Generational and Intergenerational Mission

'Generations' are frequently referenced in mission and church growth strategies. From various quarters we are advised distinctively to target evangelism, worship, preaching and teaching at Boomers, X-ers, Millennials, and now, 'Gen-Z' or 'i-Gen'. These terms have some cultural significance, but too often those who apply them in a Christian context fail to subject them to adequate biblical and theological interpretation. This seminar will build on 15 years of research and publication to offer a fresh perspective on generations, church and mission.

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0. Introduction: Defining the Issues

0.1 The 'generation gap problem' and 'intergenerational antipathy'

- Donald McGavran & Charles Kraft (USA)
- 1967 as key in defining antipathy:
    - *UK Crusade* magazine: 'The Drifting Generation'
    - Jonathan Green – coinage of 'generation gap'

0.2 The church's 'deficit of youth' since the '60s: demographic trends and attempted solutions

- Decline in UK under-20s church attendance (1960 – c.4 million; 1980 – c.2 million; 2020 – 0.2 million?). Cf. majority of conversions before 17.
- Only 3% of Britons aged 18-24 now Anglican; 95% of English & Welsh children/youth not in church
- Attempted remedies:
    - *Mission-Shaped Church* (2004) – Fresh Expressions
    - Renewal and Reform (2015) – Resource Churches
    - Resourcing Ministerial Education (2016) – Incentivizing ordinands under 30
    - 95 Campaign (Scripture Union)

0.3 The need for theological reflection amidst the crisis

- Secular generational thinking in relation to biblical definitions of 'generation'
- Sociological and biblical understandings of youth and age
- Generational stratification v. intergenerational synergy

- Recognising the 'crisis of youth' while avoiding ageism (cf. Butler 1987)

1. **Generational segmentation in recent cultural and missional discourse, compared to generational discourse in the Bible**

    1.1 Generations in recent cultural and missional discourse

    - Popular segmentation:

        o Builders (c.1925-1945)
        o Boomers (c.1946-1963)
        o Xers (c.1964-1981)
        o Millennials (c.1982-2001)
        o Generation Z (c.2002-Present)

    - The explosion of Christian writing on 'generational' church and mission since the early 1990s:

        Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation,* London/New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1993; George Barna, *Baby Busters: The Disillusioned Generation*, Chicago: Northfield, 1994; William Mahedy & Janet Bernardi, *A Generation Alone: Xers Making a Place in the World*, Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity, 1994; Mark DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry: Reaching the Been-There, Done-That Generation,* Downers Grove, Ill., 1994; George Barna, *Generation Next: What You Need to Know About Today's Youth*, Ventura: Regal Books, 1995; Kevin Ford, *Jesus for a New Generation*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1996; Tim Celek & Dieter Zander, *Inside the Soul of New Generation,* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996; Jimmy Long, *Generating Hope*, Downers Grove: Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1997; Mike Starkey, *God, Sex and Generation X* , London: Triangle, 1997; Tom Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spirituality of Generation X*, San Fransisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998; Todd Hahn, & David Verhaagen, *Gen Xers After God*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998; Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion*, Princeton, NJ: Prineton University Press, 1999; Wendy Murray Zoba, *Generation 2K: What Parents and Others Need to Know About the Millennials*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999; Dawson McAllister, *Saving the Millennial Generation*, Eugene, Or.: Authentic Publishing, 1999; Steve Rabey, *In Search of Authentic Faith: How Emerging Generations are Transforming the Church* Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2001; Gordon Lynch, *After Religion: Generation X and the Search for Meaning*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2002; Gary McIntosh, *One Church: Four Generations: Understanding and Reaching All Ages in Your Church,* Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002; Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations,* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003; Sarah Savage, Sylvia Collins-Mayo, Bob Mayo & Graham Cray, *Making Sense of Generation Y: The World View of 15-25- Year-Olds,* London: Church House, 2006; Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus But Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007; Roger Standing, *Re-emerging Church: Strategies for Reaching a Returning Generation*, London: BRF, 2008; Frog and Amy Orr-Ewing, *Millennials: Reaching and Releasing the Rising Generation,* London: Latimer Minster, 2010; Thom & Jess Rainer, *The Millennials: Connecting to America's Largest Generation*, B&H Publishing, 2011; Mark Perry, *Kingdom Churches: New Strategies for a Revival Generation*, Arroyo Grande, Ca.: Cameo, 2013; Lee Kircher & Andy Stanley, *For a New Generation: A Practical Guide for Revitalizing Your Church,* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016; Jim & Judy Raymo, *Millennials and Mission: A Generation Faces a Global Challenge,* Pasadena, CA, 2016; Seth Nelson, *The Church Unknown: reflections of a Millennial Pastor,* Ronan MT: Nelson, 2016; James Emery White, *Meet Generation Z: Understanding and Reaching the New Post-Christian World.* Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017. Also: Jean M. Twenge, *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy – and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood.* New York: Ataria, 2017, pp.119-142.

    - Theological deficits in Christian applications of generational sub-divisions:

        o Lack of biblical-hermeneutical scrutiny (e.g. McIntosh 2002)
        o Over-reliance on Neil Howe & William Strauss' model of 'generational cycles' (1991) – e.g. Rabey, Beaudoin

      o   Heedlessness of economic, commercial and political motivations in generational analysis (cf. Ann Fishman; Graeme Codrington; Eugene Gilbert's 1950s marketing theories – the 'teen consumer' as a $10b target market (*Life* magazine, 31/8/59)

1.2 Generational definition in the Bible

1.2.1 Kinship

- *dohr; genea*
- Generational interval

1.2.2 Age

- Birth/date of birth (Ex. 28:1; Matt. 1:18)
- Passage of years: all alive at particular time (Ex. 1:6; Matt. 11:16; Mk. 8:12)
- Cf. Sixties Generation/Millennials

1.2.3 Socio-historical events

- Epochal definition – qualitatively-defined 'mood', 'ethos', or 'spirit' (Isa. 51:9; Ex. 3:15)
- Jesus' depictions of faithless and sinful generation (Matt. 12:39; Mk. 8:38)
- Cf. Wilhelm Pinder – *Zeitgeist*
- Importance of fall of temple in Gospels: 'This generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place' (Mark 13:30 & par.)
- Cf. Schuman & Scott (1989) – 'Post-War'/Baby Boom/Vietnam Generation

1.2.4 Worldview

- Kant, Hegel, von Humboldt – *Weltanschauung*
- Naugle – 'underlying principle'/'concept of life' in 'cosmic perspective'
- NT shift from mission for House of Israel to mission for 'all nations'
- Jesus condemnation of 'unbelieving' (Mk. 9:19), 'perverse' (Matt. 17:17), 'adulterous' (Mk. 8:38) and 'evil' (Matt. 12:39) generation
- Peter – 'crooked' generation; Paul – 'corrupt' generation (Phil. 2:15)
- Cf. 'Generation X'; 'Chemical Generation'

2. Youth and age in the people and mission of God

2.1 Biblical representations of youth and age

- Long life as blessed (Ps 92:12-14; Isa. 65:20; 2 Cor. 4:16)
- Jacob, Barzillai, Simeon, Anna
- Youth as to be celebrated and fulfilled (Prov. 1:4; Zec. 9:16-17; Tit. 2:6)
- Intergenerational synergy as defining a healthy nation (Deut. 28:50)
- Intergenerational synergy as defining a healthy church (Hebrews 5:11-14)

- Intergenerational succession in ministry: Timothy (1 Tim. 4:14)

2.2 Karl Mannheim ([1928] 1952): 'youth generations' as drivers of cultural change

2.3 Mannheim and intergenerational co-operation as 'compensating factor' (e.g. through education and mentoring)

3. Intergenerational and generationally-specific models: ecclesial and missional implications

3.1 Generationally-based mission and the Homogeneous Unit Principle (HUP): McGavran, Kraft, Glasser and Wagner (early 1970s)

3.2 Critique of the HUP: analogies of classism and racism (Abraham 1989, Ashton, 1986); differences between White and BAME Millennial evangelicals (2016 Evangelical Alliance survey)

Pitfalls of generalisation

- 35% of voters 18-24 voted for Donald Trump (cf. 38% of under-30s for Nixon, 1968)
- Adam Conover, *Adam Ruins Everything*: 'Millennials Don't Exist'

3.3 Rebalancing in recent intergenerational models:

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3.4 Practical Suggestions for Intergenerational Ministry

- Mission Statements - Leadership teams - Church committees - All-age worship - Feasts & celebrations - Cf. Deut 29:10-12; Josh 8:34-35; 2 Chron 20:13 - Community service - Evangelism - Worship bands	- Worship planning - Cross-era music - Scripture reading - Drama and dance - Communion servers - Processions & pilgrimages - Worship stations - Prayer-leading - Testimony

3.5 Generationally-based church and mission as a 'penultimate dynamic' (Wagner, 1998)

3.6 Intergenerational church and mission as signs of final redemption

4. Conclusion

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