



Quidditch anyone?: postmodernity and ministry with the Millennial Generation

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Each team has a keeper, to guard the goals, three chasers for scoring, two beaters to hit the bludgers, and one seeker to catch the golden snitch. Each player is to provide his or her own broomstick on which to ride, and have robes of the team color. One Referee, (also on a broomstick) should be present for each match... There are seven hundred different kinds of fouls in Quidditch... When a referee calls a foul, a penalty shot is awarded to the fouled team. A chaser, starting at a short distance from the goal, throws the quaffle towards the goal. The opposing team's keeper is the only player allowed to block the shot. The fouled team then gets possession of the quaffle. (Some of the rules of Quidditch, from the world of Harry Potter).

“Those of us intent on securing an adaptive strategy for the coming millennium need look no further than our own children for reassuring answers to the myriad of uncertainties associated with the collapse of the culture we have grown to know and love. Our kids may be younger than us, but they are also newer. They are the latest model of human being, and are equipped with a whole lot of new features. Looking at the world of children is not looking backwards at our own pasts--it's looking ahead. They are our evolutionary future.” (From Douglas Rushkoff's *Playing the Future: How Kids' Culture Can Teach Us to Thrive in an Age of Chaos*)

A changing culture: modernity into postmodernity

Somewhere in the 1960's, a massive sea of change in our cultural landscape began to emerge. Management theorist Peter Drucker aptly recognized the shift. “Every few hundred years in Western history,” he writes, “There occurs a sharp transformation... within a few short decades, society rearranges itself—its worldview; its basic values; its social and political structure; its arts; its key institutions... Fifty years later, there is a new world and the people born then cannot even imagine the world in which their grandparents lived and into which their own parents were born.

We are currently living through just such a transformation.” (Peter Drucker, *Post-Capitalist Society*, New York, Harper's Business, 1993, pg 1).

The cultural shift, which gained momentum into the 90's, is only now coming to full expression. Those born after 1940 experienced the first winds of the coming change. Those born after 1960 braved the waves of change and are presently building the first huts on the beach of the future, but it will be those born after 1980 who will be the first to move inland and construct a more lasting homestead in the new world.

The sea-changing shift from modernity into postmodernity (which has flipped the gyroscope of our culture) is characterized in a nutshell by:

- the loss of trust in science and progress
- the loss of meta-narrative (or belief in a “universal story”)
- the individuation of truth
- the rise of pluralism and globalization
- the domestication of technology
- the marginalization or transformation of mega-structures and institutions
- the democratization of knowledge and power
- the widening and layering of time

The different strategies used by each generation to navigate their particular phase of the cultural shift also mirror their varied approaches to life (and therefore faith and ministry) within the new world. In the new cultural landscape, ministry with various generations can be aided by acquiring a basic familiarity with the differing compasses used by each cohort to find its way.

Positioning the generations

The Boomers

Born between 1943 and 1960, the “boom” generation reacted to the smell of change in the air by headily rejecting many “former things,” and “considering not” the things of old. 60's Boomer “counter-culture” with its mega concepts of “universal peace” and “free love,” also birthed deep suspicion of authority, appreciation for individual expression, love for experimentation, and preference for novelty. Past their cultural peak, and approaching the crest of their leadership arch, Boomers are navigating the new age with their native idealism in hand.

The Survivors

The winds of change that excited the Boomers became the tidal waves that smacked the Xers. Born postmodern between 1961 and 1981, Xers were shaped by the “post-revolution” fall-out of the 70's and early 80's. Seriously wounded by rampant divorce, child abuse, recession, crime and societal turmoil, Xers often experienced “latchkey” childhoods while parents or older siblings pursued social experiments or rising new careers. Independent, street-wise and pragmatic Xers, will continue their emergence as the first native leaders of the postmodern age.

The Millennials

Unlike Survivors who grew up in the wake of the Boomer revolution, Millennials (born 1982-2002) are being raised “post-revolution,” and in a culture that once again is embracing and protective of childhood. The “No children allowed” 70's, gave way to the “Baby on Board” 80's. Although they will rely upon the Survivors to secure the beachhead of the new era, it will be the Millennials who will become the first true homesteaders of the new world.

“Back to the Future” Millennials and worship

Theologian Robert Webber writes that “what is happening in the religion of teenagers is nothing short of astounding. They are not interested in the Boomer approach. Instead, they want to return to a more stable time, a period of tradition. Not the tradition of the fifties, but of a much earlier time, the tradition of very old times.” (Robert Webber, “How Will Millennials Worship,” in *Reformed Worship*, Number 59, page 3)

The worship ethos that is emerging among Xers (and even more so among Millennials) is classic Christianity with post-modern ethos, infused with “pre-Christian,” and “re-pagan” spice.

In an article entitled “Retro Worship” the March/April 2001 issue of *Youth Worker Magazine*, veteran youth minister Jim Ramos discusses his turn away from youth worship models (prevalent in large churches) that often try to replicate youth media culture within the church. In the article Ramos comments “we have created the anti-church.” and goes on to outline how the low-tech “Holy Ground” youth services at his church are driven by need for worship intimacy rather than worship novelty among teens.

Though still emerging, the characteristics of worship native to the Millennial generation seems to include: contemplation, silence, frequent communion, rituals, symbols, spiritual disciplines, mystery, diverse instrumentation (including stringed and wind instruments) and an eclectic mix of musical styles (from centuries old hymnody to postmodern rock).

Quidditch Anyone?: Millennials and ministry

Described by generational scholars Neil Howe and William Strauss as the next “great generation,” Millennials will likely bring renewed energy and purpose to the church well into the mid-twenty-first century. Serious study of this generation is only in the beginning stages, yet their seemingly native optimism and “can do” nature can be glimpsed, both in their reactions to serious societal events (such as the tragedies of 9/11/01), and in playful cultural currents (such as the Harry Potter craze).

Though only time will tell, the generational optimism of Millennials appears in tact (despite events such as 9/11/01). In the aftermath of that event, the Millennials’ reaction to crisis seemed less “we’re scared,” and more “how can we help?”

The positive and focused energy of Millennials can be seen in their cultural embrace of the fanciful world of Harry Potter and its mythical game of “Quidditch.” Heavily reliant on teamwork and choked full of roles, rules, regulations and symbols, the fictional game resonates with the purpose-driven, group-oriented and non-rebellious traits in Millennials.

In terms of Christian discipling, the cohort traits of the Millennials beg for a focus on the “ministry of” rather than the “ministry to” this generation. In other words, what is most needed with this generation is not “youth ministry,” but the cultivation of the ministry of youth. Thus adults who companion youth in *their* ministry, become mentors and spiritual directors, rather than instructors and teachers.

Effective discipling of this generation includes providing space for them to discover and then walk their own spiritual path and journey in Christ. Adult leaders can assist youth in their discernment by providing them with real “spiritual tools” rather than novelty. Formation in faith through prayer and scripture reflection, growth in grace within intimacy, and Christ-centered worship will provide Millennial youth with the dense fuel they need as they grow in faith and love, and tackle the hands-on, compassionate and servant-centered ministries that they seem born to do.

Reading

[*Millennials Rising*](#), William Strauss and Neil Howe (Vintage Books, 2000)

[*Postmodern Youth Ministry*](#) by Tony Jones (Zondervan, 2001)

[*Generation Next: What You Need to Know About Today's Youth*](#), George Barna (Regal Books, 1997)

Playing the Future: What We Can Learn from Digital Kids, Douglas Rushkoff (Riverhead Books, 1999)

What NeXt? Connecting Your Ministry to Generation X, (Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2001)

Millennials/generational Web sites

www.millennialsrising.com

www.millennialpolitics.com

<http://library.thinkquest.org/23440>

Millennial ministry Web discussion group

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/millennial-ministry/>

Postmodern ministry Web sites

[THEOOZE](http://www.theooze.com/main.cfm) (www.theooze.com/main.cfm)

[Next-Wave Church & Culture](http://www.the-next-wave-ezine.info/issue82/index.cfm) (www.the-next-wave-ezine.info/issue82/index.cfm)

[emergingchurch](http://www.emergingchurch.org) (www.emergingchurch.org)

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