

THE EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE COUNCIL SYMPOSIUM
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE 18-30 MISSION

A MISSING GENERATION?



16 SEPTEMBER 2009

FOREWORD

BY STEVE CLIFFORD, GENERAL DIRECTOR

On the 16th September, the Evangelical Alliance Council, together with a number of invited guests from across the UK, gathered to engage in a vital conversation regarding the 18-30's mission.

Surveys/research statistics and papers were provided in preparation for the day. All those who gathered at the Symposium recognized that this issue of 'a missing generation' cannot be ignored. We knew it was important to hear from each other, but more importantly, we needed to hear from God.

The enclosed executive summary captures a little of the conversations which took place. We recognize that this is only the beginning and that many similar conversations still need to be provoked and outcomes will need to be explored. But as a start a number of themes emerged out of this day:

- The need to listen to 18-30 year olds
- The need to make space for them and to allow them to influence the shape and priorities of both churches and agencies
- The recognition that 18-30s is a time of much change and that every re-location or change in circumstance provides an opportunity to opt out of church and possibly out of a relationship with God
- The need for discipleship/mentoring/modeling with recognition that for many of this age group their experience of parenting has not always been positive
- The need for a call to count the cost of discipleship to a generation immersed and brought up in the context of a consumerist culture

So how do we move forward?

The enclosed document is designed to inform and hopefully provoke further conversations. During the course of the day a number of case studies and stories were told of 18-30's mission being successfully delivered. These stories need to be gathered so that we can learn from each other and make them available to a wider audience (please send us your stories to yourstories@eauk.org).

The Evangelical Alliance leadership will also be considering whether similar days should be planned around the country to encourage leaders and to provide an exchange of good practice.

So to all of those who attended and participated in the day, an enormous thank you. Let's pray together that it will mark a watershed in the Church's ability to engage with 18-30s.

INTRODUCTION

On the 16th September 2009 the Evangelical Alliance Council met to discuss the 'Missing Generation' of 18-30s in our churches in Britain today. In August, a survey was carried out of over 800 young people at Soul Survivor's Momentum festival, an event for 18-30s which was fed into the day and prompted many of our discussions. The aim of the day was to ask important questions that would start a discussion leading to strategic and unified action. Research carried out by Innovista found that 96% of church leaders think that increasing the number of 16-30 year olds in their church is either more important or equally important as any other top priority. Yet despite this, only 11% of the same church leaders felt 'well resourced' to do this in terms of people, training and tools. Clearly then, work is still needed in this area.

A Symposium document was sent to all Council members in advance of the meeting. This included some statistics on 18-30s in general and on their attitudes to church, a vision for 20s and 30s, which highlighted that young people are looking for destiny, direction and community, a personal reflection of being a 20 something in the church today, and a theological reflection entitled *A Theology of the Generations*.

Statistics on this age group indicate that the numbers attending church are rapidly declining. However, the larger the church, the greater the proportion of those in their 20s attend. Over half of those in their 20s going to church attend churches in London and they tend to go to churches with congregations of 200+. Of course, many of those in their 20s will never have had any contact with church, whereas older adults are more likely to have experienced church at some point.

PLENARY ADDRESS



MIKE PILAVACHI
FOUNDER OF
SOUL SURVIVOR

Mike Pilavachi is founder and pastor of Soul Survivor Church in Watford. He's also the founder and leader of Soul Survivor, a youth organization seeking to reach, disciple, equip and empower young people to make a difference in their generation. His heart is to reach them with dynamic worship, life-changing ministry, and relevant evangelism.

Mike Pilavachi, founder of [Soul Survivor](#), gave the plenary address, drawing on his considerable experience working with young people and young adults. He stressed the importance of listening to what 20 somethings are saying, but highlighted three issues that he believes are relevant to this age group that need to be addressed, namely a culture of consumerism, individualism and entitlement. All of this mitigates a culture of commitment to community and also means that people in this age group struggle to commit to careers and relationships. Krish Kandiah highlighted in his paper, *20-30 vision*, "When a person looks to have their spiritual needs met in a particular church, it sets up a relationship of church as 'service provider' and the attendee as 'client.'"

Mike suggested that there is a sense in which in the youth group young people are cocooned and looked after; as they emerge into their 20s that same support is not there and therefore it is easy to lose people at this stage. Mike stressed that young people often feel they are not listened to, not understood, feel they are not provided with resources to live this life and feel they are not empowered. He also highlighted the pain this age group feel: in contrast to the exuberance of young people at Soul Survivor, there is huge pain and angst amongst the 20-30s at Momentum during ministry time. Mike concluded that we need to find ways of gently and lovingly challenging some of the things that are coming out of the culture of consumerism, individualism and entitlement. We need to integrate them into the whole church and this might mean we have to give them some sort of special treatment. As Mike put it, 'Our arm is damaged and needs bandaging until its better.' This isn't about pandering to consumerism, but about raising up disciples.

You can [watch Mike's talk here: www.youtube.com/EvangelicalAlliance#p/u/1/1f6mxNUSoGA](http://www.youtube.com/EvangelicalAlliance#p/u/1/1f6mxNUSoGA)

MOMENTUM SURVEY



MILES GILJAM
HEAD OF
COMMUNICATIONS
EVANGELICAL
ALLIANCE

Miles Giljam has worked in the field of communications for the Anglican Church in Southern Africa and more recently in public affairs and communications for the Royal Commonwealth Society, based in London. He considers bringing people together as a calling. Miles is particularly passionate about church unity.

After Mike's address, Miles Giljam, the Alliance's Head of Communications, presented some of the findings from the Momentum survey. While aware that this survey was of a select group of people, some interesting results still emerged.

The results revealed that this sample of young adults are charismatic, read the Bible often, support women in leadership and for the most part believe homosexuals should be celibate. 1 in 5 are young earth creationists. Many say they love their church, with half attending weekly and 38% more than once a week. However, only 30% consider themselves leaders, suggesting a lack of empowerment.

A strong emphasis on relevant preaching came through; this was seen as more important than good worship. However, there was an overall sense of this generation being 'me focused' with a desire for good community and excellent preaching and worship – they were less concerned about their church being mission orientated or a place where they could invite their friends. They also don't give money to church regularly, with most only giving loose change. The survey also suggested that while they have high standards, they often fail to live out their convictions. Stemming out of discussions on the day it was noted that this generation is often passionate about issues such as poverty and global justice, which should be encouraged.

Miles pointed out that while focus on student ministries is good, we also need to be considering what to do about the 60% that don't go to university and remember that this is a mobile group, facing challenging life-changing decisions. People rarely change their beliefs and practices after 25 and therefore ministry to this age group does have a high impact.

A copy of the [survey can be found here: http://tiny.cc/oaHwP](http://tiny.cc/oaHwP)

PANEL RESPONSE



GAVIN CALVER
NATIONAL
DIRECTOR, YOUTH
FOR CHRIST

Gavin Calver is the National Director of Youth for Christ, a charity that works with over 300,000 young people a month. A theology graduate, ordained evangelist and regular public speaker, his third book 'Lazy, Anti-social & Selfish?' came out in 2009. Gavin is married to Anne and they have a little girl Amelie.



JASON LANE
EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR
INNOVISTA
INTERNATIONAL

Jason Lane leads Innovista, an organisation that works across Europe, identifying and developing young leaders for relevant mission to their generation. Home is in Oxford with his wife and daughter. Jason's other loves are skiing, Formula 1 racing and curry.



TIM RUDGE
UCCF
THE CHRISTIAN
UNIONS

Tim is responsible for the regional team leaders and all matters related to UCCF: The Christian Unions student ministry. He's married to Lynn and they have one son James and a second child on the way. Tim joined UCCF in 2006 after working with IFES in Eurasia.

Three people responded to these presentations: Gavin Calver ([Youth for Christ](#)), Tim Rudge ([UCCF](#)) and Jason Lane ([Innovista](#)). Key points from their responses included the need to be actively empowering this age group, giving them responsibility but equipping them on the way and the need to allow for style changes even though our message remains the same. We need to be doing more to engage and respond to culture, and also need to be aware that adolescence is starting younger and carrying on later. Therefore we need to start mentoring from a younger age and also be teaching apologetics from a younger age – this prepares young people to deal with the culture around them. It was observed that church is often seen as 'for me' or 'for mission' – it's an either/or rather than a both/and. We need to be developing

church for them, but also church that includes mission. The question was also raised as to whether lack of secure leaders was also part of the problem, and that more needs to take place in theological education to develop confident leaders.

Council members then had time to respond to the panel. Some of the points raised included whether professionalizing youth work is causing the church to miss out on lay volunteers and the relationships they can provide for young people. Often youth workers are quite young, lacking experience and provide a brother/sister figure to young people, when what is needed is really a parent/grandparent figure. The church needs to be offering greater support to parents and a greater model of parenting young people. The importance of getting young people involved in doing mission was stressed; the importance of discipleship is to support and empower young people to get out there themselves and do mission.

SEMINAR DISCUSSIONS

After lunch, seven structured conversations were held to allow for deeper discussion. The following are a few highlights:

Role of Agencies: We need to create more creative partnerships and the question was asked as to whether agencies should be doing more about the 93% that don't go to church. Agencies need to give young people a range of ways to learn and can plant seeds which hopefully churches will grasp. There's a need with this generation for agencies to be talking seriously about sexuality.

Fresh Expressions of Spirituality and Church: Discussion focused on the new café style churches. Offering an eclectic mix of creative ways to engage is good and offering lots of different ways to opt in and opt out can be helpful. Fresh expressionists are often accused of 'watering down the gospel', 'diluting' and 'selling out,' hence a biblical reflection on methodology is needed, signposting to resources and finally communicating the urgency about the need to connect with this age range. The Alliance could provide this.

Reaching the Unchurched: There's a real need for sacrificial and incarnational ministry with this group. Particularly with poorer communities, there is a poverty of aspiration and hope and churches need to be prepared to deal with this. Change is most likely to come from the margins in, rather than the centre out. Running events doesn't always work; what matters more is building genuine, authentic relationships. The importance of authenticity was also stressed in Justin Thacker's paper, where the question was asked, "Have we by the way we behave and speak compromised ourselves and the ethical integrity to which we are called and so compromised the medium if not the message? The words that come out of mouth may well be those of grace, but if our actions betray them, they mean very little."

Student Track: Each point of transition heightens the risk of dropout so there is a need to create more effective discipleship pathways. There was debate about the role of the CU versus the local church. It was noted that there is a problem with competing Christian campus ministries, that there is space for 'creative conflict' but that it is important that each learnt to speak well of one another. Relationships need rebuilding each year with new intakes.

Gender: The question was raised as to why the church is not attracting more men and whether we have failed to represent the full person of Jesus, feminizing the church. At the same time though, women in leadership are often required to lead in a 'male' way. It was recognized that people outside the church are used to equality, when they come into it, church culture can seem very alien. Discussion included consideration of how men and women can lead together, that more training needs to happen together, emphasizing the strengths that both bring rather than saying that everyone can do the same. The question was asked as to whether women have to work harder to prove themselves? We need more balance in the church – where there is balance, gender becomes less of an issue.

Developing/ Mentoring: We need to create a culture in which we are all being discipled by each other. Mentoring was described as skills training as well as character training. It's like being a 'spiritual father/mother' – women find this easier than men do but there's a real need for men to do this. Peer to peer can be a powerful way of mentoring although values can be helpfully learnt from older people. Points to note include making sure we are making disciples and not dependants and that mentoring is not about controlling.

New Technology: Concerns were raised about new technology, in particular that it can cause the breakdown of normal face to face relationships and community, people are not interacting with the real world, it has greatly increased the problem of pornography and access is very easy, often meaning parents have little control over what their children are looking at. There is also the danger of 'information overload' making people suspicious of new information. However, new technology does present great opportunities for mission, which should be encouraged. The question was raised as to whether Christians can start to shape the internet culture instead of always playing catch-up. There is also a need for some theological work to be done on the universals/ big issues behind the medium of the internet that is driving it forward.

Details of the seminar discussions: www.eauk.org/theology/upload/Seminar-Discussions-PDF.pdf

CASE STUDIES/DOING CHURCH WITH 20 YEAR OLDS



NESS WILSON
OPEN HEAVEN
CHURCH
LOUGHBOROUGH

Ness Wilson planted and leads Open Heaven church in Loughborough, a church with a focus on students, 20's and 30's and young families. She lives in Loughborough with Rich, her husband, and their two girls. She is passionate about discipleship and people discovering who they were created to be in Christ.

Following the seminar discussions, three case studies were presented considering three different issues. Ness Wilson from [Open Heaven Church](#), Loughborough, spoke about student focused churches, pointing out that only 2% of students are actively involved in church at university. Churches in university towns need to step up. Students are one of most unreached but most open people groups. Appointing student workers is a good way to do this. 1 to 1 discipleship works well with this group and students need teaching on a robust theology of suffering, values of commitment and responsibility. Working with university authorities and offering to serve them works well – as a long term relationship is built, more opportunities emerge to reach students.



DAVID STROUD
FOUNDER OF
CHRISTCHURCH
LONDON

David leads ChristChurch London and the Newfrontiers UK team, and is the author of Planting Churches, Changing Communities. He has been involved in leading churches for over sixteen years and ChristChurch is the third church that he has planted. He is married to Philippa, and they have three children.

David Stroud spoke about his experience of setting up [Christ Church](#) in Central London. In this church, 85% are in the 18-30 age range. Alpha has been a massive investment and life groups are meeting not so much in people's houses, but in bars and cafes where people are working. Key points highlighted included: be prepared to take risks, recognize there is a move of God going on amongst 20s in central London, enable people to do what they are doing day to day with whole life discipleship and focus on good preaching with practical application.



JONATHAN
EDWARDS
GENERAL
SECRETARY
BAPTIST UNION

Jonathan is the General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain. He's passionate about prayer, mission and working in gracious partnership with other Christians. The Baptist Union brings together about 2,000 Baptist churches in England and Wales. Jonathan is married to Sue and they have three children – Hannah, Thomas and Bethany.

Jonathan Edwards, General Secretary of the [Baptist Union](#) of Great Britain, then spoke of the Baptist Church's experience with this age group. Amongst Baptist Churches, the community of 20s is very small, but they are seeking to address this, inviting 20s onto the Baptist Union Council, and working at consulting with people in their 20s. Jonathan asked whether young people have been disappointed with the church? They were promised excitement, that they were going to be history makers and instead they've found church to just be comfortable and polite. Jonathan stressed that young people are looking for authenticity and need to feel loved and treated as adults.

WORLD CAFÉ

Following on from the case study presentations, everyone had a chance to contribute to three questions around small group table discussions: What should youth agencies be considering as they prepare young people for adulthood? Can churches and the agencies that focus on the 18-30s age group better collaborate to rise to the challenge? And has the Evangelical Alliance got a contribution to make in supporting the Church in responding to the 18-30s challenge?

In response to the first question, answers included that youth agencies need to be doing more to prepare young people for the whole of life, that we need to be doing more to identify cultural norms for young people and speak into them and that agencies could be doing more to support parents. We need to have more of a vision for young people influencing different spheres in society and make sure that we are not just entertaining young people but providing something with substance. There is more work to be done asking questions about identity and vocation and intentionally engaging with those questions at every stage. Susannah Clark's *Personal Reflection* also raised this point, "Many may return home unsure of what it is they want to do – are churches offering support as young adults try and discern what their calling might be or how God might want them to use their gifts and abilities?" It was also suggested that there may be a need to set up an agency specifically for people in their 20s – although there are several student agencies, there is not currently one for 20s in general.

Responding to how churches and agencies can better collaborate on this issue, suggestions included that there was a need to be more aware of each other's expertise, drawing on this and networking. They can also collaborate on research to learn more about young people. Agencies need to listen to what really works in churches and churches need to listen to what agencies have to offer. There may be a problem at the moment of a competitive spirit rather than a Kingdom focus. Agencies offering gap year placements with churches can be useful when young people are placed with leaders who can empower and develop them. Another way to do this is to run training programmes. It was suggested that more churches should have young people on their councils and so on with opportunities to contribute to the leadership team. It was recognized that cross generational mentoring presents its challenges, but that we need to be doing more to enable this to happen, linking younger people with older people in our churches. Churches could also appoint specific 20s workers and both agencies and churches could work more closely with universities. Finally, when people relocate in this age group, churches and youth agencies could collaborate to help them find new churches.

When asked what the Evangelical Alliance can do to support the church in responding to this issue, it was recognized that hosting this day was an important first start and that these kind of conversations need to continue to happen regionally as well as nationally – the Alliance can play a role in facilitating this. For example, we could do a road trip, bringing churches together in different areas to talk through these issues – encourage this conversation in a wider context – regional/local symposium. It was suggested that it would be helpful for the Alliance to continue surveying more young people, broadening the survey carried out at Momentum to increase our data and understanding about this age group. It is the Alliance's intention to do this. It would also be helpful to have more people in this age group on council. It may be a relief for many church leaders that the Alliance are raising the issue and offering to listen to them and support them and we can educate them in how to respond. The Alliance could have a role to play in sharing stories, particularly examples of good practice and experiments that might inspire other churches; positive ways forward need presenting along with the challenges. Given that there are few agencies working specifically with this group. Do we need to encourage current youth agencies to expand their remit to encompass people in their 20s? The Alliance online church search could provide more information, so people can identify churches with a 20s programme.

For full data from World Café: www.eauk.org/theology/upload/World-Cafe-Responses-PDF.pdf

APPENDICES

SOUL SURVIVOR & EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE SURVEY RESULTS

ADMINISTERED AT MOMENTUM 2009

MILES GILJAM

Out of 2,500 surveys administered, we used an 800 random sample captured for this analysis. We hope to increase the sample in order to be able to add further results on the age analysis.

Summary of *Tell us about yourself*

The majority of the respondents were:

Age 18 to 20 (49.4%)

Age 21 to 24 (36.3%)

- Most were university graduates (42.4%) or had completed their A levels (42.9%).
- Most were single (66.5%) or dating (25.2%)
- Most were students (51.5%) or working (35.3%)
- The majority were from the South East (32%), London (18.2%) and the South West (17.4%)
- 70% use Facebook daily and an additional 19% use it two to three times a week
- 9% use Youtube daily and an additional 47% use it at least once a week. The younger the individual the more likely he/she is to use Youtube.
- Despite all the media hype only 5% use twitter daily and an additional 4% at least once a week. It is most popular amongst the 29 to 32 age group.
- Email is by far the most popular way young adults want to be communicated to, with 47% making it their first choice. Facebook and social networking sites had the next highest ranking with 10% making it their first choice. Websites, letters and church visits were popular to a lesser degree. Don't bother with the Christian media, podcasts or advertising to communicate with this age group.
- The respondents valued online resources that provided information rather than connection with people. Most valued was information on the latest books, events and resources, as well as resources that provoke them to think in new areas of their Christian life. The latter is most popular amongst the under 24s and the former the over 25s.

Summary of *Tell us about your faith/beliefs*

- 98.9% considered themselves Christian, rising to 99.7% amongst the 18 to 20s. 4.4% of the 25 to 28 age group were not Christian.
- Over 80% read the Bible at least once a week with the most common frequency 1 to 3 times a week (33.6%).
- Young adults' most helpful resources for spiritual life are church and then worship. Small groups also rate highly. They see virtually no value in Christian radio and TV. Podcasts are only marginally better.
- 35.6% believe that God created the world in six days that corresponded to geological time periods. 23.1% think Genesis is symbolic and 20.2% think creation took place literally in six 24 hour days. 21.1% don't know. Younger people tended towards the 6 geological day creation with older respondents tending to the more literal interpretations. Comparisons with past surveys of the beliefs of Alliance member churches are below.

	Youth 2009	Adults 2008	Adults 1998
Young earth creationists	20.2%	36.3%	36.9%

- 97% of those that answered believe that gifts of the Spirit should be observed in the church today.
- 64.8% believe that women should be eligible for all leadership roles in church. 11.2% don't know and 18% think women should be eligible for all roles, except that of church leader.
- 76% believe that evangelism and social action are equally important, with double the number prioritising evangelism over social action (11%) as opposed to social action over evangelism (5.5%).

Summary of *Tell us your views on Church*

- 53.5% attend church weekly and 38.3% attend church more than once a week. The 18-20 age group are less likely to attend church more than once a week (34% attend weekly compared to 42% in the other age groups).
- 45.5% say they love their church and 39.7% say their church isn't perfect but they feel called to it. The 18-24s are more likely to love their church and those 25 and older are more likely to say their church isn't perfect.
- The 21 to 24 age group is twice as likely to be looking for a new church than the 18 to 20 group.
- The factors that are most likely to attract young adults to church are relevant preaching, excellent worship and people they can relate to – in that order. The least popular factors attracting them to church are if a church is mission orientated or a safe place to invite friends.
- Factors that are likely to push young people away from church include judgmental community, poor preaching, inaccessible worship and a lack of community. Poor preaching is mentioned twice as often as inaccessible worship. The least likely to push them away is a lack of ministries that interest them.

- Only 30.8% consider themselves leaders in their churches. In the 18 to 20s only 24.4% consider themselves leaders, whereas 50% or more of the over 29s do.
- The major factors that prevent young people getting involved in church are work, education and friends. Family and sport also play a role. Education is the primary factor amongst 18 to 24s and work is overwhelmingly the dominant factor in the over 25s. For the under 28s friends are likely to be an issue. The older the individual the larger the role family plays and the less likely sport will keep them away from church!

Summary of *Tell us your views on giving*

- 43.5 % of young people only give loose change to the church. 30% give 10% of their income or more. The 18 to 24s are most likely to give just loose change, whereas the 25 and older crowd most usually give between 5 and 10% of their incomes.
- The older the individuals the more likely they are to give to Christian charities, but more than half of the respondents have never given more than loose change.
- Young people give even less to non-Christian charities than they do to Christian charities! 74% have never given more than loose change and the rest give a lower percentage of their income than to Christian charities.
- In the last six months the most popular charities donated to by young people include Christian outreach (53%), international aid (37.4%), local communities (31.4%) and children (30.5%).
- The older young people get the more likely it is that they will donate to children's charities.

Summary of *Tell us your views on sexuality*

- The majority of respondents believe that just kissing is appropriate outside of marriage (58.5%).
- However when it comes to past practice, two major groups emerge. 32.5% have only kissed outside of marriage and 30.8% have had full intercourse. 5.3% don't seem to know, which is a bit worrying!
- The age groups break down differently when it comes to actual experience with, as you would expect, people going further the older they get.

18 to 20: Kissing 42.9%; Intercourse 22.3%; sexual touching 17.4%

21 to 24: Intercourse 34.1%; Kissing 30.1%; Sexual touching and mutual masturbation about the same on circa 17%.

25 to 28: Intercourse 54%; kissing 20.3%; oral sex 13.6%.

- Over 28 the trend of 25 to 28 continues without practice groups swapping order. There is a sharp rise in marriage in the 25 and above group, although in the under 33s it barely goes over a quarter of those surveyed.
- 98.3% claim to be heterosexual in orientation, with 0.9% bisexual and 0.6% homosexual in orientation.

- Most 18-20s desire to be married in 3 to 5 years; most 21-24s in 2 to 5 years; 25-28s in 2 to 3 years; 29-32 in 1 to 3 years and 33+ in 1 year. Younger people are less likely to know when they want to get married than the older people in the sample.
- 72% of the 18 to 20 age group believe that homosexual practice is unacceptable. This rises to 82% in the over 20s, with on average 77.2% of respondents believing that homosexuals should practice abstinence and celibacy.

20-30 GENERATION AND THE CHURCH

A STATISTICAL OVERVIEW

BY KIM WALKER AND DANNY WEBSTER

Skint, single and mainly unchurched – welcome to the 20s and 30s of 2009.

Despite good levels of education and average gross wages of around £450 per week, 90 percent of young people are in debt by the age of 21.

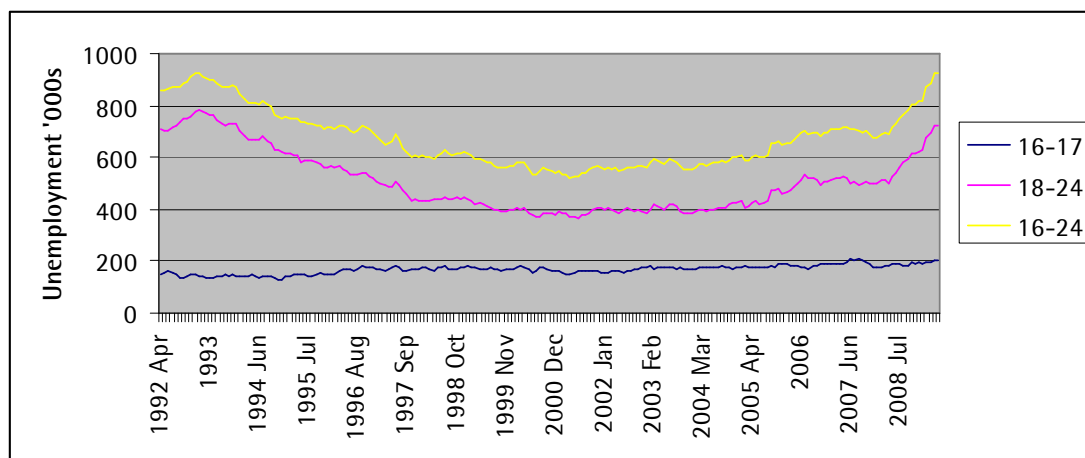
With the recession taking hold, 70 percent of under-24s are worried about losing their jobs and 11 percent are putting off getting married or starting a family because of the current economic climate.

And the numbers of 20s and 30s attending church are rapidly declining.

Here are the detailed facts and figures about this elusive age-group.

UNEMPLOYMENT

Unemployment among young people has risen to a level not seen since the early 90s. Some 928,000 people aged between 16 and 25 were out of work in the three months to June 2009, up from a low of 521,000 in April 2001.



<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/politics/article6792754.ece>

UNIVERSITY

The number of UK students at UK universities over the past 5 years:

2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
1,918,680	1,939,150	1,974,195	1,978,715	1,964,315

2009 has seen a 10% rise in applications from 2008 due to the recession and a demographic anomaly.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/7859034.stm>

WOMEN AND MEN IN FULL TIME EDUCATION

Across Britain 49.2% of women aged 17-30 have been or are currently in higher education, compared with only 37.8 % of men of the same age. For white working class males the number is only 6.4%.
Sunday Telegraph as reported in Quadrant Jul 09

SPENDING AND ATTITUDES TO MONEY

Research conducted by T-Poll on behalf of the Post Office People's Panel during late March 2009 found that the credit crunch has impacted young adults (18-24) in the following ways:

- More than twice as likely to have borrowed money from a friend (12 per cent) than older age groups.
- 11 per cent cite the decision to put off getting married or starting a family as a direct result of the current economic climate, more than twice the level of any other age group.
- Their greatest fear is the risk of losing their job, this is in line with older age groups; for a third (32 per cent) losing their job is something they are extremely concerned about.
- Overall, 70 per cent of under-24s are concerned about becoming unemployed.

http://www.news.royalmailgroup.com/news/article.asp?id=2537&brand=Post_Office_network

How young adults would tighten their belts if forced to: "Assume for a moment that due to recession, money became tight for you and you have to give up/cut back on some things. Please indicate what you'd do with each of the following:

% among young adults 18-29	Wouldn't change no matter what	Would downgrade to something less expensive	Get rid of/ stop doing this altogether
Your internet connection	61%	34%	1%
Your mobile/smart phone	35%	46%	13%
Cable/satellite TV	20%	29%	13%
Buy new clothing	13%	53%	30%
Go out to movies	10%	28%	39%
Holidays	9%	42%	31%
DVR/TIVO subscriptions	8%	25%	20%
Gym membership	8%	15%	25%
Attend sporting events	8%	18%	26%
Taxi/cabs	8%	13%	43%
Movie rentals	6%	19%	38%
Dine out	6%	36%	44%
Clubbing	6%	32%	34%
Pay to download music	5%	13%	29%
Magazine subscriptions	5%	8%	34%
Alcohol	4%	38%	32%
Cigarettes	4%	17%	9%
Buy video games/equipment	3%	20%	39%

The above figures come from online research done by the JWT Anxiety Index with young people in 5 countries in February 2009. Results featured are from the British cohort (1250 young people) only.

<http://www.jwtintelligence.com/blog-thanks2.htm>

Average gross weekly income 1997-2008

	Men 22-29	Women 22-29	Women's wage as % of Men's
1997	£329.20	£274.40	83.35%
1998	£346.60	£287.50	82.95%
1999	£361.30	£303.10	83.89%
2000	£376.70	£315.90	83.86%
2001	£401.40	£339.50	84.58%
2002	£419.20	£356.40	85.02%
2003	£425.00	£363.60	85.55%
2004	£426.40	£374.20	87.76%
2005	£432.80	£386.20	89.23%
2006	£440.10	£395.00	89.75%
2007	£451.90	£407.30	90.13%
2008	£467.10	£426.10	91.22%

Average weekly earnings for men of all ages £631.20, and for women £485.5, which is 77% of the mean male.
Source ASHE 2008 ONS

DEBT

YouGov poll conducted a poll in 2008 for young people's charity Rainer and found that:

- 90 per cent of young people questioned were in debt by the age of 21.
- Almost half of 18 - 24 year olds (46%) have owed more than £2,000
- One in five have owed more than £10,000.
- 61% of 18-24 currently have more than £1000 debt

Why do Young People Pay More? Rainer May 2008

MARRIAGE

The average age for getting married for the first time in England and Wales is 31years for men and 29 years for women.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/relationships/couples/life_whymarry.shtml

BABIES

Number of live births to women in their 20's in 2007:

Age 20 - 24 years	Age 25-29 years
130,784	182,510

Average age for women giving birth to first child:

2007	29.3yrs
1997	28.3yrs
1971	26.6yrs

Source Social Trends 2009 ONS

Number of legal abortions for women in their 20's in 2008

	20-24 yrs	25-29 yrs
Total number	56,171	41,896
Rate per 1,000 women	32	24

Source Abortion Statistics England and Wales 2008 Dept. of Health

LIVING WITH PARENTS

Adults living with their parents:¹ by age and sex²

United Kingdom		Thousands						
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Men								
20-24	949	996	969	1,054	1,079	1,103	1,085	1,086
25-29	454	390	416	434	432	438	445	486
30-34	208	213	216	203	194	185	178	180
20-34	1,611	1,599	1,601	1,691	1,705	1,726	1,708	1,752
Women								
20-24	624	638	641	675	685	733	747	745
25-29	220	193	184	201	211	210	232	245
30-34	75	68	84	89	66	64	63	70
20-34	919	899	909	965	962	1,007	1,042	1,060

1 Includes stepchildren. Does not include foster children or children-in-law.

2 Data are at Q2 (April-June) each year and are not seasonally adjusted. See Appendix, Part 4: Labour Force Survey.

Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

Source Social Trends 2009 ONS

20 SOMETHINGS IN THE CHURCH TODAY

TOTAL NUMBER ATTENDING CHURCH ON A SUNDAY

The numbers attending church in the 20-29 age group have declined from 520,900 in 1985 to 230,600 in 2005, a decline of 62%.

Age Group	1985	Change 1985-95	1995	Change 1995-2005	2005
10-19	863500	-29.02%	612900	-35.67%	394300
20-29	520,900	-27.68%	376,700	-38.78%	230,600
30-39	545500	-17.75%	448700	-26.28%	330800
40-49	534400	-15.03%	454100	-22.00%	354200
50-59	523400	-12.19%	459600	-17.86%	377500
60-69	544600	-8.37%	499000	-9.62%	451000
70-79	446800	-4.30%	427600	-3.09%	414400
80-89	211800	3.78%	219800	4.82%	230400
Total	4190900	-16.52%	3498400	-20.44%	2783200

Frequency of churchgoing declines rapidly in the 20-29 age group so that by the time they are in their 30s they are the least frequent churchgoers of any age group.

Source Pulling out of the Nosedive by Peter Brierley 2006

MALE CHURCH ATTENDANCE BY AGE GROUP 1979, 1989, 2005

Percentage of Church Attenders who are Male, by Year, 1979-2005									
	Under 15	15-19	20-29	30-44	45-64	65-74	75-84	Over 85	Overall
1979	50	44	45	44	45	39			45
1989	48	43	40	41	41	37			42
2005	47	51	45	44	42	40	38	34	43
Male % of 2005 Population	51	51	50	50	49	48	41	29	49

CHURCH ATTENDANCE BY AGE

According to the results of the English Church Census, 6.3% of the population of England attend church on Sunday. Here are some figures that divide this figure into numbers and percentages for each age cohort:

	Number of churchgoers 2005	Percentage of total churchgoers in each age group		
		1989	1998	2005
Under 15	624,000	25%	19%	19%
15-19 years	153,300	7%	6%	5%
20-29 years	230,600	10%	9%	7%
30-44 years	496,200	17%	17%	16%
45-64 years	755,100	22%	24%	24%
65+ years	907,000	19%	25%	29%

Source English Church Census 2005 as published in Religious Trends 6 and UK Population 2006-2071 by the Government Actuary Dept. as featured in Religious Trends 7

Churchgoing by Age

Year	Percentage of churchgoers aged under 15 years	Percentage of total population aged under 15 years	Percentage of churchgoers aged 15-19 years	Percentage of total population aged 15-19 years	Percentage of churchgoers aged 20-29 years	Percentage of total population aged 20-29 years
1979	26%	21%	9%	8%	11%	14%
1989	25%	19%	7%	8%	10%	16%
1998	19%	19%	6%	6%	9%	13%
2005	19%	18%	5%	6%	7%	13%

Source: Religious Trends 6

Church attendance in the UK by age in 2007

	All ages %	16-24 years %	25-34 years %
Weekly churchgoer	10	6	6
Regular churchgoer (monthly visit to church)	15	10	11
Fringe churchgoer	3	3	2
Occasional churchgoer	7	3	7

From churchgoing in the UK Tearfund 2007

Average age of churchgoers

The average age of churchgoers is 45, whereas the average age of the population is 40. This gap has emerged over the past 30 years.

	1979	1989	1998	2005
Churchgoer average age	37	38	43	45
Population average age	37	38	39	40

LARGE CHURCHES

The larger the church the greater the proportion of those attending will be under 30. 43% of churchgoers in their 20s attend churches outside London – and the majority of them large churches with congregations of 200+ - which leaves smaller churches outside London with a shortage of young people in their congregations.

“So how do those [small] churches find young people to help with youth clubs or Sunday young people’s work, to say nothing of potential ministers or mission workers of the future?”

Quadrant : Special English Church Census edition Sept.2006 and Nov 2006.

LONDON

57% of churchgoers in their 20s attend churches in London. There are a number of reasons for this:

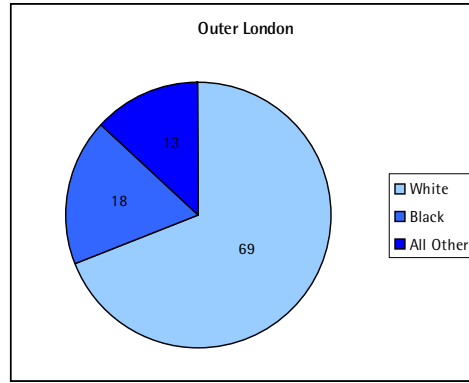
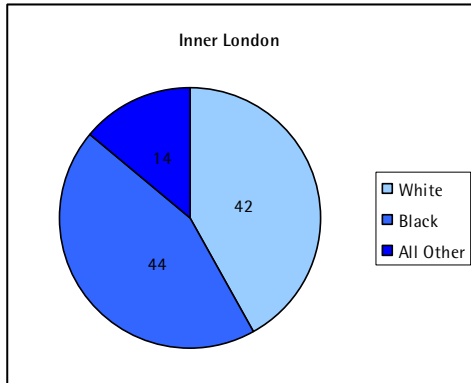
- More young people from this age group are concentrated in Greater London
- The large churches like Hillsong, Kingsway International and Holy Trinity Brompton all attract high number of people in their twenties
- There are a large number of Pentecostal churches in London and they tend to have a slightly younger age profile.

Quadrant. Nov. 2006 Christian Research

Church Attendance in London has risen since 1998

Year:	1989	1998	2005
Attendance	649,600	617,900	623.000

Ethnicity of church attendance in London:



Although anecdotally the figures from London (church attendance: 9% in inner London and 7.9% in outer London) would suggest

that a large Black/African/Caribbean church population drives up overall figures, there is no significant correlation across the country between the percentage of an area attending church on a Sunday and the proportion of those whose ethnicity is Black/African/Caribbean.

OTHER RELIGIONS

During the research for the 2007 Tearfund "Churchgoing in the UK" report 7000 adults were asked "Do you consider yourself belonging to any particular religion?" 11% of 16-34 year olds responded by saying they belonged to religions other than Christianity compared with an average of 6% for adults of all ages who said they had a religion but it was not Christianity. The Tearfund researchers relate this result to the younger age profile of ethnic minorities in the UK.

GROWING UP WITHOUT THE "CHURCH HABIT"

The Tearfund report also highlighted the issue of young people growing up without experience of church:

"..younger adults are more likely to have grown up with no experience of church and be closed to the possibility of attending whereas older people are more likely to have experienced church at some point in their life and rejected it."

Research done by David Voas from the Cathie Marsh Centre for Census and Survey Research, Manchester University found that *"..on average people experience little change in their beliefs and practices once they reach their early 20s. What secularization does is to change the environment in which children are raised and the likelihood of effective religious upbringing."*

David Voas also states that the decline in church attendance has not happened because adults have stopped going to church instead *"The decline has happened because more and more adults never start attending in the first place."*

Source Quadrant November 2005

The findings reported in Making Sense of Generation Y also support this view:

“The decline in church attendance among young people is a continuation of a trend set by previous generations (which actually encompasses all types of institutional affiliation, not just religious institutions). There has been a progressive atrophying of the churchgoing habit, particularly since the 1960s. This means today there is neither the expectation that young people will go to church, nor a pattern of churchgoing for young people to follow. Even if young people want to go church, the generational decline in church attendance means there is a shortage of adults with the necessary knowledge and skill to accommodate them.”

source Making Sense of Generation Y: the world view of 15-25 year olds by Sara Savage, Sylvia Collins-Mayo, Bob Mayo and Graham Cray 2006

MOST TWENTYSOMETHINGS PUT CHRISTIANITY ON THE SHELF FOLLOWING SPIRITUALLY ACTIVE TEEN YEARS

Barna Group 2006 found that six out of ten twentysomethings in the USA who were involved in a church during their teen years have failed to translate that into active spirituality during their early adulthood.

“There is considerable debate about whether the disengagement of twentysomethings is a lifestage issue - that is, a predictable element in the progression of people’s development as they go through various family, occupational and chronological stages - or whether it is unique to this generation. While there is some truth to both explanations, this debate misses the point, which is that the current state of ministry to twentysomethings is woefully inadequate to address the spiritual needs of millions of young adults. These individuals are making significant life choices and determining the patterns and preferences of their spiritual reality while churches wait, generally in vain, for them to return after college or when the kids come. When and if young adults do return to churches, it is difficult to convince them that a passionate pursuit of Christ is anything more than a nice add-on to their cluttered lifestyle.”

David Kinnamen, Director of Research, Barna Group

From <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/16-teensnext-gen/147-most-twentysomethings-put-christianity-on-the-shelf-following-spiritually-active-teen-years>

US RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE SURVEY. PEW FORUM ON RELIGION AND PUBLIC LIFE 2008

17% of the members of evangelical churches in the USA are aged 18-29.

From <http://religions.pewforum.org/pdf/portrait-Evangelical+Churches.pdf>

20-30 VISION

BY KRISH KANDIAH

Sarah is a 29 year-old marketing analyst living in East London. She attends a local church where she is involved in the youth work and a midweek home group. She is bright, attractive, outgoing and single. She is happy at work, has a bustling social life and is a popular member of her church family. But some Sunday evenings Sarah travels into London to go to a big church with some friends, and this has caused a discussion in the elders meeting: Is Sarah 'man-hunting' on Sunday evenings? Should it be discouraged? Is Sarah suffering from being the only 20 something without kids in their congregation? Is Sarah going to walk out the door one day and never come back? Is there something more the church could be doing for Sarah?

This scenario, not untypical in our churches today, is part of a much larger issue. When considering how the church relates to 20-30s, Sarah's story is only a drop in the ocean. What about the young Bangladeshi restaurant workers who play football on the field opposite the church every Sunday afternoon? What about the self-professed atheist graduates who run a book group round the corner? What about those in the church who married straight out of college and have young children who keep them up at night? What about those who have never left the youth group or their parents home even though they are working full-time? Suddenly the conspicuous absence or silence of 20-30s in many of our churches should cause us to act.

Research carried out recently by Innovista and the UK Evangelical Alliance revealed that 96% of church leaders place increasing the number of 16-30 year olds in their churches as either a priority or the top priority in their churches. Yet despite this only 11% of church leaders feel 'well-resourced' to do this.

"16-30 year olds represent one of the greatest mission challenges of our day. The rapid-rate life change that accompanies these years creates openness as young people figure out what they will give their lives to. Offering this generation credible opportunities to follow Jesus is a 'must do'"
Jason Lane, Innovista's Executive Director

Innovista is currently carrying out some research into how to resource church leaders to work effectively with this critical missing generation in the church. There are of course already several good resources available. Recognising the need to address this age group, the Evangelical Alliance has launched two new resources in the last three years that are proving particularly helpful and relevant to 20s and 30s. *Slipstream* provides leadership resources, aimed at younger leaders, and seeks to encourage, equip and network leaders across the denominations and generations. *Friday Night Theology* (FNT) is a short email that provides an evangelistic comment on an event of the week. The aim of FNT is to enable people to bring their faith into conversations they may have over the course of the weekend, for example in the pub or the coffee shop, and to help them make connections between world events and their faith.

Other organisations we are aware of that are helping to meet the needs of this age group include the UCCF resource *bethinking.org*, bringing together a range of resources to help people understand, defend and communicate the Christian faith. The London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (LICC) also provide weekly emails, particularly focusing on helping people to connect with culture.

In my work though over the last 18 years with this age-group, I have identified three key challenges consistently raised by all sorts of 20-30s, which churches should consider to engage effectively with this generation gap.

SUNDAY-MONDAY CHALLENGE

The period of life during which we are in our 20-30s is arguably the most exhilarating. It is usually during these two decades that we face a raft of life-stage experiences: leaving home, leaving university, finding work, dating and marrying, having children, buying a house, enjoying financial independence, discovering the world. 20-30s from all sorts of backgrounds need to have a great deal of drive and energy to help them face these changes and challenges as part of their quest to realise their identity and vocation. This should be the time of life when Christians and non-Christians are most receptive to hearing the radical call to follow Jesus whole-heartedly, whatever the cost. And yet often the church, instead of calling people to active discipleship, presents what it perceives to be a more palatable version of the gospel, but which is often so watered down that it is particularly unappetising. However Christ and cross-centred our evangelistic preaching, we also need to present 20-30s with the challenge of the Lordship of Jesus, the mustard seed Kingdom conspiracy, and the salt and light mission Jesus calls us too. 20-30s are often switched on to issues of ecology, contemporary culture, vocation, ethics, and social transformation and they need to hear how the gospel impacts the way they approach the rest of their week and the rest of their lives.

Unfortunately what 20-30s often hear in church is not encouragement to take huge steps in their faith, but to take on huge responsibilities within the church. Churches can all too easily channel the drive, energy and enthusiasm of the 20-30s into church-based activities – helping with the cleaning rota, youthwork or music – or all three. Instead of inspiring our young adults for discipleship, we often cause them to burn out and lose all heart for discipleship and the church. What could be character-building, can also become soul-destroying.

Tim Keller from Redeemer Presbyterian Church comments that as a pastor he was taught how to make people busy working in the churches.¹ Speaking on the Evangelical Alliance's new Square Mile resource, which aims to help churches develop a bigger picture of God's mission, he explains how this often meant taking people out of effective mission in other areas of their lives – at work, in the community or in their families. Mark Greene from the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity, gives an example of a teacher who was being prayed for in a service as he was commissioned for the role of Sunday School teacher. This man broke down in tears as he realised that prayer and support was offered only for the one hour in his week he spoke to churched kids, not the 40 hours he taught non-churched kids. When we don't teach people that the Christian faith is to be practiced 24/7, then life and faith can quickly become distant relatives, and burnout can easily result. Rather than pouring pressure on busy people, we need to be in the business of empowering Christians to live for Christ in every area of their lives.

HISTORY-FUTURE CHALLENGE

One of the main criticisms 20-30s make of the church is that it is outdated. Traditionalism can be a major roadblock for 20-30s engaging in church. We must make a distinction here between traditionalism and tradition. Christian Historian Jaroslav Pelikan described the difference as: "Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living."² We must hold on to the tradition of evangelicalism with its commitment to the authority of scripture, the need for personal

¹ See Square Mile DVD, Chapter 3, (www.eauk.org/squaremile)

² *The Vindication of Tradition: The 1983 Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities* (1986) Yale U. Press,

repentance, its focus on the centrality of the cross and our activism.³ However when alongside our right instinct to hold on to the gospel and the historic teaching of the church, we also enforce the culturally relative ways in which that teaching was expressed in the past, we effectively hold onto the baby and the bathwater. For a church to move forward and be accessible to today's generation, we may need to change the water.

A recent advertising campaign for Hovis bread shows a boy being sent to the corner shop to get some bread. As he travels back with his trusty loaf, he is transported through some of the key moments in 20th century British history. The message is that Hovis has been with us through thick and thin (excuse the pun) and can also be relied upon into the future. It is especially in difficult times such as the current economic crisis that we need to be able to look backwards to the good things in the past and carry them forward into the future. Teaching Bible truths is vital, but we also need some creative thinking to show how the Bible speaks to every culture and generation. Personally I like to connect Bible truths to current films and current affairs. I like to sing a mix of classic hymns and the latest festival worship music. I like to use modern technology and the latest gadgets as I quote from ancient commentators and modern celebrities. As 20-30s are struggling to find their niche, the church can provide an environment that does not pigeon-hole them into being outmoded social outcasts, but frees them to explore how they can face the future with God and the church.

I-WE CHALLENGE

As 20-30s grapple with the question: 'What am I going to do with *my* life', there often remains a residue of the quest for self-identity begun in their teenage years. But at some point during this journey, they will usually reconnect with the first-person plural pronoun 'we'. The search for a spouse, a family unit, friends and church community is a universally strong pull. The church could be the place that helps them form those new adult networks that will last a lifetime, but many 20-30s feel isolated in our churches – they don't fit into the two obvious groupings of youth or families. Moreover the church is asking them to 'not fit in' at work as they stand up for their faith.

There is also a further problem that the question 20-30s often bring to church is 'What can this church do for *me*?' In other words, while 20-30s are looking for community, they often do so out of individualistic, even selfish motives. Most people I talk to choose churches in terms of the warm welcome, the quality of the sermon, and the enjoyment of the worship songs. There are strong biblical injunctions for a church to provide good teaching, worship and hospitality, however the mindset many of us have in rating a church is less led by a sense of community, than it is by a sense of consumerism.

When a person looks to have their spiritual needs met in a particular church, it sets up a relationship of church as "service provider" and the attendee as "client." Members of the congregation feel they have every right to complain about the music not being up to scratch, or getting nothing out of the sermon, or about the lack of facilities. Churches themselves sometimes accept this role of "service provider" as they advertise themselves: "come to our friendly services where you will find great teaching and lively worship." We need to recognise that we are not church-users, or church-goers but we are the church. The church is a community – the church is us. We need to stop asking what can I get out of this church, but what can I give to this church. In our individualistic society there is often little opportunity for genuine community and so if the church can live up to our calling as the body of Christ, God's family, rather than focusing on the event of the Sunday service we have a lot to offer.

³ David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 2-17.

In one church I attended, there was a small number of 20-30s and the house-groups fought to adopt them into their midweek activities. I have a lot of sympathy with their reasons as the Bible teaches that we as the people of God are called to demonstrate the multicultural, multigenerational, multi-class composition of God's kingdom. But while the Sunday services were beginning to achieve this, there was also a growing acknowledgment that different life-stages struggle with specific issues that can best be helped through specialized age-specific groups. So along with the effective senior citizens work, toddlers groups and youth outreach, we also started a home-group solely for 20-30s. Over the course of two years that group grew from a small handful to a crowded houseful. Key to that success was the open house feel – we invited a local football team and atheist bookworms as well as the newlyweds in the church and over-aged youth group members. Bible studies were, as you can imagine, lively, with a particular focus on how they impacted issues connected with work, family, and community. And there was a good helping of creative social highlights that ranged from Salsa-dancing to beach-volleyball.

The 20-30s group became an entry point into the church family, although it brought the church new challenges. The church was noisier and the friendship groups were so strong that units developed and were perceived to be cliques. But there was also a healthy pool of volunteers to help with the youthwork, as well as take on new community initiatives and workplace ministry. And there was also a growing feeling that the church was a place the 20-30s really belonged. Many received practical help moving house, redecorating, hospitality and friendship before they showed any interest in the gospel. And some of the seekers and sceptics, after belonging to the group for a while, eventually came to believe too.

The three factors that I have described – the search for destiny, direction and community, are not restricted to 20-30s. However they are issues that are particularly acute to that age bracket as they begin to make their mark on the world. The church, more than any other social network, employment facility or club, should be leading the way in helping 20-30s find their feet and their faith.

20-30 GENERATION IN THE CHURCH TODAY

A PERSONAL REFLECTION

BY SUSANNAH CLARK

It is rather obvious that when people are in their 20s, enormous life changes take place, not least, starting a career, potentially getting married, starting a family, gaining financial independence and if you're lucky, getting on the housing ladder. Forty percent of young people now go to university and at some point during their 20s they will emerge from this to the working world – an enormous change that is perhaps not being significantly recognised by the church as a stage where young adults can easily cease church attendance, and where help is needed to make that transition.

Churches in university towns usually cater extremely well for students and are ready and waiting to pick up new students when they arrive in fresher's week. Many employ specific student workers. Church youth groups have often prepared their young people for going to university and stressed the importance of finding a good church, joining the CU and meeting other Christians. There are many books available for Christian young people starting university and summer festivals like Soul Survivor often provide the opportunity to network with those already at university, for example with Fusion representatives⁴, thus ensuring that new freshers have some inroads into potential churches before they even arrive, and some friendly faces to reassure them and make sure they don't go 'off the rails' in those first few weeks. Not only are churches in university towns usually well prepared to help students make the transition from school or gap year to university, but the universities themselves offer a huge range of support to young adults through this transition, ranging from welfare support, to college reps, to financial advice, housing advice and so on.

The point of all this is that the support on offer from churches for those making the transition from school to university is usually not lacking. In contrast, however, what are churches doing to help young adults make the transition at the other end of university into working life? Will, 24, who graduated two years ago, said this, "*When I arrived at my church I asked if there was anything specific for 20s to 30s and was surprised/shocked when I heard there was nothing. Maybe university churches need to warn students about this.*" Many young Christians will have been actively involved in churches, Christian Unions and usually enjoyed strong networks of friends. On leaving university, though, this can often disappear very quickly, especially if the young person moves to a new area, goes on a post university gap year or returns home to their parents. I suspect, therefore, that this is a crucial time when many young people may well drift from church going or simply cease going all together. The question, then, is what are churches going to do to address this?

I am 24 and write as someone who graduated two years ago and moved to London to begin work. I had been actively involved in my church at university for three years, leading a small group, helping

⁴ <http://www.soulsurvivor.com/uk/links/index.html>

with Sunday school and serving on the welcome team. Moreover I had enjoyed the fellowship and support of a fantastic group of friends and dedicated student workers at that church. On moving to London, although I moved in with friends, I rapidly found myself feeling incredibly lost in an enormous city and greatly missing the strong support networks that a student church had offered. I was fortunate that my church at university had offered some advice on making the university to working life transition; particularly helpful was a resource booklet suggesting a range of excellent churches scattered across London. It was to this I turned to identify a local church in the area I had moved to, which I promptly tried out. I was fortunate that this church was well aware that September often provides an influx of fresh faced graduates and they wasted no time in welcoming me. In two weeks I was signed up to a small group, introduced to others in their 20s and 30s, invited to socials and within a couple of months was encouraged to get involved in the youth work. Such was the welcome and support that this new church offered, there was no danger of me drifting from church going.

Sadly, though, my experience is not shared by every graduate. I witnessed many friends spend months deliberating over which church they wanted to join, often not feeling that they were particularly welcomed or catered for in the churches they visited. Especially in bigger churches, it was particularly easy for them to remain anonymous and to not feel welcomed or recognised by anyone – in direct contrast to the eager CU reps waiting to welcome them when they arrived at university and the endless offer of free lunches from student churches. Meanwhile, they were finding starting work daunting, finding it hard to make new friends, missing old friends and struggling to make sense of what life was supposed to now look like post university. For many they simply drifted for a while – or at worst, felt the church had let them down and was failing to value them and recognise their needs as a young adult.

What can churches do about this? I would suggest that the first step is to simply be aware that the transition from university to working life is often extremely daunting and hard to make and that young people need support during this time, just as they did when they started university. Churches can help students prepare for this transition in the first place by offering advice, perhaps from those who have gone through the experience, and by recommending good churches people can join in the areas they are moving to. If they have contacts there already, they could link people up with them before they even arrive. September is often a time when new graduates arrive and thus churches should be aware of this, perhaps even designating a few people to be on the look out for new graduates, specifically ready to welcome them, invite them to socials, home groups and introduce them to others. Often welcome teams will already be doing this, but it might be helpful to have people specifically prepared to address the needs new graduates may have in making this transition. Churches could even consider offering a series of talks or a short course on making the transition from university to working life, perhaps looking at questions like money and time management, making career choices, building supportive friendships and how to adapt to working life.

As mentioned many young people will have enjoyed strong and supportive friendship groups at university. If young people move to a new area, this can often at the very least diminish as people scatter to new areas. Churches need to be ready to help young people meet people their own age and quickly get involved in new friendship groups if they want to help ensure that they don't get 'lost' at this stage and cease church attendance. Ben, 30, who experienced the university to post university transition twice (after undergraduate study and then later after post graduate study) said this: *"I think the hardest thing to deal with is the loss of identity. University provides such a sense of community and the feeling of belonging to and being cared for by something outside of yourself is usually much weaker in the 'real' world, or at least it takes a lot longer to develop that sense. I think the church could help students to understand that it's OK to find it hard to settle into a post-uni community, that there are good reasons why it's hard and that it's not based on personal inadequacy."*

Katie, 24, who graduated two years ago, said this, *“I had a lot of anxiety when moving out of university into the real world. What I valued most at this time was COMMUNITY – a small group of close people who would pray and support me at this time of transition. Who showed me LOVE and VALUE regardless of my job position.”* An excellent way churches can offer this need for community is by having house groups that particularly cater for this age group. Not only will this provide spiritual support and encouragement during a turbulent time, but it will also provide the support of other people going through a similar life stage and the opportunity to make good friendships. This is certainly not to imply that the church should just be a social club for people in their 20s, but the reality for many at this age is that they may not have family living near by, they may well be single or not yet married and therefore it can actually be quite a lonely time. Thus the support of good friendship groups will probably be more important and needed than at other stages in life. Churches need to recognise that this is not a bad thing and actively seek to promote and encourage such friendships to form. Surely this is part of encouraging the church to be the family community that it should be.

Whether they have gone to university or not, many people in their 20s are very mobile, moving jobs, going on gap years and moving to new areas. At any of these points, it could be easy to stop attending church, or to drift for several months, if not years, before finding a new church. Leaving university and starting work may be a key moving point to look out for, but churches need to be aware of the often constant mobility of young adults at this stage and be prepared to address their needs. Networking people in their 20s with churches in the new area they are moving to may well be helpful every time they move on, or at the very least, providing suggestions of good churches to attend. Once a person has moved to the new area, it might be helpful for someone at their previous church to contact them, ask them how they are doing and encourage them to find a good church – thus supporting them from a distance through the transition period. Will, mentioned earlier, is just about to move and said this, *“I think having links/Christian friends in a new city makes such a difference. I’m about to move to York, it’s so good knowing about a few of the churches, knowing a couple of people who go to one or two. It just means that in my first few weeks I will have someone to encourage me along to church and who’ll probably ask me in a few weeks if I’ve found a place to settle.”*

Of course, in writing this I am aware that 60% will not go to university at all and this group is probably one whose needs the church is particularly failing to address. While churches often have youth and student ministries, there is often little on offer for those who don’t go to university. Furthermore, if the 20s and 30s group is predominantly made up of those who have gone to university, those who haven’t may well feel isolated. Often talks and sermons may assume that people are graduates, even through simple phrases such as, “Many will have found at university...” Such phrases and assumptions in churches can quickly make those who have not attended university feel isolated. Perhaps too we need to reconsider how we might do home groups for this group. Are we assuming that everyone will be comfortable with an in-depth intellectual bible study? Do we assume too much prior knowledge of the Bible? Do we even assume that people will be comfortable reading out loud? These points may seem minor, yet we may just find that some small and subtle changes can make a difference to attracting and keeping this group in church.

Increasingly, another new phenomenon churches need to recognise is the issue of those returning home post university⁵ and those choosing to stay at home during university - 20% now live at home during their university years⁶. Top up fees, student debts, the increased cost of living not to mention difficulties finding jobs in the economic crisis have all contributed to this. The Office for National Statistics reported that six in 10 men and four in 10 women aged 20-24 were still living with their

⁵ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2008/jan/12/familyandrelationships.graduates>

⁶ <http://www.studentastic.co.uk/AdvantagesOfLivingHomeDuringUniversity.html>

parents.⁷ Those staying at home during university will often still have excellent opportunities to get involved in student activities offered by churches, but for many returning home post university can be a lonely and difficult time, particularly if the return home is out of necessity rather than preference. Some may return to churches attended prior to university, others may have become Christians at university and need to identify a church in their local area to join. Are churches on the lookout for these people? Willing to offer them support as they look for jobs, face the possible frustrations of living at home again and try to figure out what to do with the rest of their lives? Many may return home unsure of what it is they want to do – are churches offering support as young adults try and discern what their calling might be or how God might want them to use their gifts and abilities?

What can we conclude from this? Many believe that the 20s are the best years of your life with financial freedom, lack of commitments and responsibilities and an active social life. Although the 20s can be an exciting time full of opportunities, the reality for many is that the transitions one has to make during this time can also be daunting and overwhelming and that the pressures can be hard.⁸ Perhaps then, if the church is not to lose people during this time, it needs to be better equipped to help people make these transitions, to welcome them, to offer them spiritual encouragement, the social support of good friendship groups and to recognise more clearly the challenges they face.

⁷ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-512779/Boomerang-kids-hit-parents-pocket-home-university.html>

⁸ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/2180552.stm>

A THEOLOGY OF THE GENERATIONS

BY JUSTIN THACKER

Consider the following quotations regarding the youth of today:

The children now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, cross their legs, and tyrannize their teachers.

The world is passing through troublesome times. The young people of today think of nothing but themselves. They have no reverence for parents or old age. They are impatient of all restraint. They talk as if they knew everything, and what passes for wisdom with us is foolishness with them. As for the girls, they are forward, immodest and unladylike in speech, behaviour and dress.

Despite what you might expect, these quotations do not come from the letters pages of the *Daily Mail* but rather the first was written in the 4th Century BC, and the second in the 13th Century. I have highlighted them because one of the perennial temptations for each new generation is to think that the issues affecting it are somehow unique compared to those that impacted all previous eras. These quotations, then, act as a reminder that what we think is new may in reality be nothing of the sort.

This is important as we consider the issue of declining church attendance by young adults today. For once again, as many of us look round our churches and see the absence of those in their 20s and 30s, we can very rapidly jump to the conclusion that what we are witnessing is a sudden and dramatic decline in that age group's participation in church.

Consider the statistics that are presented earlier on in this report. On the surface, they appear to show a dramatic decline in the attendance of 20s and 30s over the last 30 years. However, a more careful reading of those statistics reveals that the decline over the last 30 years has been taking place in almost *all* age groups, and that in fact the greatest decline has not been amongst those in their 20s and 30s, but actually among children under 14.

This is evident if we examine church attendance by age in comparison to the national population at that time. In 1979, children under 14 were over-represented in church by a factor of 5%. In 1989, they were still over-represented by a factor of 6%. However by 2005, their attendance had slumped such that their attendance was precisely in line with what we would expect compared to the national population. Over the same time period, 20s and 30s were under-represented in 1979 and remain under-represented in 2005. In fact, between 1989 and 2005, there was no change in their degree of under-representation in our churches. So, yes it is the case that proportionately we have few 20s and 30s in our churches, but the important point is this: that under-representation is not some particularly new phenomenon. It is not occurring in unprecedented ways in our generation. It is simply continuing

the under-representation of that age group that also existed 20 years ago. The significance of this is that it means that we need not think that some terrible and dreadful thing has happened to the church in the last five or ten years, which unless we address, the future of the church is in peril. No, it is rather the case that we have problems attracting 20s and 30s, but such problems have certainly existed for the last quarter of a century and probably much longer.

And if we think about it, there are a number of very good reasons why those in their 20s and 30s might be hard to attract to church. More importantly, we can recognise that these issues apply to all 20s and 30s in every generation (at least in the modern period) and therefore have nothing to do with the particular things our churches have been doing more recently. So, those in the 20s in particular are often busy trying to build careers, find partners, experiment with life and so on. Now I'm not suggesting that those are good reasons to not attend church, but I am suggesting that they are pressures 20s face in all generations – and are not peculiar to our own. Similarly, those in their 30s are probably even more pressured in terms of career, and in addition have the added challenges of settling down in marriage and managing young families. Once again, this does not excuse non attendance, but it indicates reasons that apply to this particular stage of life that do not apply to others. My point is simply this: I would suggest that the right question to be asking if we are to tackle the issue of under-representation of 20s to 30s should not so much be concerned with what our churches have or haven't been doing in the last 5 to 10 years – the latest fads and fashions – but much more importantly we should be tackling the longer term strategic questions about why for the last quarter century and probably longer we struggle with this age group. In other words, what we require is not a 5-10 year piece of analysis, but one that is relevant for half a century.

Given this, I want to address a couple of tensions that arise as we seek to address the problem. The first is what I would call the consumerist-servant polarity, and concerns the tension that arises in balancing our desire to give young adults what they want with a proper concern to require of them a servant heart. The second tension resolves around ecclesiology and the tension that exists between seeking an all-inclusive, all-age 'church' versus the desire to frame church around one particular age-group or lifestyle. Relevant to both these tensions is the generational challenge in which we struggle to maintain the appropriate tension between allowing younger leaders the freedom to change the status quo without losing all sense of respect for the wisdom and experience of the older generations. I will address these tensions before turning to Paul first letter to the Corinthians for some guidance in how we might handle them.

THE CONSUMERIST-SERVANT POLARITY

Whenever a church leader repeatedly stares out upon row upon row of older people, sooner or later, either because his elders force it upon him or because he forces it upon himself, he will face this question: what do I need to do to attract more young adults to this church? So, in the 1998 church survey undertaken by the Evangelical Alliance, one of the questions concerned activities undertaken specifically to attract 21 to 40 year olds. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the survey found that those activities with the highest attractive ratings for that age group were: "social events" and "student meals". As a result the Alliance report concluded that if we are to reach and increase the proportion of 21 to 40 year olds in our congregations one of the most important factors to which we must pay attention is that of "intentionality". In other words, "a process involving prayerful reflection, careful analysis, and specific targeting." As part of this, it is important that we have an appropriate leadership culture which is not shocked or judgemental regarding young adults values and lifestyles, and that is "needs sensitive" in respect of this age group. In similar vein, Scot McKnight writing in a recent issue of Leadership magazine on the problem of the missing 18-30 generation states,

Emerging adults (those between 18 and 30) form a generation that is largely insensitive to the potency of God's holiness, and are therefore insensitive to the magnificence of his grace, the shocking nature of his love, and that gratitude forms the core of the Christian life. Some today

complain about these matters. But I doubt very much that ramping up moral exhortations and warning about an endless hell are the proper places to begin with emerging adults. Paul was sensitive to his audience; we need to be as well.⁹

And again, a recent issue of *Perspectives* asked the question, 'What do 18-40s need and expect?' and went on to list nine characteristics of the generation that, as the article concludes, "we would be irresponsible to ignore".¹⁰

Much of this analysis is extremely useful, indeed essential if we are to effectively reach this generation. When a pioneer missionary enters a new territory the first thing he or she does is ensure that they know and understand the language and culture of those with whom they are working. Hence, whether or not we agree with the 'culture' of those in their 20s and 30s, we must at least know what it is and understand it. As Paul said, "I became all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22). But at the same time, a rightful word of caution is needed as Krish Kandiah has already pointed out. The primary purpose of the church is not to meet the needs of its congregation, but to be a mission community in the midst of a world in need.

There is a real danger, then, that in our efforts to win back these missing generations, we simply pander to the spiritual consumerism that has a tendency to affect evangelical Christianity. While the Barna group have helped us much in understanding the needs and aspirations of the younger generations, I cannot agree with George Barna when in his 1988 book, *Marketing the Church*, he wrote, "the major problem plaguing the church is its failure to embrace a marketing orientation in what has become a marketing-driven environment.' And so he goes on, we must imagine church "not as a religious meeting place, but as a service agency – an entity that exists to satisfy people's needs".¹¹

This is surely far from the case. It may well be possible to create churches with great music and great preaching that attract lots of lots of young adults, but merely having great music does not necessarily mean that we are a worshipping community, just as having a great preacher does not necessarily mean that we are a biblical community. The question we face is whether our primary concern is to build *our churches*, or whether it is to co-build *His kingdom*.

The contrast, of course, is an attitude that understands worship not as something that meets my need for emotional intimacy or whatever, but as "a profoundly unselfish activity", in which "there is little room...for self-indulgence or self-absorption."¹² The challenge for us, then, is to present Christ not as a spiritual Santa Claus or Fairy Godmother, but as a profoundly counter-cultural, counter-consumerist Lord.

THE ECCLESIOLOGICAL CHALLENGE

The second tension we face in reaching out to those in their 20s and 30s concerns the type of church that we run. In their book, *God and the Generations*, David Hilborn and Matt Bird draw attention to the so-called Homogenous Unit Principle (HUP). The HUP arose in the 1970s from Fuller Theological Seminary's School of World Mission. The idea, as Donald McGavran, one of its chief exponents, liked to put it was that people "like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic or class barriers."¹³ As a result, we should make it as easy possible for people to become Christians by first of all seeking converts according to a Homogenous Unit, that is "a section of society in which all members have some

⁹ Scott McKnight, 'The Gospel for iGens', *Leadership* (Summer 2009) p20.

¹⁰ *Perspectives*, May 2009, p13.

¹¹ Quoted in Hilborn and Bird, *God and the Generations* (Paternoster, 2002), p11.

¹² *Ibid.*, p190.

¹³ Cited in *Ibid.*, p183.

characteristic in common.”¹⁴ What made this a *principle* though was that McGavran and others were not just observing that people became Christians in this way, but were positively advocating an intentional stance in this direction, that we should seek converts in this way. In short, if we targeted converts from one particular social group then we would be far more likely to have success than if we sought to make our churches accessible for all.

For fairly obvious reasons, since the HUP arose in the 70s, it has come in for a fair amount of criticism both from cross-cultural missionaries and theologians and practioners in the West. Nevertheless, it is arguable that something similar is going on when we tailor make our ‘seeker-sensitive’ services to appeal to just one demographic, or when we create churches that are designed for just one particular group.

The critiques are fairly obvious. In the first place, the church by definition is meant to be all-inclusive of all-ages, all social strata, all races and all genders. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul did not encourage the hands to all get together and form a home group, let alone a service just for them. Rather, he encouraged them to see their need for the eyes and the feet. Moreover, the image with which we are provided in the book of Revelation is not of a mono-cultural church, but rather a diversity in which “every nation, tribe, people and language” are together worshipping before the Lord (Revelation 7:9). In addition, though, whenever churches do become mono-cultural there is a significant danger of group-think such that other equally valid expressions of church are at best ignored, at worst, despised. If all we ever meet with are people who reinforce our sense of sub-cultural identity then it is very hard for us see either the flaws in our own sub-culture, or the richness in others. Finally, it can also be argued that a mark of true discipleship is precisely the ability to embrace those who are different from ourselves, and therefore a lack of willingness to do this calls into question both the gospel being preached and the depth of the conversions being achieved.

In response to these criticisms, advocates of HUP modified their stance to some extent and viewed it not as an *ultimate* expression of the body of Christ, but as a penultimate or interim approach that may be used by God in order to extend his kingdom. So, a 1977 Lausanne conference which specifically examined the issue concluded in its report,

All of us are agree that in many situations a homogenous unit church can be a legitimate and authentic church. Yet we are also agreed that it can never be complete in itself. Indeed, if it remains in isolation, it cannot reflect the universality and diversity of the Body of Christ. Nor can it grow into maturity. Therefore, every [homogenous unit] church must take active steps to broaden its fellowship in order to demonstrate visibly the unity and variety of Christ’s church.¹⁵

The relevance of this point for ‘student’ or ‘Gen X’ or ‘Gen Y’ churches is obvious. Yes, they may well see very rapid growth and apparent success. Such approaches might well ‘work’, but to what extent are they faithfully replicating the body of Christ as it is meant to be. Interestingly, in a very recent example in Leadership magazine Collin Hansen has called into question the long term success of such churches anyway. He draws attention to the fact that Axis, the Willow Creek young adults service, which at its peak in 2000, 2001 was pulling in 2,000 people had slumped to just 400 and was going to be axed, at least in its current format. He goes on to suggest that this in fact has been the pattern for a significant number of such generation specific services / churches. They have proved immensely successful for a while, but often in due course, subsequently collapsed just as readily. He writes,

¹⁴ Ibid., p182.

¹⁵ The Pasadena Consultation: Homogenous Unit (LOP no.1) p3.

“Due in no small part to Willow’s example, ministry leaders across the country once viewed separate, age-targeted services as the key to reaching a generation largely absent from the churches built by their boomer parents. Little more than 10 years after Willow launched Axis in 1996, many of these once-prosperous twenty-something ministries have folded, spun off, or morphed. Leaders from these ministries have learned differing lessons from the experiment.”¹⁶

Hansen points out that one US church leader who has followed the ups and downs of young adult ministries “estimates that 90 percent of worship services targeting a younger generation run into serious trouble after three years.” He goes on, “One factor is the way these age-specific ministries isolate young people from the rest of the church.” If we think about it, such an analysis make sense. If what young people ultimately need is the full gospel of Christ expressed in the full body of Christ, then while age-specific services are fun and exciting for a while they will, like a McDonald’s cheeseburger, ultimately fail to nourish. Yes, of course, worshipping alongside those who are older, perhaps more traditional, is harder work, but perhaps it is precisely in that harder work that real strength is born and real discipleship takes place.

This is not then to suggest that age-specific services have no place in the church. But it is to say, as the group at Pasadena did, that we need to find ways to integrate those who attend such services into the rest of the body of Christ. There are, of course, as many ways to do this as there are forms of church, but as Hansen himself concludes, “Across the spectrum, twenty-something ministry leaders say reaching the millennial generation will require more than playing mainstream music, dimming the lights, and talking about sex. All see deep, genuine community as a crying need and key avenue for communicating and displaying the gospel of Christ.”¹⁷ And as we all know, real community, is inter-generational.

PAUL AND THE GENERATIONS

The issue for us, then, is how to negotiate this tension between understanding the needs of 20s and 30s without either us or them being held captive by them. Such a tension is always hard to negotiate, but the key has to be in Paul’s exhortation in 1 Corinthians 9:19-27. On the one hand, as we have already noted, Paul describes himself as being a “slave to all”, “to the Jews a Jew”, to the gentiles a gentile etc. We have here then what we might call Paul’s capitulation to culture or sensitivity to needs etc. But on the other hand, Paul’s efforts in this regard are not aimless or pointless (v24ff). He indicates in fact three specific purposes of his efforts. Firstly, his aim is to “win as many as possible”, secondly it is for “the sake of the gospel”, and thirdly it is so that he “may share in its blessings”.

In relation to the first of these, then, the point of our cultural adaptation is not so that we seem cool, it is not so that people like us, or buy our books, or come to hear us at conferences – its so that people are saved. His point seems to be that cultural adaptation is fine, but lets ensure that its focus is not us and our popularity, but rather them and their eternal destiny. I remember once hearing a well respected national youth leader put it this way: “there’s a fine line between stand up comedy and an effective youth sermon.” His point was that there absolutely was a valid use of comedy and amusing stories in order to create and maintain attention with young people, but the purpose must not be so that they go away thinking ‘what a great and funny speaker’, but rather ‘what must I do to be saved’. A focus on salvation, not our popularity, will help us walk this tightrope of cultural adaptation.

The second point Paul makes is that it is for the sake of the gospel. Once again, the important point here is that it is not for Paul’s own sake. Many commentators take it that the implied contrast is with the sophists of Paul’s own day, whose oratory was precisely designed to win popular audiences and the

¹⁶ Collin Hansen, ‘The X Factor’, *Leadership* (Summer 2009), pp25,26.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p29

consequent financial benefits of having such a following. In contrast, for Paul, the purpose primarily is to save others and for the sake of the gospel. Now the commentators are divided on whether the phrase 'for the sake of the gospel' is referring to the *content* of the gospel, its essential tenets as it were, or it whether it is referring to the *progress* of the gospel, in other words its power to save (Romans 1:16). The preceding verses of course suggest that it is the *progress* of the gospel that Paul primarily has in mind, but having said that do we need to choose? For we are making a major mistake if we think that somehow the advance of the gospel can be separated from its content. The reason that the gospel has power to save is precisely because of its content – that it is a message of salvation in and through Christ alone. If we remove or modify the *content* then some kind of spirituality may well progress, but it will not be the gospel of Jesus Christ. The message and its progress are inherently related, and therefore I see no problem in suggesting that Paul's concern was *both* for the progress of the gospel and for its content.

Given this, what Paul seems to be suggesting is that there are limits on what he will and will not do in order to win others. It is indeed his goal to save some (v22), but in order to achieve that he will not compromise the gospel itself, for it is the gospel that saves – not Paul's oratory. For Paul, then, it is not just undesirable but actually impossible to preach a sermon that would 'win' some, but in the process compromise the message. In saying this, we see precisely why Paul's accommodation to culture could never result in mere decisionism. For when Paul says that he becomes a slave in order to win some, he is not winning them to anything other than the full orb'd gospel which is far broader than a mere 'decision' for Christ. Perhaps the whole debate that has been had regarding an emphasis on conversion in contrast to disciple making would have been avoided if we had paid closer attention to what Paul says here. It is for the gospel's sake that he seeks to save, not merely to 'win' folk in some kind of spiritual popularity contest.

Finally, then, Paul adds that he does all this in order to 'share in its blessings'. The phrase used here literally means 'to be a fellow-partaker of it', and once again the commentators are divided. Does he mean to be a fellow-participant in the *work* of the gospel, the efforts he has been describing in verses 19ff, or does he mean to be a fellow-participant in the *blessings* of the gospel as the following verses (24ff) would suggest? Once again, I would suggest both, not least because part of the blessing of the gospel is that in this life we are enabled to work with God in proclaiming it. We get to be God's co-workers and ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:18 – 6:1). How marvellous is that?

I would suggest, then, that his point here simply flows directly from the previous two. If he had in fact accommodated himself or his message merely to win popularity, or in a way that compromised the message of the gospel itself then as a direct result he would necessarily have also disqualified himself from being God's co-worker and so enjoying the blessings that brings. That seems to be precisely what he goes on to say in the following verse, culminating in his conclusion in v27. "I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize." Paul is not so much saying here that he makes himself a slave in order to receive blessing himself. It is rather that as he necessarily accommodates himself in order to win others for the gospel, he must ensure that he does not do this in such a way that would disqualify him from sharing in its benefits either in this life or the one to come.

We have then three principles that set limits on our accommodation to culture. Firstly, the goal is winning others for Christ. Secondly, we must not compromise the gospel in the process, and thirdly we must never act in such a way that we ourselves would be disqualified from working with God in this great endeavour. All three of these points help us walk the tension between reaching out with every possible kind of cultural accommodation that is required, but not compromising our biblical principles in the process.

To give a practical example, the vast majority of preachers like to tell stories – especially those seeking to communicate effectively with those in their 20s and 30s. Secondhand stories are good, but often what really impacts such audiences are personal, heartfelt tales of our own struggles and triumphs with faith. There is a great temptation then for preachers to exaggerate one or two finer details in order to make our point. Perhaps, we exaggerate a little the extent of the healing miracle we saw: the old lady did not struggle out of his wheelchair – she leapt out of it. Perhaps, we make worse the situation someone was in before we preached Christ to them: the young man was in and out of prison and living on the streets addicted to heroin, when in reality he'd been arrested once and slept on a park bench a couple of times, but was actually now living at home and doing well in a drug rehab program. Or perhaps we increase just a tad the number that responded to our previous message: the 50 who actually came forward turns into 100s. Now, if all we had to guide us was Paul's admonition that it is all about winning others for Christ, then it would be all too easy to justify such liberality with the truth by saying either openly or in our hearts – 'yes, but this is in order to save them', or 'surely a little exaggeration is justified if as a result people come to know Christ'. Whether we acknowledge it or not, I'm sure many of us have at times played with the literal truth of the stories we tell.

But Paul's other points – that what we do must not compromise the gospel message itself, and must not disqualify ourselves from the prize – put breaks on this kind of behaviour. It says to us that even though telling the story in that way may well lead to more 'conversions' that night, or people feeling more moved by the worship or our speaking, it will not have served to advance the gospel and we will have disqualified ourselves from enjoying its blessings. For how can a medium of untruth in any way proclaim that which is true? In similar vein, if we fail to show love and grace in the way we express the gospel, the real advance of the gospel will be hindered, for how can a medium which fails to show love be used to communicate a message of grace.

In practical terms, then, it seems to me that there are three questions we need to ask ourselves as we rightly seek to accommodate ourselves and our churches to reach the lost generations. Firstly, are we doing absolutely everything we can to win these people for Christ? This is the admonition that will cause us to remove every and any possible stumbling block that would prevent such folk from coming to know Christ. But at the same time, we must also ask the second question: is our accommodation compromising the gospel itself? Have we, in other words, short-changed our hearers by providing them not with the good news of Jesus Christ, the message that salvation is found in him alone, but rather with a piece of spiritualised sophistry that sounds great, makes us feel warm and gooey inside, but does nothing to save us from eternal judgment? Thirdly, have we by the way we behave and speak compromised ourselves and the ethical integrity to which we are called and so compromised the medium if not the message? The words that come out of mouth may well be those of grace, but if our actions betray them, they mean very little. These three questions, then, I would suggest may help us as we walk this tension between accommodation to culture and remaining true to the purpose to which God has called us: the gospel of Jesus Christ.