search. The difference is the place to which they go to find the spiritual answer. Both are fully engaged in a process that uses things, activities, and philosophies to confirm their worth as human beings.

Traditional religious words, such as righteousness, can become stumbling blocks to seekers becoming affiliated with a church, even though their meaning adequately

[51] Ibid., xvii-xix.
[52] Ibid., xix.
[53] Ibid.

describes the spiritual quest the person is on. When the church uses the term righteousness, it is not proposing that people must use that word. While those unaffiliated with the church may reject the "churchy" language (along with the experience Millennials have had with self-righteous church goers), they may find the reality expressed in the term adequate in describing what they are experiencing. The church, then is not being called to give up their core beliefs, but Zahl proposes that they consider alternative words and concepts to describe the situation. The act of considering alternative words can reduce the resistance of Millennials to talking about important theological concepts. At the same time, there may not be words that fully capture the depth of traditionally religious words such as sin, faith, and grace. The common spiritual pilgrimage on which affiliated and unaffiliated people are on is the desire to satisfy the need for righteousness/enoughness. The search for righteousness/enoughness is the steps a person takes to get to the threshold of feeling validated, and to what a person turns in the face of making the wrong choices or putting ones trust in things or activities that do not validate a person's value.

A key part of the church's mission to Millennials is to identify commonalities. The human condition is universal, even if the words used to describe the condition vary. If using a "churchy" word becomes an obstacle to finding common ground, then accepting the meaning behind the word for the sake of engagement can be one step in fulfilling the church's mission.

Offering A Proposed Narrative

Each person has a collection of narratives at their disposal. These narratives include family stories, accounts of childhood adventures, coming of age stories, college myths, love and engagement stories, stories from work, their neighborhood, and their friendships, and growing old stories. These stories are accounts not only about a person, but also about the relationships the person has with others, with institutions, with life experiences, and with their spiritual journeys. Even though people are different, there can be similarities from one person's stories to another. These stories provide an important part of a person's identity.

Stating the importance of narrative for identity formation, Dan McAdams writes that a person's life is given "unity, meaning, and purpose" by having an inner story.[54] His definition of a life story is that which "provides a moral frame of reference because it grounds your experiences in basic values and beliefs."[55] This moral framework aids a person in determining what is right or wrong, good or bad, beautiful or ugly. With that definition of story, it is possible to note that the word story in McAdams' article and the word authority defined in Chapter 3 of this thesis are interchangeable. Authority was defined as that which determines right and wrong, good and bad, beautiful and ugly.

Without a "narrative identity", a person's life is "episodic."[56] Life as episodic is a concept developed by McAdams. He describes the life that is episodic as one where a person

[54] Northwestern Now, "The Strange Case of Donald J. Trump: A Psychological Reckoning," accessed March 9, 2020, http://news.northwestern.edu.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.

lives in the moment. Living in the moment, a person does not reflect on the past, thus does not learn from experience. Being in the moment sees the present as one more argument or war to have. One moment does not appear to have a connection to the next moment, so there is minimal if any growth in the person. Moving from battlefield to battlefield, a person living in the moment does not gain experience and perspective for the following moment. Living in the moment, according to McAdams, is "when one is compulsively in the present."[57]

Having an inner story is to have a "narrative identity."[58] The lack of an inner story, or an episodic life as outlined by McAdams, leaves a person to identify truth as that which works at a particular time to "win the moment."[59] Each moment stands alone, so no consistency is seen between one's actions at one moment to one's actions at the next time. A person's value is believed to be based on success in each episode of life. To have a life story or narrative Identity is to have a narrative that continues from moment to moment and develops experience that can be applied to a new experience. It is to grow and gain perspective that will aid in the next moment. Having a consistent inner story leads to the formation of personality.[60]

McAdams, for over 20 years, has been working with his students to study a kind of story called a redemption story. Redemption stories are stories of "overcoming suffering or

[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.

adversity."[61] Research has shown that those who have more themes of redemption in their life story, are healthier and happier. For those who do not have as many moments of redemption in their lives, there are health problems and lower levels of happiness.[62] Additionally, research has shown "strong associations between redemptive life stories and an adult's concern about the well-being of generations."[63] With a narrative that includes redemption, a person is more likely to act in ways that are moral and more likely to have concern for other generations.

Millennials have been shown to be tinkerers in the practice of bricolage. This tinkering of Millennials has led them to gather a diverse collection of narratives in their lives. Each collection is unique. Millennials will gather with others that have similar stories to tell. They will honor those who are different, and they will gather with those who are similar. To each of those situations, they bring the yearning for enoughness.

The yearning for enoughness comes in large part from the social force of capitalism. In that system, Millennials are perceived as a commodity. Their life value is based on their performance. Their performance in each situation classifies them as valuable (to various degrees) or disruptive. Being a commodity is a life story. It is a life story whose narrative does not include redemption. As McAdams would state, without a narrative identity that includes a redemption story, Millennials find themselves centered on their needs, identifying with those who hold similar values, gathering techniques from various on-

[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.

line sources, and relying heavily upon others—especially those who are older such as parents and the government to solve the problems that they face.

Ministry with Millennials involves the awareness that not every believer is focused on the pilgrimage of getting into heaven. Younger believers are more likely found to be on a pilgrimage to make a difference in the world for those who are suffering.

Throughout Scripture, there are stories about people who encounter God's presence. That encounter is performative. The person, after the encounter, does not return to life as it was. From the story of Noah building the ark, to Abraham and Sarah beginning their wandering lives, to Joseph and his colorful garb, to Saul, David, Solomon, to the prophets, to Mary as mother of Jesus, to the disciples, the stories about a person's life changes after the encounter with God. None of those who encountered God and started a new chapter in their lives were perfect. Of all the people who are lifted up in the world's religions, only the people in the Old Testament and New Testament are shown to make mistakes.[64] This is the unifying narrative that engages all humanity.

The church's mission is about proposing a specific narrative to others. This narrative is a narrative of redemption. The redemption comes from the one who is ultimate. The narrative is offered/proposed to others as a story that shapes their lives. There are various ways that the proposed narrative can be offered as a gift. The narrative is a gift, for it proclaims the enoughness of each person.

[64] Professor Stephen Chapman made this statement in the Old Testament class he taught for the Duke Divinity School 2015 Doctor of Ministry cohort.

The proposed narrative of redemption that announces the gift of enoughness is conveyed from one person to another through story telling. What is the connection between Millennials, the church, and storytelling? Jeff Cloeter answers that question. First, Millennials are not strongly moved by the authoritative announcements of the church. Second, Millennials regularly share their stories, and they appear to treasure when other people tell them stories. Third, the primary method of community for Millennials is through "shared experience."[65] For Cloeter, when the church wants to engage with Millennials, it listens to stories and it tells stories. In doing so, an intersection is found "between God's story and our own."[66] In the moment of intersection, vitality, creativity, surprise, and life can be found.

In speaking of the intersection of the divine and the human, Christians, according to Cloeter, must become "good storytellers."[67] Millennials have many stories about themselves, their relationships with others, their life experiences, and their feelings about the world in which they live. Christians are proposing a story/narrative that both transcends one person, but also is incarnate in every person. "American Christianity," states Cloeter, "is shifting from places to people, from attractional to incarnational in nature."[68] Buildings are not what holds Millennials together. Doctrinal statements do not speak to them. It is "shared experience" that engages Millennials.[69]

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[65] Jeff Cloeter, "On Millennials and Story," *Missio Apostolica: Journal of the Lutheran Society for Missiology* XXI, no. 1, issue 41 (2013): 48-54.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.

Millennials are yearning for meaning in a way of living that appears to be meaningless. They have incredible access to an enormous amount of information, all of which seems to be unrelated. Without the thread that draws it all together, they move from episode to episode.[70] As shared earlier, an episodic way of living is one that lacks a story of redemption. A redemption story gathers up the past and is oriented to the future. In writing about this episodic way of living, Cloeter states, "God's Story affords significance and meaning to the endless information we possess, ordering the chaotic events and episodes that once seemed unrelated."[71] This is something that stating doctrine and speaking with reasons does not accomplish. Of all generations, it appears that Millennials are living in a time where experience is more prevalent than reason.[72]

Evangelism, which for most mainline Christian churches, still means getting a person to become a member of one's congregation. The assumption is that the person has been raised in the church. Orienting the person to the congregation is less about encountering God and more about teaching how the church works. Evangelism is required to recapture its original meaning—telling the Good News. Telling the Good News is story telling. For the church to be evangelical, it is called to tell God's story of good news. To tell this story, Cloeter offers three priorities. First, the church is called to understand that Scripture is a story. Individual stories are pulled together by the collective story of ancestors in faith. Over those stories, the story of God's election,

[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.

salvation, and renewal draws all stories into the ultimate story of restoration. This makes God's story the story of all people.[73] Second, leaders and members of congregations are challenged to become better story tellers. Being better story tellers begins with the belief that every person's story is part of God's story. In doing this, Cloeter offers three objectives of good story telling. These objectives are defuse "any tension or hostility," identify with "the pain" of the other person, and to earn "relational capital."[74] Third, in telling stories that see Gods' story as over-arching all other stories and learning how to tell stories well, leaders and members of congregations shall work on "integrating God's story" and their own story.[75]

Finally, the use of narrative is central in establishing and building relationships with those unaffiliated with the church, such as Millennials. According to Cloeter, there are four qualities to using narrative. The narrative is to be told with clarity, are to be concise, are to be consistent, and are to be compelling.[76]

Maturational Process

The measures of maturity listed in chapter two were marriage, children, stable employment, and owning a home. For past generations, marrying, having children, having stable employment, and buying a home happened for people by their mid-

[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.

twenties. As explored in chapter two, it was shown that the age of attaining these markers of adulthood has moved from mid-twenties to mid-thirties. This creates a generation of people for whom existing congregations do not have ministry programming. As congregations reflect on ministry with Millennials, they must make note that a new developmental stage is at play. The church has a role to play in the process of maturation.

Leaders and their congregations are called to honor Millennials in speaking about them and engaging with them. Caricatures of Millennials depict them as disheveled young men living in their parents' basement, sleeping most of the day, and playing video games with their friends. While some Millennials are required to live with their parents due to financial constraints, most Millennials are working and bringing with them their unique gifts of the use of technology, creativity, tolerance, and genuine concern for the well-being of others. A ministry cannot be built on a caricature. The ministry can be built upon a genuine concern for the well-being others and with a belief that the faith community is incomplete without their presence. Millennials are honored by others who have genuine concern for them. This honor is expressed in being with Millennials during key moments in their faith, personal, and professional development.

Leaders and congregations must evaluate the traditional markers of maturity and ask if there are other markers of maturity worth consideration. Asking basic questions about the markers begins the evaluation process. Does owning a car necessarily indicate maturity? Does owning a home indicate maturity? Not having an interest in owning a car or home may determine possession, not maturity. There may be additional markers

of maturity. These may include growing into one's role as a public citizen, gaining self-awareness through mentoring relationships, challenging the ethos of "Safetyism" coming from their upbringing, advocating for social justice concerns affecting Millennials, and seeing science as a way of understanding and knowing.

To help in the maturation process, leaders and congregations can advocate for public education that is broader than the purpose of providing good employees for corporations. As explored in chapter two through the writing of Malcolm Harris, when capitalism is the glue of society, then the telos of education is good performance that turns "into money…into choice or…'better life outcomes."[77] At the heart of the church's proclamation of God's activity in human life is faith in a God who loves deeply and is merciful to humanity. Christian living is the life-long process of living into the new being God creates. God's work also defines how others are to be treated—by honoring them for their integrity and preserving for them an environment and culture where they can thrive. This is a drastically different telos for the education of children and youth. Leaders and congregations can consider the possibility that the telos of education is not increasing one's elite status and worth in the consumer system but is to prepare a child for full and beneficial engagement in their community. Neil Postman calls this level of engagement "citizenship."[78] For him, education serves the purpose of creating citizens.

[77] Malcolm Harris, *Kids These Days: Human Capital and the Making of Millennials* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2017), 2.
[78] Neil Postman, *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School* (New York: Vintage Books of Random House, Inc., 1995), 18.

Public education does not serve a public, it creates a public.[79] The qualities that come from citizenship being the telos of education include "confidence, a sense of purpose, a respect for learning, and tolerance."[80] The re-identifying of the telos of education honors the integrity of children and youth, and it blesses communities as they become places where people thrive. Also, research has shown that Millennials lean toward wanting others, such as government, to solve the problems they face. Claiming the role of education as that which shapes citizens, education can instill not only an ability to engage in problem solving as a community, but also a desire to do so.

Millennials are highly relational, even in the way that they gather information. Ted Talks, podcasts, social media sites, and crowdsourcing (putting out an inquiry among acquaintances for guidance) are extensively used methods for gaining information. Learning occurs through interpersonal relationships. Leaders and congregations can engage Millennials through mentoring relationships. These relationships involve partnering Millennials with older members who have similar interest. These mentoring relationships must be based on equality. An older person wanting a Millennial to sit back and listen to instructions on how something is to be done will quickly volunteer themselves out of a job. The mentoring relationships must include the use of stories from both participants, be based on a mentor taking a low status position in the relationship and honoring the capability and capacity of the Millennial. These mentoring

[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.

relationships can become friendships of depth that bring about changes both in the mentor and in the mentee.

The basic need for safety among Millennials can have an adverse effect on their maturation. The term *concept creep* refers to a process where the definition of a term is made broader. Haidt proposes that the word safety has been the victim of concept creep. He writes, "the meaning of 'safety'…expanded to include 'emotional safety.'"[81] When physical danger is equated with emotional danger, a culture can be created "that encourages people to systematically protect one another from the very experiences embedded in daily life that they need in order to become strong and healthy."[82] For Lukianoff and Haidt, the endgame is to have people who are "wiser, stronger, and anti-fragile."[83] Lukianoff and Haidt believe that as adults, people with these qualities "will thrive as they become more independent."[84] People who are "wiser, stronger, and anti-fragile" have attended to the impact of social media, engage in activities that are not always supervised, avoid falling into extreme right or left political identities, and find ways to be part of communities of discernment that tests the truth of claims and beliefs.[85] Leaders and congregations can establish a culture in which all people are in the process of growing and invite others to be part of that growth.

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[81] Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting up a Generation for Failure* (United States of America: Penguin Press, 2019), 24.
[82] Ibid., 29.
[83] Ibid., 235.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid., 265-68.

The political and economic systems of the United States can be obstacles to the maturation of Millennials. The high levels of college loans being held by Millennials limits their disposable income—thus making an impact on house ownership. For Millennials who are underemployed, covering basic living expenses is nearly impossible. The cost of healthcare coverage or lack of coverage has a significant impact. In chapter two, Rubin and Rubin present a set of social issues for Millennials to address. Including student debt, Millennials have to address the role that money plays in politics; climate change; disparity of equal rights for people of other races; religious freedom; gun reform; women's rights; LGBTQ+ rights; the blurring of lines between news and opinion; cyber security; social security and Medicare; immigration; and voting rights.[86] God's church, as part of its mission, must address issues of injustice. Many current members of congregations have had or still have their hands in programs to improve society. For conversation to be efficacious, a group of care values must be established. Rubin and Rubin propose the following values, "People should be valued over profit. Our climate and planet should be valued over corporate greed. Voters and constituents should be valued over special interests. Everyone should have access to lifesaving healthcare, without having to go broke to get it."[87] Leaders and congregations can work within their communities to offer affordable housing. Additionally, many of the Boomers in congregations may have been active in various social causes having experience that can be shared with Millennials.[88]

[86] Ibid., 31-91.
[87] Ibid., 108.
[88] Ibid.

In chapter two, the role science plays in the life of Millennials was reviewed. It was shown that some can perceive interpreting the world through science as a more mature approach than interpreting the world through faith or religion. When science is used as a social practice, science is seen as providing "a life-philosophy" that gives guidance to how people behave in the world.[89] Root expresses his hope for those for his readers. He hopes "that scientific findings like evolution, relativity, cosmic fine-tuning, and the Big Bang are not moves seeking to sweep the leg of faith." Instead, he wants people to see how "scientific perspectives open up a possibility for us to think again about God's action and how it comes to use for the sake of ministry."[90] In many ways, when it comes to allowing a conversation between science and faith, it is the established church members who must be willing to grow. This means biblical literalism must be challenged. When leaders and congregations can reflect in amazement on the outcome of the Big Bang that leads to the perfect conditions for human life, common ground can be found with those more scientific minded.[91]

Function and Form

As it is prudent to make sure the cart comes after the horse, so it is important to make sure that function precedes form in a congregation's ministry. Function is the who, the what and the why of planning. It starts with the what, why, and with whom "The

[89] Andrew Root, *Exploding Stars, Dead Dinosaurs, and Zombies: Youth Ministry in the Age of Science,* 36.
[90] Ibid., 7.
[91] Ibid., 180.

congregation wants to engage in ministry." The congregation articulates why the ministry is the right thing to do, why it is important, and why the congregation is the one to do the ministry. Once a congregation has established the function questions of who, what, and why, then the congregation can answer the form questions of how, when, and where. Too many times a congregation will start with an idea of a specific ministry without asking if that idea is relevant to those being served. For example, a congregation may announce that it wants to initiate a lecture format educational event for Millennials on Sunday mornings at 9 a.m. in the education wing of the church building. The idea is noble, a key question needs to be asked, "What do we know about Millennials that will shape the ministry we hope to perform?" What a congregation knows about Millennials, the way they gather information, their desire for equal footing in conversations, and their daily rhythms should have an impact on how to go about the ministry and when and where the ministry will happen.

In addition to seriously considering the tasks of identifying function and form, the mindset of the congregation needs to stop seeing Millennials as a problem to be solved. In ministry, outreach to Millennials is not a situation that can be solved. Gil Rendle acknowledges conditions that "cannot be solved."[92] When a congregation finds itself in that situation, they are called to step "into the unknown to learn new ways of thinking, new ways of being, and new ways of doing."[93] Ministry within the current climate

[92] Gil Rendle, *Quietly Courageous: Leading the Church in a Changing World,* 28.
[93] Ibid.

requires the willingness to abandon normal activity, to take on a challenge, and to bring curiosity to bring to the challenge.[94]

Congregations must understand their context. A context for a congregation includes its geographical location, the demographics of the area, the demographics of the membership of the congregation, and the history of the congregation. Geographical location can include a description of the area such as rural, small location, city, suburbs, or second- or third-class cities. The way that the system functions is determined by the geographical location. People walking to shops and restaurants have a different impact on a community than a place where locals are required to drive at least 30 minutes for a grocery store. Congregations should become aware of the demographics of their setting. The demographics will identify ages, race, culture, economic levels, education, and so forth of the people who live there. Demographics can determine if a congregation will even do certain kinds of ministry. If a congregation in rural Iowa decides it wants to do ministry with Aboriginal people, the congregation should ask, "Do we have Aboriginal people living in our area?" If not, that ministry may not be warranted. Demographics go beyond classifications of people, and identify the practices of the residents, such as where they get their information, do they own cars, and how do they view government. Having these details can be significantly helpful for shaping ministry plans. The demographics of the congregation are the details specifically about the members of the congregation. This information also helps shape what is possible in

[94] Jeffrey Swarr, Twitter post on April 17, 2020.

ministry. If the congregation is primary made up of members over the age of 70, then a triathlon training group may not resonate with the congregational members. Finally, the history of the congregation shapes its identity and its attractiveness to those unaffiliated. A congregation that was founded in the 1730's and still worshipping in the building that was dedicated in 1766 may find itself attractive to others. In addition, if a congregation has a strong history of social advocacy, Millennials may naturally be attracted to it. The rule of thumb is this—Know one's self and know others as ministry is shaped. There are extraordinary tools available online to explore the demographics of an area, and most judicatories keep statistics on congregations.

In striving to reach Millennials, leaders and congregations must know that building relationships should happen prior to program. The temptation for congregations is to guess what Millennials want, come up with a program, and then try to get Millennials involved. Usually the program ideas are based on what the members want to do and wanting Millennials to like the same thing. Congregations are called to build relationships with Millennials first. Most likely this will happen away from the church property. It may happen in pubs, cafes, shared workplaces, barber shops, and living rooms. Along with being away from congregational property, the relationship building will include listening to the stories of Millennials. Millennials will most likely want to hear stories from others. The engagement with Millennials as stories are told rarely includes indoctrination. The values and beliefs of a congregation will more often than not be observed as they are lived out. From trusting relationships and mutual interest in each other, a grass roots effort will offer guidance into the shape of programs. Many

times, a community need will surface the provides the opportunity to clarify a mission. For example, a start-up congregation in Durham, North Carolina is dedicated to a ministry of social justice by young professional Millennials. Early into the ministry of the congregation, a large apartment unit was found to be making residents sick due to carbon monoxide poisoning. The ministry start-up jumped at the opportunity to serve. Quickly, the identity of the mission start up solidified. Watching for the opportunity to serve is just as important as the ministry being grass roots.

A congregation that is inter-generational is important. From the research shown in chapters one and two, it was shown that Millennials have a strong, positive bond with their parents. While Millennials see themselves on the same status level as their supervisors at work, they do not fundamentally reject their older supervisors. There is not a rebellion against older generations, but rather there is an attraction. A vital congregation comprised of people in different relationships with God and God's church creates a vital environment for people to grow in faith.

There are significant challenges that Millennials are going to face in society in the years to come. Millennials are concerned about the quality of life in the present, and Millennials face significant challenges themselves when it comes to quality of life. Being able to identify areas for concern is a key part of the ministry with Millennials. The challenges include Affordable Housing, (insert Rubin list from chapter two). In ministry together, all generations can work on addressing these challenges. It is important to note that older members of a congregation are going to expect a structured ministry led by a committee or task force to conduct the ministry. Being hands-on, Millennials are

less likely to be attracted to serving on a committee. Instead, congregations would do well to offer time and task specific opportunities to serve. These opportunities are set for a specific day and time and have specific tasks to perform.

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