

## **Chapter 19**

### **Global Christianity and Gen Z: What is the Hope for the Future of Faith? (Antipas Harris)**

#### **Introduction**

This study offers a global perspective on how Generation Z engages with Christianity. Gen Z is often defined as comprising of those individuals born between 1996 and 2012 and is identified as the most disengaged from religion in modern history. This global observation necessitates further investigation, beyond the scope of this chapter, to comprehend the diverse racial, cultural, and contextual settings that shape their generational characteristics. On the one hand, this generation is religiously disaffiliated. On the other hand, this study reveals that Gen Z possess a deep spiritual hunger amid fast-paced societal changes.

As Spirit-filled people of God, it is important to remain aware of cultural and contextual realities while acknowledging spirituality as a unique gift to society. Clinically speaking, spirituality has to do with one's hunger for supernatural agency for meaning and purpose. The Holy Spirit offers meaning and purpose to a generation in such a quest.

This chapter explores four significant concerns in this generation's search for meaning: spiritual, technological, social-psychological, and personal-communal, including the family. The role the church plays as the agency of the Holy Spirit to "serve this present age" (*a la* Charles Wesley) requires a revised approach to faith to address Gen Z's needs. This study proposes five suggestions: normalise advanced technology as part of congregational life, develop communities of meaning, commit to diligent prayer, involve young people in rethinking the way we do church, and connect faith to relevant needs in everyday life.

There are dynamics pertinent to generational examination. The next section outlines the precautions. In summary, several dynamics play a role in sociological realities. Also, generations do not exist in neat and distinct categories. With these dynamics in mind, all living generations in varying ways participate in the current religious landscape to be discussed in subsequent sections in this chapter.

### **Five Precautions**

Pew Research Center's president, Michael Dimock, offers five important precautions in generational study<sup>1</sup> apropos to this discourse on global Christianity and Gen Z. The first is that generational categories are not scientifically defined and thereby remain imprecise.<sup>2</sup> Second, categories can lead to over-generalisations and stereotyping. Groupings violate the fullness of human personhood and diversity.<sup>3</sup> Third, categorising generational differences tends to get more attention than generational commonalities, i.e., millennials are like this, and Gen Zs are like that.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, comparisons are false methods of assessment. Fourth, generational research is often "skewed toward the experiences of the upper middle class."<sup>5</sup> Some of the research does not capture a full picture of socio-economic, racial/ethnic, and perhaps gender diversity. Lastly, people change over time. Dimock aptly notes, "Young adults have always faced a different environment than their parents, and it's common for their elders to express some degree of

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Dimock, "5 Things to Keep in Mind When You Hear about Gen Z, Millennials, Boomers and Other Generations", Pew Research Center, 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2023, [Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/05/22/5-things-to-keep-in-mind-when-you-hear-about-gen-z-millennials-boomers-and-other-generations/>], [Last accessed: 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024].

<sup>2</sup> Dimock, "5 Things".

<sup>3</sup> Dimock, "5 Things".

<sup>4</sup> Dimock, "5 Things".

<sup>5</sup> Dimock, "5 Things".

concern or alarm.”<sup>6</sup> Categorising people based on their generation demarcates human behaviour with oblivion to similar behaviour in previous generations.

### **Issues of a Changing World Affect All Generations, With Gen Z in the Vanguard**

From the digital revolution to changing views on sexual morality; from climate change to war and terrorism; from the uptick in violent behaviour to post-pandemic stress and more, the world is rapidly changing. Many adverse experiences result from a fast-moving world where people have little time to process before other adverse experiences occur. Psychologists observe trauma amid unprocessed personal and societal adversity. Some of the changes such as with digital technology advance society as a whole. Others like climate change, the threat of nuclear and biological war, and the sexual revolution raise philosophical, theological, and anthropological questions of identity, the meaning of life and death, the role of spirituality, and hope. At the same time, faith is not the obvious resource to quench the thirst of this generation. While all living generations are affected by these many issues, the younger generation experiences the brunt of it.

To consider the future of faith in the face of so many global issues, this chapter analyses the situation of faith and Gen Z from a position of concern about the future of the Church. American millennials came of age at the peak of American secularism. Because of this, Pew labels millennials as drivers of religious disaffiliation.<sup>7</sup> They are tagged “the generation of

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<sup>6</sup> Dimock, “5 Things”.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Lipka and Claire Gecewicz, “More Americans Now Say They’re Spiritual but Not Religious”, *Pew Research Center*, 6<sup>th</sup> September 2017, [Available: <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2017/09/06/more-americans-now-say-theyre-spiritual-but-not-religious/>], [Last accessed: 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024].

‘nones,’” popularising “spiritual but not religious”.<sup>8</sup> Gen Z scholar, Ryan P. Burge,<sup>9</sup> Christian historian, Dale M. Coulter,<sup>10</sup> and others point to several attributes for the stark decline of faith affiliation. Some have to do with political ideology, a more bold confession of disaffiliation, growing multiple secularisms,<sup>11</sup> and demographic issues such as increased formal education, challenging questions about Christianity’s participation in racial histories, racialised nationalisms, marital status, sexuality, and matters related to gender. Moreover, some of the reasons are not merely cynicism about Christianity as much a slow, long-term shift of priorities more crystalised in this generation. Therefore, such concerns must not be discussed independently of living generations such as baby boomers, Gen Xers, and millennials.

When making value comparisons between generations, however, we must note that times are changing more than generational comparisons reveal. *All* generations participate in and are impacted by the changes. Thus, comparisons are more fluctuant than static. As Dimock aptly notes:

[G]enerational thinking can help us understand how societies change over time. The eras in which we come of age can leave a signature of common experiences

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<sup>8</sup> Lipka and Gecewicz, “More Americans.”

<sup>9</sup> See Ryan P. Burg, *The Nones: Where They Came From, Who They Are, and Where They Are Going* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2021). See Daniel A. Cox, “Generation Z and the Future of Faith in America”, *Survey Center on American Life*, 24<sup>th</sup> March 2022, [Available at: <https://www.americansurveycenter.org/research/generation-z-future-of-faith/>], [Last accessed: 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024].

<sup>10</sup> See Dale M. Coulter, “Thoughts on the Future of American Christianity”, *Firebrand*, 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2023. [Available at: [https://firebrandmag.com/articles/thoughts-on-the-future-of-american-christianity-firebrand-big-read?fbclid=IwAR3azTAmv3axMdfq9uQJ277a9Ppe0-yAo\\_Uozj1C3ukx0HpXw8PdA-0\\_h8](https://firebrandmag.com/articles/thoughts-on-the-future-of-american-christianity-firebrand-big-read?fbclid=IwAR3azTAmv3axMdfq9uQJ277a9Ppe0-yAo_Uozj1C3ukx0HpXw8PdA-0_h8)], [Last accessed: 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024].

<sup>11</sup> The academic conversation has moved beyond European secularism that compartmentalises religion as non-essential in public discourse. Post-secularism and post-liberalism consider religion important for private life but not public discourse. However, my usage of secularisms seeks to capture Jose Casanova’s insights of local challenges with religion rather than an import of European long-known secularism. Also, this chapter’s reference to secularisms pushes Casanova’s views towards new insights into how this generation separates institutional religion from spirituality. This contemporary lived reality seeks to break down the secular-sacred divide while also distancing from traditional forms of religion. The new form of religion (*a la* spirituality) is more fluid, syncretic, ever-changing, connects divine love as affirmation of human-centred interests, and is less concerned about religious routines unless they are mysterious (other worldly), meaningful (feels personal), and practical (adds positivity to how one feels about themselves and the world). See Clayton Crockett, “What is Postsecularism?” *American Book Review* 39(5), (2018): 6-14, [Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1353/abr.2018.0062>], [Last accessed: 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024].

and perspectives. Similarly, historical advances like desegregation, effective birth control, the invention of the internet, and the arrival of artificial intelligence can fundamentally change how people live their lives, and the youngest generations are often in the vanguard.<sup>12</sup>

Sociology observes emerging trends in human behaviour incalculable to hard science. This means that one must not take a hard stance such as, this generation is about this, and that generation is about that. All generations are experiencing shifts at the same time, even if one generation behaves differently than another when they were *this* or *that* age.

As we consider Gen Z, we find ourselves saying, “That’s not really unique to Gen Z!” Or, “We were kind of like that in my day,” as if our “day” no longer exists. Actually, there are probably more youth trends across generations than not. Yet, paradoxically, generational attributes contribute to the lived reality and views of faith. Much of what impacts Gen Z are ripple effects from previous generations. At the same time, studies show evidence of discontinuities in which one generation moves in the opposite direction of another.<sup>13</sup>

An Ipsos Global Advisor study revealed some surprising twists regarding generational religious affiliation. Researchers surveyed twenty-six countries<sup>14</sup> and found that overall, younger people are less likely than older adults to identify as Christian, especially Catholic. Religious young people are more likely to identify as Muslim or other religions.<sup>15</sup> The same study indicated an even more notable shift – the difference in religious affiliation among boomers in comparison to Gen Zers.<sup>16</sup> While in nearly all countries at least one-third of all

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<sup>12</sup> Dimock, “5 Things.”

<sup>13</sup> “Global Religion 2023: Religious Beliefs across the World”, Ipsos, 11<sup>th</sup> May 2023, 2 [1-39]. [Available at: <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2023-05/Ipsos%20Global%20Advisor%20-%20Religion%202023%20Report%20-%2026%20countries.pdf>], [Last accessed: 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024].

<sup>14</sup> Nicolas Boyon, “Two Global Religious Divides: Geographic and Generational”, Ipsos Global Advisor, [Available at: <https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/two-global-religious-divides-geographic-and-generational>], [Last accessed: 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024].

<sup>15</sup> Boyon, “Two Global Religious Divides”.

<sup>16</sup> “Global Religion 2023”.

adults believe in God as described in holy Scriptures, Gen Zers are the ones less likely than boomers to hold such beliefs.<sup>17</sup> However, that trend is reversed in less religious countries. Gen Zers tend to gravitate toward faith in countries where older adults are less religious.<sup>18</sup> In countries where religious practice is low, young people tend to have higher participation rates.<sup>19</sup>

### **Critical Factors Impacting Gen Zs' Faith Participation**

Several crucial factors currently impact the global Christian situation: (1) elements of secularisms mixed with non-religious spirituality, (2) continued decline in traditional family systems, (3) modern technology, and (4) social isolationism. While these crucial elements are listed separately, they are interwoven.

#### **Secularisms Mixed with Non-Religious Spirituality**

First, the decline in religious affiliation in Gen Z exists as a by-product of multiple generational shifts away from holding church affiliation as essential to faith formation. A three-hundred-year-rise of multiple iterations of secularism, post-secularism, and the resurgence of secularism is coming to a head, impacting a diverse world in multiple ways. The resurgence of secularism is complex. On the one hand, it comprises a variety of secularisms rather than the traditional Western one. On the other hand, contemporary secularisms are unique because they are not absent of spirituality but rather integrate non-traditional spiritualities. Thus, calling this a resurgence of “secularism” proves problematic.

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<sup>17</sup> “Global Religion 2023”. Also, see Samantha Saad, “Where Boomer Faith in God Is Low, Gen Z Belief Is Up”, *Christianity Today*, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2023, [Available at: <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2023/july/ipsos-global-religion-survey-boomer-gen-z-belief.html>], [Last accessed: 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024].

<sup>18</sup> Saad, “Where Boomer Faith in God Is Low”.

<sup>19</sup> Saad, “Where Boomer Faith in God Is Low”.

However, the new secularisms are hard to define. For the sake of discussion, I will mention a few perspectives. White South African scholar, B.J. van der Walt, defines secularism in the following manner:

Secularism, born from the atheistic notions of three centuries, is a subjectivist, relativist and utilitarian view – as well as the resulting state of affairs – according to which [hu]man[kind] is so-called free, independent and having come of age. Because of the part the particular powers which [human beings] ha[ve] at [their] disposal, [humanity] has taken the place of God, who in [their] view has become superfluous, so that [human beings] can now live solely out of, by and toward this life which is closed off in itself.<sup>20</sup>

While van der Walt provides insights into an anti-religious, anti-God version of secularism, other scholars argue for a more nuanced view, pointing out many secularisms as opposed to a single Western version.

Another definition of secularism hails from The Center for Inquiry. This definition bootstraps secularism with humanism in the following manner: “Secular humanism is a nonreligious worldview rooted in science, philosophical naturalism, and humanist ethics. Instead of relying on faith, doctrine, or mysticism, secular humanists use compassion, critical thinking, and human experience to find solutions to human problems.”<sup>21</sup> An attempt to define many approaches to secularity is evident in this definition.

The research is a mixed bag. Some secular humanisms are anti-religious and anti-God. Others are not concerned about God so much as they are with understanding the human situation.

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<sup>20</sup> B.J. Van der Walt, *Transforming Power: Challenging Contemporary Secular Society* (Potchefstroom, South Africa: ICCA, 2007): 298, quoted in T. Derrick Mashau, “A Reformed Missional Perspective on Secularism and Pluralism in Africa: Their Impact on African Christianity and the Revival of Traditional Religion”, *CJT*, 44 (2009): 108-126. 110, [Available at: <https://www.calvin.edu/library/database/crcpi/fulltext/ctj/2009-441-108.pdf>], [Last accessed: 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024].

<sup>21</sup> “What is Secular Humanism?” *Center for Inquiry*, [Available at: <https://centerforinquiry.org/definitions/what-is-secular-humanism/#:~:text=Secular%20humanism%20is%20a%20nonreligious.find%20solutions%20to%20human%20problems>], [Last accessed: 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024].

The human-focused secularists may be where many “nones” are. They are neither atheists nor religious. Many expressions of secularism emerge from contextual social struggles. Jose Casanova explores this from a global-comparative perspective: “[M]ore importantly [than a European comparative analysis] the further recognition that with the world-historical process of globalisation initiated by the European colonial expansion, all these processes [of secularisation] everywhere are dynamically interrelated and mutually constituted.<sup>22</sup> Although there are variations of secularisms, they maintain a common focus on responding to the human condition. They tend to account for highly diverse experiences, globalisation, social environments, and human history in all its complexity.<sup>23</sup> This means that secularism is not all a reaction to religion or God per se. Some secularisms even critique Western ideals and how religion has wielded oppression, privileging some human persons over others. In this sense, any reasonable religious person would laud global secularity for its needed critique of historical Western religious overreach and abuse.

### **Decline in Traditional Family Systems and Values**

The second factor impacting the global Christian situation as pertaining to Gen Z is the continued decline in traditional family systems and values. Failing systems include the disintegrating family nucleus (father, mother, and children). Declining values refers to regular family time playing games, talking about life and faith, sharing family dinners, taking trips with, and going to church as a family. A report from the Survey Center on American Life of the

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<sup>22</sup> José Casanova, “Rethinking Secularization”, *Hedgehog Review* 8(1-2), (Spring/Summer 2006): 11, [Available at: <https://hedgehogreview.com/issues/after-secularization-special-double-issue/articles/rethinking-secularization>], [Last accessed: 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024]. Also, see Aprilfaye T. Manalang, “Generation Z, Minority Millennials and Disaffiliation from Religious Communities: Not Belonging and the Cultural Cost of Unbelief”, *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* 17 (Article 2) (2021): 2 [1-24], [Available at: [https://www.religjournal.com/articles/article\\_view.php?id=159](https://www.religjournal.com/articles/article_view.php?id=159)], [Last accessed: 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024].

<sup>23</sup> Casanova, “Rethinking Secularization”, 1-2.



American Enterprise indicates that previous generations produce more religious detachment in the next generation. The detachment may also be described as a break from the secular-sacred divide while also detaching from traditional forms of religion. The new form of religion (*a la* spirituality) is more fluid, culturally syncretic, ever-changing, employs divine love as affirmation of human-centred interests, and less concerned about traditional religious routines unless they are mysterious (other worldly), meaningful (shedding light on personal inklings and affectivity), and practical (adding positivity to how one feels about themselves and the world).

The evolution of religious engagement, detachment, and new forms of engagement is an incremental process from one generation to the next. It often appears reasonable, empowering, and harmless. Examples are as follows. Busyness has pushed family meals down the priority list. They are no longer centrepieces for family life with prayer being part of the daily or even weekly family table fellowship. The Survey Center on American Life reports that

For as long as we have been able to measure religious commitments, childhood religious experiences have strongly predicted adult religiosity. They still do. If someone had robust religious experiences growing up, they are likely to maintain those beliefs and practices into adulthood. Without robust religious experiences to draw on, Americans feel less connected to the traditions and beliefs of their parents' faith.<sup>24</sup>

The trajectory is set. Without another societal Great Awakening, the future will continue in the direction of secularism and church disaffiliation. Sunday school is almost obsolete. There is often a justifiable reason to choose work, leisure, or sports over regular church attendance. The separation between church and state has construed a false notion of divided human consciousness when we are in fact holistic beings. Like everyone else, Christians are just trying

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<sup>24</sup> Daniel A. Cox, "Emerging Trends and Enduring Patterns in American Family Life", *Survey Center on American Life*, 9<sup>th</sup> February 2022, [Available at: <https://www.americansurveycenter.org/research/emerging-trends-and-enduring-patterns-in-american-family-life/>], [Last accessed: 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024].

to keep up in a fast-paced world. Subsequently, they participate in *secularisation* while also rejecting *secularism*. As a result, young generations are moving further away from fidelity to faith or affiliation with the church.

### **Modern Technology and Social Isolationism**

Third, while modern technology is an asset in many ways – enhancing the spread of the Christian message through digital means (apps, YouTube, GodTube, streaming technology, and social media outlets) –the digital age has, nevertheless, challenged the role of faith in contemporary times. A world made smaller through technology amidst social isolationism is a perfect storm for mental health challenges and to stifle communal formation in a generation that is hungry for community and belonging.

In Jean M. Twenge’s book, *iGen*, she notes that the problem of loneliness is much deeper than merely a popular desire for belonging or seasonal depression. She says that “More young people are experiencing not just symptoms of depression, and not just feelings of anxiety, but clinically diagnosable major depression.”<sup>25</sup> That depression has led to a growing epidemic of self-injury such as cutting and even suicidality. Twenge highlights comments from New York psychiatrist, Fadi Haddad, in *Time Magazine* where Haddad laments, “Every single week we have a girl who comes to the ER after some social-media rumour or incident that upset her.”<sup>26</sup> Those ER visits are almost always caused by girls cutting themselves. According to a report from the Centers for Disease Control, “[P]oor mental and health remains a substantial public health problem, particularly among adolescent females.”<sup>27</sup> Twenge points out, “Many parents have no

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<sup>25</sup> Jean M. Twenge, *iGen: Why Today’s Super-Connected Kids Are Growing up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy – and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood* (New York: Atria, 2017): 108.

<sup>26</sup> Twenge, *iGen*, 109.

<sup>27</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Emergency Department Visits Involving Mental Health Conditions, Suicide-Related Behaviors, and Drug Overdoses among Adolescents – United States, January 2019–February 2023”,

idea what their children are doing on social media, and many feel helpless.”<sup>28</sup> Particularly, girls often cry out for help in subtle ways, even on social media.

In an article in *The Gospel Coalition*, Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra points out that Gen Z, often called iGen,<sup>29</sup> is anxiously digital.<sup>30</sup> Twenge asserts that Matt Carmichael, *Advertising Age*’s former director of data strategy, asserts that more than “Gen Z,” this generation is more accurately described as “iGen.”<sup>31</sup> They seek approval and validation, and they express their opinions and cry for help in digital spaces. Zylstra explains: “Part of the problem is that every social media platform is like a stage on which Gen Zers both perform and compare themselves to others.”<sup>32</sup> They create social media pages and soon delete them. Or they create multiple pages and make them private for select friends in each one. Twenge points out that New York psychiatrist Haddad reports, “One mother found that her self-harming daughter had seventeen Facebook accounts, which the mother promptly shut down. ‘But what good does that do?’ asked Haddad. ‘There will be an eighteenth.’”<sup>33</sup> Or they create public pages, post photos, and soon delete the pictures and start over.<sup>34</sup> Image insecurity is blatant in a culture of bullying and a generation with an unprecedented desire for peer acceptance. Zylstra quotes from her interview with Malisa Ellis who has worked in various parts of the world with a youth ministry called Cru: “The level of panic is high. Everything is out there all the time on social media [...]. As this

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*Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 72(19), (2023): 502-12, CDC, 12<sup>th</sup> May 2023, [Available at: [https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/72/wr/mm7219a1.htm?s\\_cid=mm7219a1\\_w](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/72/wr/mm7219a1.htm?s_cid=mm7219a1_w)], [Last accessed: 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024].

<sup>28</sup> Twenge, *iGen*, 109.

<sup>29</sup> Twenge, *iGen*, 7.

<sup>30</sup> Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra, “6 Things Christians Should Know about Gen Z”, *The Gospel Coalition*, [Available at: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/gen-z/>], [Last accessed: 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024].

<sup>31</sup> Twenge, *iGen*, 7. Twenge explains: “The prominent magazine *Advertising Age* has backed iGen as the best name for the post-Millennials. ‘We think it’s the name that best fits and will best lead to understanding of this generation,’ Matt Carmichael, *Advertising Age*’s former director of data strategy, told *USA Today*.”

<sup>32</sup> Zylstra, “6 Things”.

<sup>33</sup> Twenge, *iGen*, 109.

<sup>34</sup> Zylstra, “6 Things”.

generation leans into that, their anxiety goes up. But as they disengage from it, they feel like they're missing out. They're constantly battling back and forth between deleting and reinstalling their social media.”<sup>35</sup> One might conclude that in this way, Gen Zers have a love-hate relationship with digital resources.

The current digital age offers many assets, but at a time when social isolation and anxiety are at an all-time high, what once was a source of human progress is adding to social ills. For example, on the one hand, the Bible app is conveniently available for the smartphone as are many preaching videos and opportunities for virtual community. Most Christians would say that is a great thing. On the other hand, so too are negative things immediately and freely available such as anti-religious thought, porn, and damaging misinformation. The virtual good, bad, holy, profane, and propaganda all flood the digital natives at the click of a button. A world ravenous for more and more vices, more and more success, and more and more attention is overwhelming Gen Z. So, they engage a bit and then want to pull back for self-preservation.

### **Selected Global Cases**

The following four global cases – the Netherlands, the US, Ghana, and Singapore – shed light on Gen Z and its potential to lead a revolution of faith. Admittedly, these cases do not reflect all the continents and are thus an inadequate representation of a global context. Notwithstanding, they demonstrate the urgent need for a more robust conversation to examine faith's relevance in a global context, revealing both the challenges and the potential for a revival of faith.

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<sup>35</sup> Zylstra, “6 Things”.

## **The Netherlands**

For centuries, a Euro-secularism matured across Europe and influenced other parts of the world. In 2002, Dutch scholars, Manfred Te Grotenhuis and Peer Scheepers, studied why, since 1937, the Netherlands is one of the most secular countries in the world.<sup>36</sup> Most Dutch people do not attend church regularly, and most of the population does not affiliate with any church. They found that people are introduced to rationalisation at a young age. As people deepen their analysis of life with logical reasoning as the primary tool, the role of faith in their lives fades into shadow. Religious disaffiliation did not suddenly drop in the millennial and Gen Z generations. As structures of logical reasoning have taken centre stage, the role of faith has been pushed to the margins. This process has been underway for decades.<sup>37</sup>

Ipsos Global Advisor's study, mentioned earlier, offers a glimmer of hope. In mostly religious countries where baby boomers are more religious, younger generations tend to be less religious. But, where older generations are less religious, younger people are more likely drawn to religion. With this trend in view, the Netherlands may be positioned for revival. As the current generation is largely secular, Gen Z may be the key to a forthcoming Great Awakening in the Netherlands!

## **The United States of America**

The United States is also experiencing an ongoing faith erosion. As in the Netherlands, it did not start with millennials but accelerated among them and continues in Gen Z. Christian historian, Dale Coulter, points out that "The tag 'none' has been used since the 1960s as

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<sup>36</sup> See Manfred Te Grotenhuis and Peer Scheepers, "Churches in Dutch: Causes of Religious Disaffiliation in The Netherlands, 1937-1995", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 40(4), (2001): 591-606, JSTOR [Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1387654>], [Last accessed: 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024].

<sup>37</sup> Te Grotenhuis and Scheepers, "Churches in Dutch", 591-606.

shorthand for those who consider themselves ‘spiritual but not religious’”.<sup>38</sup> Pew Research Center reports that in 2017, 27 percent of cross-generational adults (boomers, Gen Xers, millennials, and older Gen Zers) said they are “spiritual but not religious” – an 8 percent increase over five years.<sup>39</sup> The arc is sharply bent toward increased religious disaffiliation in this generation, including women and men; whites, blacks, and Hispanics; varying educational levels; and a mixture of political affiliations. Much could be said about what happened in preceding generations that facilitated this.<sup>40</sup> Notably, older adults cultivate the environment for Gen Zers. They are the parents, leaders, teachers, and influencers.

Norfolk State University sociologist of religion, Aprilfaye T. Manalang, explains: “Although Gen Z and minority millennials feel ambivalent about their relationship to the church, they do not regard unbelief as either atheistic or religious per se, but a more nuanced negotiation in their daily lives.”<sup>41</sup> They respect religion and would likely say they believe in God. This stems from their sense of loyalty to family. In communities of colour, integration of faith and God-talk remain part of the cultural fabric that binds parents, children, grandparents, grandchildren, etc.

The spread of spiritual exploration intermingled with elements of secularism accelerates through the virtual halls of high-speed Internet. One observes emerging challenges related to the digital revolution in Gen Z. For example, Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra, shares an article in *The Gospel Coalition* entitled, “6 Things Christians Should Know About Gen Z.” Concerning the “Anxiously Digital” generation, Zylstra quotes her interview with Craig Millard, College Ministry pastor at Redeemer Church in New York, saying:

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<sup>38</sup> Coulter, “Thoughts on the Future of American Christianity”.

<sup>39</sup> Lipka and Gecewicz, “More Americans”.

<sup>40</sup> Racism, misogyny, and Christian nationalism – to name a few.

<sup>41</sup> Manalang, “Generation Z”, 1-24. Manalang examines faith disaffiliation and unbelief among Gen Zers and Millennials in American communities of colour, specifically, Filipino Americans (the second-largest Asian-American group), African Americans, and Hispanic Americans.

When we announce we're doing a 24-hour ministry-wide fast, they immediately think of fasting from social media. When I first started, I thought that was an easy way out of fasting from food. But now I can see how hard it is for them [...]. Students are more aware of how damaging it is to be constantly online, but it's so wrapped up in how they think of the world.<sup>42</sup>

In other words, Gen Z has a love-hate relationship with the digital age. Food is not the source of Gen Z's most serious gluttony. Social media is! It keeps them up at night. As Twenge observes,

Smartphone use may have decreased teens' sleep time: more teens now sleep less than seven hours most nights. Sleep experts says that teens should get about nine hours of sleep a night, so a teen who is getting less than seven hours a night is significantly sleep deprived. Fifty-seven percent more teens were sleep deprived in 2015 than in 1991. In just the three years between 2012 and 2015, 22% more teens failed to get seven hours of sleep.<sup>43</sup>

Differently than reading a traditional book or watching TV, electronic devices and social media are addictive. Twenge explains that "[t]he allure of the smartphone, its blue light glowing in the dark, is often too much to resist."<sup>44</sup> As part of Gen Z's everyday life, digital technology is both an asset and a challenge. The world acknowledges the digital age as a gift in human advancement. However, more attention must be given to the impact of modern technology on Gen Z's mental health.

A similar observation exists related to digital media and worship. Many Gen Zers have greater attraction to cathedrals and traditional worship space than to worship spaces inundated with digital screens and flashing lights. Notwithstanding, the complexity is that Gen Z is not completely averse to all digital assets.

Millard's point above is that, while Gen Zers seem lost in the crevice of the worst fractures in the structures of faith, they are crying out for a better way. To say this is an

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<sup>42</sup> Zylstra, "6 Things".

<sup>43</sup> Twenge, *iGen*, 114.

<sup>44</sup> Twenge, *iGen*, 115.

“anxious” generation is an understatement. A current mental health crisis exists, exacerbated by the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Gen Z is in search of spiritual and mental better-ness. Yet, better is not a return to some previous generation’s way. It is a search for a way forward that includes the digital age but with more guidance and temperance. It is a search for holistic treatment of mental, spiritual, and physical wellness. Christian spirituality has internal norms to satisfy this thirst if only the church rethinks the role of the Holy Spirit in the everyday life of the believer with Gen Z’s interests in mind.

### **Ghana**

Countries like Ghana, where Christians make up 71.2 percent of the country,<sup>45</sup> boast more Gen Z religious affiliation than many countries. Ghanaian scholar and pastor, Mensa Otabil, explains two important factors in strong faith participation: (1) family and (2) the African spiritual culture. First, Otabil says Ghanaian parents continue to heavily influence young people’s faith practices.<sup>46</sup> The central role of faith incubated in the home cannot be overstated. The influence and authority of the family remain strong in Ghana and other African countries. Second, Otabil points out, “Even the most secular African is also spiritual.”<sup>47</sup> So, a Ghanaian Gen Zer may be less likely to say, “I am spiritual and not religious,” since spirituality is inherent to the persisting pan-African culture. Notwithstanding, one wonders what the future of faith will look like for Africa. Certainly, they struggle with forms of secularism and even the infiltration of Western versions of secularism as indicated above in South Africa. However, Ghanaian Gen

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<sup>45</sup> The World Factbook, “Introduction: Africa, Ghana”, *Ghana Statistical Service*, [Available at: [https://statsghana.gov.gh/docs/countrypdf\\_gh.pdf](https://statsghana.gov.gh/docs/countrypdf_gh.pdf)], [Last accessed: 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024].

<sup>46</sup> Mensa Otabil (Pastor of International Central Gospel Church) conversation with Antipas Harris, 21<sup>st</sup> September 2023.

<sup>47</sup> Otabil, conversation.



Zers, for example, do not seem to have significantly wavered amid the global resurgence of secularisms.

It is not surprising that Spirit-filled Christianity fans the flames of young African spiritual excitement. Pentecostal expressions of the faith find home amid cultural spirituality. So, while family nurtures faith in children, Ghanaian theologian J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu observes that when they come of age, they make their faith commitment in Christian high schools and post-secondary schools.<sup>48</sup> That is when they often deepen their faith commitment and experience the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Because the younger generation feels excited about their experience of the baptism of the Spirit, Pentecostal spirituality permeates many denominations as well as Catholicism.

Christianity in the Global South does not seem to be tapering off any time soon. However, Asamoah-Gyadu points out a brewing rift between older generations and Gen Z on the basis of what he calls “denominational uprootedness.”<sup>49</sup> Gen Zers pull away from traditional denominational approaches in search of church experiences more aligned with contemporary culture, which is largely informed by normalised high-speed Internet, new forms of music, Western influence on dress, as well as personal and societal trauma and victories. Nigerian business leader, Tunji Adegbite, aptly notes:

Gen Zs [sic] were born during the dot com era and were raised on technology. They witnessed the election of Barack Obama, rise of gender equality, sexual orientation equality, shared family responsibilities, and collective volunteerisms. However, they were born into a deeply troubled system, a time of worldwide terrorism attacks, Arab uprisings, effects of climate change and a great recession.

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<sup>48</sup> J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu (President of Trinity Theological Seminary), conversation with Antipas Harris, 15<sup>th</sup> September 2023.

<sup>49</sup> J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu (President of Trinity Theological Seminary), conversation with Antipas Harris, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2023.

This generation (c.32% of world's population) have come of age to shape policies and open doors they were locked out of.<sup>50</sup>

Fast-paced technological advancements stimulate excitement for innovation and hope for material success. Ghanaian and other churches must keep reimagining ways to bridge faith with Gen Z where they are – socially, spiritually, aspirationally, etc. The global trend is that young people tend to lose interest in faith that they deem disconnected from their complex experience of self and the world at large. Churches in countries like Ghana, parts of Nigeria, and other places where Gen Z remains highly connected must invest more in hearing their voices and ideas as well as including them in leadership roles.

### Singapore

Singapore is experiencing shifts amidst the maturing digital revolution and other related cultural shifts. A version of Western-like secularism is affecting Singaporean views about self, life, family, morality, sexuality, and faith, with Gen Zers raised in both a far less religious world and a society resistant to traditional values. The challenge presents itself not only in Christian families but also in other religions and non-religious families.

Reflecting on Gen Z and the church in a *Christianity Today* article, Pearlyn Koh writes, “Many young people’s views on issues like sexuality or what comprises a family unit are no longer defined by Asian societal norms.”<sup>51</sup> She points out that a 2020 census revealed that a growing number of Gen Zers have joined the Western “nones” – from 21 percent in 2010 to 24

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<sup>50</sup> Tunji Adegbite, “Tapping into the Chutzpah of Nigeria’s Generation Z”, *This Day Live*, [Available at: <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2020/10/18/tapping-into-the-chutzpah-of-nigerias-generation-z>], [Last accessed: 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024].

<sup>51</sup> Pearlyn Koh, “To Keep Gen Z in the Pews, One Singapore Church Lets Them Run the Service”, *Christianity Today*, 10<sup>th</sup> February 2023, [Available at: <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2023/february-web-only/singapore-youth-church-gen-z-ministry.html>], [Last accessed: 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024].

percent in 2020.<sup>52</sup> Pew reports that the rise of “nones” in Singapore is “uniquely high” along with other countries.<sup>53</sup> This in part results from the influence of the Western world. Parents encourage education and new experiences, not gauging how they might lure youth away from tradition. It is, however, not surprising that Gen Z has benefitted from exposure to cultural and ideological diversity. Also, Gen Z has also been impacted by varying parental decisions about faith and church attendance, changing family systems, modern technology, and an isolationism compounded by COVID-19 and more.

### **Opportunities**

Many opportunities exist to engage the younger generation. The first, education, is such a shaper of culture. There is a need for more Pentecostal scholarship and Christian education, which must engage the whole person. When considering human beings, there really is no separation of *secular* and *sacred*. Pentecostal-sponsored education must show concern about the mind, soul, body, and spirit.

The second opportunity has to do with leadership. Gen Z is a generation of leaders. Empowering young people to lead through experiential learning is key to capturing their faith interest. Koh points out that Heart of God Church in Singapore has “succeeded in attracting a hard-to-capture demographic: the average age of its congregants has remained steady at 22 years old.”<sup>54</sup> They employ an effective strategy to host Gen Z-led main services. The Church’s co-

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<sup>52</sup> Koh, “To Keep Gen Z in the Pews.”

<sup>53</sup> William Miner, “In Singapore, Religious Diversity and Tolerance Go Hand in Hand”, *Pew Research Center*, 6<sup>th</sup> October 2023, [Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/10/06/in-singapore-religious-diversity-and-tolerance-go-hand-in-hand/>], [Last accessed: 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024]. “Among Singaporean adults, 26% identify as Buddhist, 18% as Muslim, 17% as Christian, 8% as Hindu, 6% as a follower of Chinese traditional religions like Taoism or Confucianism, and 4% as some other religion, including Indigenous religions. Another 22% do not identify with any religion.”

<sup>54</sup> Koh, “To Keep Gen Z in the Pews”.

founding pastor, Cecilia Chan, explains: “Youths need to be invited, included, [and] involved, before they can be influenced and impacted.”<sup>55</sup> This also suggests that to capture the innovation and spiritual energy of this generation is to centralise space for experiential congregational leadership and experiential spirituality.

As in many other contexts, ministries in Singapore struggle to adjust to a generation where change is their new norm. Change challenges traditional forms of normalising communal practices. Yet, to reach this generation effectively, creating new norms of change remains crucial for the future of faith. Cru Singapore published an article called the “Future of Youth Ministry” by Deborah Ng, who sums up an interview with a Singaporean youth leader who observed that “one of the main weaknesses highlighted by youth leaders [...] seemed to be a resistance to change. That ministry was ‘running in the same way when the culture is changing’, and ‘just struggling to hold on to certain forms of discipleship, certain programmes.’”<sup>56</sup> The same report explains a similar issue in varying proportions globally: “Young people are thinking about questions like meaning, purpose, identity, and sexuality. These questions are not new, but in a post-truth world where they’ve been told to think with their feelings, they are facing more uncertainty in dealing with these questions than ever before.”<sup>57</sup> The relationship between Christianity and everyday life is in question. Ministries in Singapore must continue to learn and creatively adjust approaches to ministry to capture the imagination of this generation while remaining faithful to the core tenets of faith. This is no small task. Yet, we have hope!

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<sup>55</sup> Koh, “To Keep Gen Z in the Pews”.

<sup>56</sup> Deborah Ng, “The Future of Youth Ministry in Singapore”, *Cru: Christian Stories about Helping Others*, [Available at: <https://www.cru.org/sg/en/stories/helping-others-grow/the-future-of-youth-ministry-in-singapore.html>], [Last accessed: 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024].

<sup>57</sup> Ng, “Future of Youth Ministry in Singapore”.

Ng quotes Max Jeganathan, Director of Thinking Faith, who says, “It makes sense to me, why issues like anxiety and loneliness are at an all-time high among young people.”<sup>58</sup> From the article, it is not altogether clear why Jeganathan draws such a conclusion. However, reading between the lines, it seems that his conclusion is based on what he perceives as a gap between this generation of digital natives and previous generations. The digital age coupled with the social isolation effects of COVID-19 pandemic have created the perfect storm for anxiety and loneliness for everyone, particularly Gen Z. Moreover, Ng understands Max to believe that conditions are ripe to respond to Gen Z’s search with a gospel belonging, community, meaning, and purpose. Singaporean youth need a renewed presentation of the person of Jesus Christ whose life and teachings have more relevance to them.<sup>59</sup> When the church’s vision of Christ is renewed, the faithful are more authentically equipped to extend a relevant Jesus in this generation. Revisioning is necessary for the future of the church.

### **Conclusions**

This chapter provides only a snapshot of the complexities related to the current crisis of faith. There are no quick fixes. There remains insufficient research to capture all contemporary nuances pertinent to a survey of Christianity and Gen Z. Yet, this birds-eye view ponders important characteristics to begin that study.

Importantly, Gen Z are growing up as “nones” but are searching for spiritual awareness. I teach many of them in my “Life, Death, and Meaning” course at Old Dominion University. One of the gifts of teaching in a secular university is that students are often either not affiliated or

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<sup>58</sup> Ng, “Future of Youth Ministry in Singapore”.

<sup>59</sup> Ng, “Future of Youth Ministry in Singapore”.

loosely affiliated with a religious tradition. When I lecture on religion, it is as if I have them in the palm of my hands. A student recently asked me to start a podcast. Another student commented, “It will be very popular!” Every week, I rediscover a hunger for meaning and identity formation. Students have questions about life and death and wonder whether faith can give sufficient answers. Podcasts and YouTube are the new pulpits. Millennials as well as Gen Zers look for answers there rather than at church. It might also be argued that they bring their search to the classrooms, whether online or in-person.

### **Gen Z and the Non-Faith Based Spiritual Search**

Often, my students share their admiration for their grandparents’ religion and are curious to learn more. Some don’t see the point of going to church but do believe in God. Others grew up in church and are questioning whether a church is the best expression of God in the world. Yet others believe in something out there but are not sure whether “God” is the best way to describe that “something”. Some are exploring other faiths like Wicca, indigenous religions, science of consciousness, and expanded consciousness. Some agnostics question the validity that there is a “God” or “something out there” altogether. Then, there are those holding on to their faith but weary with questions about faith and life that the church does not answer adequately. They are exploring how to follow Jesus differently than traditional approaches. They want a Jesus who cares about the things they care about and who navigates the world the way they do. That Jesus is down for their cause. In short, he attends to brokenness in the world, affirms love in whatever forms people claim it, includes everyone, and incorporates digital reality and social media as the social and religious norm.

Notwithstanding, the same bout with faith manifests itself in the neighbourhood. Gen Zers everywhere are asking the same questions. I was pleasantly surprised when I visited Barnes

and Noble. Young people's heads were buried in books. There is no denying their hunger for truth and deeper understanding. A closer examination observes an unprecedented spiritual search. This means the search for truth is no longer purely a scientific one. Gen Z may be dubbed a generation of creativity – not because previous generations were not – but because they are most unrestrained by the rules of what's right and wrong, appropriate, and inappropriate. So, even in their spiritual search, there are no rules; nothing is off-limits. They are more creative, more “in-touch” with today's times, it seems. Integration is premium, even the integration of religious thought, signs, and symbols with scientific ones.

Gen Zers are looking for something scientifically supported but that also brings peace, joy, love, identity, community, and a sense of belonging. This means that affectivity is just as sacred as anything else. Feelings, motivation, emotions, and belief systems must exist in tandem with that which is cause-driven, affirming, non-discriminatory, and non-sectarian. They care about social evolution – why should things remain the way they've always been? They also value art, science, ecology, climate change, peace over war, fairness, and a type of community that both affirms and includes each person's gifts.

These salient theological anthropological questions sum it all up:

- Who am I?
- Why am I here?
- Is there a power greater than me?
- Does that ultimate being care about what's going on in the world?
- Can life be better for me?

These are complex queries. The answers must not be cookie cutter but contextual and must include Gen Z in the discovery of truth. Importantly, such complex questions require

deeper analysis of the questions. Where are they coming from? Why are the questions important to you, and why now? Understanding where the questions are coming from sheds light on ways to arrive at the answers in a meaningful and inviting manner. Many times, probing questions reveal abuses and trauma embedded in the life of the questions. All of this is important to reimagining faith and local church ministry for greater engagement with Gen Z – and any other generation for that matter.

### **What Should Churches Do About the Gen Z Crisis of Faith?**

Churches attuned to what's important to Gen Z are best positioned to attract and cultivate a faith environment to produce a Great Awakening amidst a generation of spiritually hungry, spiritual but not religious, unchurched young people. Thom Rainer offers helpful observations for pastors around the world interested in evangelising and retaining Gen Zers:

**1. Churches who are negative and fight often will not even be considered by**

**Gen Z.** “Gen Z will quickly walk away from churches fighting over such trivia as times of worship services, styles of music, and facility preferences. They hate the divisiveness and pettiness they see when church members complain about their pastors. They’ve had enough negativity! They are wondering if any church members really remember the gospel is good news!”<sup>60</sup>

**2. Gen Z will strongly prefer churches that are focused and simple.** “They

detest activity-driven churches. They will not hang around long if you ask

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<sup>60</sup> Thom Rainer, “3 Significant Issues for Churches to Reach Gen Z, Teenagers”, *The Pentecost*, 5<sup>th</sup> October 2021, [Available at: <https://thepentecost.ng/2019/12/3-significant-issues-for-churches-to-reach-gen-z-teenagers>], [Last accessed: 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024].



them to attend a plethora of events and activities that make no sense to them.

The simple church will be the church of choice.”<sup>61</sup>

3. **Change-resistant churches will not attract Gen Z.** This generation is not stuck in a rut of “it’s always been this way.” “This is a generation of digital natives. They understand constant change. They live in a world of technological disruption. Change is their norm. Gen Zers, therefore, have no concept of the pettiness of many church issues.”<sup>62</sup>

4. **Additionally, churches that invite Gen Zers into worship and administrative leadership roles are more likely to attract and retain them.**

This is a generation of innovators accustomed to navigating life more independently.

The search for community amidst an epidemic of isolation, the desire for meaning, the hunger for spiritual awareness within a generational religious draught – all these must not be taken lightly. The atmosphere is set. The harvest is ripe. We must pray to the Lord of the harvest to send labourers like the children of Issachar who understand the times. A Great Awakening is just beyond the horizon!

### **Glimmers of Hope**

Pockets of Gen Zers are rekindling the flames of revival, providing glimmers of hope. Globally, Pentecostal, or Charismatic-type Christian spirituality is leading the charge. As a recent article in the Washington Examiner asserts:

Younger generations of Christians are particularly drawn to the charismatic experience today. So it is with Holy Spirit-led churches each week around the world. The Asbury Revival and others like it embody a universal desire to experience the more supernatural, metaphysical faith that has been absent in many

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<sup>61</sup> Rainer, “3 Significant Issues”.

<sup>62</sup> Rainer, “3 Significant Issues”.

of the churches that are hemorrhaging members. Headlines often declare the loss of religion in the United States, a notable trend toward those who identify as “nones.” That shift, however, is being slowed dramatically by the rise of charismatic movements found partially in the influx of immigrants from Latin America, Africa, and Asia to the U.S.<sup>63</sup>

Congregations unafraid to engage in ongoing re-imaginative ministry remain on the cutting edge of youth attraction. Some examples are referenced above; examples are the Ghanaian prayer gatherings in secondary and post-secondary schools and the sparks of congregational enthusiasm at Heart of God Church in Singapore.

Another example is the 2023 Asbury University Outpouring,<sup>64</sup> sparked during a chapel service that lasted twenty-four hours, seven days a week, for a few weeks. Local news in Louisville, Kentucky reported that approximately 50,000 to 70,000 people from around the world gathered at Asbury University to attend a worship service that started at 10 a.m. on Wednesday, 8<sup>th</sup> February 2023, and continued uninterrupted<sup>65</sup> until 24<sup>th</sup> February 2023, when the university officials ended it. Notably, the revival was at a Christian university and not a secular one. As stated earlier, Pew Research Center reports Gen Z as the highest generation of “nones.” Most Gen Zers attracted to the Asbury experience – on campus and beyond – seem to have been among the declining remnant of Gen Z Christians. Not many of the testimonies were from people who converted from being a “none” to the faith. For example, Anneli White is a student at the University of Kentucky and a member of Immanuel Baptist Church. She journeyed

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<sup>63</sup> Ericka Andersen, “Charismatic Christian Movements Offer Hope for Gen Z”, *Washington Examiner*, 12<sup>th</sup> April 2023, [Available at: <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/charismatic-christian-movements-offer-hope-for-gen-z>], [Last accessed: 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024].

<sup>64</sup> Asbury University, “What Happened at Asbury University?” *Asbury University*, [Available at: <https://www.asbury.edu/outpouring/>], [Last accessed: 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024].

<sup>65</sup> WDRB, “Asbury University Student Uses Map to Track Worshipers Who Came to ‘Revival’ Services”, *WDRB*, 24<sup>th</sup> February 2023, [Available at: [https://www.wdrb.com/news/asbury-university-student-uses-map-to-track-worshipers-who-came-to-revival-services/article\\_a5e03506-b459-11ed-b30e-474a6ca5ff8b.html#:~:text=Over%20the%20past%20couple%20of,for%20more%20than%20a%20week](https://www.wdrb.com/news/asbury-university-student-uses-map-to-track-worshipers-who-came-to-revival-services/article_a5e03506-b459-11ed-b30e-474a6ca5ff8b.html#:~:text=Over%20the%20past%20couple%20of,for%20more%20than%20a%20week)], [Last accessed: 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024].

to Asbury for the revival experience and commented, “The Holy Spirit was tangible in the room. Chains were broken, confession happened, and God was praised as holy, holy, holy.”<sup>66</sup> While White and others touched by the revival were already Christians, their experiences represent the need for a fresh wind of the Holy Spirit among the remnant of believing Gen Zers. The hope is concealed in their renewed excitement about the faith. Their congregational participation and leadership inspire new ways of communicating the relevance of faith in their generation.

Churches worldwide that include young people in the ongoing work of theological reimagination – bridging faith, higher education, business, care for the environment, community formation, and technology – prove more effective in attracting and retaining young people most affected by secularism. Faith integration in the pursuit of meaning in everyday life produces fresh religious excitement in this generation.

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<sup>66</sup> Mark Maynard and Hannah Julian, “All Eyes Focus on (Another?) Asbury Revival”, *Kentucky Today*, 13<sup>th</sup> February 2023, [Available at: [https://www.kentuckytoday.com/baptist\\_life/all-eyes-focus-on-another-asbury-revival/article\\_6994621a-a9b0-11ed-9cf7-67c841f9b6a3.html?fbclid=IwAR1tq3P\\_4dntYTur7ipKOPbi7w3zGoBLB\\_-t2ishqBEjSQRdzB2OUxOT6dg](https://www.kentuckytoday.com/baptist_life/all-eyes-focus-on-another-asbury-revival/article_6994621a-a9b0-11ed-9cf7-67c841f9b6a3.html?fbclid=IwAR1tq3P_4dntYTur7ipKOPbi7w3zGoBLB_-t2ishqBEjSQRdzB2OUxOT6dg)], [Last accessed: 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024].

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### **Abstract**

GenZ are people born in 1997-2012. Their current ages are 11-26. The focus of this paper is the younger Gen Zs (11-19) with consideration of older Gen Zs (20-26). There are global similarities while there are regional and ethnic nuances worthy of note. This essay addresses four crucial concerns that emerge in this generation: 1) spiritual, 2) technological, and 3) social-psychological and 4) family relational. To lay out the issues, I will draw heavily upon findings at Pew Research Center, One Hope Global, the Barna Group and Black Millennial Café. I will then engage in critical theological analysis to offer constructive proposals for revised ministry practices with concern for the future of the Christian church. The findings reveal that a renewed vision of faith for this generation necessitates recalibration of religious language, technological embrace, smaller communities of meaning, and diligent prayer and vigilant strategy for the restitution of family.