

# **Hope Springs**

## **Empowering the Next Generation**

### **Young Adults and Church**



"The Spirit Of The New Moon", Arthur Loureiro, 1888, Brisbane Art Gallery

### **A Sabbatical Report**

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# Preface

Between 1989 and 2010 my work life<sup>1</sup> involved engaging in long dialogues with groups of young people about God, meaning and faith. I did this up to five times a day, week in week out for twenty years. Consequently I have an instinctive feel for the way this generation thought about these things as teenagers. I participated in their search for meaning and I care deeply for that search in this generation. This cohort is now made up of young adults. They are largely missing from our churches. What are they thinking about God, meaning and faith? And how can the older generation of church going Christians engage with them in life giving ways?

I was readying myself for study leave and found myself in Brisbane for a meeting and, in a down moment, wandering the art gallery. The painting that captured me was Arthur Loureiro's "The Spirit Of The New Moon". It draws attention to the cycle of death and rebirth in the natural world as the old gives way to the new. So it is with human generations. Indeed there is a prayer in a liturgy often used at funerals that begins with the words 'Dear God, before whom generations rise and fall... but how does one generation of Christians give way to the next in a useful, helpful and functional way? How does a generation rise and fall so as to graciously empower the next generation?

In contemplating this question I began by looking at what the scriptures have to say. After pondering a number of relevant scriptures I settled on the book of Deuteronomy. It is a book which delves deeply into passing faith down through the generations. It has timeless lessons for us to apply to the generations of today. I have used the word generativity to capture this idea. It is a word used by Erickson to describe the way those in midlife can positively care for and empower younger generations.<sup>2</sup> In this paper I use generativity to mean the nurture and guiding of younger people so as to contribute to the faith journey of the next generation. I have also focused my attention on two recent publications by New Zealand writers within the Presbyterian context, Losing My Religion –Changing Patterns on Believing and Belonging in

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<sup>1</sup> Chaplain at St Andrew's College, Christchurch NZ, a large coeducational independent Presbyterian school catering for young people from pre-school to year 13 (3-18 year olds).

<sup>2</sup> Erik Erikson was a German-born American developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst known for his theory on psychosocial development of human beings.

Secular Western Societies by Kevin Ward<sup>3</sup> and Embedded Faith – the Faith Journeys of Young Adults within Church Communities by Carlton Johnstone<sup>4</sup>. These books in turn led me to a myriad of other resources on the topic into which I dipped when and where the connections were relevant to my study. Of these, two particularly caught my attention for the depth and durability of analysis provided; Daniele Hervieu-Leger’s Religion as a Chain of Memory<sup>5</sup> and Walter Brueggemann’s Texts Under Negotiation – the Bible and Postmodern Imagination.<sup>6</sup> Finally I reflected on how my findings translated into the Hope Presbyterian context by way of a case study. Particularly helpful to this part of the process were the results of a focus group survey of young adults from Hope (see appendix A). So this work began with a search of scripture that settled on a study of lessons in generativity in Deuteronomy. It then branched out into a solid dose of sociology and with a pinch of theology tossed in. It was then tested against the Hope Presbyterian context. This is an eclectic disciplinary mix, but hopefully it bears some fruit in understanding how the church can best connect with young adults in today’s world.

Hamish Galloway

Easter Term 2015

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<sup>3</sup> Wipf and Stock (2013)

<sup>4</sup> Wipf and Stock (2013)

<sup>5</sup> Rutgers University Press (2000)

<sup>6</sup> Fortress Press (1993)

# **Chapter One**

## **Generating Faith**

### **The Generativity of Deuteronomy<sup>7</sup>**

It is the first day of the eleventh month of the fortieth year of the wandering in the desert following the deliverance from slavery in Egypt. Nearly forty years earlier the people entered into the covenant at Horeb. Now Israel is camped on the great plains of Moab, able to see across the Jordan River into the Promised Land. Moses begins a long address that passionately preaches the promise. This sermon is about covenant renewal aimed at embedding the principles of the law into the hearts and lives of a new generation. Here is timeless truth for ‘all Israel’ (1:1) yet there are three distinct generations present: the generation that came out of Egypt (Exodus Generation), those who only knew the wandering time (Desert Generation)<sup>8</sup> and those who would go into the Promised Land (Promised Land Generation – see Deuteronomy 1:39). Are there lessons for the generations of today in the application by Moses of the timeless principles of the Covenant to each of these three generations? I have read and pondered Deuteronomy with this in mind. I have used the teaching on generativity in Deuteronomy as a framework for the task of empowering the faith journey of young adults in today’s world.

### **Generativity**

In this paper I use generativity to mean the nurture and guiding of younger people so as to contribute to the faith journey of the next generation. The book of Deuteronomy is full of it. Moses is deeply motivated by a desire to see the Promised Land Generation know God and experience his blessings. Here is Moses, in old age, deeply appreciative of the life giving law of Yahweh and passionate about passing this on to the new generation. He has seen so many people from the Exodus and Desert Generations get it wrong. He is most concerned to see that this new generation does not repeat the mistakes.

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<sup>7</sup> I am aware of the academic debate about the authorship and timing of the writing of Deuteronomy. That is not my concern here. I treat the narrative at face value, Moses speaking to his people as they are about to go into the land. It is a powerful narrative that speaks wisdom to our generations, as it has for many generations before us.

He appreciates the importance of getting it right from an early age. In this respect Deuteronomy mirrors the teaching of Ecclesiastes 12:1

*‘Remember your Creator in the days of your youth’*

This passage is part of a longer passage (Ecclesiastes 11:9-12:7) that is more than just sterile wisdom teaching from an ivory tower. In the words of the passage you can hear echoes of a lovely interaction between two generations, one the voice of a grandparent, the other the ear of a grandchild. In this respect there is an interesting little verse tucked away in 1 Corinthians 4:

*<sup>14</sup> I am not writing about these things to make you ashamed, but to warn and counsel you as beloved children. <sup>15</sup> For although you may have ten thousand others to teach you about Christ, remember that you have only me as your father.*

At one level Paul talks to them as their spiritual father, the one who brought them to faith. But there is more here – ‘others to teach you’ is *paidagōgos* in the Greek, meaning a guardian. These guardians were engaged as slaves by rich families to look out for their children. Paid, for example, to escort the children to school and ensure their attendance and safety. To pick up the imagery of John 10, Paul here is the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep in comparison with these guardians who were the hired help. These seemingly obscure verses in 1 Corinthians are an inspiration for us to care for our spiritual children as a father for a child, or as in the case of Ecclesiastes a grandfather for a grandchild, or in the case of Moses, an elder statesman to a promising new generation of leaders. It speaks to us of the need to come with the gentle but passionate love of an older generation who know a bit about life and want the younger generation to get the best out of it.

### **Speaking to the youth culture**

One of the key issues is: How does the older generation capture the attention, interest and imagination of younger generations? Do they really want to listen to old people telling them what to do? Young adults do have a strong sense of independence. And I have read that there is a high mortality rate among young men due in great part to a bullet-proof mentality, a belief in their invincibility! It leads to all sorts of hedonistic risk-taking without too much thought of the consequences. I heard of a young man fresh out of university who went to



Europe for an overseas experience that included a sowing of the wild oats before settling back in New Zealand to a job, a wife and a family. Upon his return he found his future dominated by the news that through casual sexual adventures he had contracted AIDS. It is into this kind of culture the writer of Ecclesiastes speaks. Times have not changed. It was the culture then and it is ours today.

To this culture Ecclesiastes speaks truth about the brevity of life. As one commentator puts it, we should live ‘in view not only of death but also the slow and steady intrusion of death into life’.<sup>9</sup> W.H. Auden’s poetic take on it was: ‘death is the sound of distant thunder at a picnic.’ This is graphically described in Ecclesiastes 12 with a variety of analogies alluded to, including the aging body, a crumbling house, an approaching thunder storm, a passing funeral and possibly even the eschatological destruction of the cosmos!

As one approaching sixty, the image of the aging body speaks to me! For many years now our family has gathered with friends on Boxing Day – a day that has included much competitive sporting activity. There was a day when I mixed it with the best of the youngsters. At last year’s event we played cricket. The ball was hit close to where I was fielding. My mind said run, dive and catch! My body stumbled, fell and did not even reach the ball! The youngsters looked on with a sort of kindness that masked their pity. I love the way the Living Bible brings out this aging of the human body in its paraphrase of the text:

*<sup>2</sup> It will be too late then to try to remember him when the sun and light and moon and stars are dim to your old eyes, and there is no silver lining left among your clouds. <sup>3</sup> For there will come a time when your limbs will tremble with age, your strong legs will become weak, and your teeth will be too few to do their work, and there will be blindness too. <sup>4</sup> Then let your lips be tightly closed while eating when your teeth are gone! And you will waken at dawn with the first note of the birds; but you yourself will be deaf and tuneless, with quavering voice. <sup>5</sup> You will be afraid of heights and of falling—a white-haired, withered old man, dragging himself along: without sexual desire, standing at death’s door, and nearing his everlasting home as the mourners go along the streets.*

It is a passage that brings home the pedagogical power of the inevitable gravity of death for all of us, yet laced with the lovely twinkling humour of a self-deprecating grandfatherly figure.

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<sup>9</sup> William R Brown, *Ecclesiastes*, John Knox Press (2000)

The voice of Moses in Deuteronomy and Ecclesiastes carry a sense of urgency for the task of nurturing the younger generation at this vulnerable and vital time of their lives. The choices they make at this time of their lives will largely determine their future happiness and wholeness.

Certainly the research supports this sense of urgency. Barna research suggests that if people do not make a commitment to Christ by the age of 14, the likelihood of them doing so is slim.<sup>10</sup> And a recent book by clinical psychologist Meg Jay<sup>11</sup> talks about the vital importance of the twentysomething years. The title of the book speaks for itself: The Defining Decade- Why Your Twenties Matter – And How To Make the Most of Them. Drawing on her work with people in this age group and recent discoveries in brain science, she shows how work, relationships, personality, social networks, identity, and even the brain can change more during this decade than at any other time in adulthood if this time is used well.

The plea from this grandparental voice is to ‘get faith you young’uns’:

*... let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth.*

*Follow the ways of your heart*

*and whatever your eyes see ... (11:9)*

At first reading it seems to be handing hedonistic licence to our young bucks. But that would be a wrong reading. Already in Ecclesiastes 2 the writer has already given a compelling description of the shallowness of wine, sex, money, fame, power and possessions – to seek happiness in such things is akin to chasing after the wind. It is this elusive gain, so tempting yet so hollow, that one must avoid.

Rather this is a call to embrace what is good and wholesome in life, for life is very good. In the text the gift of life is compared to a silver thread and a gold bowl (12:6). This is the goodness and joy in life that flows from seeking God and living the life God created us for. (note the allusion to creation in the use of light in 12:2).

This passage is saying to this younger generation ‘now is the time to embrace God my young friends, any delay is time wasted!’ It is the catch cry of the great Robin Williams movie Dead

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<sup>10</sup> Research referred to in Ward’s Losing Our Religion 96

<sup>11</sup> (2013)

Poets Society – Carpe Diem! Seize the day! The tragedy is that the young man at the centre of this movie's plot had a father who had him tied to a different track! Rather than let the young man raise his sail to the wind of the spirit, figuratively speaking, his father tied him down to a track that was in the path of an oncoming train. And the result was death not life.

The influential developmental psychologist Erik Erikson popularised the notion of generativity as a good way of being in middle age. And he promoted the value of doing each stage of life well for the stages to come. He believed that generativity in middle age leads to fulfilment in old age, whereas the person who becomes self-centred at this time of life stagnates. Likewise the writer of Ecclesiastes speaks with conviction, concern and care to his young friends – live life in the God given fullness and joy that will in turn allow you to grow old graciously without regret or resentment.

Danielle Heryvieu-Leger has some good turns of phrase to talk about this kind of generativity. She refers to a 'lineage of belief' and 're-productiveness' springing from sharing of memories 'which give meaning to the present and contain the future'.<sup>12</sup>

The consistent message from Deuteronomy, Ecclesiastes, science and sociology is that choices made in youth are very important. The urgent task of the older generation is to take that seriously and nurture good decision-making in our younger generations with kindness, wisdom and effectiveness.

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<sup>12</sup> 125

## **Chapter Two**

### **Three successive distinctive generations**

#### **Gen Ex, Desert Wanderers, Promise Generation**

Gen Exodus had an interesting life! They started as slaves under an increasingly oppressive Pharaoh in Egypt. They experienced the rise of an inspirational leader who brought them hope! They took the bold step of leaving Egypt and saw many great things done by the hand of God during the escape into the desert. Remembering what they had seen and passing on the story to their children and their children's children is a constant theme of Deuteronomy. But they were also a fickle lot, frustrated by delay and vacillating in their keeping of the covenant. There were times of regret when they wanted to go back to Egypt. In the end they, and the great leader of this generation, Moses, are prevented from going into the Promised Land because of disobedience (1:35-37; 31:2; Numbers 20).

Gen Desert were those born after the crossing of the Red Sea. They only knew the desert wandering life. They too were a fickle generation, vacillating between keeping the covenant and being sucked in by false gods. And it was a tough life in a harsh environment and with more than a few battles to fight. By the thirty eighth year all their fighting men were dead (2:14-16).

Then there was the generation who were to go into the Promised Land – the preaching of Moses in Deuteronomy is forward-looking in focus, speaking words of hope and guidance to this generation, building on the way God worked with the Exodus Generation and the lessons learnt by the Desert Generation. Shaping this generation so that they could move into the Promised Land well is a key, driving and oft repeated theme of Deuteronomy:

*<sup>13</sup> Their children, who do not know this law, must hear it and learn to fear the LORD your God as long as you live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess. (31:13)*

#### **Boomers, Gen Y and Millennials**

Over the last 100 years the Western World has also seen distinctive generations emerge. Each has been shaped by their sociological context and display distinctive trends that have impacted on the way they relate to church. Moreover, there has been a cumulative effect on each generation. There are trends in one generation that have impacted on the next in terms of faith and church. The three generations of particular interest to this study are the Baby Boomers, Gen X and the Millennials. There are dangers in placing too much weight on generational characteristics – there are other factors at play in shaping connection with faith and church and there are problems associated with stereotyping.<sup>13</sup> However, picking up on trends that emerge in generations and pondering the impact of these trends on faith and church is informative and it is that which I seek to do.

### **The Boomers**

The Baby Boomers were born between the end of World War 2 and 1963. As of today they are aged between 52-67. They are the parents and grandparents of our present cohort of young adults. Their parent's generation (The 'builders' or 'silent generation') were, and still are, reasonably well connected with church. In contrast, the boomers walked away in huge numbers. That has impacted hugely on the church engagement of their children and grandchildren. At the beginning of the Boomer generation in 1960 the average weekly attendance at Presbyterian worship in New Zealand was 119,000. By 2005 it had dropped to 34,000.<sup>14</sup> And there has been a decreasing involvement in church down through the generations. In the USA the generation who are parents of the Baby Boomers make up 10% of the population and 60% of the church population. Boomers are 29% of the population and 40% are affiliated with church. Gen X are 28% of the population and 18% of the church and the Millennials 21% of the population and only 12% of the church. Analysis of the most recent surveying carried out in the USA in 2014 has just become available. It shows an accelerating trend towards disaffiliation in the USA driven in part by the behaviour of the Millennials:

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<sup>13</sup> Carlton Johnstone gives a good perspective on the issues here and calls for caution – 'being born in a similar period does not guarantee a common life experience or worldview' - see Chapter 1 of Embedded Faith.

For great perspective on this watch the video *Lost Generation*: <http://350orbust.com/2010/01/15/i-refuse-to-believe-i-am-part-of-a-lost-generation/>

<sup>14</sup> quoted in Ward, Losing Your Religion 9

*‘One of the most important factors in the declining share of Christians and the growth of the “nones” is generational replacement. As the Millennial generation enters adulthood, its members display much lower levels of religious affiliation, including less connection with Christian churches, than older generations’<sup>15</sup>*

The 2007 Church and Life Survey in New Zealand found similar trends in this country.<sup>16</sup> This age profile in the church community is frightening. It will almost certainly exaggerate and accelerate the trend of decline – a big section of the church-going population will die in the next 10 years.

What happened with the Baby Boomers and church reflected wider trends in society at this time. Kevin Ward shows how this movement towards non-affiliation is reflected in other areas of community life in New Zealand over this period (for example membership of sporting organisations). At the National Portrait Gallery in London there is an introductory note to the artwork of the post-60’s period that reads:

*‘By the 1960’s the pace of social, political and artist change gathered momentum. There was new prosperity and increasing consumerism. In the visual arts traditional values were challenged. The growing emphasis was on the individual’s freedom of expression and this led to a succession of artistic movements.’*

For the church and for society there were many sociological factors at play in this shift, including the development of an anti-establishment attitude (post the Vietnam War), changing moral perspectives around relationships, sex and marriage which resulted in escalating divorce rates between 1960 and 1980 (post the pill) and a period of wealth and materialistic prosperity which included an increasing number of women joining the workforce to create double-income families. Retired minister Alistair Taylor was very involved with the Presbyterian Church in New Zealand through these years and has some perceptive observations on why things went this way:

*‘Some baby boomers left the church during times of controversy, for example the 1981 Springbok tour, styles of worship under charismatic ministers and the gay leadership debate.*

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<sup>15</sup> America’s Changing Religious Landscape - Christians Decline Sharply as Share of Population; Unaffiliated and Other Faiths Continue to Grow, Pew Research Center (May 2015)

<sup>16</sup> Ward 95

*The Geering controversy had a big impact on the Baby Boomers. How strong the baby boomers personal faith was beyond the Bible Class movement leaves me wondering whether it is an 'affiliative' type of faith without too much depth or personal experience of God. I think it was strongly influenced by our parent's generation who had experienced the 1930's depression and the loss of so many lives in the war. The comparative affluence of the 1950 – 1965 period meant Baby Boomers became quite materialistic. I think life style, double income couples, car mobility, Sunday trading and sport have all had a significant impact on the church's place in society.'*

Interestingly however, while this generation has left church in great numbers, they have not stopped believing in God.<sup>17</sup> Surveys of belief throughout the Western World have shown spiritual belief amongst Boomers has been maintained or even increased. Ward talks about this in terms of a trend towards belief without belonging. Many still believe but most do not relate to the church as a place to nurture that belief. Some Christian leaders think this generation is a good target-market for the church as they come to retirement age. These people do have historic links with the church going back to childhood. Retirement is a transition that could be targeted by the church as a time to return for this generation. There are some churches experiencing success with this.<sup>18</sup>

## **Gen X**

Gen X is generally regarded as those born in the 1960's and 70's (there is some variation in the research but this is a good guide). That means they are presently aged between 35 and 50. The youngest of this group are still just in the young adult category, the older ones are parents of Millennials. This generation has been stereotyped as having characteristics such as a lack of direction and cynicism. They have been influenced by a wide range of cultural and political shifts, perhaps most notably the development of various technologies which led to the alternative label, the MTV Generation. Diane Spiegel identifies other main societal factors such as the breakdown in marriage of their parent's generation and the increasing incidence of mothers returning to work. Many grew up with working solo mothers and came home from school to an empty house, hence their alternative label 'the latch-key generation'. She identifies the defining characteristics of this generation as: sceptical of others, depend on themselves, suspicious of authority, free-agents mind-set, priority on family.

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<sup>17</sup> Alan Jamieson deals with this well in *A Churchless Faith*, Dove (2000)

<sup>18</sup> St Enoch's Presbyterian Church in Tauranga and Opawa Methodist in Christchurch are two examples.

However, there is evidence that this generation is growing up well. In 2011 The Generation X Report (based on annual surveys used in a longitudinal study of today's adults) found Gen Xers to be highly educated, active, balanced, happy and family-oriented. The study contradicted the materialistic, slacker, disenfranchised stereotype associated with them as the youth of the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>19</sup>

When it comes to religion, clearly this generation is more likely to be brought up without any affiliation. However, there is also research that suggests that when Gen Xers do have religious affiliation, they are more committed to it and are less likely to disaffiliate compared to Boomers.<sup>20</sup> But there would seem to be a clash of culture between the way most church is done and this generation. One commentator talks about the rigid and traditional culture of church versus the innovative and progressive culture of Gen X, while another talks about the church being out of touch with Gen X because of its droll music, antediluvian technology, retrograde social teaching and hostile or indifferent attitudes to popular culture.<sup>21</sup>

## **Millennials**

Born in the 1980's and 1990's , Millennials (also known as Gen Y), are presently aged between 15 and 35. They make up the bulk of the young adults this study is interested in. A key defining characteristic is that they are of the digital age. They grew up with the technological revolution as a given and natural part of their world. Whereas previous generations have had to get their heads around this stuff, it is a natural extension of being for this generation. Promotional material for the book Grown Up Digital: How the Net Generation Is Changing Your World by Don Tapscott (2008) puts it this way:

*'Chances are you know a person between the ages of 11 and 30. You've seen them doing five things at once: texting friends, downloading music, uploading videos, watching a movie on a two-inch screen, and doing who-knows-what on Facebook or MySpace. They're the first*

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<sup>19</sup> Miller, Jon "The Generation X Report: Active, Balanced, and Happy: These Young Americans are not Bowling Alone", Longitudinal Study of American Youth – University Of Michigan (Fall 2011).

<sup>20</sup> Schwadel, Philip, The Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, University of Nebraska-Lincoln (August 2010)

<sup>21</sup> Miller and Miller, Gen X Religion and Beaudoin, Virtual Faith quoted by Johnstone in Embedded Faith, 4



*generation to have literally grown up digital and they're part of a global cultural phenomenon that's here to stay.'*<sup>22</sup>

Grown Up Digital was inspired by a \$4 million private research study which surveyed more than 11,000 young people. Tapscott discovered a remarkably bright community which has developed revolutionary new ways of thinking, interacting, working, and socializing via digital resources.

There is evidence of a strong and increasing sense of self-entitlement through the generations. Jean Twenge, the author of the 2006 book Generation Me, considers Millennials, along with younger members of Generation X, to be part of what she calls "Generation Me". Twenge attributes Millennials with the traits of confidence and tolerance, but also identifies a sense of entitlement and narcissism. This was based on personality surveys that showed increasing narcissism among Millennials compared to preceding generations when they were teens and in their twenties.<sup>23</sup> Some see this as the aftereffects of 'helicopter' parenting that has characterized their upbringing.<sup>24</sup> These trends were hugely evident to me in my work at St Andrew's College. Parents were increasingly involved with and protective of their children's 'rights'.

However, more recent research has questioned Twenge's interpretation of Millennials. Jeffrey Arnett is advocating for a new phase of development for Millennials called 'emerging adulthood'. It is helpful in explaining some of the behavioral trends in this generation that Twenge and others label as selfish. In an article wonderfully titled Oh Grow Up! Generational Grumbling and the New Life Stage of Emerging Adulthood, Arnett traces the way the period beyond high school has dramatically changed over time. Millennials are transitioning to stable work, marriage and parenting much later than previous generations. He argues that instead of going from adolescence to young adulthood there is a new and normative life stage from late teens until mid-20's which he calls emerging adulthood. He believes that many of the negative views associated with the Millennials are based on a lack of understanding of this newly emerged life stage:

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<sup>23</sup> Twenge, Jean M, Generation me: Why today's young Americans are more confident, assertive, entitled—and more miserable than ever before, Free Press (2007).

<sup>24</sup> Henig, Robin and Samantha, Twentysomething: Why Do Young Adults Seem Stuck?, Penguin (2012)

*‘... the later entrance into adult roles by today’s emerging adults is misinterpreted by older adults as selfishness, the identity explorations of emerging adulthood are misinterpreted as widespread suffering, the search by emerging adults for identity based work leads older adults to see them as slackers uninterested in “real” work, and their high hopes for their lives are misinterpreted by others as grandiosity’<sup>25</sup>*

Arnott’s view seems very credible and if so, adds significantly to the nature and scale of transitions that take place in young adulthood. The church needs to be aware of and attend to these transitions if it is to connect with this generation.

In other research released in 2014, the Pew Research Centre talks about how Millennials in adulthood tend to be detached from institutions and yet well-networked with friends. The report also says Millennials are somewhat more upbeat than older adults about the future.<sup>26</sup>

From what I have read and observed there are a number of social, political and spiritual trends that have impacted on the Millennials. If the Baby Boomers were shaped by the Vietnam War, the pill and increasing wealth, Gen Y have been shaped by social and political impact of 9/11, the consequent upheaval in the Middle East and the related terrorist activity that has pitted Islam against Christianity. Ethically and relationally they have been molded by the break down in the marriages of their parent’s and grandparent’s generations. This has resulted in a loss of confidence in marriage and a tendency towards delaying or discarding the institution of marriage. Living together before marriage has become the norm. They have also been influenced by a vigorous and persistent gay rights movement that has developed a tolerance for and acceptance of gay relationships in this generation. Another major shaping factor has been the looming threat associated with Climate Change; the people of this generation are big Green voters. And then there are factors such as the growing gap between rich and poor at both national and international levels and the rise of the digital age as discussed above. These issues loom large for these generations and signal to the church the need for attention. The church needs to address consistently and in depth matters such as how to relate to Islam, Christian ethics and relationships, creation care, stewardship and economic justice, and living as a good digital citizen.

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<sup>25</sup> Perspectives on Psychological Science 5(1) 89-92 (2010)

<sup>26</sup> Millennials in Adulthood". Pew Research Center’s Social & Demographic Trends Project, (7 March 2014)

Running alongside all this has been the well-documented transition from modernism to post-modernism. This transition emerged in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century as a critique of and reaction against aspects of modernism. Australian sociologist of religion, Adam Possamai, documents well the crisis in Modernity that led to Post-modernism.<sup>27</sup> By the 1960's Modernity had reached a crisis. It had not delivered the kind of human progress dreamed of in its inception two centuries earlier. It's much-vaunted power of reason had seen two horrific world wars, genocides and death camps, the great depression, Hiroshima, oppressive and totalitarian fascist and communist regimes, a widening gap between rich and poor, frightening ecological deterioration and the Vietnam War was the final straw. Thus emerged a post-modern way of thinking where there was more emphasis on feelings, emotions, intuition, creativity, imagination and fantasy.<sup>28</sup> Young adults have grown up in the midst of this transition and their thinking has been deeply impacted by the post-modern perspective. So what is this perspective, especially as it relates to Christianity? Brueggemann in Texts Under Negotiation – the Bible and Postmodern Imagination talks about postmodernism as a place where the old orthodoxies and the more recent positivisms<sup>29</sup> do not hold. He goes on to say that post-modernity has no grand story to which all assent. We are left only with quite local stories. He sees this as a decisive turn in how we 'know'. In place of objective certitude and settled hegemony, mastery and control we have the following characteristics:

Our knowing is inherently contextual – the knower helps constitute what is known and the socioeconomic-political reality of the knower is decisive for knowledge.

Contexts are quite local – the so called teaching of the universal Church of Rome or Geneva is actually, if the truth be known, 'quite local'.

Accordingly knowledge is inherently pluralistic – 'a cacophony of claims, each which rings true to its advocates.'

This rings true in my experience at St Andrews. Through the 1990's into the 2000's, I witnessed a quite remarkable rise in a strongly held view that if something was right to you, it was truth. The right for quite different points of view to co-exist as 'truth' became something these young people of a post-modern age would fight for with a passion. When I challenged a statement made by a student in Religious Education discussions, there would inevitably be

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<sup>27</sup> Sociology of Religion for Generations X and Y, Equinox (2009)

<sup>28</sup> 69-70

<sup>29</sup> a philosophical system that holds that every rationally justifiable assertion can be scientifically verified or is capable of logical or mathematical proof

push back from the group along the lines, ‘you can’t say that what she said isn’t true sir. If it is true for her then it is true!’ This is the generation for whom Harry Potter was a formative text. Towards the end of the last book, Harry asks Dumbledore ‘Is this real, or has this been happening inside my head?’ Dumbledore’s reply is archetypally post-modern: “Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?”<sup>30</sup>

Talk of post-modernism is not as frequent now as it was 10 years ago. Neither Johnstone nor Ward make much of it in their recent books. However, it is a relevant component in the mix of factors that have shaped the young adults of today. When I questioned Carlton Johnstone about this he responded:

*‘There are aspects of postmodernism that are now part of our culture and education system. Even the way we tell stories (non-linear) and things like tolerance for difference and acceptance of the ‘other’, ability to live with contradiction and mystery are all signs of the impact of post-modernism on young adults. But social change led by one generation moves up and down generations, either side of them. I certainly would not define a generation as post-modern or even modern. And at the same time young adults that have grown up in a more post-modern culture will embrace it more easily’*

Ward commented when asked the same question:

*‘I think a lot of the trends picked up by what was identified as postmodernity are significant. However they were lumped together into a big thing called postmodernism. That made too much of it all - as if it were a trend that was dispensing with everything modernity and the enlightenment had delivered. In reality many of those things have remained. I like the Hegelian paradigm of how history advances: thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. If modernity was the thesis, postmodernism was the antithesis - a needed critique and corrective of the modernity and the enlightenment. We are still in the midst of the mess of that. Postmodernity is not a destination; it is one of the unstable periods of change history enters periodically. There is definitely rapid change going on. The last 3 generations (boomers, X and Y) have been impacted by these changes by increasing degrees. This is not to mean that everyone in Gen Y or Gen X is postmodern, as some claim.’*

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<sup>30</sup> Chapter 33, Rowling, J.K., Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Scholastic (2007)

There is a helpful handbook about how to relate to Millennials in the American workplace.<sup>31</sup> It has findings that are transferable to the church context. Spiegel does good work on how to respond to some of the generational trends of the Millennials:

They are technological natives who have much leadership and skill to contribute in this area. ‘They come ‘prewired,’ and it’s to your advantage to tap in and find where they can contribute and connect.’<sup>32</sup> They also demonstrate a high level of global citizenship through this connectivity.

Because parents have tended to be over-involved in all their activities, they are used to being empowered and coached, mentored and connected with. Feedback has been a constant for them. They quickly respond to coaching and ongoing feedback about how to enhance performance.<sup>33</sup>

While seen as ‘entitled’ they would see themselves more as ‘deserving’. Having a voice in all things that connect to their lives is how they have been raised and socialised. Fostering high self-esteem was their parent’s guiding principle and they are used to being applauded for participation in a team and making an effort even when that did not lead to success. This is relevant to loyalty to institutions – to avoid turnover or indifference there is a need to build relationship and trust. If this happens very strong bonds can form.

They are used to working in teams with a collaborative style and permission to question rather than top-down leadership. They are the ‘why?’ generation who like to question and seek for transparency and authenticity. Consistency in actions and words is something they pay close attention to, and they will be quick to expose hypocrisy on social media. But they also tend to respect the opinion of others and that leads to a culture of inclusion and tolerance.

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<sup>31</sup> Spiegel, Diane E, The Gen Y Handbook, Applying Relationship Leadership to Engage Millennials, Select (2013)

<sup>32</sup> pxvii

<sup>33</sup> 34

Spiritually there has been some evidence of a growing openness in these generations.<sup>34</sup> Certainly, during my time at St Andrew's College I witnessed an increasing interest in spirituality, the meaning of life and God as I moved from working with Gen X to the Millennials. Interestingly, despite the strident evangelical atheism of the likes of Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris, in a university town like Cambridge I am told that church attendance is higher than the norm for the UK.

However, most recent research disputes this. A research article Generational and Time Period Differences in American Adolescents' Religious Orientation, 1966–2014 published in May 2015<sup>35</sup> looked at information gathered from 4 large national studies that tracked generational changes and trends in the USA. This confirmed the existing belief that American adolescents in the 2010's are significantly less religiously orientated on average than Boomer and Gen X predecessors of the same age. They are less likely to attend religious services and less supportive of religious organizations. But they also found that the decline extends to the importance of religion, spirituality and prayer. This also comes out in the findings of the UK research written up in The Faith of Generation Y<sup>36</sup> which found that church and faith are largely irrelevant for young people – 81% of non-church goers said they thought about God occasionally or never and when they did it only equated to mild curiosity.

There has also been a major research project in Australia called 'The Spirit of Generation Y Project.' This looked at how young people relate to religion and spirituality and how families, schools and church might best contribute to preparing young people for their future. The research took place between 2002 and 2006 and focused on young people between ages 13-24. This is the Millennial Generation and so the study highlights the belief systems and values of the present young adult generation when they were teenagers and emerging adults. The book that records the outcomes of this research is Putting Life Together – Finding from Australian Spirituality Research by Philip Hughes.<sup>37</sup> There are a numerous findings in this study that are relevant to passing on faith to the next generation. The proximity to New Zealand is significant. While there are differences New Zealand and Australian youth culture (for example, the much higher level of church schooling in Australia) there are many

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<sup>34</sup> Ward spends some time exploring a spirituality that has survived and shown increasingly levels of belief even as belonging to church has decreased

<sup>35</sup> Twenge, Jean M, Exline, Julie J, Grubbs, Joshua B., Campbell, W Keith, DOI:10.1371/journal.pone.0121454 (May 11, 2015)

<sup>36</sup> Collins-Mayo, Sylvia, Mayo, Bob, Nash, Sally, Cockworth, Christopher, Church House (2010)

<sup>37</sup> Fairfield (2007)

similarities. Certainly, the findings were very similar to what I experienced working with the same cohort in the same timeframe in NZ. The main findings of the study include the following:

The focus of life for almost all young people was on enjoyment, primarily expressed through close friendships and experiencing excitement.

Many young people did believe there is an inner-self that can be found and that life fits into some great scheme of things.

Community is important but these young people have not grown up in ready-made communities. Generally they form their own communities and social media plays a big part in this.

There was a comparatively low level of engagement with wider society other than a desire for the kind of society that would provide them with an enjoyable life. They did express a sense of what was right and wrong.

Connection with the natural environment was strong for between 50-60% of those surveyed.

Scientific knowledge formed the basis of their worldview. However, they also acknowledged a grey area of possibilities where they have choices about what to believe. Religious knowledge was seen as part of this grey area for most of them. There was a great range of ideas about God, from a personal being, to a higher power, to there being no God at all. There was considerable overlap between Christian beliefs and other beliefs like astrology and reincarnation. There was a strong sense of 'whatever one wishes to believe is fine, it is up to the individual'. Around 14% attended church weekly and a further 10% monthly. 30% said they prayed at least once a week. 25% said religion was important in how they lived their lives and around 28% said they had, at some time, made a personal commitment to God. The influence to family was evident in relation to religious faith. 60% said church services were boring, although they sometimes helped them to think about important things. Most did see churches as warm communities.

Based on these findings Hughes comes to some conclusions for the churches engagement with young adults:

There is a strong need to develop worship and forms of community that are relevant to young people. He believes this is about a more exciting style of communication using contemporary forms of language, music and content that address relevant issues.

Young people's desire for autonomy in the construction of meaning in their lives needs to be respected. Belonging before believing is an important value in engaging with this generation.

It is important for the church to both critique contemporary culture and to offer Christian alternatives in terms of self, relationships, society, the environment and relationship with God.

One of the trends that Hughes highlights is the 'pick and mix' approach to spirituality. This is a postmodern tendency that has resulted in an increasing movement away from understanding God and spirituality within a solely Christian framework. There is more a tendency to take what is needed or what is attractive from a variety of sources. With these generations the church finds itself in a spiritual market place, one voice among many. Daniele Hervieu-Lege puts it this way:

*'The drop in observation does not necessarily mean loss of belief, even if belief has tended to more and more diverge from the church's official teaching ... Religion has become like a toolbox of assorted beliefs and practices available to individuals for their selective use'*<sup>38</sup>

Another trend revealed in Hughes study was the high value placed on the pursuit of happiness primarily expressed through close friendships and experiencing excitement. This is affirmed in research with Gen Y in the UK where Collins-Mayo, Mayo and Nash found that the dominant implicit world view was the pursuit of happiness through the finding of self, connection with others and the universe.<sup>39</sup> They call this the Happy midi-narrative where:

The central goal in life is to be happy.

Happiness is eminently achievable through relationships with family and close friends.

Creative consumption of the resources of popular culture will provide it.

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<sup>38</sup> 131

<sup>39</sup> The Faith of Generation Y, Church House (2010)



I found the same trend emerging in work I did with 17 year olds at St Andrew's College. Over a 20 year period I surveyed around 100 of them each year on what they saw as the most important things in life. Pursuit of happiness through family, friends and material wealth was consistently top of the list for the vast majority. When asked where God fitted into this, I was usually greeted with a polite but firm, 'with respect sir, God is not really relevant to us.'

Clearly, the church cannot rely on being the default setting. How it positions itself in this market is essential to success in connecting with these generations. Christian spirituality and church belonging need to be seen as relevant, helpful, vital and effective.

This is all the more important with young adults because even for those who are connected to church, both their faith and their belonging to church are fragile. Johnstone talks about this in terms of faith crossroads; 'an intersection of choice between following or walking away from faith.'<sup>40</sup> Critical factors at the crossroads include: socialization pressure from a peer group where the predominant ethics are not Christian; geographic mobility (there is often disconnection with church when people move – a really good reason for churches to be very active in connecting with new arrivals in their communities); and the natural developmental stages of faith and life.

In summary, the main trends in the Millennial generation that are relevant to this study include: they are highly engaged with the digital age; they are significantly impacted in their thinking and values by postmodernism; they have pursuit of happiness through relationships and fun as their goal; they look for community experiences that value them, their growth and ideas; and they have little or no connection with church and struggle to see God or church as relevant. Those in church have fragile connections for a number of reasons.

Many periods of history have been relatively stable for long periods of time and change from one generation to the next has been slow. By contrast, the time of Deuteronomy and the present context for the Western world share distinct differences from one generation to the next. In this sense it may be that the approach of Moses in Deuteronomy provides a framework useful for making sense of passing faith down through the generations in today's world. This is what I want to explore. There are a number of relevant lessons in Deuteronomy about the effective passing of faith to the next generation that provide a framework for Church in the early twenty first Century.

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<sup>40</sup> 22ff

## **Chapter 3**

# **Deuteronomy's Framework for Generativity**

## **The content of faith**

The framework for generativity in Deuteronomy has 5 main pillars – content, renewal, teaching, vision and leadership. These pillars are very relevant to the task of generativity in our present context. I will deal with each in turn in terms of how it worked then and how it can work now.

### **Content**

The consistent and abiding message is this:

*<sup>4</sup> Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. <sup>5</sup> Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. (6:4)*

This LORD is the great 'I am' of the burning bush, the unique creator of the universe (4:32-40 outlines the case for the uniqueness of Yahweh among gods). This God is so overwhelmingly great that when people come to realisation of this truth they are drawn to a love that takes all of them, body, heart and soul. And when a person does this they have found life, life as it is meant to be, life in proper relationship to the loving creator of all life.

This is it. This is the message. In fact Moses warns the people:

*Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you.(4:2)*

And the Deuteronomic corollary is to beware of false gods that would take people away from this central life-giving truth. The young adults of today know the seductive power of false gods - powerful gods like money and sex. They are pursued relentlessly by materialism's

multi-billion dollar advertising machine. As capitalism has moved from demand to over-supply Western Society had found itself with a great reservoir of products and services to be consumed. And they are constantly conditioned by casual sexual ethics of their digital world, movies and magazines. Significantly, Gen X and the Millennials have grown up with TV and then the internet as major influences on their moral development.

The double-barrelled message of Deuteronomy to the church as it engages with this generation is: stick to the message and avoid false gods. In both cases it is a trap for the church, in going after the younger generation, to water down its message and adopt, rather than engage with and adapt to, aspects of the culture that are not of God. The challenge is to remain focused on the core message, for that is the message that brings life. I would like to deal with these two areas in turn, for they have important implications for the way the church engages.

### **The message**

Kevin Ward's research indicates it is evangelical churches with strong Biblically based teaching that have survived best in the decline in church attendance since the 1960's. And he produces evidence that it is this style of teaching that is generally doing best with the younger generations. This was also the finding of the British research conducted by the Fresh Expressions movement. It found that the existing churches that were connecting best with Millennials were from a broadly charismatic evangelical tradition. While on sabbatical in Cambridge I have taken the opportunity to attend a wonderful mix of church services. I sampled more than a dozen. The two churches full of young adults were of a charismatic evangelical style.<sup>41</sup> The liberal theological movement that was popular with the Presbyterian Church in New Zealand in the 1960's, 70's and 80's is dying out with its aged followers – it has had very few spiritual children. Why is this? A lack of evangelistic zeal maybe. Or is it that a discerning younger generation, with their dislike of hypocrisy and incongruence, sensed the disconnect between what the liberal theologians taught and what the bible says. And was the adoption of liberal theological perspectives simply a selling out to the liberal cultural trends of the age? Tough questions that have resulted in some push back from my liberal friends. But they are questions we need to engage with in terms of understanding how faith connects with particular generations. Liberal theology and traditional worship styles

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<sup>41</sup> Holy Trinity Cambridge and St Barnabas Mill Road

have tended to go hand in hand in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand for the last 60 years. It is a style of thought and practice which has failed dismally to connect with the Boomers, Gen Y and the Millennials.

Indeed Posterski's research in the Canadian context in the early 1990's found there were four consistent cornerstones in churches that bucked the trend of decline: orthodoxy, community, relevance and outreach.<sup>42</sup> Kevin Ward's research based on four churches in Christchurch, New Zealand came up with similar results showing that orthodoxy and relevance were predictors of growth.<sup>43</sup> However, his research also revealed that much of the growth experienced by these churches was transfer growth from liberal mainline churches. There are problems with that, not least being that it is both a diminishing market and not actually the ideal target-market for a missional church. It does however speak volumes about what those who are already in church tend to look for and want in a church.

The theological flavour that best connects with younger generations is an issue that is developed more thoroughly later in this paper. Basically the research and reading done in preparing this paper, points towards a theological perspective that is neither literalistic fundamentalism nor free-ranging liberalism, but rather one that holds to an infrastructure of orthodox Christian beliefs with freedom to question and explore both the big questions and the detail.

When it comes to staying true to the core message there is often a tension between truth and staying relevant. There has been some controversy about the lengths churches will go in order to be 'relevant'. The criticism is that, in doing so, the church can end up saying what the 'customer' wants to hear, thus the core message is diluted. Ward asks 'How much should the shape of the church be driven by market forces determined by social science findings?' He quotes from two hard hitting books, Selling out the Church: Dangers of Church Marketing<sup>44</sup> and Thieves in the Temple: The Christian Church and the Selling of the American Soul.<sup>45</sup>

Ward addresses this well, drawing attention to the tension between remaining relevant and engaged with the culture of the day without selling out on the core message. He looks

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<sup>42</sup> Posterski, Don, Where is a Good Church. Wood Lake (1993)

<sup>43</sup> Losing our Religion

<sup>44</sup> Philip D Kenneson, James L Street, Stanley Hauerwas (2003)

<sup>45</sup> G. Jeffrey McDonald (2010)

helpfully at the classic work by Richard Niebuhr on Christ and culture and the more recent Christ and Culture Revisited by Don Carson. He refers to the view of Hans Kung that the church needs to aim for a ‘critical correlation’ between the biblical message and the paradigm of culture. And he quotes William Reiser;

*‘[There is a need for] a deep, sympathetic adaption to, and appropriation of, a local culture in which the church finds itself, in a way that does not compromise the faith’.*

Ward himself concludes:

*‘the church lives in a relationship of some tension with whatever culture it inhabits. It needs to both incarnate the gospel into that culture but also allow the gospel to transcend and judge every culture in which it is present’<sup>46</sup>*

I like this view. The tension is a creative one. It allows the church to engage with culture with a style that is relevant at the same time as it holds to gospel truth and thus stands apart in order to bring the Godly critique of the prophetic voice. Far from selling out to the culture, this is a buying into the culture that is interactive and meaningful. This is an approach so reminiscent of the way the apostle Paul operated as he made his way around the Roman Empire, wading into the central places of the culture with the gospel message. Indeed, Johnstone calls on the church to have confidence in the gospel story in a market place of so many competing stories.<sup>47</sup>

The conclusion I draw from reflection on the combination of the Deuteronomy text, the challenge of contemporary false gods and from observation of the kind of churches that connect best with the culture of the younger generation: be sure to hold to the core biblical message. And what is this core message, this orthodoxy? Brueggemann deals with this well. While he makes the point that the postmodern perspective does not consist of settled certitudes and that in this context, theology can no longer make absolute claims in a vacuum and expect ready assent, there remains the need for a framework for belief. It is a matter of keeping the balance right between post-modern contextualization and the timeless truths of scripture. In this respect Don Carson has some helpful things to say. He draws attention to Christian criticism of Post modernism that is intent on preserving a place for ‘objective truth’

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<sup>46</sup> 173

<sup>47</sup> 18

and for the ‘possibility of knowing it.’<sup>48</sup> But he sees another way through where a ‘chastened modernism’ and a ‘softened post-modernism’ meet and find they have a lot in common. He likes Christian Smith’s ‘perspectivalist realism’:

*‘Things are not of human construction and interpretation all the way down; there does exist an ordered reality objective of human consciousness of it, which provides materials which humans then interpret to construct what for them is reality’*<sup>49</sup>

Carson is right to advocate for this creative tension between modernity and post-modernity. I like his conclusion that ‘reluctance to speak the truth is notoriously distant from the biblical writers.’<sup>50</sup> He goes on further to say:

*‘We see through a glass darkly. Nevertheless we do see. If an unchastened postmodernism extends its claims toward raw relativism and denies the possibility of knowing the big picture, it is not only idolatrous and anti-Christian but borders on the self-refuting and silly.’*<sup>51</sup>

On the other hand there is evidence that some young adults respond to the challenges of postmodernism by retreating into an extreme modernist perspective. I worshipped for six months in the context of the extremely conservative theological certainty of Sydney Anglicanism. The church was full of young adults. Clearly this is a style that attracts some young adults. And yet it is so modernist, so counter postmodernism in its thinking. I wonder if the attraction is a rebellious counter-cultural reaction. Adam Possamai muses on this trend in helpful ways. He suggests that this very conservative orthodoxy offers a solution to a world burdened by too much choice and uncertainty by providing hope and confidence by re-packaging conservative Christian modes of conduct and beliefs in a format conducive to contemporary aspirations.<sup>52</sup> This is an approach that is experiencing some success in keeping young people, although research suggests that while very conservative groups tend to retain their offspring, they do not have much success in attracting new converts. By contrast, more moderate evangelical groups not only retain their off-spring but also attract converts from

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<sup>48</sup> Christ and Culture Revisited, Eerdmans (2008) 92

<sup>49</sup> Quoted on 92

<sup>50</sup> 93

<sup>51</sup> 94

<sup>52</sup> Sociology of Religion for Generations X and Y, Equinox (2009) Chapter 8.

outside.<sup>53</sup>

I do know this: a very conservative modernist theological approach tends to close down questioning in a way that can become quite divisive in the end. It can be seen in the strong views that are held about the beginning and end of time. A strictly modernist approach to creation and end-time theologies leads to people expressing certitudes about things that have much mystery and unknown attached. The details of our beginning and our end are great to wonder upon, to muse about and to debate (with a twinkle in our eye) but disastrously divisive when we try and nail down every detail. One has only to look at the raging debates between different camps in evangelical circles over both creation and eschatology. Post-modernism offers welcome relief from such a petty desire to know everything. It gives us permission to question and to live with uncertainty.

On the day I was writing this, a theological student conducted morning chapel at Westminster College. He was on the brink of being ordained and taking up his first parish. He reflected on the need to navigate between theologies that have only answers and those that have only questions! It seems to me this is actually a creative tension. In contemplating this tension I have found Walter Brueggemann's approach in Texts Under Negotiation very helpful. On the need for some solid ground within the questioning post-modernist context, Brueggemann advocates for an infra-structure for looking at biblical truth that has three key components:

Evangelical – of the gospel.

Biblical construction – from the text of the Bible.

A system or network of signs and gestures that make social relationships possible, significant and effective.

Without such an infrastructure he submits, the church will simply rely on the dominant infrastructure of consumerism. He advocates for an infrastructure that is based on the biblical faith that life is created by God and consummated by God. That our past has originated

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<sup>53</sup> Stolz and Favre (2005) quoted in Sociology of Religion for Generations X and Y, 124

through, and been kept for us, by a faithful, sovereign God who calls into being those things that do not exist (Rom 4:17). He talks about this in terms of:

The origin of self – we need to respond with praise for God’s generosity and acknowledge with humility our fragility

The origin of the world – he calls the church to forget the task of trying to accommodate science because that is a tangent and a blind alley. We need to affirm the text which says this is a God-ordered world which is a life-giving, joy-producing system of generativity

The origin of community – the church does not originate with good human intentions but is birthed by God’s own resolve

And regarding the future, he advocates for an infrastructure that has a vision of a God who will bring us to wholeness not yet at hand. This is the notion of consummation (eschaton). This is a difficult concept for the hopelessness of modernity. This is the hope that God will bring things to a glorious completion:

The finished self

The finished world

The finished church

And so he sees this infrastructure as supplementing amnesia with memory, supplementing consumerism with covenant community and supplementing despair with hope.

I love the infrastructure of Breuggemanns! I defer to it, as a novice to a master. Yet in the practical world of pastoral ministry I think there is a need for it to be filled out a little more. I would advocate also for an infrastructure of core beliefs within which the church can work; within which young adults influenced by postmodernism can imagine, question, debate and develop personal thought and philosophies. Or as one of my thoughtful elders pleaded, ‘let me have wriggle room for my faith’. A broad brush is required. For example, one core element of the infrastructure is that God created the universe, but how that happened is a great debate that will accommodate a range of Christian opinion (good natured debate and wriggle room that does not exclude those who disagree on the detail). The kind of core beliefs in such an infrastructure would include God as creator, human beings as sinful and in need of salvation, the centrality of Jesus; his incarnation, death for sins, resurrection, ascension and return; the presence of the Holy Spirit in daily life and the call to be church in the world. Holding together an infrastructure of core beliefs with room for post-modern



musings around the detail captures two important aspects for the church in connecting with young adults today; Firstly, it recognises the reality that churches with orthodox biblical teaching are best at connecting with young people; and secondly, it gives room for the post-modern imagination.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Deuteronomy's Framework for Generativity**

#### **The need for renewal**

Deuteronomy is in essence about the renewal of the covenant that was entered into at Horeb after the crossing of the Red Sea and at the beginning of the time in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 5:2-3). There are 2 things that stand out about this:

Firstly, there is the need for each new generation to renew the covenant with God. I love the annual covenant Sunday of the Methodist church in the UK - recognition of the need for constant renewal of our relationship with God. And there is a liturgy of marriage used in the PCANZ that also captures this idea of constant need for renewal. It contains the words 'a relationship like this demands continual recommitment to each other'.

Secondly, the renewal of the covenant for each generation will come also with a context that will colour the recommitment. There are many examples where the context is wandering away from the covenant. For example, the book of Deuteronomy plays a major role in one of the great renewals of the covenant that took place under Josiah. He was king of Judah in 641-609BC. In the eighteenth year of his rule, Josiah ordered the High Priest Hilkiah to use the tax money, which had been collected over the years to renovate the temple. It was during the clearing of the treasure room of the temple that Hilkiah discovered a scroll described as "the book of the Torah" (2 Kings 22:8). This is the phrase Joshua 1:8 and 8:34 use to describe the sacred writings that Joshua had received from Moses. Many scholars believe this was a copy of Deuteronomy. The ongoing reforms of Josiah based on the book have been referred to as the Deuteronomic reforms.

Indeed, the renewal of the covenant at Moab covered in Deuteronomy comes after significant wandering away from the covenant during the time in the desert, nowhere more so than in the episode of the golden calf. The golden calf has become the emblem of idolatry and false

worship. In Deuteronomy 9:7-21 Moses sets this event before the people as an essential part of the context that sees them renewing the covenant at Moab (Deuteronomy 29).

This is so relevant to the young adult generation in the New Zealand context. As a generation most of them have not connected with church. They are children of a baby boom generation that tended towards increasingly hedonistic values. A widely used metaphoric interpretation of the golden calf emphasizes the fact that it was "gold" as a pointer to the false god that is the pursuit of wealth. Certainly the pursuit of wealth has been a strong baby boom motivator in the Western World, and their children have grown up with it and have bought into it by osmosis. Nurtured by advertising, they set goals around the acquisition of material possessions which are seen as vehicles to happiness. It is a common thing to hear the builder generation lament the fact that this young generation, in the spirit of Queen, 'want it all and they want it now'.<sup>54</sup> The powerful pull of the golden calf is alive and well in this present generation.

Following from this, I would make two observations about the young adults of today.

Firstly, as a generation where most have wandered away from a living faith in, love for and commitment to God, there is a need for renewal of relationship with God.

Secondly, somewhere in all my reading I came across the remark that generational change tends to be circular rather than linear. There is an element of pendulum swing involved. The proposition is that in terms of faith, generations may wander further and further away from God and yet there comes a reckoning point that motivates a return. And while it is easy to despair about whether the Millennials will ever connect with church in great numbers, revival and renewal does happen. The Biblical narrative and history itself are full of stories of generations who wander away from God ... and return. It is the narrative of Deuteronomy itself, but also of Josiah's day and of Nehemiah. And in the so called dark ages of economic, cultural and spiritual deterioration that followed the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, the gospel manuscripts and message were preserved by monks and monasteries – kept alive for a time of renewal and recommitment to this timeless truth. And that time did come in a beautiful way with the rise of the Italian Renaissance in the 14th century, which in turn

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<sup>54</sup> I want it all (1989)

contributed to the Reformation that revived a Christian faith that was sinking under the corruption of sixteenth century Roman Catholicism. John Wesley's Methodist movement swept through eighteenth century England with wonderful renewing vigour. In more recent times a number of significant revivals have brought new generations to recommitment. This seems to be the ebb and flow of generational connection with God. It is painful to see many of our churches closing or at best propped up by tiny congregations of very aged parishioners. Christians in the West grieve for the missing generations who substitute church for staggering into the mall around midday on Sunday recovering from a big night out. But this is not a hopeless situation. Time and time again there are examples of spiritual revival and renewal where whole generations turn back to God. There is a great Philip Yancey quote on this:

*'CK Chesterton names five moments in history, such as the fall of the Roman Empire and the period of Islamic conquest, when Christianity faced apparent doom. Each time, a fresh spirit of renewal emerged from the crisis and the faith revived. As Chesterton put it, when 'the Faith has to all appearances gone to the dogs ... it was the dog that died.' He adds, 'Christianity has died many times and risen again; for it has a God who knew the way out of the grave.'*<sup>55</sup>

And indeed there are contemporary hope springs. There are examples of growing churches in most places. And there are interesting new possibilities for renewal of faith and church. I will examine five, in historical sequence: the charismatic movement; the post-denominational mega-churches; Alpha; the emergence of dynamic, growing ethnic churches; and the new expressions movement. I will also explore the idea of ongoing renewal in existing congregations.

## **Charismatic Movement**

Ward has a whole chapter examining this movement. It evolved through the 1970's and 1980's. It had a particularly strong impact in New Zealand. Reports of the Presbyterian Church in 1985 and 1991 identified that it was the charismatic evangelical churches that were growing. Ward shows how the movement held together adherence to orthodox theology and at the same time picked up on the cultural trends of the baby boomers. He points to the more

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<sup>55</sup> Vanishing Grace, Hodder and Stoughton (2014)

relaxed and experimental style of worship, use of contemporary music, rapid rise in small groups, valuing of individual gifts and participation, development of closer personal relationships, less hierarchical and more informal leadership as being in touch with the trends of the baby boomer culture of the time. However, Ward also traces a change in the movement during the prosperous 1980's. There was a greater influence from American Pentecostalism and a move to a more inward looking spirituality that veered towards adherents looking for 'what can God do for me and what's in this for me?' An over-concern with personal health, wealth and experience developed. It found itself morphing into a mirror of the culture in which it dwelt. In the new millennium growth associated with the movement has slowed and many of the churches that were boosted by it are now smaller in size. The baby boomers who led this movement are now the older generation. The challenge of this group is to be prepared to embrace the next move of God. There is a real desire among many in this group to go back to the good old days of Charismatic renewal – a 'let's bottle it and preserve it' attitude. That is dangerous. It does not allow room for openness to what God wants to do with a new generation in a very different cultural context. There are some very lovely things about this movement that should always be retained. And it is a great story about how God moved for the baby boomers that needs to be shared with the new generations. But there is also a timely warning for the church. Many of those who failed to embrace the changes of this movement stayed stuck in a style more akin to the 1950's and failed to attract the new generations. And in the same way, it would be a mistake for the church of today to slavishly adhere to what God was doing in the 1970's and remain closed to new moves of the Holy Spirit for new times.

### **Large Post-denominational Churches**

There are examples of large vibrant churches scattered throughout the Western World. Some of the American examples such as Willowcreek and Saddleback are very big and very well-known worldwide. They are part of a renewal movement that has seen a new form of church emerge that is light on denominational belonging, connects well to the style of young adults and has teaching that is biblically based, relevant to life and well presented. They tend to be big, trendy, popular and growing. And while a lot of this growth is transfer growth, there is a steady stream of new converts attracted to these churches. Because they are big they can afford to be multi-staffed. This allows specialization and leads to quality and professionalism in the way church is done. They increasingly have multi-congregations within the large whole.

Rick Warren of Saddleback talks about the ‘cineplex concept’. This is based on the post-modern theatres that are no longer one big auditorium showing one movie, but rather provide for variety of choice under the one roof. It is a response to the desire for choice and for community in the current generations. There are examples of this style of church in most areas. Sometimes they are within a denomination. In Christchurch New Zealand, South West Baptist, Hope Presbyterian and St Christopher’s Anglican are examples of this. In Cambridge UK St Barnabas and Holy Trinity are examples. These churches tend to have more in common with each other rather than with their denomination. Sometimes they have morphed out of a denominational church (Grace in Christchurch came out of Shirley Methodist); sometimes they are part of a ‘franchise’ network of a post-modern church movement (Arise in Christchurch); and other times they arise naturally out of a new independent church plant (Willowcreek in Chicago). They are responsive to culture and faithful to orthodox biblical theology. They tend to be intergenerational, attract young adults and typically have large youth groups. They are vibrant and full of life in many areas including worship and outreach. They are focused on growth rather than the orientation towards survival that is the experience of the many declining churches of the mainline denominations. They often have real presence in their wider communities that give them permission to speak into that community.

Possamai refers to those behind these churches as ‘evangelical pragmatists’ who are prepared to repackaging the traditional message of Christianity for the new context. The change is cultural and stylistic only, not a change in theology or ecclesiology.<sup>56</sup>

Recent analysis of survey data on faith and affiliation suggests that this kind of church is having a growing impact on the New Zealand Church scene. In their paper Strength of Religion and the Future of Churches<sup>57</sup> Troughton, Bulbulia and Sibley explore the findings that the number of people reporting as Christian with no further definition is growing and that the strength of faith of this group is significantly higher than those who chose to affiliate with a denomination:

*‘Across age cohorts, the contrast between the strength of identification in the historical mainline churches, and among the Christian NFDs [not further defined] is one of the most striking features of this analysis. Not only is strength of identification notably higher than*

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<sup>56</sup> 150

<sup>57</sup> 2014

*among other groups analysed here, this strength is maintained across age cohorts. This consistently high strength of religious identification is remarkable. In census terms, the Christian NFD category has become an important group, and appears set to be increasingly so. Against the general pattern, the category grew by 16.1% between 2006 and 2013. At 216,177, there are now twice as many census NFDs as Methodists, and four times more than there are Baptists. In total, this still only represents 5.1% of the population. However, the age distribution is significant: Christian NFDs are the second largest Christian grouping among those under 30 years of age – except in the 10–19 year age group, where the Anglican Church attracts slightly more support. The NZAVS data is consistent with this general picture. There were 1,621 participants in the 2012 wave of the NZAVS who were aged 18–30. The majority of this cohort (61.9%) identified as non-religious. Looking specifically at this cohort, the largest religious grouping were Christian NFD (16.2%) followed by Catholic (6.4%). And yet, as our primary analysis of differences in the strength of religious identification tells us, while Catholics may be the second largest Christian group among young adults, they identify relatively weakly or express only moderate or neutral levels of psychological identification with their religion relative to their peers who self-label simply as “Christian” and offer no further definition.’*

On the eve of the new millennium, Donald Miller published a book that examined the rise of successful non-denominational churches. He called it Reinventing American Protestantism – Christianity in the new millennium<sup>58</sup>. He talks about "new paradigm churches", sometimes called megachurches or post-denominational churches. Ward quotes him as follows:

*‘If Christianity is going to survive, it must continually reinvent itself, adapting its messages to the members of each generation, along with their culture and the geographical setting ... Churches... that do not constantly ‘resymbolize’ their message eventually die; in contrast, groups that have the foresight to encapsulate their message in contemporary symbols and form not only have the potential to survive, but sometimes grow at remarkable rates.’*<sup>59</sup>

The vigour, life, faith, generational mix and outreach found in these churches is exciting. God is doing renewing work through these churches.

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<sup>58</sup> 1999

<sup>59</sup> p32-33

In the PCANZ there is a growing trend to group congregations together in a larger multi-staffed regional church – Rotorua, Timaru, Nelson, The Village in Christchurch are all examples of this. There are elements of picking up on the post-denominational style in this trend.

## **Alpha**

Alpha began as an introduction to the Christian faith for new Christians attending Holy Trinity Brompton church in central London in the late 1980's. When curate, Nicky Gumbel, took over the running of Alpha at HTB in 1990, he noticed its appeal to those who would not describe themselves as Christians. Alpha became increasingly popular and has now grown to the point that 27 million people have completed Alpha in 169 countries and 112 languages. It describes itself as 'an opportunity to explore life and the Christian faith in a friendly, open and informal environment'. This ethos has been vital to its success in an age where too much Christian evangelism has been perceived by non-Christians as formulaic and judgemental.<sup>60</sup> Alpha combines charismatic evangelical theology with a style that appeals to current generations. It encourages questions and allows doubt. It majors on a kind of hospitality that puts belonging before believing. It has been incredibly successful over the last 25 years when most churches have failed to reach anyone new.

## **Ethnic Congregations**

While the church has declined in the West, the growth of Christianity in places like Asia, African and South America has been staggering. Possamai coins the phrase 'Next Christianity',<sup>61</sup> as he outlines projections such as; by 2025 three quarters of all Catholics will be from Africa, Asia and South America, and by 2050 50% of Christians will be in Africa and South America and a further 17% in Asia. Christianity in these places is vibrant in expression and conservative in theology and morality. With increasing levels of emigration to the Western World there have come energetic Christians from these cultures where Christianity is still relatively new and vital. I witnessed this first hand in London in 2009. The Methodist church context in which I worked was being renewed by an influx of enthusiastic Christians from places like Zimbabwe, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. In addition to this, there are non-Christian immigrants eager to learn from the new culture and are prepared to investigate Christianity. This is true for many Chinese who have immigrated to New Zealand in recent

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<sup>60</sup> See Yancy, *Vanishing Grace*; Kinnaman, *Unchristian*

<sup>61</sup> 151



years. In the PCANZ the biggest and fastest growing churches have tended to be ethnic churches. There is both potential here to grow ethnic church communities and also to look for ways to bring renewal to existing congregations through integration of an influx of enthusiastic immigrants.

## **New Forms of Church**

There is a new movement that is trying out a whole range of creative ways to adapt how church is done in order to better connect with those who are not in a traditional or existing church. It is working hard on adapting styles that best suit the post-modern generations by seeking to incorporate values such as the sharing of experiences, exploring of questions (rather than a monologue of answers) and community.

The emergent church movement has been influential here. If the post-denomination church response is ‘evangelical pragmatism’, emergent church is seen as post-evangelical and post-charismatic. It seeks to adapt not only in style but also in methodology, content and theology. Proponents talk about a generous orthodoxy and are very comfortable with the questioning and dialogue of post-modernity.<sup>62</sup>

A good example of this move to new forms of church is Fresh Expressions. This comes out of the Church of England. Their webpage<sup>63</sup> explains this movement:

*Fresh Expressions seeks to transform communities and individuals through championing, resourcing and multiplying new ways of being church. We work with Christians from a broad range of denominations and traditions and the movement has resulted in thousands of new congregations being formed alongside more traditional churches. A fresh expression of church is a new gathering or network that engages mainly with people who have never been to church. There is no single model, but the emphasis is on starting something which is appropriate to its context, rather than cloning something that works elsewhere.*

Another example of this is Messy Church. From their website<sup>64</sup> we learn:

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<sup>62</sup> McLaren, Brian D., *Generous Orthodoxy*, Zondervan (2004)

<sup>63</sup> <https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/>

*‘that Messy Church is a form of church for children and adults that involves creativity, celebration and hospitality. It’s primarily for people who don’t already belong to another form of church. It meets at a time (and sometimes in a place) that suits people who don’t already belong to church. In the words of Claire Dalpra of The Sheffield Centre: Messy Church is an all-age fresh expression of church that offers counter-cultural transformation of family life through families coming together to be, to make, to eat and to celebrate God.’*

Fresh Expressions in conjunction with the Church Army has just completed a research project in the UK looking into the kind of churches that are reaching young adults.<sup>65</sup> It identified five kinds of church that are having some success:

**Church planting hub** – These have many of the characteristics of the post-denominational churches discussed above. They are churches that are connecting with young adults through Sunday worship, small groups, discipleship and mission. They tend to attract those who went to church when they were young and are now looking for good worship and socialisation with a larger group of young adults. They are part of a bigger church that resources them in many ways (buildings, finances, mentoring). They are from an evangelical/charismatic theological perspective. There is a high emphasis on discipleship and leadership development, releasing them into leadership which in turn leads to more growth.

**Youth Church gown up** – This involves growing an expression of church out of a successful youth group. These churches have found it difficult to retain young adults from non-church backgrounds post-youth group involvement. There is UK research that found that there is a danger that when a youth group morphs into church, there is high risk of disconnection and intergenerational disengagement.<sup>66</sup>

Johnstone reflected in his book Embedded Faith on worship services that segregate the young from the old. He sounds a word of caution. The young people he interviewed talked about the difficulty that occurs when they feel they have out-grown these services. The transition to something else is difficult. Certainly one of the things that came out of the focus group discussion at Hope Presbyterian with young adults was a desire for intergenerational life and worship.

**Deconstructed church** – This is a reaction to the way church has been done in the past. Many attracted to this have been in church but are now disillusioned with the way it has been done in the past. They are the de-churched. This group desires to find

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<sup>64</sup> <http://www.messychurch.org.uk/what-messy-church-and-isnt>

<sup>65</sup> Keith, Beth, Authentic Faith – fresh expressions of faith for young adults, Fresh Expressions (2103)

<sup>66</sup> The Faith of Generation Y, Church House (2010)

another way, looking to deconstruct church in order to find authenticity. Community is a high ideal and meetings often include food and have minimal liturgical structure, although it is common for them to borrow a sacred space for more spiritually-orientated times together. These groups tend to be about 20-50 in size. They tend to have a flat leadership structure. They reach both the de-churched and the unchurched.

**Church on the margin** – These groups meet in parks and community buildings around food and practical help for at-risk non-church young people.

**Context shaped churches** – An example of this is café church. These expressions often have elements of liturgy. They have been successful in reaching the non-churched. They usually have a small core, with a larger group of loosely affiliated people.

It is interesting to note that the research found that the expressions of church that are most unlike traditional church have the best chance of reaching non-churched.

It is also interesting to note that the data found there were common characteristics shared by churches that were connecting well with young adults regardless of the style they practiced. Those successful characteristics are:

Community – they often met around a table and reported a sense of family

Authenticity – emphasis on realness over rightness. Discipleship is about learning to do things well, not about learning to believe the right things

Doubt – permission to question and deconstruct old beliefs and structures

Spirituality – experientially real and satisfying, a sense of connecting with God

Change – often based on the mobility and change experienced in young lives

This movement towards new forms of church is a broad one. It is still relatively young and success has been mixed. But it is the church seeking to respond to a new generation and find ways to connect. It does not seek to replace traditional church, rather work alongside it. This is experimental and many existing churches are taking up the challenge of trying something different in addition to what they already do. There are interesting examples of where the new expression is overtaking the old. BACH, the breakfast church at Maori Hill Presbyterian Church in Dunedin is a good example of this. It is important to keep experimenting and see where the Spirit leads the church.

## Existing Church Done Well

One of the catch-cries of the Reformed Church movement is ‘reformed and reforming’. The recent emphasis in the PCANZ on missional theology and widespread adoption of mission planning is a good example of this spirit. And it is not all doom and gloom for the mainline denominations. There are some good examples of churches that are doing well in the current climate. Indeed a key conclusion from the excellent UK based study The Faith of Generation Y<sup>67</sup> was that there is strength in church done well. They talk about how authentic church, staying true to what it truly means to be a loving community of Christ, should connect well with a range of Millennial issues, questions and needs. A lovely example of this is Bromley Methodist Church in London<sup>68</sup>. There have been combinations of factors involved in the continued strength of this congregation. They have mentored young adults into leadership (creating junior steward roles and consistently seeking to have younger adults in the leadership mix). They have a long history of quality children’s programmes. It has been very warm and welcoming to a range of cultures that in turn have enriched the life of the church. A vital factor is that there is a strong group of older lay leaders who have consistently encouraged and empowered the younger generations. This church is a traditional mainline church that is intergenerational and growing. However, gone are the days when people turn up to church regardless. Traditional church life is a fragile thing. It competes against a myriad of other things for people’s attention and time. Those in this form of church need to be consciously working hard on generativity.

The story of Deuteronomy is a call for renewal of faith to generations prone to wandering. It is a story that mirrors the ebb and flow of the ‘exodus, desert, promised land’ experiences of history. The church of the Western World is in a time of ebb at the moment. In many ways the present age is a golden calf phase. If history (His story – the narrative of God with His loved people of planet earth) is anything to go by, renewal and recommitment, revival and faith are on the way. In this section some trends and possibilities for that coming renewal are explored.

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<sup>67</sup> Collins-Mayo, Sylvia, Mayo, Bob, Nash, Sally, Cocksworth, Christopher, Church House (2010)

<sup>68</sup> I ministered there for 9 months in 2009 and visited in 2015 to find the church in great heart.

## Fear of the Lord

There is another repeated theme sown into the fabric of the message of Deuteronomy that could be, or maybe should be, a motivator for renewal. It is the fear of God, a concept not talked about much with the present generation. When Moses spoke in Deuteronomy there were people present who had witnessed the awesome God events of the Exodus. They were etched in wonder on their living memory. This talk of fear in Deuteronomy is borne out of awe and wonder at the power of God.

So do we need to put the fear of God into our younger generation – or does this take us back to Irish Catholics or the hell-fire breathing Protestants of last century? And is it even possible to generate fear in a generation who has already seen everything on the internet?!<sup>69</sup>

Moses was quite clear. When it comes to God there needs to be a deep and healthy respect and we need our young people to know this:

<sup>12</sup> *Assemble the people—men, women and children, and the foreigners residing in your towns—so they can listen and learn to fear the LORD your God and follow carefully all the words of this law.* <sup>13</sup> *Their children, who do not know this law, must hear it and learn to fear the LORD your God as long as you live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.”*  
(31: 12-13)

Has all our post-modern talk about the grace and love of God left out the awful consequences of placing ourselves outside the grace of God? Because that is how it is – we do it to ourselves. We are the ones who wander away. And there is no doubt in Deuteronomy that there are consequences - both blessings and curses. We are dealing with the patient, merciful God Moses talks about in 4:30-31 but we must weigh this up alongside verses like 8:19:

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<sup>69</sup> In my research I came across a Gen Y novel, Reagan, James, Leeds House, Riververse Books (2014). It is a post-Empire horror novel that asks this question!

*If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed.*

Deuteronomy uses the ‘two ways to go’ approach. Moses talks about it in terms of blessings and curses, life and death:

<sup>19</sup> *This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live*  
<sup>20</sup> *and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (30:19-20)*

And we must pay attention to the teaching in places like Deuteronomy 27-28 about blessings and cursing and be sobered by the fact that there are four times as many potential curses as there are potential blessings!

So how do we get this message across to our younger generations? For a start, we need to accept the awful truth of this ourselves for a start. When people live away from the way God created us to live, cursed consequences come tumbling out in our lives. We have successive generations now who worship the gods of money and self, power and sex. And the destructiveness of this is not hard to see. Generations wracked by crippling debt incurred to live the good life, epidemics of sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies and all that comes with that, high divorce rates, addictive behaviours ... and underlying this list of cursed consequences, is there a primary problem? Is it because of a generational spiritual anorexia borne out of the fact that we now have three successive generations that have been starved of spiritual nourishment?

We need to communicate a healthy fear of God in our practice of worship. For too long now the contemporary approach to God has tended to be too casual – it needs to more closely reflect the reality of who it is we are dealing with – the all-powerful creator of the universe who holds the power of life and death, blessings and curses.

This is a sensitive subject because of the dysfunctional way the church has leveraged off fear in the past. I have vivid memories of going to a so-called ‘Good News Club’ at a neighbour's place when I was only a child. I was confronted with a large poster of people falling into the

fires of hell. It was only bad news as far as I could see. They had this terrified child on his knees in a flash! I compare this to the experience of God wooing me into faith and commitment as a teenager – I know which of the two experiences was life-giving and life-changing. Yet the ‘curses’ on lives lived away from the way of God are real and evident as outlined above. And here is the clincher for me. In all my years working as a school chaplain with Gen Y kids, the most asked question was ... ‘is there a hell and what is it like?’ This trend was confirmed in the UK research into the faith of Gen Y where questions about death and what happens when we die were a recurring theme in the conversations with non-churched young people.<sup>70</sup> We need to be able to entertain these questions well. With grace and with a sense that it is not what I say that matters, it is what the bible says ... and the bottom line is this: God is gracious, forgiving and accepting but he does not force Himself on anyone. If a person does not have a relationship with God in this life, from what the bible says, it is highly unlikely they will have one in the next life. It will be judgment and then either hell fires or eternal death depending on the school of thought you belong to – both are to some extent sustained by scripture<sup>71</sup> – I hope it is the second for the first is too horrible to contemplate. Eternal conscious punishment does not rationally hold together with the grace and love we see in Jesus. The idea of a nice human being who has lived a good life, albeit not without sin, being tormented eternally is absurd in my view. What kind of vindictive god allows that to be?<sup>72</sup> And many of the younger generation have rejected Christianity after getting stuck on this kind of hellfire theology. I perceive a generational disconnect in the church over this. It became apparent in the generational reactions to Rob Bell’s Love Wins.<sup>73</sup> At Hope Presbyterian we held dialogue groups about the book. The older generation of evangelical Christians present at these dialogues tended to accept the eternal hell fire idea as a fact and were angry that Bell should question it. By contrast the young adults tended to

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<sup>70</sup> Collins-Mayo, Sylvia, Mayo, Bob, Nash, Sally, Cocksworth, Christopher, The Faith of Generation Y, Church House (2010)

<sup>71</sup> Bible translator Ross McKerras comments ‘this cannot be decided from scripture because the biblical languages do not have an unambiguous technical term for eternal death – the English language has co-opted one from the Latin – annihilationism.’

<sup>72</sup> For a good discussion of this issue see The Nature of Hell: A Report by the Evangelical Alliance Commission on Unity and Truth Among Evangelicals ACUTE Paperback – April 1, 2000 by David Hilborn (Editor); also a reflection on the findings: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/october23/1.30.html>

<sup>73</sup> Collins(2011)

welcome Bell's questions and were keen to look at alternatives to the traditional evangelical view. The church needs to engage well with this generational disconnect.

Despite his passion for impressing on the Promised Land Generation the need to fear God and the need to keep the covenant, Moses acknowledges the ebb and flow of faithfulness when he raises the possibility (or is it inevitability?) of future generations wandering off again (4:25). Yet he also talks to them of a loving and merciful God who grieves for them in their wandering and waits patiently for their return:

*<sup>30</sup> When you are in distress and all these things have happened to you, then in later days you will return to the LORD your God and obey him. <sup>31</sup> For the LORD your God is a merciful God; he will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your ancestors, which he confirmed to them by oath. (4:30-31)*

This is the God of the book of Hosea speaking, the waiting father of the prodigal.



## **Chapter 5**

### **Deuteronomy's Framework for Generativity**

#### **The importance of teaching well**

Teaching is a repeated theme of Deuteronomy. The verb teach (Piel) occurs 10 times in Deuteronomy and the verb learn (Qal) 7 times. The theme is beautifully re-presented in chapters 4, 6 and 11:

##### Deuteronomy 4

*<sup>9</sup> Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them. <sup>10</sup> Remember the day you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when he said to me, "Assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land and may teach them to their children."*

##### Deuteronomy 6

*<sup>4</sup> Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. <sup>5</sup> Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. <sup>6</sup> These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. <sup>7</sup> Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. <sup>8</sup> Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. <sup>9</sup> Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.*

##### Deuteronomy 11

*<sup>18</sup> Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. <sup>19</sup> Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. <sup>20</sup> Write*

*them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates,<sup>21</sup> so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land the LORD swore to give your ancestors, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth.*

And there is some excellent pedagogy here! Hear you people who would teach the younger generation in a way that connects. It is learning through repetitive passionate lessons integrated into all of life delivered with a creativity that connects. Repetition, passion and creativity; I will deal with these three aspects in turn:

### **Remembering, repetition and ritual**

Moses clearly understood this power of repetition and ritual. His long sermon in Deuteronomy is full of repeating themes and calls to incorporate these themes into the habits of daily life. An outstanding example of this is the ritual of the Passover which he commands in Deuteronomy 16. It has been repeated in Jewish communities year after year for centuries. It has kept hope alive. Through nearly two millennia of dispersion and sustained brutal persecution, the Jewish people have repeated the catch cry of the Passover faithfully year after year, ‘next year in Jerusalem!’ Whatever you think about the modern state of Israel, you have to admit this is probably the most outstanding story of resilience of the last two thousand years - resilience based in large part on the power of remembering a powerful faith story through repetition and ritualization. This is picked up on by Danielle Hervieu-Leger:

*‘What characterizes a religious rite ...is that the regular repetition of a ritually set pattern of word and gesture exists in order to mark the passage of time (as well as the transience of each individual life incorporated in the chain) with the recall of the foundational events that enabled the chain to form and/or affirm its power to persist through whatever vicissitudes have come, and will still come, to threaten it.’<sup>74</sup>*

Constantly Moses calls upon the people to remember how God has acted and to pass this on to the next generation. ‘Do not forget’ is the catch cry!

<sup>9</sup> *Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.* <sup>10</sup> Remember the day you stood before the LORD your God at

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<sup>74</sup> 125

*Horeb, when he said to me, “Assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land and may teach them to their children.”*  
(4:9-10)

A particularly poignant expression of this message is the way Moses draws attention to the fulfilment of the promises God gave to Abraham:

*The Lord your God has increased your numbers so that today you are as numerous as the stars in the sky.* (1:10 cf 10:22)

This is such a strong and abiding theme of Deuteronomy. It is picked up poignantly by Daniele Hervieu-Legér in Religion as a Chain of Memory.<sup>75</sup> For religion to endure in the modern world it must maintain a “chain of memory”—a process by which individual believers become members of a community that links past, present, and future members. She states that ‘*one of the chief characteristics of modern societies is that they are no longer societies of memory, and as such ordered with a view to reproducing what is inherited*’<sup>76</sup> She goes on to demonstrate a range of factors that contributed in the contemporary break in chain of memory (the ‘unloading’ of memory and the ‘gauging’ of memory!) including:

Affirmation of the autonomous individual

Advancing rationalization that has broken up ‘sacred canopies’

Indifference towards institutions

Fragmentation of individual and group memory

Mobility, especially movement to the cities, and the consequent breakdown in the mechanisms for dissemination of memory, extended family and the parish church

Economic changes that favour pragmatic individualism at the expense of long lasting forms of cooperation and social solidarity which cultivates collective memory

She talks about three processes that contribute to difficulties in sustaining memory in our young people: rationalization, pluralisation and individualization. Reflecting on this Mayo,

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<sup>75</sup> Rutgers University Press, (2000)

<sup>76</sup> 124

Mayo and Nash comment that present day ‘society is not conducive to the maintenance of the Christian faith as expressed through the historic church traditions: rationalization tends to side-line it, pluralism makes it a matter of choice and individualisation dis-embeds faith from the community and subjectivizes belief and practice.’<sup>77</sup>

With these factors at work in society and the huge exodus from church life beginning with the Baby Boomers clearly there is a missing link in the chain of faith. There is now a whole generation full of religious “amnesiacs,” no longer able to maintain the chain of memory that binds them to their religious past. Certainly my experience at St Andrew’s College over a 21 year period was a gradual but persistent trend toward growing ignorance of the Biblical narrative. By the end of my time there I was being invited to talk to art history classes about key events in the biblical narrative because students had very little knowledge of them and were struggling to make sense of an art world shot through with biblical imagery.

Johnstone closely links remembering with the forming and maintaining communities of faith. He makes an interesting play on the words ‘remembering’ and ‘recollecting’, reshaping them into ‘re-collecting’ and ‘re-membering’ to highlight the community forming power of memory.<sup>78</sup>

The importance of remembering is two-fold: firstly, for encouragement and inspiration, but perhaps more importantly to create an expectation that these God moments can happen in this new generation too! Commentator McConville<sup>79</sup> makes this point by drawing attention to Deuteronomy 31: 11;

*‘when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place he will choose, you shall read this law before them in their hearing.’*

He believes that the fact that the place is not named is a sign that there is no limit to the times and place where God will reveal himself again. As we look back through time we see God touch generations in new and interesting ways. We also see movements that have been great wither, because people have wanted to stay with the way God touched their generation. They displayed a stubborn unwillingness to be open to the new thing that God wanted to do.

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<sup>77</sup> 32

<sup>78</sup> 53 where he quotes Assmann on this

<sup>79</sup> J.G. McConville, Deuteronomy, IVP, (2002)

Both Ward and Johnstone address the power of ritual in the task of remembering well. Johnstone has a whole chapter on it: 'Rituals as Bonding and Collective Memory'. He quotes Durkheim:

*'the moral vitality and self-identity of human communities are significantly strengthened by individuals' participation in ritual acts'*<sup>80</sup>

Ward talks about the need to be respectful of traditions in a way that is appropriate to changing times. He underlines the importance of preserving collective memory, wisdom and means of grace. And there are surprising signs of engagement from Gen Y in the rituals of the church – Ward calls this the re-appropriating of ancient rituals and symbols.<sup>81</sup> A good example of this is St Paul's Simon Street in Auckland where a formal ritualistic Sunday afternoon Eucharist is popular with university students from the surrounding area.

Young adulthood is full of transitions – coming to faith and owning faith, moving from training to work, from single to relationship and marriage, into parenting and for some, towards the end of this period, separation, divorce and renewed singleness. Rituals have power in marking transitions. Finding appropriate ways to help them navigate these transitions is an important way the church can connect with young adults. Some transitional rituals like baptism are well-established; others need some careful creative thought.

### **Heart-felt passion, congruent and integrated**

Moses understood how quickly the young spot hypocrisy in their teachers! It sinks both the teacher and the lesson into the realm of irrelevancy. On the other hand, we all remember the inspirational teachers who had a passion for their subject and impacted us deeply. Many young people testify that they chose to pursue further study in a subject because of an influential teacher rather than the subject itself. God, Moses – they clearly understand this. Deuteronomy calls for teaching that flows out of an older generation with heart-felt love for the Lord:

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<sup>80</sup> 37

<sup>81</sup> 144

*‘watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.’ (4:9)*

All the talk of outward symbols on hands, foreheads and doorposts (6:8-9; 11:20) is linked closely to the call for this heart-felt passion. What is in the heart should find outward expression. The student should see in the home, office and life of the teacher, symbols and signs consistent with what is being taught. It seems to me this is what it means to truly wear your heart on your sleeve! My experience working with young people at St Andrew’s College is that they are quick to spot hypocrisy. Johnstone similarly found in his studies a strong desire in young adults for transparency and authenticity. Similarly, in UK research with Gen Y, Mayo, Mayo and Nash found that it came through very clearly that young people are looking for authenticity.<sup>82</sup>

The teaching called for in Deuteronomy is to be present in all of life. It is to flow naturally and not be artificially forced into classroom settings. It is action-reflection and internship style. It is teaching that is wound into the fabric of life and conversation:

*Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. (11:19 cf 6:7)*

This is about integration of teaching about faith within community. Again Johnstone has a chapter on this: ‘The Relational Nature of Embedded Faith’. He talks about the need for faith to be anchored in community with roots that reach deep into the experience of daily life. And this is about family and church together – he draws attention to the research that shows that faith is most likely to be embedded in young people if they have been taught it by their parents. This is very much the ethos of the Faith at Home Ministries<sup>83</sup> which traces the modern trend whereby the family abdicated to the Sunday schools the teaching of faith. Faith at Home is a movement that seeks to see the church actually empowering parents as the prime teachers of faith for their children. It is a movement in tune with the principles of generativity in Deuteronomy.

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<sup>82</sup> Collins-Mayo, Sylvia, Mayo, Bob, Nash, Sally, Cocksworth, Christopher, The Faith of Generation Y, Church House (2010)

<sup>83</sup> <http://www.faithathome.com/>

The emphasis in Deuteronomy on faith integrated into the life of a community raises interesting questions about the trend in young adults toward believing without belonging. Ward observes that this trend is resulting in believing that is far from orthodox, that is often quite shallow and underdone, and that has a tendency to go off in all sorts of tangential directions.

The other observation that I would make here is that the churches that connect best with young adults are evangelical/charismatic. This ideological camp emphasises both the need for heartfelt commitment (encouraging people to give their hearts to Jesus) and highly experiential worship. This fits with the call of Moses for love of God that comes from the heart and flows into all of life. It also fits with my observations of non-church Millennial teenagers when they came into contact with church in the 2000's. While I was at St Andrew's College, year 10 students (14 year olds) undertook an assignment that involved them attending a church service in their local community and reflecting on it. Routinely the response of those who attended the mainline denominational services with traditional worship styles was – 'it was full of old people and really boring'. Those who attended the more upbeat charismatic or Pentecostal style churches came back interested and excited by what they saw. Partly this was about style of music and communication. But when explored further it was also about the fact that they witnessed people 'who really believed this stuff and were passionate about it'. In looking at characteristics of churches that attract young people, we must add to the list a heart-felt passion that comes from a strongly experienced loving relationship with God.

## **Creative**

'The greatest tragedy is to take the most important message in the world and make it boring.'<sup>84</sup>

There is such a creative mix in the communication of Deuteronomy, including Moses bursting into song (32). There is story, there is preaching, there is prophesy, there is wisdom,

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<sup>84</sup> Erwin McManus, Mosaic Church Los Anglos in a recent video interview:  
<http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=karl+faase&FORM=HDRSC3#view=detail&mid=3C63A77E3AB381AEC4A13C63A77E3AB381AEC4A1>

there is law and there is song. There is also the use of visual aids. The positioning on the Moab plains allowed the people a tantalizing glimpse of the Promised Land across the river!

What a gorgeous thing it is when you are singing gently into the ear of a toddler and they are transfixed. You stop and they quietly say 'more'. Or you are telling a great story to a chapel filled with hundreds of young people in a church school and you can hear a pin drop; they are hanging on every word. I think Deuteronomy is replete with this understanding: tell them the stories, sing them the songs.

In part this is about style. Communicating timeless truths in the story telling and musical styles of the generation you are seeking to reach has to be important. Mvuno church in Kenya is a stunning example of this. A large church filled with young adults, they have active and highly successful engagement in the TV and music industries of Kenya – a soap opera they produced for TV is a countrywide hit. That is inspirational engagement.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, Redeemer Presbyterian Church is a large church in downtown New York with the average age of attenders in the thirties. Most of the people attending are highly qualified professionals. The aim is to preach at University lecture standard and have concert standard music. Over the top? Or is it taking the culture and style of the group you are seeking to reach seriously?

Indeed, Walter Brueggemann is enthusiastic about the creative opportunities post-modernism has gifted the church. He believes the church needs to liberate the text for a new situation – a wholly new interpretive context. It is a pluralistic postmodern situation which some perceive as a threat but he sees as a positive opportunity to attend to with considerable eagerness. Within this new context, theology and textual interpretation are an ongoing, creative and constitutive processes requiring much imagination. The purpose of worship and proclamation is transformational. He submits that people do not change through doctrinal argument or cognitive appeal or moral haranguing on their own. Change actually takes place through conversations that offer new ideas, models and images of how this all fits together in a particular place for a particular community. He asks if the church has the courage to move beyond the matrix of modernity. He asks if the church has enough confidence in the biblical text to let it be the fund for counter-imagination. If not, he warns, the church confines itself to

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<sup>85</sup> <http://www.mavunochurch.org/new/content.php?id=255>



disappear with the rest of modernity! I love the way Walter Brueggemann talks about this in terms of the church's role in funding this post-modern imagination:

*'The church is to fund – to provide the pieces, materials and resources out of which a new world can be imagined'*<sup>86</sup>

This shows good understanding of the style of communication that works best with the young adults of today. Johnstone talks a lot about this in his chapter 'Preaching and Interpretive Communities'. He quotes Carroll<sup>87</sup> on the need to have preaching that engages in 'reflexive' monitoring of their situation in order to develop a 'reflexive ecclesiology' that understands the style of communication that best connects with a generation. In his musing on this he identifies a whole list of helpful points for good communication with the generation. It is a list consistent with so much of the previous research referred to in the report: less directive, more open ended; allowing for questions, struggles and doubts; communication that is relevant and applicable to life and has depth and authenticity. Johnstone quotes Sweet<sup>88</sup> in saying that this kind of preaching will 'draw fewer conclusions than it does entertain possibilities. It is the preaching of departures, beckonings, thresholds ... to a people on the Way'

The Night Church services at Hope Presbyterian seek to communicate in this style. After one such service, the service leader was met at the door by two people in close succession, each with very different perspectives what had happened. The first was of the older generation and lamented that the sermon had left too many loose ends - the young people would not know what to think. The second person was a young adult who came out raving about the fact that the service had given him so many questions to ponder during the week. The difference between the generations was stark.

Finally on the topic of teaching faith, it is interesting that of the main stream denominations, the Roman Catholics are doing best in both retaining young adults and arresting overall decline in church attendance.<sup>89</sup> It is also the denomination that invests most into the religious education of their young.

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<sup>86</sup> Texts Under Negotiation – the Bible and Postmodern Imagination

<sup>87</sup> 154

<sup>88</sup> 158

<sup>89</sup> Troughton, Bulbulia and Sibley, Strength of Religion and the Future of Churches, (2014)

## **Chapter 6**

### **Deuteronomy's Framework for Generativity**

#### **Looking Forward**

##### **Vision**

It is now time to explore the inspirational big picture of the Promised Land so central to Deuteronomy. It is a vision of a people in a loving relationship with God inhabiting a good land. And these two are related – you will live long in the land if you keep the commands I have given you to love the Lord your God with all your heart. The description of the land is wonderful and oft repeated. I like the rendition in Deuteronomy 8:

*<sup>7</sup> For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with brooks, streams, and deep springs gushing out into the valleys and hills; <sup>8</sup> a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; <sup>9</sup> a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills.*

This was read on the 17<sup>th</sup> March 1917 at the founding of St Andrew's College. In my time as chaplain at the College we re-read it each founder's day. It spoke to us about the vision of the Rev Thompson who founded the College with a handful of students in his manse lounge. Year after year I looked out on a sea of young people in the Assembly hall set amidst the substantial and beautifully scaped grounds and buildings of the Norman's Road site, and I often thought; 'O how Thompson would love to see all this now!' For in reality, he worked relentlessly to get it all going because he actually had a vision for something like this. Vision is a powerful motivator.

Over the years this Promised Land vision of Moses has been given other worldly meaning. The black slaves of America sang out of their harsh oppression 'I looked over Jordan and what did I see, a band of angels coming for me'. There is no doubt truth in this, but I am sure that God and Moses also had something earthier in mind. This Deuteronomic vision is very

grounded! It is about a rich, vital and sustained life on the land and with the land. It is a vision of Eden renewed. It is God's Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. What does this look like for us today? One thing is for sure: it does play hugely into the hands of the ecologists and Green politicians who connect so well with the younger generations.

The grounded nature of this vision is especially important to young adults who have grown up in a rapidly-changing and very mobile world. In my reading, I came across some great literature on the waves of change young adults have faced. Books like Soul Tsunami: sink or swim in new millennial culture by Leonard Sweet<sup>90</sup> and the 1991 novel by Douglas Coupland, Generation X: tales of an accelerated culture. Johnstone found in the young people he interviewed a yearning for a church home, which he connects with the feelings of homelessness and rootlessness felt by so many of them in this fast paced world. He talks about this in terms of a place to embed their faith.<sup>91</sup> This is an idea that fits well with the earthy and grounded faith vision of Deuteronomy's Promised Land.

The people of Deuteronomy had been wandering in the desert for 39 long, parched and seemingly aimless years. They were perishing. God gave them a vision. From where they stood they could get a glimpse of the big landscape they were to inhabit. Moses fills in the details with images of pomegranates and grapes. The young adults of today are also wandering in an expansive desert defined by soulless materialism, devastating wars in the Middle East and the lingering threat of terrorism that hangs over the whole globe impinging on even out most sacred moments. I was in London for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Gallipoli landing– a moving and affecting event, but nonetheless one accompanied by massive police presence based on the threatened horror that terrorist violence would come crashing down on the remembering people praying for a better, more peaceful world.

My experience with young people tells me they actually yearn deeply for a better world. The bible has a wonderful vision of how the world can be – it is called Shalom, the relational peace and prosperity of Eden. As church, we are stewards of this vision to each new generation. Building Hope in a Broken World, the visionary phrase of Hope Presbyterian, is the kind of future our younger generation needs to hear and deep down wants to embrace.

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<sup>90</sup> Zondervan (1999)

<sup>91</sup> 81-82

Moses set forth a vision that sustained the generation of the Promised Land and one that comes ringing down through the ages with timeless power.

### **Making the way clear**

Deuteronomy outlines a plan for ridding the promised land of all that is ungodly and evil. While the sentiment of purification is a good one, the actual plan outlined in Deuteronomy 7 horrifies us in our day and age. It is tantamount to a plan for ethnic cleansing and genocide. It fuels the evangelical atheistic fervour of the likes of Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris. They use this to deride the bible as a handbook for war, thus promulgating the much-repeated critique that religion starts all wars. All this makes this part of the Deuteronomy text hard to apply today. I was at a lecture in Cambridge on the Place of the Old Testament in Mission given by highly respected missiologist Christopher Wright<sup>92</sup>. He talked about how the Godly ethics and Godly heart for the nations that existed in the Hebrew Scriptures and in Hebrew lifestyle were an attractive witness to the surrounding nations. In the crowded lecture theatre I found the courage to ask how this squared with the commands in places like Deuteronomy to wipe out every man, woman and child of the nations of the land they were to possess. He began his answer by saying he dealt with this in a book entitled The God I Don't Understand, Reflections on Tough Questions of Faith!<sup>93</sup> He then went on to say two things. Firstly, this was a judgement directed at evil practices and the Hebrews were equally warned that they too would be similarly judged if they fell into such practices. Secondly, he drew attention to the fact Jesus maintained a campaign against evil in the world but with a paradoxical change in practice that replaced violence with self-giving love. Building on this answer, I would submit that this comes out in sayings of Jesus such as: "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also." Jesus did advocate for the purification of this world, but not by ways of violence. He resisted calls to use his popularity to build an army to take on the Romans. He instructed Peter to put his sword away when he sought to free Jesus from the guards in the garden. Rather he encourages his followers to be like salt,

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<sup>92</sup> Revd Dr Christopher J H Wright, "Declare his glory among the nations: Reading the Old Testament for Mission", The C F D Moule Memorial Lecture (Wednesday 10th June 2015)

<sup>93</sup> Wright, JH, Langham (2008)

like light, like yeast ... purifying, illuminating and changing the world in creative ways that infiltrate the world with God's Kingdom values and actions. This is a progressive revelation of God through salvation history that culminates in the merciful, non-violent Jesus. I would argue that, while we condemn and abhor the idea of genocidal ethnic cleansing, there is a lesson for us in the Deuteronomy narrative about clearing the land for a new generation. And is it a message about the kind of world that we would love our children and grandchildren to inhabit. We need to have a desire to see the future freed from that which is not of the fullness of God's intention for life on earth. In New Testament terms it is activating the prayer 'your Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.' It is worth exploring this in terms of what it means for the landscape inhabited by young adults today. Indeed the authors of The Faith of Gen Y argue that the dialogue of sociology and theology reaches its natural conclusion in apologetics, the theological discipline that concerns itself with how the gospel should be presented mindful of the particular culture and context in which it is to happen. Each generation is called to handle different issues and questions. They quote Tillich; 'the fatal pedagogical error is to throw answers like stones at the heads of those who have not yet asked the questions.'<sup>94</sup> Therefore the church needs to be clear about what are the issues and concerns of the new generations.

And so we need to turn our attention to a myriad of issues.

Things like wars in the Middle East. Presently \$18 billion a year is being spent on arms for the Middle East, most of it supplied by so-called Christian countries (USA and UK) to fuel Islamic wars! That is an outrage and is behaviour that needs to be wiped off the face of the earth.<sup>95</sup>

Things like the downside of the IT revolution. It is so wonderful in so many ways. The Millennials grew up with it and have much to contribute to the older generation about how to live in this world. And yet it also comes with considerable negative impact on human relationships. For many, genuine face to face connection is being overtaken by things like snapchats, where the image and caption disappear as quickly as they arrive, and instagrams, where the maximum duration of a video message is 15 seconds. But most disturbing is the

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<sup>94</sup> 108

<sup>95</sup> Beaumont, Peter, The 18 Billion dollar arms race helping to fuel Middle East Conflict , The Guardian (April 24, 2015)

crass objectification of women and sex through the wide-spread access our young people have to pornography. Is this view too extreme? Is it the view of an old fuddy duddy who does not understand this IT generation? I was wondering about this when I came across an article in the Sunday Times, Real sex, real effort are too tough for our lost boys.<sup>96</sup> It reflects on an interview with 82 year old Philip Zimbardo, professor emeritus at Stanford University and one of the world's most eminent psychologists. Concerned that many of his students were confiding that they were watching too much on-line porn or were having trouble stopping internet gaming he investigated. The brand new book, Man Disconnected,<sup>97</sup> is the result. He believes on-line technology has bred a new generation of young men who no longer do normal young male things and as a result they no longer want to interact with reality – sexually or socially. He sounds a grave warning: masculinity as we know it is being destroyed by on-line porn and gaming. Technology is sabotaging what it means to be male. And he believes this is not just a phase. If we ignore this, it is only going to get worse. In his book he cites a study which shows that the average young male spends 10,000 hours on-line before the age of 21. Zimbardo see this in terms of time not spent sleeping, reading, writing, talking to girls, playing sport or getting out into nature. He talks about the development of a new kind of shyness he calls 'social intensity syndrome' in which men prefer the company of men and display a shyness with women that is very different from old-fashioned shyness. In extreme forms it sees boys retreating from being social animals – they do not want to interact with reality. Zimbardo believes that when young men are playing games or watching internet porn they are 'trapped in a present hedonistic time zone which keeps them in a constant loop of instant gratification'. This leads to what he calls arousal addiction, but unlike drug and alcohol addiction, porn users and gamers don't just need more, they crave novelty, change and more extreme stimulation. What do we do about this? He talks about the responsibility of every man to mentor the next generation. Yet research shows that fathers spend very little time with their teenage sons. He recommends limiting screen use, taking technology out of the bedroom, regular family dinners without any technology present. He suggests that boys be told to turn off games, turn off porn and instead turn on people, learn to dance, make

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<sup>96</sup>Eleanor Hills, Sunday Times (May 10, 2015)

<sup>97</sup> Zimbardo, Philip & Coulombe, Nikita D, Man Disconnected: How technology has sabotaged what it means to be male, and what can be done , Rider (June 2015)

female friends, exercise regularly outside and make long-term goals in the real world. He sees a vital need to become future orientated rather than becoming stuck in a virtual present.

Some psychologists and social scientists disagree with his warnings. They argue that young people find communities and friendships on-line and those who see the virtual world as a threat are stuck in the past. There are surely good relationship-enhancing things about social media and this counter view is a balance. However, I believe there is great weight and wisdom in Zimbaro's warnings. I think our great grandchildren will look back on the way we allowed this to happen and wonder why on earth ...? The Sunday Times journalist who wrote the article asks if it is time to push 'escape'. In my view, yes it is. How do we clear the land of such a life-taking and relationship-smashing scourge. William Morris was a Victorian man of wide-ranging skills and interests. Among other things, he sought to soften the hard edge of industrialization in the UK. The impact of his work and thought has continued to the present.<sup>98</sup> We need to join to raise a Morris like voice that seeks to soften the hard edge of the digital age on our landscape.

Things such as the continued slide into environmental ruin and the 'head in the sand' approach of the baby boom generation who have overseen much of the damage. How do we save the land from this? It was gratifying to see a major article in the Guardian which trumpeted growing involvement of the world's religious communities in the fight to tame climate change. In one week in May 2015, the Church of England decided that climate change was an ethical reason to liquidate some investments and the Vatican called for a moral awakening on climate change.<sup>99</sup>

Things such as the superficial and fluffy new age spirituality of pop culture - popcorn for the soul. Or more importantly, the militant, arrogant and aggressive spirituality of fundamentalism, most vilified in Islam, but present in all religions. So often this kind of religion exists by bullying its more gentle and peace-loving kin. How do we stand up to these religious bullies with truth and dignity? Sam Harris in his book The End of Faith; Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason, is stinging in his attack on fundamentalism in all religions.

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<sup>98</sup> MacCarthy, Fiona Anarchy & Beauty: William Morris and His Legacy, 1860-1960, National Portrait Gallery (2014)

<sup>99</sup> Fossil Fuel Divestment gives the Earth a Prayer of a Chance (Saturday 2 May 2015)

He zeros in on the ‘we alone are right’ attitude that results in arrogant disregard for the views and rights of others. But he also zeros in on the failure to critique this kind of belief by people of more moderate faith who are crippled by a politically correct need for tolerance. I agree with him. Christians need to speak up and stand against this form of religion which in its worst expressions leads to bombs in the name of god!

Things such as the crazy distribution of wealth in the world that sees most of the money in the hands of a very few (most of whom exist in the so-called Christian West) and great swathes of humanity subsisting on very meagre pickings. I am haunted by a walk down a railway line in Calcutta in 2013. Family after family were camped within inches of the tracks, eking out an existence by making the yellow garlands that adorned the nearby funeral pyres down by the river. How do we galvanize the Westernized church to this cause when we are instead comfortably camped in our comparatively opulent lifestyles?

And things such as the casual sexual ethics of the age which preaches freedom but is enslaving millions in shallow and lonely ‘love’ lives, let alone the physical and emotional pain of casual sex. How does the church get a hearing on life-giving sexuality from the deaf ears of this generation? No less challenging is the task of engaging with Millennial Christians around sexual ethics. Research in the US indicates that the majority of Millennial evangelical Christians are having sex before marriage.<sup>100</sup> This exposes a huge disconnect from the church’s teaching on sex. Most young Christians in this situation end up leaving the church because they feel like hypocrites. Those who stay feel guilty but continue with their sexual behaviour. This is a big stumbling block. How can the Church keep this group meaningfully engaged without compromising Biblical teaching on sexual ethics? And one of the biggest factors here is sociological change. The new ‘emerging adult’ trend whereby marriage is delayed until late 20’s is a big factor compared to Biblical times when marriages were arranged when couples were still in their teens. This societal trend has now added years of temptation for the Millennials. How the church deals with this is very significant. Not dealing with it well means opening the back door and letting them go and closing the front

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<sup>100</sup> O’Neil, Tyler, Christians are following secular trends in premarital sex, Christian Post (Jan 27, 2014); Charles, Tyler, (Almost) Everyone is doing it, Relevant Magazine, (Issue 53, Sept/Oct 2011)



door and not letting them in. This is a hugely relevant issue for the church's engagement with Millennials. It deserves a study of its own.

These are the kind of issues we need to get our theological and ethical teeth into for the sake of our children and our children's children. They need to be the subject of our pondering, our discussions, our listening, our debates, our preaching, our coaching and our action.

## **Chapter 8**

# **Deuteronomy's Framework for Generativity**

## **Handing Over**

### **Leadership**

Leadership lessons abound in Deuteronomy.

At the forefront is the picture of Moses, a wise, battle hardened leader speaking with authority at the end of a long campaign! The people listen for he has their respect. He has made mistakes but he has learnt from them. He has been courageous, he has spoken up for those he led and he took the hard decisions when needed. And he is a leader who understands sustainability and transition to the next generation. This is where Joshua comes in as the leader of the next generation, the generation of the Promised Land.

On the surface we are drawn to the commissioning of Joshua in Deuteronomy 31:

*<sup>7</sup> Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the presence of all Israel, "Be strong and courageous, for you must go with this people into the land that the LORD swore to their ancestors to give them, and you must divide it among them as their inheritance. <sup>8</sup> The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."*

This is a great commission containing an exhortation to be a leader who displays strength, courage, peace, encouragement and abiding faith in the presence the Lord who is before and beside! And in addition to this, Moses has spoken to the people about their responsibility to support and encourage the new leader (1:38) and taken opportunities to build Joshua's faith along the way (3:21-22).

But behind this statement is much more: years of internship alongside Moses with no doubt increasing responsibility. And most significantly, present in this text and pervasive in the

whole narrative, ultimately God is the leader. God teaches Moses and Moses teaches the people. God leads Moses and Moses leads the people. This is not leadership in its own right, this is leadership by God, under God and for God that Joshua is being commissioned for.

All this is hugely relevant to our topic. Leadership transition is crucial to keeping faith alive down through the generations.

In recent months it has grieved me to see a company I have had a little to do go into receivership. I am sad to say that after three generations of big business it is no longer viable and the demolition firms are moving in. It was a family business into the fourth generation. What happened I wonder? How well did leadership pass from one generation to another?

Similarly it is sad to see hundreds of churches in the New Zealand context that are either closing or on the brink of closure. There are so many big church buildings with small congregations of elderly folk hanging on to a style of church that they know and like. It is effectively a style from the 1960's that is not connecting at all with the younger generation. Granted it has been a difficult societal context for faith over the last 30 years and the church has been in continual decline. But not all churches have been in decline; there are more than a few stunning examples of openness to change, transition of leadership and faith to the new generation.

### **What can we do?**

Firstly, the older generation needs to accept change. The next generation will not do it the way it has been done in the past. It will be different and sometimes very challenging of existing ideas and structures.

Secondly, we need to empower this next generation of Christians to lead. Just as Moses mentored, strengthened, encouraged and commissioned Joshua, we too must look to release the leaders of the next generation to lead. This means identifying leaders and handing over responsibility. There is an adage in ministry circles that a pastor is most effective in reaching people 10 years either side of their age. To the extent this is true, younger people need to be leading churches if we want to connect with the younger generations. It means the stepping back of the old and the promoting and empowering of the young. This is particularly relevant

in a world so dominated by the digital dimension and demands leaders who move seamlessly in this environment.

This point is well illustrated by Ward in The Church in Post-Sixties New Zealand; decline, growth and change. He refers to research done in Australia that links church decline with aging leadership who found it hard to understand and relate to the cultures and values of younger attenders. He also explores this in relation to the plateauing of growth at Spreydon Baptist in the 1990's as Senior Pastor Murray Robertson and other key staff aged.<sup>101</sup>

Thirdly, we need to work hard to disciple these younger generations of Christians. At Hope Presbyterian we have Project Moses – designed to empower the spiritual life and work, discipleship, of those who are around retirement age. It was born directly from a preaching series on the Exodus from a few years back. Surely it is now time for Project Joshua – designed to empower the discipleship of those in the younger generations. A consistent theme of conversations I have had with those in the 25-40 age group at Hope Presbyterian is this: ‘we were nurtured in Sunday school and youth group and then nothing! We suddenly found the church treating us like adults who could stand on our own two feet, not needed too much attention until we reach old age, when the care of the church kicks in again!’ That is challenging message and needs addressing.

One of the successful things Hope Presbyterian developed with Project Moses is engagement with each person around their time of life, their gifts, ability to serve and areas for growth. It involves an interview, some homework, a day long course, a follow up interview, the establishment of a mentor, areas for service, opportunities for further learning and an invitation to be part of an ongoing support group. It is a good model that may be worth duplicating for the younger age group. Such an approach is deeply grounded in the Deuteronomy text.

Gordon McDonald has written a book on this issue of change in the church and empowerment of the younger generation: Who Stole my Church: what do you do when the church you love tries to enter the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.<sup>102</sup> It is a novel based on his wide-ranging experience of church life. It deals with an older generation of “builders” and “boomers” who feel that their church has been hijacked from underneath them by leaders focused on the

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<sup>101</sup> Archer (2013) 199

<sup>102</sup> 2008

culture of the younger generation. In the book an intergenerational crisis looms as the church's general meeting refuses to agree to a recommendation to spend \$150,000 on multimedia upgrades to the church building. The minister calls together fifteen characters in their fifties, sixties and seventies, to work through their response to the dumping of existing programmes, the neglect of traditional music, the disappearance of symbols of reverence, and the appearance of video, irreverent humour, new preaching styles, and even a new church name. This story has a familiar ring to it. It is reminiscent of a group of disciples that kept youngsters out of the Jesus's reach:

*<sup>13</sup> People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. <sup>14</sup> When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. <sup>15</sup> Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." <sup>16</sup> And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them. (Mark 10)*

While the children in this passage are, according to the Greek word used, only up to 12 years of age, there are interesting parallels that can be drawn here with the young adult generations we are dealing with in this study.

Jesus had a passionate desire to see the younger generation in the Kingdom. Mark uses strong wording to express the feelings of Jesus towards the exclusion of the youngsters – indignation or anger (eganaktesen)! For the older generation of Christians in New Zealand the abiding emotion about the missing younger generations is a more gentle and resigned emotion. Time and again I hear people reporting sadly that their children and grandchildren are not in church. Maybe we, with Jesus, need more indignation about this for it might get us much more motivated to do whatever we can to get them back.

The disciples sought to keep them out. Again a strong word is used to describe the way the disciples spoke to the parents in order to keep the children away: rebuke (epetimesan). The text does not explicitly say why they were so keen to shoo them away. Maybe it was simply to protect Jesus from being mobbed? But when one considers the context, there are more telling possibilities. And what do these possibilities challenge us in our attempts to include the younger generations?

Was it selfishness? Two things point to the problem being self-aggrandizement on the part of the disciples. Firstly, there is an obvious dichotomy between the children's low status in contemporary culture and how the disciples saw themselves: insiders with a rabbi who was taking the world by storm. Had it gone to their heads? The context would suggest 'yes' because this passage is surrounded by other examples of the same sort of behavior: the controversy over who is the greatest disciple (9:33-37); the desire to stop the exorcist who was 'not one of us' (9: 38-41); and the request of James and John for honoured positions (10:13-16). Compare this with the kind of humility Jesus was looking for in his disciples and there is a shocking contrast! The theme in all these incidents is one of keeping people out by lifting yourself up. It is a kind of critical attitude that judges others as less worthy of belonging. This is really relevant to the interaction of those in the church with those on the outside in today's world. And let's face it, most of the Boomers, Gen Xers and Millennials are outside the church. David Kinnaman's book 'Unchristian – What a new generation really thinks about Christianity ... and why it matters'<sup>103</sup> is based on research by the Barna Group. It reveals a perception from those in the younger generation that Christians have a judgmental attitude that works to exclude them. It was this research that inspired Philip Yancey to write his most recent book, Vanishing Grace. He was shocked by the research that showed a plummeting respect for Christians in the USA.

'I decided to write this book after I saw the results by the George Barna group ... in 1996, 85% of Americans who had no religious commitment still viewed Christianity favourably. Thirteen years later in 2009, only 16% of young 'outsiders' had a favorable impression of Christians and only 3% of evangelicals.'<sup>104</sup>

Anecdotal comments from my experience with those outside the church within the New Zealand definitely suggest similar trends here, albeit not as strong.

This feeling has been popularized recently with the younger generations through the lyrics of the hit song 'Take Me to Church', written by Hozier<sup>105</sup> over his frustration with the Roman Catholic church's stance on homosexuality:

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<sup>103</sup> Baker Books (2007)

<sup>104</sup> 3

<sup>105</sup> 2014

*Take me to church*  
*I'll worship like a dog at the shrine of your lies*  
*I'll tell you my sins and you can sharpen your knife*  
*Offer me that deathless death*  
*Good God, let me give you my life*

Hozier was born in Ireland on St Patrick's day 1990 – right smack in the middle of Gen Y. Whether we think it is fair or not, the perception he sings about is strongly felt for many of his generation. How the church deals with this issue is of vitally significant importance if we are to engage with those outside the church in these younger generations.

Certainly, Yancey is helpful. He sets the scene as follows:

“Nowadays the principle of tolerance rules above all others, and any religion that claims a corner on truth is suspect. Combine that with Christians’ reputation for judging others’ behaviour and no wonder opposition heats up. As one critic remarked, ‘Most people I meet assume that Christian means very conservative, entrenched in their thinking, anti-gay, anti-choice, angry, violent, illogical, empire builders; they want to convert everyone, they generally cannot live peacefully with anyone who doesn’t believe what they believe.’ Jesus never commanded us to score well in the opinion polls, but as I mull over the list of works people use to describe Christians, I wonder how we can act as salt and yeast within a society that views us so negatively.”<sup>106</sup>

Yancey spends the rest of the book exploring how Christians deal with this. Part two of his book is aptly called ‘Grace Dispensers’. Here he argues for Christians who are pilgrims (on the journey alongside others on the way), activists (who express faith through deeds) and artists (who connect authentically and creatively faith and the human condition). Certainly the church does need to find ways to connect well with the growing number of non-Christians in this post-modern age of questions, dialogue, pluralism and tolerance.

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<sup>106</sup> 11

David Rhoads in his commentary on Mark<sup>107</sup> talks helpfully about the expansive and inclusive networking of Jesus:

*‘Jesus is expansive. This is not a stationary community that seeks to protect boundaries but a network going out from Jesus like branches on a tree; first Jesus, then the disciples ... the person who is at the extremity of the network – the one who simply offers a cup of water to someone who bears the name of Christ – is fully part of the network (9:41) ... in contrast to a stationary and protective culture, the Jesus movement in Mark is a loose-knit network comprised of people who are reaching out’<sup>108</sup>*

The attitude of the disciples in Mark 9 and 10 is in stark contrast to this and comes to a head with the attempted exclusion of the parents and children! Jesus uses the situation to make a point. In fact he moves the ones they would keep on the margins to the centre (in the midst [9:36]) and used them as an example of how to enter the Kingdom. Then he embraces them and blesses them (remember the blessings of Deuteronomy). The word for blessing here is used elsewhere in Mark for healing. Its use here speaks to us about the healing and wholeness that the touch of God brings.

Rhoads sees the crowning glory of the inclusive perspective of Jesus taking place at the last supper where he offers the cup to all of them, knowing that one of them was about to betray him (Mark 14:23). They all drink, a sign that there is a place for us in the Jesus community in all the various stages of commitment or betrayal. Reflecting on this I wonder if a distinctive difference between Moses and Jesus, the law and the gospel, is exposed here. Deuteronomy is very clear about who is in and who is out – a simple legal judgement. The gospels portray a grace that seeks to keep people in as much as possible, even supping from the same cup, sinners together. Is there something here for how we engage with the younger generations of this confusing post-modern world.

Gordon McDonald’s novel has the older generations calling out in anger and rebuke, ‘who stole my Church?’ Wouldn’t it be great if together we could be part of a narrative that has the younger generation thankfully calling out to the old ‘you gave me my church!’

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<sup>107</sup> Reading Mark, Augsburg Fortress (2004)

<sup>108</sup> 171



## **Epilogue**

### **Practical Implications**

#### **A Case Study**

##### **Hope Presbyterian**

Hope Presbyterian is located in the South West of Christchurch New Zealand. Average attendance at worship is between 700 and 800 people each week. Hope has a long standing evangelical background and embraced the Charismatic movement in the 1980's. It is a church that has been open to change and new styles of worship. The church has experienced considerable growth in the last 10 years. It fits the profile of Large Post-denominational Church. It is 'pragmatic evangelical', although there signs of post-evangelical thinking amongst some of the young adults.

Based on figures from the Hope Presbyterian data base, the age profile of the congregation is as follows:

Builder Generation (68 years +)	13.1%
Baby Boomers (52-67)	21%
Gen X (36-51)	27.6
Millennials (15-35)	15.9
Children and youth (0-14)	22.4

This is a profile of a church which is strongly represented by Gen X and their children. While Millennials are present in good numbers, as a percentage of the whole, this is an age group where Hope is weaker.

**What are the potential outcomes of this study for Hope Presbyterian?**

The following assessment is based on the framework of this paper. Where Hope exhibits a trend, a practice or an ethos that is helpful for connecting with young adults, this is commended. Areas where there is need for change or tweaking result in recommendations.

## **Generating Faith**

Hope people are to be commended for their strongly felt **desire** to see the younger generations come to faith. The congregation has accepted changes that have accommodated youth from the 1980's on. The church has been successful in attracting and retaining young adults for many years. The topic for this study leave was widely affirmed in the congregation as very important. Hopefully working with this report and its implications will raise even further the effectiveness of Hope in building faith in young adults.

The church invests heavily in ministry with children and youth, with both staffing and programme costs covered. However, **investment in ministry young adults** has been much less and staff focus on this area has been patchy. The area has been mainly led by motivated volunteers on a very limited budget. This report leads to a recommendation that more investment be made in ministry to young adults.

## **Three Successive Distinctive Generations**

### **Boomers, Gen X, Millennials**

There is a commendable mix of ages attending Hope including good numbers of Millennials and Gen Xers.

At Hope there are 120 Millennials on the role. There are 12 Growth Groups with members in the 18-40 age range. 40 people attend a group for 18-25 year olds. There are over 100 people on the list of those who connect with the group for 25-40 year olds, Pursuit. While this is reasonably healthy, Millennials, as a percentage of the overall Hope population, are under-represented. The findings of the focus group (see appendix A) identify issues for further work if Hope is to connect better with this age group. The issues identified by the focus group are consistent with the trends identified in the readings that form the basis of this report. A strong recommendation is that Hope takes the findings of this report seriously in continuing to work on ministering effectively to the young adult generations.

## **Deuteronomy's Framework for Generativity – the content of faith**

Hope is an evangelical charismatic church known for good **orthodox biblical preaching**. These values are articulated clearly in documentation like the Guiding Principles and Strategic Plan. There is a strong biblically based infrastructure for faith development. As this fits the profile of churches that are doing best with young adults, it is a commendable aspect of the DNA of this church.

However, when it comes to making room within this belief system for elements of postmodern thinking that appeal to young adults, there is some work to be done. Other than the Night Church context, the tendency has been to take a more modernist approach to teaching and preaching, one that seeks to give all the answers. I would recommend that the preaching team be more **cognizant of the post-modern ethos** that allows questioning and doubts to exist. A recommendation of the report is that the preachers at Hope work on developing a style that is consistent with the following statement from the body of the report:

*‘Holding together an infrastructure of core beliefs with room for post-modern musings around the detail captures two important aspects for the church in connecting with young adults today; firstly it recognises the reality that churches with orthodox biblical teaching are best at connecting with young people and secondly it give room for the post-modern imagination.’*

In terms of **adapting to culture so as to be relevant**, Hope in my view holds well to the creative tension identified in this report:

*The tension is a creative one. It allows the church to engage with culture with a style that is relevant at the same time as it holds to gospel truth and thus stands apart in order to bring the Godly critique of the prophetic voice.*

However, in a church like Hope with a strong desire to connect, to be relevant and to grow, there is pressure to say what the ‘customer’ wants to hear. The leaders are constantly bombarded with the latest ideas from the American church scene about how to be relevant and connect with contemporary culture. The recommendation is for continued and critical discernment to ensure the right balance is kept so that the church does not trade in the gospel for the latest whim of sociological research or entrepreneurial acumen.

In addition to this is the need to stand **against culture with the gospel alternatives** where appropriate. A good example of this is the need to critique the emphasis in the Millennial generation on ultimate meaning coming from a pursuit of happiness through relationships and

materialism. Hope is to be commended for the way it does sound a prophetic note in these matters.

Another aspect of the report that needs serious work is the issue of **mobility** amongst young adults (and in society generally, particularly in post-earthquake Christchurch). Both Johnstone and Hervieu-Leger make it clear that mobility is a major reason why Christians disconnect from church. My recommendation is that Hope work harder on keeping tabs on people and on making our presence felt in the new subdivisions. Hope already do this to some extent and certainly acknowledge the value of it. There is huge room for improvement.

Strongly related to this is the desire for authentic and loving **intergenerational community**. Johnstone's research found this was a deep desire for Christian young adults. He talks in terms of finding a 'home', as 're-membering' and 're-collecting'. This desire for authentic intergenerational community was the strongest finding that emerged from the focus group of young adults at Hope. Clearly there needs to be a strong and central recommendation that Hope works hard to enhance opportunities for community life to be strengthened, with a particular focus on intergenerational interaction.

### **Deuteronomy's Framework for Generativity – the need for renewal**

A longing for, and constant prayer for, **renewal and revival** is a feature of Hope. This is in commendable harmony with the ethos of Moses in Deuteronomy. There is a huge untapped market for Christianity within the millennial generation. Hope needs to continue to pray about and think about how to reach these young people. Godly renewal movements abound in church history. Hope needs to be prayerfully in step with the Spirit to catch each new wave of renewal. In terms of engagement with the signs of renewal discussed in the report, Hope is doing well:

Hornby Presbyterian Church, as it was then, embraced the **Charismatic Movement** in the 1980's (not without some pain) and this brought spiritual renewal and openness to change that eventually fuelled growth.

Hope now fits the profile of a **Large Post-denominational Church** as outlined in the body of this report. It has more in common with other such churches than it does with the majority of other Presbyterian churches. It has many of the positive features of this kind of church: intentional, missional, strategic, multi-staffed, growing, intergenerational, quality delivery

and good numbers of Millennials. It has also managed good diversity within the larger whole. Some time ago the decision was made to become **multi-congregational** rather than concentrating on one big Sunday gathering. There are 8 congregations operating<sup>109</sup> and there are around 500 people involved in small groups. This fits well with the postmodern desire for choice that is a strong feature in younger generations today. These are all commendable elements that help the church connect with Millennials.

There is a growing desire at Hope to experiment with **alternative forms of church** that might engage with non-churched and de-churched people in the Gen X and Millennial generations. Currently attempts are being made to start Messy Church and the leadership is open to other ideas. Hope has the capacity to explore this and should continue to do so.

**Alpha** is well integrated into the life of the church and is resulting in significant numbers of new commitments and baptisms. There were 19 adult baptisms in 2014.

There is a growing **ethnic** diversity in the church but there is potential for more to be done here. A significant number of Chinese families from the new Wigram subdivision connected with some of Hope's community ministries in 2013 -2014 (Women's Café, Playgroup and Mainly Music). Some started attending church. While thoughts of a new Chinese congregation were entertained, this was not actioned. Subsequently a Chinese church has moved into the area and an opportunity was lost. There is potential for Hope to connect with this growing ethnic edge of church life in NZ. A recommendation of this report is that Hope be open to opportunities to create ethnic congregations and quick to act when opportunities arise.

The call **to fear God** in Deuteronomy is honoured in the worship at Hope with a high level of acknowledgement of the holiness and power of God. The balance between grace and consequences both earthly and eternal is consistently communicated.

### **Deuteronomy's Framework for Generativity – the importance of teaching well**

**Remembering, Repetition and Ritual** are all features of the Hope environment. The children's programme is particularly strong in telling the old stories. There is a strong and growing emphasis in the children's ministry on empowering parents for the development of

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<sup>109</sup> Hornby at 9am, 10.30am and 6pm; Rolleston at 10am; West Melton at 9.30am; Halkett monthly at 11am; Edge youth service fortnightly at 5pm; Every Other Wednesday for older folk fortnightly on Wed at 10am.

faith at home. This is commendable and powerfully consistent with the ethos of Deuteronomy and the research on how faith is passed on to the young. There are other things that can be done in this area that flow out of the report.

Given the break in the chain of memory caused by the absence of boomers and Gen X from church, there is a strong incentive to **encourage grandparents** and great grandparents to persistently reach out to their unchurched young with the stories of faith – books of bible stories as presents, telling and retelling the old stories, witnessing to their own faith journey are all examples of what can happen.

A very strong finding from the focus group discussion at Hope was the desire of the young adults surveyed to have more opportunities for **intergenerational conversations** and fellowship. The fact that Hope has a good mix of all ages was seen by them to be a major draw card for younger Christians who desire and need mentoring in faith. It is a recommendation of this report that Hope look for further ways to encourage intergenerational connections to grow.

Secondly, the Millennials are presently in a time of many **personal transitions** – from school to tertiary education or work, from singleness to relationship, from relationship to marriage, from marriage to starting a family and in some cases from marriage to singleness and solo parenting. The Hope Presbyterian focus group findings stressed the desire for practical teaching and help with these transitions. The church needs to work hard at nurturing people through these times. Good practical teaching and use of appropriate rituals in the life of the church for doing this are also important.

Faith in God was the overwhelming reason those in the Hope focus group gave for staying with church. Nurturing growing, vital and alive **faith in God** is a key element in connecting church and young adults. Heartfelt, congruent, integrated and creative communication about faith and life is a strong feature of the Hope environment to be commended and encouraged. The committed work of the Creative Ministries team is outstanding. All this is strongly attractive to Millennials at the church and this work needs to be strengthened and enhanced even further.

There are, however, some challenges and some areas for further development around **integrating young adults, youth and children more fully into morning worship**. One

clear finding from the focus group discussion with Millennials at Hope was the expressed desire to be part of intergenerational interaction in church.

With respect to **youth**, the fortnightly youth service, Edge, is going well – a youth service for youth by youth. It fits the profile of the Youth Church grown up that is featured in the report – a service that has emerged out of a successful youth group. The problem identified in this study is that this kind of church can lead to disconnection with the rest of the church community. It can lead to people ‘growing out of’ church when they no longer fit the age profile of the youth expression of church. There is work to be done to ensure that Hope youth are integrated as much as possible into the life of the whole church in a way that aids transitions to other kinds of church within the Hope context. This has worked best in the past at the Hornby site when youth workers have been committed to one of the main morning services and have gathered groups of young people around them in church. This trend has declined in the last two years and this needs to be reversed. There are things that the church can do about this and things the youth team can do. A recommendation of this study is the Core Leadership Team work with the Youth Team to increase their presence and involvement at morning church. This may mean a reallocation of working hours for the youth team. It also means ensuring that Hope increasingly uses exciting styles of communication that are consistent with the way youth and young adults communicate. It is also important that Hope address relevant issues faced by young people including digital communication; care for the environment; relationships; sexual ethics; the complex rise of Islam and related issues; science/rationalism/atheism and faith. At present, young adults are asking for these kinds of issues to be addressed in services, youth want the morning services to be more exciting (or less boring) and families are calling for a style that is more inclusive toward children for the time that they are in church. A recommendation of this study is that the Hornby morning services be reviewed with these things in mind.

With respect to **children** more work is needed to ensure church is good for them when they are in church. Gen X and their children make up a large proportion of the worshipping community at Hope – we need to be attentive to their needs.

### **Deuteronomy’s Framework for Generativity – Looking Forward**

Hope works hard on **vision-casting and mission planning**. This is to be commended. There is also a strong Kingdom-building focus in many aspects of the work, not the least being the community work of Te Whare Awhero and Hope Youth. This study also identifies some

crucial issues for Hope to address as people working with God to bring His Kingdom to earth as it is in heaven. It is a recommendation of the report that consistent focus and attention be given to the issues.

One such issue is the disconnect between the church and Millennials over **sexual ethics**. It is a major issue because it is a significant reason why the church is losing connection with Millennials. How should the church deal with this? It is complex. There are many relevant questions to explore:

Should the church simply hold the biblical line on sexual ethics as a prophetic counter voice to prevalent culture and take the likely consequences of disconnecting with most Millennials? There is much to critique in the trend in the Millennial Generation towards delaying marriage. From a Christian perspective, it is a trend that is based on dysfunctional values and results in destructive consequences. These dysfunctional values include the materialistic motivation to delay marriage until there is enough money in the bank to have everything needed to set up house in the manner desired. Then there is the understandable caution about marriage caused by widespread marriage breakdown in their parent's generation. From a Christian perspective is this not something to counter with good marriage rather than delay. Because a negative consequence of the trend towards delayed marriage is that there is a long period when Christian young people are wired for sex yet are not married, creating an environment of great temptation. And the trend to delay marriage often means that young adults come to marriage carrying baggage in the form of hurt from the breakdown of a series short term, medium term and long term live-in relationships. And there are many negatives consequences that come from the prevalence of casual sexual relationships that are common-place amongst twentysomethings who are single, sexually wired and available. Taking these factors into account, should the church be proclaiming loud and clear that the trend towards delaying marriage is flawed; that the Christian view is to delay sex until marriage, but not to delay marriage. Should we be like the monasteries of the dark ages who kept historic Christianity alive and protected in the face of invading hordes, waiting for a better day for the faith? Is this the time for radical sexual orthodoxy?

Another line would be to argue that the biblical view of sexual ethics is different in different contexts. Aspects of the teaching in the Deuteronomic context about sex and



marriage are at odds with New Testament sexual ethics. Take for example the passage on marrying a captive woman in 21:10-14 which allows a person to marry a captive woman but let her go if not pleased with her. Then when we come to the New Testament context, it was one of teenagers entering into arranged marriages where there was a high cultural emphasis placed on the bride's virginity. Is today's trend of delaying marriage creating a context where the church needs to rethink its sexual ethics? Is the mature biblical ethic actually that sex belongs in a long term monogamous relationship? And is that possible outside the modern definition of marriage? And what makes marriage as modern society defines it the one biblical model for sexual cohabitation? This thinking will really stretch evangelical Christians but it is one perspective in a debate that needs to happen.

A really important pastoral question is this: can the church hold to the Biblical teaching on sexual ethics at the same time as it is warm and welcoming to those who have lifestyles that do not fit those ethics? Big US churches with large numbers of Millennials have been working on this recently<sup>110</sup> and a recommendation of this report is that the Hope leadership do further work and investigation in this whole area.

## **Deuteronomy's Framework for Generativity – Handing Over**

### **Leadership**

This study has concentrated on how the church can best connect with young adults. Both common sense and research suggests that there is a better chance of that happening when Gen X and Millennial-aged people are in the leadership mix. Hope is a church with a good number of Millennials and Gen Xers but leadership dominated by baby boomers - the Senior Pastor, previous Senior Pastor and most of the elders are baby boomers. The charismatic renewal experience in the 1980s' still has a significant impact on the way things are done at Hope. One of the key challenges for this church is around how well this group of Hope baby boomers, who have seen so much success, **hand over power** to the younger generation. This does not mean that the boomers disappear from leadership, for their wisdom and experience is invaluable. But it does mean mentoring younger leaders and stepping back when it is time to empower them. It is a challenge that involves some letting go, some **accepting of change**

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<sup>110</sup> Willowcreek and Redeemer Presbyterian are good examples of this

and gracefully welcoming new things that do not necessarily fit well with a charismatic baby boomer Christian's way of doing things. Such a person with a good generative attitude would say to themselves. 'well, this is not really the way I like it but I have had a good go, and my faith is strong and intact, now I just want to support and empower the next generation.' The baby boomers of Hope have had good role models in the wonderful folk of the builder generation who accepted the changes brought by the Charismatic Movement in the 1980s.

The recommendations of this report include a call to be open to and supportive of change. The other recommendations in this area are about willingness to empower the younger generation with strong discipleship and providing increasing opportunities to lead. In terms of the nurturing and empowering of young adults, a new initiative which I have called **Project Joshua** is recommended. It could follow the Project Moses model developed for those approaching retirement and would offer nurturing discipleship development for each person in the Millennial and Gen X demographics.

In terms of leadership development, **good transition** is an area of high interest and importance at Hope Presbyterian. After 25 years of very successful ministry Murray Talbot nears retirement, moving to a part time role at Hope West Melton. Over the last 5 years I have engaged with the elders and Murray in a staged transition to the senior leadership position. The next challenge is to steer a course towards finding a younger leader who can connect well with younger generations who can be mentored and transitioned into the Senior Pastor role when the time is right. And this should be mirrored by increasing numbers of Gen X and Millennials being involved in other leadership roles at Hope.

### **Concluding Comment**

While on Sabbatical, Anne and I went to Barcelona one weekend. We had some trouble finding our way to the apartment we were to stay in. We asked many people for directions. Some were not interested, for others the language barriers were the problem. Then we came across an elderly lady who was a perfect mentor to these two travellers seeking the way. She gallantly sought to navigate the language barrier in order to answer our questions. She gave us space to find the way but she stayed close enough to nudge us in the right direction when we were unsure. At one point she lingered rather than pursue her own journey, just so she could make sure we headed in the right direction. We knew this because she suddenly

reappeared to redirect us at a vital crossroad! What a lovey parable for the older generations of Christians who long to see living faith in our younger generations.

## Appendix A

### Focus Group Questionnaire and Discussion

#### 25-40 Age Group and Church

Hope Presbyterian 12 April 2015

#### Questionnaire answers:

##### 1. Why have you stayed in church?

- a. Relationship with God ✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓
- b. Community and fellowship ✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓
- c. Support and growth in faith and life ✓✓✓✓✓✓
- d. Involvement in ministry ✓✓✓
- e. It feels like home ✓✓✓
- f. Grown up in the church ✓
- g. Role models from older generation ✓
- h. Habit ✓
- i. Believe in what this church is doing ✓
- j. Relevant and interesting services
- k. Church prepared to invest in me
- l. Growth group
- m. A place for our children to find faith

##### 2. Why do you think people of your generation have left church?

- a. Societal trends/peer group where church is side-lined ✓✓✓✓✓
- b. Disillusioned with traditional and narrow stance on doctrine and morality  
(desire for more freedom to question and investigate faith and meaning) ✓✓✓
- c. Lack of time ✓✓✓
- d. Lack of personal faith ✓✓✓
- e. New freedom in moving away from home ✓✓
- f. Not finding a fit ✓✓
- g. Not tailored well to the younger age groups ✓✓
- h. Not enough intergenerational involvement/feeling that outgrew youth group ✓
- i. Felt judged ✓
- j. Non-Christian partners ✓

- k. Distrust of institutions ✓
- l. Churches failure to connect well with prevailing worldview ✓
- m. Not practical enough
- n. Hurt
- o. Misunderstood
- p. Conflict in church

**3. What are the biggest disconnects between you and the older generation when it comes to church life?**

- a. Not enough opportunities to relate to other generations ✓✓✓✓
- b. Different ways of thinking and learning ✓✓
  - i. Need more room for post-modern questioning
  - ii. Digital awareness in the younger generation
  - iii. Music ✓✓
- c. Fear of change in older generation ✓
- d. Older generation thinking that the culture of the younger generation is bad – need to embrace changes in culture which are ok or positive
- e. Hope does connect well
- f. Grace message popular with young adult Christians conflicts with a more judgemental evangelical message of the past
- g. Church going and timing of church meetings hard for young families

**4. What are the issues the church should be dealing with?**

- a. Creating authentic Christian community ✓✓✓✓
- b. Dealing with relevant issues in practical ways
  - i. Relationships, singleness ✓, marriage, infertility, divorce, sole parenting, families ✓✓✓✓
  - ii. Money
  - iii. Social justice ✓✓
  - iv. Being male ✓✓
  - v. Dealing with a 'me' culture
  - vi. Environment
  - vii. Issues that are being debated in wider society
  - viii. Dealing with the digital age
- c. Building strong faith to sustain and empower the Christian life (discipleship) post youth group ✓✓✓✓
- d. Supporting involvement of the younger generation ✓✓

- e. Need to stay true to basic theology/core beliefs ✓
- f. Evangelism – how to best share our faith with our friends ✓
- g. Need for loyalty, commitment and involvement regarding the local church ✓
- h. Room to be able to challenge cultural norms that are not scriptural
- i. Learning from the older generation – setting up ways to interrelate
- j. Valuing prayer

## 5. What can church do to better connect with your generation?

- a. Intergenerational interaction, participation and discussion ✓✓✓✓
- b. Building community ✓✓✓
  - ‘Authentic loving community’
  - Unconditional love that shows acceptance of the person even if their lifestyle is not consistent with Christian teaching ✓
- c. Acknowledging and giving practical help with transitions that take place in young adulthood ✓✓✓
- d. Night church topics and style good and can be developed more ✓✓✓
- e. Reimagine church for the new generation - Creativity and style that reflects a younger generation ✓✓
- f. Further develop social groups for the young adult age groups ✓
- g. Helping young families eg providing support for parents to get to growth groups
- h. Support for single parents
- i. Practical sermons
- j. Clearly outline the core beliefs of Christianity
- k. The \$2 lunch on Sunday after church is a really good family friendly and fellowship developing idea.
- l. Provide two parents rooms, one can be a 'quiet room' dedicated to breast feeding and/or sleeping babies, the second can be for children who are awake and active and a more father friendly environment.
- m. On-line growth group for people with busy lives or young children who can't meet in evenings.
- n. Offering bags can be off putting for seekers in the 25-40 yr generation who rarely have cash on them – replace with a 'tithe box' at the door / EFTPOS facilities/ opportunity to donate via text message
- o. A 5pm Sunday night service at Hornby (maybe combined with Edge) and a BBQ/ \$2 dinner afterwards could be attractive to families so they can attend a Sunday night service and still feed their kids. The 6.30pm Sunday night service is too late for young children.

**The discussion that followed reinforced these points. In addition, the two following points were made:**

It is hard to generalise and people have different experience of church

There is a significant difference between young adults who are in church and those who are not. Those in church generally like church the way it is, while those outside (the majority) do not like the way it is. This raised questions about how the church can keep faith with those on the inside, at the same time as seeking to shape its life to be more attractive to those on the outside.

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