

# REACHING AN "INVISIBLE" GENERATION

## "Ministry with Post-Modern Young Adults"

### Introduction:

- **Matrix:** "Welcome to the Real World Neo!"
- **Deuteronomy 6:1-9** – God's People in a New Situation: Theology, Faith and Ministry in an "Alien" World
- **40 Years with Youth and Young Adults** – "Will Our Faith Have Children? Will Our Faith Have Adults? Will Our Faith Have Leaders? The Bridge from Childhood to Adult Faith is Increasingly Ineffective.
- **Conventional Wisdom** – They Will/Must Leave...They'll Rebel... They'll be Fine... They'll be Back!
- **Conventional Wisdom Challenged** – Is Lost Influence, Discipleship and Vitality OK with Us? Why Do Some Never Leave? Why Do Some Lead?
- **Mission** – Listen and Tend Youth and Young Adult Life and Faith Journeys; Generate Faithful and Effective Theology and Ministry with Youth, Young Adults and Other Post-Moderns in the Church and the World.
- **Strategy – Pastoral Theology in Three Movements:**
  - Our "Invisible" Generation – The First Postmoderns
  - Seekers, Skeptics and Other Disciples - God and Postmodern Young Adults
  - Ministry with Postmodern Young Adults - Faithful and Effective Relationships, Practices and Strategies

## OUR "INVISIBLE" GENERATION: The First Post-Moderns

- **The Makings of Invisibility: (Generation "X"?)**
  - **Birth-** From 4.3 Million to 3.4 Million-"Boomer to Buster"
  - **Parental Social/Economic Changes-** Children Devalued
  - **Societal Transformation** – Children Caught in the Web
  - **Religious Drift-** Child/Youth Disconnected from Church
  - **Faith Journey Shifts** – Young Adults Stay Away Longer
  - **Sacred/Secular Chasm** – Youth World vs Church World
  - **Church "Biases"** – Young Adults Disenfranchised/Absent
  - **Leadership Shortage** – Fewer Young Adults Preparing
- **An Emerging Picture: Who is this Invisible Generation?**
  - **Many Partial/Contradictory Pictures-No Full Studies**  
Fictional/Anecdotal: Doug Copland et. al.; Snapshot Spring Break Study, Miller; Roman Catholics, Hoge et. al.; Faith Popcorn-Marketing; Nothing like Hoge, Wuthnow, Roof Studies of Boomers;
  - **Generation Next, Barna is representative: 1994/95 13-18 year olds... Representative Sample;**
    - **Serious About Life** – Quality of Life at Stake
    - **Stressed Out** – School, Peer, Family, Violence
    - **Self-Reliant-My-World-My-Choice-My-Turn**
    - **Skeptical** – Little Faith in People/Institutions
    - **Spiritual** – Mystical, Diverse, Syncretistic
    - **Survivors** – Realistic not Idealistic
  - **Demographically Unique and Diverse-69 Million;**  
Ethnic Diversity; Class Polarity; Educational Discrepancies; Geographical Concentration Shifts;
  - **Social Pioneers** – 40% Divorced Parents; 35% Raised Themselves; High Rates of Drug Usage; Experience Violence in School/ Neighborhood; Mobility; Aids; Fallout of Sexual Revolution; New Sexual Identities; Ambiguity regarding Career, Family and Future; Virtual Relationships; High Rates of depression and suicide; Later First Marriages, First Children; Materialism;
  - **Independent** – Question Authority; Long Hours of Work in High School and College; Believe Must Make It on Their Own; More are Single;

- **“Technopolites”** – Grew Up on Computers; Electronic Communication Networks; Instant Information of Every Kind; Global Awareness and Inter-Activity; Sitcom Neighborhoods; CNNites; “Wired and Wireless Electronic World Citizens”
- **“Mediavores” and Pop Culture Sophisticates** – TV, Music “World;” MTV/VH1; Movies; Internet; Awareness; Knowledge; Connection; Inter-Action; Mutuality; Immersion; Infomercial; “Entercation;” 4-6 hrs of unsupervised TV per day growing up – “Pop Culture’s Narratives”
- **Spirituality vs Religion** – Great Interest in Spirituality; Few interested in Religion; Most Find Religion Boring, Trivial and “Unengaging;” Most know Little of Faith Traditions; Spirituality and Morality Shaped by Pop Culture; Self-absorbed/Serve Others; Browse A Spiritual Marketplace;
- **Isolation...Skepticism...Anger Regarding Other Generations and the Future**
  - Live in the “Shadows” of Generations Before/After; Concern about Eco and Economic Systems and Stability; Institutions Are Suspect; Most have Mixed Expectations and are Ambiguous Regarding the Future; 21% see their futures as very good;
- **“Share” Postmodern Consciousness** – There is no Common Meta-Narrative which gives Coherence to a “Universal” world; Global Info Overload; High Stimulus – Shaped Brain Functioning; Experience is the Prime Referent Regarding Truth; Rationality Gives Way to “Multiple Intelligences” and Competing Realities; Many “Worlds” Held in Tension; “Double Ring;” Chaos Is Creative; Relativity Reigns; Response to Multiculturalism is Relativism or Fundamentalism: Pluralism/Power in Tension; Change is Fast-paced, Constant...a Given and Chaotic... Consumer Capitalism is “Largest Narrative”
- **Faithfactors Research** – Beliefs and Practices of Young Adults
  - **Vanishing Boundaries-Hoge and the Presbyterian Baby Boomers as a Model: 1988-89; Confirmands**

- **FaithFactors-Black, Roberto, Martinson – Southern Baptists, Roman Catholics and ELCA Lutherans**
  - Ten through 35 Year Olds
  - Qualitative: Life, Faith, Religion Interviews;
  - Quantitative: Surveys-National Studies
  - Ten year and Ongoing
  
- **Hypotheses/Early Findings:**
  - 75% leave between 16 yrs and 24 yrs
  - 50% who leave return by age 35
  - 30% return to other churches then they left
  - 10% remain and lead
  
  - Key Factors in those who Remain/Lead:
    - \* Family
    - \* Mentors
    - \* Service
    - \* Apprenticed into Leadership
    - \* Engaging Worship/Preaching
    - \* Senior High/Young Adult Ministries
    - \* Friends in a Faith Community
    - \* Christians Support during Crisis
  
- **Faithful and Effective Ministries:**
  - Quality Relationships
  - Theological and Ethical Vitality
  - Personal/Communal Authenticity
  - Suffering and Service
  - Integrated Practices and Strategies

**SKEPTICS, SEEKERS AND OTHER DISCIPLES:  
"God and Postmodern Youth and Young Adults"**

- **Most Youth and Young Adults are Believers – Many Aren't in the Church:** Gallop, Roper and Harris etc., regularly find 90 – 92% believe in God; Most pray with some regularity; Many find the Church "unnecessary" in their faith; Many find the Church Out of Touch...Trivial... Foreign;
- **The Spring Break Study:** Representative; 600 Young Adults in 1993 and 1995:
  - God is Creator 77%... Witchcraft 15%
  - Power of Prayer 56%
  - Hardly ever Attend Church 44%
- **Barna: Study on Religious Beliefs and Behaviors of Youth in 1994/95:** "...the most crucial point is that teenagers these days are highly 'spiritual,' but they are not very religious, nor are they naturally inclined to embrace Christianity as their faith of choice. They are, after all, the first generation of Americans to be raised without the culturally established assumption that they would start their religious explorations with Christianity and continue to seek a faith system only if Christianity was found wanting."
- **Beaudoin: Virtual Faith:** Anecdotal and analytical regarding his experience and that of lower to upper middle class 20-30 "somethings:"
  - Institutions: Indifference-Suspicion-Embrace
  - Centrality of Personal Experience
  - Suffering-Test of Genuine Faith
  - Ambiguity about IdentityCore Spiritual Question: Will You be There for Me?
- **Many Youth and Young Adults "Struggle" with God and Religion:** Some of these are SKEPTICS: Many find traditional understandings/portrayals of God Unrelated and even contradictory to their Experience;
  - **Tori Amos: "God:"** *"God sometimes you don't come through; You need a woman to take care of you."* Scathing critique of God and the major World Religions' ineffective response to her own pain and the larger human condition;
  - **Common Voices:** God is Distant-Disengaged-Impotent; Church is out of Touch-"Unengaging"-Self-serving-Destructive;

- **Other Life Paths:** Fitness; Sport; Music; Justice; Causes; Relationships; Career; Success; Materialism; Wealth; Business; Travel; Alternative Lifestyles; "Practical, Good-life Humanists;"
- **Most of the Youth and Young Adults who "Struggle" with God and Religion are SEEKERS:** Many have Yearnings and Impulses which lead them to a Diverse Spiritual Marketplace;
  - **U2 – Joshua Tree – I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For:**  
*"I've run through the fields, I've climbed the city walls...  
 and I still haven't found what I'm looking for..."*  
 Restless, haunting search through a "promising" array of human possibilities...including formal religious creeds and practices and yet the emptiness prevails; "Anthem of this Generation;"  
 Paradox: I want to believe! I do believe! I don't believe!  
 Help my unbelief!
  - **Common Voices:** God is somewhere, hidden, not available to me; the Churches "means of grace" no longer deliver-they don't mean/do what they say/claim:
  - **Other Spiritual Paths:** Syncretistic Combinations of Religions; Meditation; Causes/Service; Music; Movies; Internet Bulletin Boards/Chatrooms;
- **Some Youth and Young Adults are Evangelical, "Sectarian," Roman Catholic and Mainline Disciples and Leaders:** Some have continued in their childhood faith to maturity of faith and leadership in their religious Communities; Some have experienced adolescent or young adult faith transformations that have resulted in intense participation in new "Christian" Lifestyles and Leadership; 12-15%?; Most of these Young adults are in Age-level Niche Ministries;
  - **Rich Mullins-Our God is an Awesome God:**  
 Heartfelt affirmation of traditional Christian Messages in a variety of new sounds and lyrics.
  - **Common Voices:** Jesus Christ has Transformed My Life; He is the Lord of My Life-I'm his Disciple; He is the Truth/He Gives Me Direction; Jesus Healed Me/I Belong to His Body/ These are My Brothers/Sisters in Christ; Faith Gives My Life Purpose, Direction and Meaning; I Belong Here;

- **Bonhoeffer's Writings are a Fruitful Framework for Engaging Post-Modern Young Adults in Particular and "Postmodernism" in General:**
  - **A Particular (Local?) Narrative** which makes Cosmic (Universal?) Claims yet is Open to Others And Their Truth Claims; Jesus Christ ... Living, Present, Concrete and Active God; Vital Theology;
  - **Addresses: "Who will be there for me?"** And "I'm Called/Destined to be there for others!" Questions of Fidelity and Purpose;
  - **Holds the Tension:** Relationship-History and Institutions-particularly regarding the Church; Questions of Center and Boundaries; Ambiguity; Bold Action in Uncertainty are Worked;
  - **Experience, Reason and Behavior-Integrated** in Following Jesus Christ; Discipleship;
  - **Individual and Community;** Freedom and Obedience; Church and World, "dialectics" – "Both and;" "Double Rings;" Complexity is Held in Thought and Deed;
  - **Truth As Suffering:** Authenticity; Action; Pain is addressed; Vulnerability does not Paralyze or become Sentimental; Brokenness is Addressed and Taken into the Life and Action of Faith;
  - **God follows a "Pilgrim"** on a Complex Spiritual, Intellectual, Moral Relational, Emotional, Physical Journey; Transition;

- **Bonhoeffer: Commitments, Language and Action: an Engaging Guide in Mission/Ministry with Postmodern Young Adults:**
  - **A Theology of "Sociality:"** "It is in relation to persons and community that the concept of God is formed."... "Christ existing as the Congregation." (SC: 22ff) "The more theologians have considered the significance of the sociological category for theology, the more clearly the social intentions of all basic Christian concepts as emerged. 'Person,' 'primal state,' 'sin,' and 'revelation' are fully understandable only in relation to sociality." (SC:6)
  - **A Theology of Freedom and Responsibility:** "God is not free of man (humankind) but for man (humankind). Christ is the Word of his freedom. God is there, which is to say: not in eternal non-objectivity but 'haveable,' graspable in his Word within the Church. (AB: 90)
  - **A Theology of the Word:** "For the first time I discovered the Bible... I had often preached, I had seen a great deal of the church, and talked and preached about it – but I had never become a Christian. I had never prayed, or prayed only very little... Then the Bible, and in particular the Sermon on the Mount, freed me from that. Since then everything has changed... It became clear to me that the life of a servant of Jesus Christ must belong to the church, and step by step it became clearer to me how far that must go." (DB: 155)
  - **Christocentric Reality:** "The meaning of history is found in the humiliated Christ." CD:62  
"...the one who is present in Word, Sacrament and church is at the center of human existence, of history and of nature." C:60
  - **Costly Discipleship:** "A living and obedient faith in Jesus Christ had been replace by belief in doctrine about faith; the Sermon on the Mount had been conveniently side-stepped by regarding it as law rather than gospel. The result was 'cheap grace' instead of the 'costly grace' of true discipleship." DeGruchy regarding DB  
"...only he/she who believes is obedient; only he/she who is obedient believes;" (COD:69)
  - **Christ in Community – Life Together:** "The community of the Spirit is the fellowship of those who are called by Christ;... In the spiritual realm the Spirit governs, in human community, psychological techniques and methods. In the former Naïve, unpyschological, unmethodological, helping love is extended toward one's brother; in the latter psychological

analysis and construction; in the one the service of ones brother is simple and humble; in the other service consists of a searching, calculating analysis of a stranger." (LT:32)

- **Christ in a World Come of Age:** "the question is Christ and the world come of age. The weakness of liberal theology was that if conceded to the world the right to determine Christ's place in the world; in conflict between the church and the world it accepted the comparatively easy terms of peace that the world dictated. Its strength was that it did not try to put the clock back and that it genuinely accepted the battle (Troelsch), even though this ended with its defeat." (LLP:327)

- **Religionless Christianity:** "All Christian thinking, speaking and organizing must be born anew out of this prayer and action... It is not for us to prophesy the day(though the day will come) when men (humankind) will once more be called so to utter the word of God that the world will be changed and renewed by it. It will be a new language, perhaps quite non-Religious, but liberating and redeeming -- as was Jesus' language; it will shock people and yet overcome them by its power; it will be the language of a new righteousness and truth, proclaiming God's peace with men (humankind) and the coming of his kingdom." (LPP:300)

**MINISTRY WITH POSTMODERN YOUNG ADULTS:  
Faithful and Effective Frameworks, Relationships, Practices  
and Strategies:**

- **The Challenge: Evangelizing and Catechizing Three Youngest Generations Simultaneously in Many Post Christian, Post Modern Worlds:**
  
- **Ministries with Post Modern Young Adults:**
  - **Historical, Descriptive, Systematic and Strategic Theology and Ministry: Bonhoeffer-Lively Case; "Agent of Grace;"**
  
  - **The Centrality of Relationships: Theological; Family; Peer, "Virtual Neighborhoods;" Congregational; and Community/ Global-Sociality**
  
  - **The Importance of Practices: God and Faith with "Skin on;" Engaging Multiple "Intelligences;" The Whole of Life is the "Parish"**
    - "Worldly Christianity and Confessing Christ Concretely:
      - **Craig Dykstra/Dorothy Bass et.al."**
        - Growing in the Life/Faith - Practicing Our Faith:**
          - \* Worshiping God Together/Singing our Lives
          - \* Telling the Christian Story to each other
          - \* Exploring Scripture Together
          - \* Praying Together and buy Ourselves
          - \* Confessing our Sin to each Other
          - \* Forgiveness/Working with each/others failures
          - \* Faithful Acts of Service and Witness
          - \* Giving Generously of our Gifts
          - \* Hospitality and Care
          - \* Listen to each other; "Testifying"
          - \* Know and Tend our Context/Community
          - \* - Critiquing Destructive Powers/Patterns
          - \* "Invest" in Life-giving Movements/Structures
          - \* Honor the Body
          - \* Keeping Sabbath
  
      - **Tom Beaudoin: Ten Tasks in Pursuit of "Shared" Fidelity**
        - \* Reunite "Religion" and "Spirituality;"
        - \* Reunite "Spirituality" and "Politics;"
        - \* Foster Christian Literacy

- \* Develop "Christian" Discernment/Culture
- \* Foster a Mature Moral Conscience/Community
- \* Impart "Toggle" Skills
- \* Provide Spiritual Mentors
- \* Tend Young "Households/Families"
- \* Relate Psychological and Spiritual Health
- \* Promote Stewardship

**- Ron Bagely, CJM and John Roberto: Ministry with Young Adults: Top 10 Responses:**

- \* Sense of Belonging/Opportunities/Involvement
- \* Dynamic Upbeat Liturgies
- \* Spiritual Growth and Enrichment
- \* Opportunities to Understand Ones Faith-Life
- \* Guidance and Direction
- \* Acceptance and Support
- \* Opportunities to make a Difference/Service
- \* Social Activities
- \* A Community of Common Values
- \* Inspiration and Rejuvenation

**• Effective Strategies: Niche, Cross and Shared Young Adult Ministries – Life Together**

**- David Gortner: Five Niche Generation Models: Market; Hearth; Fanfare; System; and Tribe**

- \* Market: Contextualizing in Media and Style
- \* Hearth: Safe Haven-Nan-Demanding-Warmth
- \* Fanfare: Experiences evoke numinous, divine
- \* System: Moral Principles and Guidelines
- \* Tribe: Indentity-Sharing Life Narratives

**- Spirit Garage and The Basement Church: Traditional Congregations' Mission Outposts**

- \* "Grunge Churches" in Portland and Minneapolis youth adult subcultures;
- \* Only possible because of "Mother Church," Unique Location/buildings and totally different Contextual "Styles" of Ministry.

- **Christus Rex: An Effective Cross Generation Model for Campus Ministry**
  - \* Three Generations from University and Community engaging in ministry focused on the unique faith and Life Dynamics of young adult "Learners in Transition;" Grand Forks, ND.
  
- **St. Mary's Basilica: An Effective Shared Generation Model of Neighborhood Parish Ministry**
  - \* Five Generations of Diverse Peoples Practicing Christianity with Excellence at Life Boundaries

#### **MODEST PROPOSALS:**

- **Commission a Study/Book/Video: Ministries of/with Families of Young Adults on their Journeys of Faith;**
- **Renew/Expand Lutheran Volunteer Corps;**  
**Possible: One Year of Service Rite of Passage into Mature and Integrated Faith?**
- **Study/Connect/Expand/Renew Campus Ministries**
- **Pilot: Young Adult Synodical OmbudsPerson**
- **ELCA/Ecumenical Summit on Young Adult Ministry in Congregational Life;**
- **Courageous, Substantive Reconsideration of Worship and Preaching**
- **Launch Website, TV Talk Show, Radio Station On Christianity and Culture...Led by Christian Young Adults**
- **Theology on Tap: Music, Talk: Outpost Cafes**
- **Seminaries/CM/NM/YA Send Reps to Design a Seminar on Post-Modern Young Adult Ministry to be taught as a required "Workshop" at all ELCA Seminaries**
- **ELCA Workshop on "Spawning" Young Adult "Mission Outposts;" Niche Ministries**