



**INTERGENERATIONAL RECONCILIATION  
AND JUSTICE  
AS ESSENTIAL DIMENSIONS  
OF MISSIONAL RENEWAL  
IN THE POST-MODERN TRANSITION**

**by**

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**Submitted in fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree**

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**in the Faculty of Theology,**

**University of Pretoria**

**April 2009**

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## DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis, which I hereby submit for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Practical Theology at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Dated:** \_\_\_\_\_

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The process of completing this thesis has been long and arduous, yet richly rewarding. I would like to thank Professor Malan Nel for his encouragement, wise counsel, expert feedback, and enduring patience. My times of meeting with this exceptional scholar and Christian leader on the Princeton Theological Seminary campus were truly beneficial. I am grateful for his availability to me during these times.

I also would like to thank Dr. Edwin Simanton of the University of South Dakota School of Medicine for his assistance with the survey process that provided the basis for chapter eight, the empirical portion of this study. It was reassuring and rewarding to be aided by someone possessing such expertise and passion toward statistical research.

I also would like to express my gratitude to the academic community at Spurgeon's College in London, England, where I completed my MTh studies. The benefit that I received from my affiliation with this excellent academic community lives on in my life daily. My Spurgeon's studies challenged, shaped, and enriched me in ways that have enabled me to continue my academic journey at the doctoral level. I would especially like to honor Dr. Peter Stevenson, whose supervision of my master's dissertation contributed in a very significant way to my academic formation. Interestingly, this doctoral project was inspired in large part by feedback that I received on my very first assignment as a Spurgeon's student.

I am grateful for my church families at Grace Baptist Church in Grand Forks, ND, and Christ Community Church in Sioux Falls, SD. Dr. Ken Ruit, Dr. Paul Wright, Dr. Sonia Zimmerman, Prof. Lloyd Omdahl, Rev. Rod Anderson, and Mrs. Bonita Shambaugh have offered support through their words of encouragement and prayers. Many of these same individuals have inspired me through their example of balancing the life of faith with a passionate commitment to scholarly inquiry and academic excellence.

The community at Sioux Falls Seminary also played an important role in making it possible for me to complete this project. Dr. Jay Moon, Dr. Terence Mournet, Dr. Richard Reitsma, and Dr. Gary Strickland have been especially valuable conversation partners along the way as I have sought to develop, articulate, and refine my thoughts. I am grateful for the wealth of resources that have been made available to me through SFS's excellent library. I also appreciate the opportunities my students have provided me to experiment with these ideas, most notably in the course *Congregational Mission and the Post-modern Generations*. Their thoughts and questions have been most helpful.

Last, and most importantly, I would like to express my deep appreciation for my wife, Teresa, and my four-year-old daughter, Savannah. They have had to endure the significant investment of time that this project has required of me. At times, they have had to endure sharing their home with a grumpy and frustrated doctoral student.

## SUMMARY

This research is guided by the assertion that, as American society journeys through the post-modern transition, many established churches are struggling to respond adequately to cultural change within a fragmented generational context. It further is argued that the resulting ineffectiveness of many of these churches in transmitting the Christian tradition to Gen Xers, the first post-modern generation, threatens the ability of these churches to sustain their witness through this period.

This project advances the hypothesis that, if established churches are to sustain their witness through the post-modern transition, they must engage in a process of missional renewal that encompasses Generation X. When considered from both a sociological and a theological perspective, this process must be seen as entailing a commitment to intergenerational reconciliation and justice.

**Chapter one** provides an introduction to this study and explains how it is situated within the discipline of Practical Theology. Following Heitink (1999:6), Practical Theology is defined as “the mediation of the Christian faith in the praxis of modern society.”

**Chapter two** offers additional theoretical foundations through an exploration of the *intergenerational* praxis of the church within the *intergenerational* praxis of society.

In **chapter three**, essential historical background is provided through an exploration of the influence of modernity in shaping the praxis of American society, as well as the influence of the Christendom paradigm in guiding the church’s praxis. This chapter also explores the emergence of institutional structures that have fostered distance between the generations, as well as the impact of these changes upon the intergenerational praxis of the church.

**Chapter four** examines the complexities associated with the post-modern paradigm shift. Generation X is introduced as a generation whose formative years most closely

approximate this period. Generation X is shown to be a misunderstood and maligned generation possessing discontinuous cultural values.

In **chapter five**, the “marriage” of Christendom and modernity is shown to limit the ability of established churches to respond faithfully to the post-modern turn. The intergenerational dynamics of these churches also are shown to hinder their response. This chapter demonstrates that the resulting absence of the first post-modern generation from these churches places their continued viability at risk.

**Chapter six** explores the need for these churches to experience missional renewal. A case is made for the participation of Generation X as a crucial consideration in this pursuit. The issue of “process” is shown to be important in helping churches negotiate the challenges of missional renewal.

**Chapter seven** advances the assertion that, from both theological and sociological perspectives, intergenerational reconciliation and justice must be seen as integral dimensions of the missional renewal process.

In **chapter eight**, the argument developed in the preceding chapters is subjected to empirical evaluation. The results of a survey conducted among churches from five denominations lend credibility to this study’s hypothesis.

The final chapter (**nine**) introduces the “Missional Change Model” as one strategic framework through which established churches might be guided in pursuing missional renewal. This chapter also demonstrates how this model might help to facilitate intergenerational reconciliation and justice.



## **KEY WORDS**

Missional Church  
Church Renewal  
Generations  
Generation X  
Tradition  
Intergenerational Ministry  
Post-modernism  
Post-Christendom  
Intergenerational Reconciliation  
Intergenerational Justice  
Change Processes

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