5.   THE ESTABLISHED CHURCH AND THE POST-MODERN TRANSITION

5.1   Introduction

In the preceding chapters, we have woven together several strands of exploration that are crucial to the theme under consideration here. The central problem being addressed in this thesis is the following:

> As American society journeys through the post-modern transition, many established churches struggle to respond faithfully to cultural change within a fragmented generational context. The resulting ineffectiveness of these churches in transmitting the Christian tradition to Generation X, the first post-modern generation, threatens their ability to sustain their witness through this transitional period.

In chapters three and four, we examined American society's journey from the age of Enlightenment to that of an emerging post-modern culture. Along the way, it has been demonstrated that the cultural changes accompanying the shift from modernity to post-modernity have been manifested intergenerationally. Furthermore, we have noted the way in which all contemporary generations have been shaped by the assumptions of the age-segmented culture that evolved under the influence of modernity. Amid the significant cultural changes that have occurred in recent decades, this age-segmented social framework has fostered an astounding complexity within the American generational landscape and, thus, has served as an incubator for fragmentation and conflict among the generations. As we saw in chapter four, Generation X is a cohort that most directly bears the influence of both the post-modern transition and the complex patterns of relationship existing among the generations.

Throughout these chapters, we have been concerned with exploring the praxis of the church as it has lived and ministered in the midst of this complex, changing cultural context. In chapter three, we gained some sense of the struggle that the church has faced and the ways in which its praxis, so greatly influenced by the assumptions of Christendom, has developed in response to the modern era. In this chapter, we will examine more closely the life of the contemporary church. How is it dealing with the cultural changes associated with the post-modern transition? Recognizing that the perpetuation of the church's witness through this period of transition is an inherently

intergenerational task, how is the church doing at transmitting its faith tradition to the members of Generation X, the first post-modern generation, within a complex intergenerational context? Has the church chosen a course different from that of society at large, or has it merely chosen to mimic and reinforce the marginalization that Xers have experienced in so many other contexts?

In this thesis, we are arguing that the church has established something of a poor record in responding to these realities, one that now places many churches in a state of a crisis. More specifically, we are arguing that the inadequacy of the church's response has contributed to its ineffectiveness in transmitting the Christian faith to Generation X and, as a result, that the continued existence of many churches is in jeopardy. In this chapter, we will explore these claims further and will contemplate the implications of these realities for the future of the church's life and mission.

5.2   The Church Amid Change

Throughout chapters three and four, considerable attention was given to the unfolding story of the dramatic changes that have taken place within our society. These changes, and their generational manifestation, have been explored under the broad heading of the *post-modern shift*. As we now turn our attention to the life of the church, it will become readily apparent that these changes have had a profound impact upon its life. While this cultural shift has posed significant challenges for the broader society, we will see that it also poses tremendous challenges for the church as it seeks to perpetuate its faith tradition faithfully through this transitional period.

Amid the profound changes that have occurred within society, the world to which the church long has been accustomed, by which its life and message have been shaped, and to which it has striven to respond throughout many generations, to a large extent no longer exists. Miller (2004:1) speaks in bold terms in reflecting upon this reality: "The future is now. Our world has changed. Even the dynamics of change have changed—and like it or not, we are all along for the ride." This experience of change poses significant challenges for how the church understands its life and witness. Butler Bass (2004:33) suggests that a sense of transition "is part and parcel of being alive at this moment in human history. It is just the way it is….a natural and normal

response to living in a time of rapid social transformation." The changes impacting the lives of local churches, asserts Mead (1991:85), are "connected to equally radical changes of paradigms going on throughout the world. Our evolution is part of a cosmic evolution of nations and of consciousness, one that is reshaping evolution of East and West, of humanity and environment."

So, how has the church chosen to respond to these profound changes? Two realities introduced in chapter three have proven to serve as significant hindrances to the church's capacity to respond to these changes in a way that promotes its continued effectiveness. The first is the Christendom paradigm, which has had significant bearing on the way in which the church contextualized the gospel within the world of modernity. The second is the decision of the church to adopt an approach to its intergenerational life that largely mirrors the praxis of the broader society in an uncritical and uncreative fashion, which has fostered distance and division among the generations of which these local churches are composed. We will consider each of these in turn in the pages that follow.

5.2.1   The Marriage of Christendom and Modernity

In this thesis, we are asserting that many established churches are struggling to respond faithfully to the cultural changes associated with the post-modern transition. We can recognize that this is the case in part because, in their efforts to adjust to a new world, established churches are starting from something of a "deficit" position. This is so because of the influence of the Christendom paradigm upon the life of the church. As we explored in section 3.2.1, for many centuries the Christendom paradigm has guided the church's understanding of its place in relation to society. Truly, as a result of its extended, stable relationship with the world of Christendom, the church came to be shaped by the core stories, values, and habits that were native to it (Roxburgh 2005:92).

As we noted in section 3.2.1, one particularly unfortunate facet of Christendom's legacy has been the divorce of church and mission (Murray 2004:130). The church's institutional character was emphasized rather than its relation to the *missio Dei* (Shenk 2001:8). These "deep roots" from several centuries in the past gave rise to a "flawed

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vision" of the church's mission within modern society (Mead 1991:84). Shenk (2001:41) asserts that, "Had the church understood itself as having a mission to culture, it would perforce have engaged modern culture in light of the reign of God." However, the absence of such an understanding, suggests Drane (2000:95), led the church toward an all too uncritical embrace of the culture of modernity. As Shenk (1996:72) explains, Christendom inhibited the church from interacting critically or constructively with the changes that took place within modern society. As a result, the church became "absorbed and domesticated" into the prevailing culture of modernity (Goheen 1999; www.newbigin.net).

As we saw in chapter three, this melding of the influences of Christendom and modernity within American culture seems to have reached the pinnacle of its expression during the 1950s, a period in which established churches across America flourished (Schaller 1999:140). Butler Bass (2004:78) describes the churches of this era as having been concerned with "the comfort of the familiar, not the challenge of the foreign." This model "assumes that the surrounding culture is friendly and supportive of the congregation—which tends to be a homogeneous, closed system. Chapel-style churches are routinized organizations, where members receive customs, traditions, and beliefs rather than create new ones." Butler Bass describes this as an "accidental church," one that did not perceive itself as needing to relate to its context with missional intentionality. These congregations were not bad places, she insists, but rather "vibrant, successful, growing congregations that met the needs of people at a particular moment in American history" (:95). However, it was precisely because of the success of these congregations that they lost "the capacity to imagine church being different than how they experienced it and, essentially, froze tradition in its tracks." As the culture began to change around the church, this lack of imagination contributed greatly to its own ineffectiveness.

Many commentators suggest that, as the church became "domesticated" within the world of modernity, the result was devastating to the church's true vocation. Riddell (1998:59) describes modernity as a "Trojan Horse" that caused the church to adopt a syncretistic expression of the faith. As we saw in chapter three, with time, the church's understanding of the gospel became reduced to the product of this syncretistic interface of gospel and culture (Shenk 1995:55-56). As Gibbs and Bolger

(2005:170) note, "Whereas Christendom provided institutional confidence, modernity provided an epistemological certainty based on foundationalism." As a result of this relationship, asserts Shenk (2001:6-7), "a lack of integrity has undermined the credibility of the church in modern Western culture." He adds, "The message, which had almost become a taunt, was clear: any peace settlement between church/religion and culture would be on the terms set by secular culture" (:39). This leads Riddell (1998:97) to offer the stinging assessment that the church of this era came to exist and function "in concert with the prevailing lie-tellers."

Regardless of the factors that may have led the church to compromise its witness within the modern era, this "flirtation with modernity and the ideas of the Enlightenment" has contributed significantly to a loss of influence exercised by the church within society (Frost & Hirsch 2003:14). In fact, the acquiescence of the church to the culture of modernity, and the resultant trivializing of the gospel message, has led to the marginalization of the Christian faith (Miller 2004:178). Shenk (2001:2) points to the growth of the Christian movement in the non-Western world during this same period, largely the result of the modern missionary movement, to underscore precisely how costly the loss of a proper missional identity and vitality has been for the church in the West. The church has suffered declining influence during this period, not because its faith was unacceptable to the modern world, but because of its failure to bear witness faithfully (Bosch 1995:45). Notes Shenk (2005:73), "By isolating the question of mission, the church was effectively insulated from the adjustments that missionary engagement inevitably brings."

In section 3.5.2.5, we examined the way in which this declining influence of the church became particularly notable during the 1960s and 1970s. Many commentators have suggested that this period constituted the dawning of an era of *post-Christendom*. This term, post-Christendom, captures something of the significant "relocation," or loss of position, that has been experienced by the American church in relation to society in recent decades (Van Gelder 1998:54). The church in the United States began to experience disestablishment with the legal separation of church and state described in section 3.2.1.2. This disestablishment was further fuelled by the religious diversity brought about through immigration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (:50-52). However, the hermeneutics of decision (e.g. "oneself"

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and "one's situation"), which we introduced in chapter three as having emerged with such great force in the 1960s, contributed powerfully to a third wave of disestablishment of functional Christendom within American society (Carroll & Roof 2002:41).

Hauerwas and Willimon (1989:15-17) explain the impact that this has had upon the role of the church within society:

> Sometime between 1960 and 1980, an old, inadequately conceived world ended, and a fresh new one began. We do not mean to be overly dramatic. Although there are many who have not yet heard the news, it is nevertheless true: a tired old world has ended…[In the past] Church, home and state formed a national consortium that worked together to instill "Christian values"…A few years ago, the two of us awoke and realized that, whether our parents were justified in believing this about the world and the Christian faith, NOBODY believed it today….[I]t is no longer "our world."

Van Gelder (1998:54) offers a similar characterization:

> [M]ost noteworthy was the collapse or substantial erosion of much of the churched culture that had been built up over a period of two hundred years. Notions of shared public morals gave way to personal decisions of expediency, pleasure, or private judgment. Expectations of privileged position gave way to irrelevance and marginalization. People no longer assumed that the church had anything relevant to say on matters beyond personal faith. Public policy became increasingly secularized, as public morals became increasingly personalized and privatized.

Hall (1997:1) insists that these changes in the social location of the church represent a shift "of reverse proportions" to that which occurred under the leadership of emperors Constantine and Theodisius. Christendom, he insists, "is in its death throes" (:ix).

The cultural upheaval of recent decades truly has contributed to the dismantling of this world of Christendom and the demise of its guiding assumptions (Hunsberger 1996:16-17; Riddell 1998:13; Murray 2004:178-179). Murray (:19) describes the post-Christendom context as "the culture that emerges as the Christian faith loses coherence within a society that has been definitely shaped by the Christian story and as the institutions that have been developed to express Christian convictions decline in influence." Much like post-modernism, "post-Christendom" is not meant to be understood as a comprehensive descriptor of the emerging culture; rather, this term provides important insight into a key facet of the broader changes occurring (:3, 4). Furthermore, as Murray cautions, this term should not be confused with "post-

Christian." The post-Christendom transition is not meant to imply the ultimate end of Christianity, but rather of a particular way that the church has been accustomed to existing within the prevailing culture. In essence, the church has been displaced from its long-established role as "chaplain to society" (Hunsberger 1998:28). It has moved from the centre to the margins, from the majority to the minority, and from a position of privilege to a context of plurality (Murray 2004:20).

For the purposes of this study, it is important that some effort is made to clarify the relationship between post-Christendom and post-modernity, and that we take care to maintain the distinction between these concepts. While encouraging a proper appreciation of both of these terms as genuinely reflecting transitional phases occurring within society, Murray (2004:12, 14) notes that neither can be credited as the direct cause of the other, nor can one properly be subsumed as a sub-heading under the other. Certainly, the critical stance of post-modern thought toward triumphalistic meta-narratives and authority structures has contributed to the unravelling of Christendom assumptions within society (:182, 183). Yet, Murray (:14) posits that, with time, the post-Christendom shift will prove to be of far greater and more lasting significance than its post-modern counterpart. However, at this particular moment in history, as the church endeavours to carry out its divine calling, we must acknowledge that the post-modern shift does indeed profoundly shape the immediate cultural context in which the church exists and endeavours to carry out its witness.

Because the assumptions born out of the "marriage" between Christianity and the prevailing worldview of modernity are woven so deeply into the core beliefs of the church, this makes it difficult for many congregations to respond creatively to the cultural changes that are occurring (Drane 2000:114; Miller 2004:178). As Mead (1991:3) notes, many congregations "were born into this culture of establishment, whether they approved of it and joined it, or disapproved and tried to remain apart from it." Thus, the values of Christendom remain persistently influential within the life of the church today, instinctively and unconsciously shaping its sense of its identity and calling (Murray 2004:200-203). As Frost and Hirsch (2003:8) note, "while the Christendom story no longer defines Western culture, it still remains the primary definer of the church's self-understanding in almost every Western nation,

including and perhaps especially the United States." Kitchens (2003:27) similarly asserts that "the way we think about ministry is still rooted largely in a modernist paradigm more suited to the waning era of Christendom."

A broad consensus has emerged to the effect that these old ways have run their course (Drane 2000:104). As Webber (1999:17) asserts, "the Christian faith incarnated in the modern culture, with its philosophical methodology, is eroding." Kitchens (2003:27) notes that what the church has "'always done before' no longer works." Similarly, Miller (2004:178) asserts that the "operational missiology" that guided the church during the period of modernity is no longer adequate. Mead (1991:18) reflects upon how deeply this way of doing things has come to be rooted in the life of traditional ecclesial structures:

> [A]ll the structures and institutions that make up the churches and the infrastructure of religious life…are built on the presuppositions of the Christendom paradigm—not the ancient, classical version of the paradigm as it was understood centuries ago, but the version that flourished with new life in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This paradigm in its later years flourished and shaped us with new vigor, just as a dying pine is supposed to produce seed more vigorously as it senses the approach of its own death.

As a result, insists Drane (2000:95, 114), many churches are proving incapable of re-contextualizing; these churches evidence a resistance toward engaging post-modernism. This is creating a crisis for the church as it seeks to sustain its existence within the prevailing culture (:95). Suggests Drane (:114-115), the church's resistance toward the post-modern merely betrays its loss of missiological integrity within the world of modernity. If the church's stance within modernity was truly missiological, he queries, "why can't we move on"?

5.2.2   Generational Segregation and Consumer-Driven Homogeneity
5.2.2.1 Segregationism in the Church

A second factor can be identified as to why many established churches are struggling to respond faithfully to the cultural changes associated with the post-modern transition. As we have already suggested, this struggle is bound up with the church's efforts to navigate a complex generational context. Throughout chapters three and four, we have seen how, particularly in the last 100 years, modern society has given

rise to structures that foster segmentation and separation between the generations (Allen 2005:319). Furthermore, chapter three provided extensive evidence of how the church has responded to these developments within the praxis of society largely by mimicking or mirroring them. As Allen (:319) notes, "the societal trend toward age segregation has moved into churches also." Harkness (1998:1) similarly observes that "in practice a rampant segregationism obtains in many congregations in the key aspects of congregational life: worship and education" (cf. Foster 1997:2; Barger 2005:124). This "generational segregation", thus, is "a relatively recent ecclesiastical innovation," yet has become deeply entrenched in the life of the church (Harkness 2003:13). As we saw in chapters three and four, this approach to intergenerational life has come to be perceived as a "natural" part of the world in which the contemporary generations were formed. It furthermore has shaped the perception and imagination of great numbers of established churches.

As we also have seen, this approach to structuring the life of the church has had profound implications for the ability of churches to transmit their traditions intergenerationally. In chapter two, we considered the crucial role that the formative years of young people plays in the development of any generation, as well as the importance of this period in the process of religious socialization. Then, in chapter three, we chronicled the growing separation of youth ministries from the broader life of local congregations. We have seen, as Hill (2002:164) suggests, that churches have favoured a practice of "[s]egregating (siloing) the youth ministry of the church away from the larger life of the congregation." These ministries have become "considered an appendage of the church but certainly not the primary purpose for being the church." As chapter three demonstrates, with the advance of the twentieth century, evidence emerged that this approach was of limited effectiveness in combating the growing intergenerational divide within a peer-oriented youth culture.

In fact, as chapter three demonstrates, by the time of the Boomer formative years, this approach to structuring the life of the church was proving problematic and rather ineffective in promoting the intergenerational perpetuation of the faith traditions of local congregations. In the past, these churches were able to accommodate multiple generations with the traditional church programming to which older Christians were accustomed. As Benke and Benke (2002:1) observe, "While such programming took

into account age-related differences and needs, particularly concerning children and youth, ministries to the several adult generations were structured on the premise of relative cultural homogeneity, regardless of age bracket." However, the dramatic changes that occurred in the relationship between the generations within society produced a radically different situation for the church. As Benke and Benke assert, the "multigenerational cultural continuity" that contributed to the character of traditional churches "is no longer intact."

5.2.2.2 The Church Growth Movement and the HU Principle

In chapter three, we noted the crisis that the exodus of vast numbers of Boomers created for many established churches. Amid the struggle to reengage the Boomer generation, the influence of the Church Growth Movement (hereafter referred to with the abbreviation "CGM") began to emerge into prominence. Founded by missiologist Donald McGavran and fostered through the influence of theorists like C. Peter Wagner, this movement bore heavily the influence of modernity. Suggests Olson (2002:11-12),

> The relationship of the church growth movement and the modernity project mirrors this two-sided puzzle. As the pieces of one come together, the other finds expression as well. As the principles of modernity are pieced together and then applied to the church, the picture that emerges is the church growth movement.

In response to the challenges the church faced during this era, notes McNeal (2003:21), this movement "exploded on the scene in the 1970s." McNeal suggests that the CGM was meant to constitute "a missiological response to the initial warning signs that the church in North America had lost its mission."

A core conviction of this movement was that the gospel meets people's needs. Notes Olson (2002:13), "The church growth movement, being the flip side of the modern project, turned the church's primary focus from God to the individual human being." Olson (:20) further explains that the CGM

> seeks to unleash people from all the trappings that inhibit their freedom. Tradition, doctrine, loyalty, and sacrifice only imprison the individual. The absence of these defining elements of congregational life means the church becomes the purveyor of whatever the individual desires. The church, now

focused around and committed to the free individual, dispenses commodities to ensure and further enhance this freedom.

While we need to avoid an oversimplification or misrepresentation of the intent of the earliest church growth theorists, Olson's comments do provide a fair reflection of how church growth thought came to be applied in principle within much of the American context. As was evident in section 3.5.1.3, the seeds of this way of thinking were already taking root during the thriving 1950s era. However, as we will see shortly, this sanctification of individualism by advocates of church growth thought would have profound implications for the life of the church.

As its name suggests, this movement centred upon the concept of growth (McNeal 2003:21). It was understood that "growth was a sign of life and was anticipated and even expected by God." The proponents of this movement asserted that growth would result when the church is obedient to the Great Commission given by Jesus. Furthermore, it was understood that, "if a church isn't growing it is being disobedient to God, falling short of his expectations." The fundamental way that the church's "success" is evidenced and measured, therefore, is through an increase in "numbers," more specifically the number of people participating in corporate worship services. As Roxburgh (1997:20) expresses, "Numerical growth is the talisman that all is well with our ecclesiastical souls." Snyder and Runion (2002:64-65) posit that this obsession with size and growth are most certainly a function of the modern American worldview that has shaped the perspective of so many churches.

Ward (2002:17-21) suggests that the church's notions about success and growth are furthermore born out of a mindset shaped by the world of Christendom. To describe this, he has coined the term "solid church." He explains: "Congregation characterizes solid church. By congregation I mean the tendency to emphasize one central meeting. Usually this meeting is a worship service held weekly on a Sunday morning." Indeed, suggests Ward, "Gathering in one place to do the same thing together is one of the core values of solid church;" it is assumed that "it is good for large numbers of very different people to meet in the same room and do the same sort of things together." Ward sees a primary consequence of this being the tendency for worship to become a "one-size-fits-all" exercise controlled by the preferences and prejudices of those who attend. In turn, church becomes "an exclusive club run for its members and organized

by a team of voluntary helpers." The primary indicator of "success", "spiritual health", and "church growth" is the number of people who attend on a Sunday. Thus, says Ward, "The local church may support many good and important activities, including mission trips, evangelism, youth ministry, social projects, and so on, but they are all assessed in terms of their effect or otherwise on regular Sunday attendance."

In support of this pursuit of success, growth, and progress, the CGM has appropriated the values of modernity by placing an emphasis on "technique" and "strategy." This is closely bound to the ways in which the church's self-understanding has evolved over a century's time. The church has come to understand itself as a corporate organization guided by "purposive intent" (Van Gelder 2007:75). Within this frame of reference, suggests Olson (2002:14), "A mechanistic view characterized every function of the church…If the church could engineer itself a machine that would serve individuals perfectly, this would provide salvation and a full and happy life." Consistent with the values of modernity, this pursuit of technique was grounded in the assumption that the more knowledge and competency one was able to gain, the more one could master church life (:16). Toward this end, the CGM advocated the use of scientific insight by the church. As Olson (2002:13) suggests, "The social sciences provided the mechanism for fixing what was broken and making life work in the church." He adds, "[T]he modern church has skillfully adapted statistical and measurable tools to assess knowledge, optimism, and goodness" (:19).

This emphasis on technique and strategy was bound up with a pragmatic mindset among the proponents of this movement. The defining question became, "Why do some churches grow and others do not?" (Van Rheenen 2004:2). Van Rheenen (2004:2) suggests that, while biblical passages were appropriated to lend validity to the theories advanced by church growth specialists, the core concern was anthropological. As he explains,

> Assuming that they could chart their way to success by their ingenuity and creativity, Church Growth practitioners focused on what humans do in missions rather than on what God is doing. They saw the missional task as setting goals, developing appropriate methodologies, and evaluating what does or does not work rather than seeking God's will based upon biblical and theological reflection. Their thinking segmented the gospel and practice, the human and divine into two compartmentalized worlds, and practice was

developed on the basis of 'what works' rather than the will and essence of God. Christian leaders placed more emphasis on developing effective strategy than forming communities shaped in the image of God. Although they advocated faithfulness to God, the system they proposed was based on human intelligence and ingenuity.

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Essentially, this movement embraced an a-theological, a-historical approach that was consistent with the values of modernity (Leith 1990:37; Webber 1999:75; McNeal 2003:23). In other words, this movement's approach was rooted in human "objectivity", which cannot be influenced by the past or by an eschatological future, rather than being rooted in "salvation history and God's people as a historical people" (Olson 2002:17). The end result, asserts Roxburgh (1997:20), is that "God is but a legitimating footnote of ecclesiology."

The Homogeneous Unit Principle was a core philosophical concept within the CGM. This principle was born out of McGavran's experiences as a missionary working amid the context of India's caste system. McGavran (1980:95) explains that "[t]he homogeneous unit is simply a section of society in which all the members have some characteristics in common." He further explains this concept of the homogeneous unit (or HU, for short):

> Human beings do build barriers around their own societies. More exactly we may say that the ways in which each society lives and speaks, dresses and works, of necessity set it off from other societies. Mankind is a mosaic and each piece has a separate life of its own which seems strange and often unlovely to men and women of other pieces.

<div align="right">(:223)</div>

This concept is rooted in the assumption that individuals need a social identity if they are to develop and function in society. Thus, explains Gibbs (1981:116), "They therefore form themselves into various groups in which they identify themselves as 'we', as distinct from those who are outside and described as 'they'." Each such group cultivates "a particular life-style, language, and assumptions," "develops its own behavior pattern" and is composed of individuals who "feel at home with one another."

The HU Principle recognizes these "units" as playing an integral role within the process of church growth. This is reflected in McGavran's (:223) notable assertion: "Men like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers."

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According to McGavran, this reflects "an undeniable fact." McGavran (:225) insists that the Christian faith "can be communicated across the barriers, over the ditches, and thus built into the other societies, classes, castes, tongues, and segments of humanity." However, by his account, asking people to cross these barriers in coming to Christ constitutes a "stumbling block" (:242). He argues that most cases of the growth of the church being hindered involve people being held back "not so much by the offense of the cross," but "by nonbiblical offenses." He adds, "Nothing in the Bible, for instance, requires that in becoming a Christian a believer must cross linguistic, racial, and class barriers" (:230). As we will see, the appeal of this principle has profoundly impacted the relations between generations within the church in recent decades.

5.2.2.3 Consumer Spirituality and the Proclivity for Homogeneity

McGavran (1980:225) and his cohorts acknowledged that this concept of the homogeneous unit was elastic; its meaning could vary according to context. When applied to the efforts of American churches to reach Boomers, however, this principle posed some new challenges for the local church. This was particularly so in light of the impact of consumerist individualism on the religious practices of this generation. As we noted in chapter three, the world of modernity fostered an environment in which the individual's choice of association and affiliation was of increasingly greater significance in all arenas of life (Ward 2005:41). As we also noted, the impact of a consumer mentality upon religious behaviour grew progressively with the advance of the Industrial economy, causing religion to be consigned and confined "to the privacy of an individual spiritual life" (Schmiechen 1996:10, 11-12; cf. Foster 1997:24). While we saw evidence of this focus very much at work in the church of the 1950s, the impact of consumerist values upon religious practice became particularly acute with the emergence of the Boomer generation.

Within the realm of religious behaviour, this gave rise to the triumph of the concept of the "spiritual marketplace" (Lynch 2002:11). Explains Wuthnow (1995:14-15), "It is now easy for materialism and spirituality to be conflated within American culture…The growing penetration of everyday life by materialism is even more profound in its implications for spirituality." Several observers posit that this has

given rise to a "supermarket mentality" within the life of the church (Shenk 1995:73-74; Finke & Stark 2005:9), one that treats religious belief as a consumer commodity (Miller 2005:225). The concept of "church shopping" has come to be a common part of the religious vocabulary within our culture (Gibbs 2000b:139). This provides for a complex marketplace of choice, one that "generates consumer Christians who shop around for the best package deal" (Bosch 1995:57).

In turn, this has profoundly impacted our conventional understanding of Christian identity. As Bellah et al (1985:65) have suggested, volunteeristic individuality has become the "primary language" of many churchgoers, while Christian commitment often proves to be a "second language." It has come to be understood that, "unless individual members are satisfied, they are free to change their voluntary association" (Van Gelder 2000:68-69). One result of this is that the relationship between the individual and the local church often is "fragile and short-lived," as "a high proportion of people move from church to church like choosy and critical customers taking their custom from one store to another" (Gibbs 2000b:139). This tendency is evident in Anderson's (1990:51) description of Boomer Americans looking for "full-service churches." Consumerism, he suggests, is a leading factor in denominational decline (:47). As we saw in chapter three, while many denominations fostered the mindset of consumerism and choice (Bosch 1995:57), they have come to suffer for this (Wuthnow 1988:91).

All the more, suggest some observers, there has come to be a direct link between consumer religion and spiritual superficiality (Lynch 2002:106). Notes Roxburgh (2005:35), "The gospel and Christian discipleship have been cast in terms of this larger individualistic, consumer-oriented, suburban world." As a result of this merging, observes Reeves (1996:67), "Millions of Americans today feel free to buy as much of the full Christian faith as seems desirable. The cost is low and customer satisfaction seems guaranteed." A danger inherent in this, cautions Wuthnow (1995:14-15), "is that materialism is not only shaping how we live but the way we think as well…It becomes harder for us to hear the messages about the suffering of the poor, the need for economic justice, and the desirability of seeing God's handiwork in simple things in nature." This leads Codrington and Grant-Marshall (2004:242) to express concern that the influence of Boomers within local

congregations is leading to churches being "packaged" in a "convenience store" way, one that enables them to pick and choose their involvement and not allow it to impinge upon their personal lives.

This sort of environment requires churches to remain "competitive" within the religious market (Finke & Stark 2005:9). They no longer can count on denominational allegiance as a means of securing their sustainability, as denominational barriers and boundaries are far more fluid than was the case in the era in which many established churches were founded (Wuthnow 1988:91). Furthermore, notes Regele (1995:80), the church no longer holds a "premier position" within the broader marketplace of choice, but "is simply one more of the many alternative reality constructions in the marketplace of beliefs." Thus, it has come to resort increasingly to marketing techniques. Suggests Sacks (1996:160), "consumer-driven" churches have emerged, trying to make their "'product' more appealing and entertaining in response to changes in American culture." Frost and Hirsch (2003:19, 41) note that, while these strategies do represent an effort to respond to cultural changes, they continue to reflect Christendom's "attractional" understanding of the church's ministry, one that invites prospective participants to "come and hear."

As we have already noted, the values of suburban life caused 1950s era churches to adopt an increasingly homogeneous approach to ministry. With the growing influence of the CGM in North America, the homogeneity-based approach came to be applied with narrower and narrower focus, a reality reflected in Wagner's concept of the "ethclass" (1979:61). Frost and Hirsch (2003:46) suggest that this growing focus on homogeneity was an inherent outworking of the attractional mode of church. The focus on narrow niches was seen as helping to promote growth (Armour & Browning 1995:156; Carroll 2000:6-7). Worship services became designed to appeal to the specialized needs of certain niche groups (Olson 2002:19).

As one facet of this discussion, McGavran (1980:226-227) expressed an openness to the possibility that age groups could constitute one category of homogenous units. In developing this position, he drew a parallel between generational differences and language barriers separating people groups. In essence, because of the growing differences between Boomers and their elders fostered through the "language" of

consumerism, the HU Principle came to be appropriated in a way that emphasized the differences between the generations (Carroll 2000:6-7). As Branson (2007:104-105) expresses, Boomers expected experiences of church "community" based on affinity and "sung in soft-rock tempo."

McNeal (2003:24) notes that this era gave rise to "seeker-sensitive" and "seeker-driven" worship services employing techniques and strategies born out of studies of the unchurched population (cf. Hadaway 2001:2-3). Hall (1997:28) asserts that these efforts tended to be focused "on the disenchanted and backsliding among those who would have been Christians had they not opted for or been seduced by secularity." However, a considerable amount of the "growth" that actually occurred was merely the migration of Christian people moving from one church to another (NcNeal 2003:22), a reflection of the consumer spirit surveyed above. "With rare exception," suggests McNeal (:22), "the 'growth' here was the cannibalization of the smaller membership churches by these emerging superchurches." As we will see, these developments have posed significant challenges to the life of many established churches.

5.2.2.4 The Bimodal Struggle in Established Churches

At this point, it may seem as though this chapter has strayed from its stated purpose. Our central concern here is intended to be with the church's response to post-modernism and the first post-modern generation, Gen X. What does this discussion of homogeneity and the Boomer generation have to do with these topics? As we will see, the struggle over homogeneous expressions of the church has both limited the imagination and exhausted the energies of many established congregations. As a result, these churches have been ill prepared to understand and respond faithfully to the new challenges posed by Generation X.

While vast numbers of Boomers departed from established congregations during their young adult years, many members of this generation have since returned. Writing in the early 1990s, Russell (1993:208) noted that only one-third of Boomer drop-outs had returned to the church, while the remaining two-thirds of the dropouts (or thirty-eight percent of all Boomers) still were not involved in traditional religious activities.

Nonetheless, from the early 1970s to the early 1980s, attendance among Boomers born 1945-1954 rose from thirty-three to forty-two percent over a ten-year period (Roozen, Carroll, & Roof 1995:74). Roozen, Carroll, and Roof also clarify that the increase among Boomers during this period was greater than among all older cohorts.

Roof (1999:237) suggests that many Boomers returned to established churches for "family talk." This often was driven by nostalgic memories of the relationship between their own families of origin and the congregations in which they were raised. While Boomers have been well aware of the distance between those memories and the realities within their own families, many have hoped to reconnect with the family orientation they experienced in the traditional church earlier in life. Thus, the decision for involvement in the church has sometimes been driven by motivations other than merely a concern for being devoted to a congregation.

However, in a religious climate charged with consumerist values, these Boomers have brought their preferences and expectations into the life of these congregations. To a certain degree, theses expectations have been shaped by the trends being modelled within the broader religious marketplace. As Ammerman (1998:90) notes, when new people enter the church, while bringing new life to a congregation, they also "bring in new expectations, new experiences, and new connections to other parts of the community" (cf. Corpus 1999:9). Thus, as Rendle (2002:47) observes, pre-Boomers (i.e., G.I.'s and Silents) and Boomers have come to constitute the two primary centres of values represented within many congregations. Rendle describes this situation as a "bimodal" congregation. As he explains, bimodal congregations are those that "are increasingly housing populations with at least two centers of influence." Both groups, operating largely from within the assumptions of modernity, bring to this situation their own values and agenda.

While Boomers may prefer homogeneity as a result of their consumerist values, their elders expect homogeneity on the basis of the predisposition toward convention, stability, and tradition that we explored in chapter three. The G.I. generation "prefers a formal church environment with no unexpected departures from the norm and where everything is done in an orderly manner" (Codrington & Grant-Marshall 2004:236). Their affinity for "tradition" and stability has caused them to be slow to embrace the

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"new" (Smith & Clurman 1997:8). Furthermore, notes Rendle (2002:60), "For these members, there is a right way and a wrong way to do many things, and the 'right' is determined by what is good for the group." It is a native notion within the G.I. mindset that, if an approach to something is "right," it is "right" for everyone. At the same time, "the GI generation value system specifies that once the path or pattern of how to do things has been determined, people should keep doing it the same way" (:59). Thus, for G.I.'s, it seems perfectly sensible to expect that "newcomers should maintain the established patterns of the congregation rather than initiating changes." In fact, the bureaucratic structures this generation is celebrated for constructing, by their very nature, insulate against instability and resist change (Shawchuck & Heuser 1996:153-154).

Rendle (2002:19) explains that, as a result of the distinct values they bring to bear upon the life of "bimodal congregations," Boomers and pre-Boomers have come to function like two distinct "primary media communities" or "pure markets":

> Also called 'image tribes,' these segmented and targeted groups of consumers with a shared identification by age, gender, race, socioeconomic standing, or any of a host of other variables are helped to see themselves and others as separate and distinct groups within the larger American public. We are actively encouraged by the media and advertising industries to see ourselves as a part of the specific image tribe or primary media community to which we most naturally belong.

This characterization of the generations as "pure markets" is important, for the concept "depends not only on attracting people of shared interests and needs to one another but equally on repelling people who don't fit the profile." As Finke and Stark (2005:11) suggest, making choices about appealing to one market segment may imply sacrificing another. For most churches, notes White (2001:180), the "primary 'customer'….is the 'already convinced.'" As many established congregations have learned, this has the potential to be a source of tension and to create considerable difficulty in the life of the church.

Rendle (2002:20, 21) notes that a significant problem lies in the fact that congregations are not "pure market" organizations. Rather, "congregations have been caught in the awkward position of being 'impure markets' in a time when people have come to expect that attention will be given to their differences." Rendle draws upon

Turrow's distinction between "society-making media" and "segment-making media" to explain this challenge. Segment-making media encourage small segments of society to talk to themselves, while society-making media have the potential to get all segments to talk to each other. Rendle (:21) explains how this impacts human community:

> The effect of our segment-making strategies, Torrow says, is to create a situation in which individuals are surrounded by reflections of themselves in ways that legitimize a world defined by their own preferences and needs. Marketers do not try to engage differences, large or small, in ways that negotiate those differences to build a broader sense of community. Rather, people are encouraged through self-interest to separate by similarity with others into the electronic equivalent of gated communities.

Because of their complicity in this "segment making" mindset, suggests Rendle, congregations often reflect the dynamics of homogeneity that surrounds them. As Roxburgh (2005:35) notes, "Congregations have become homogenous, attracting similar people with common sets of middle-class values."

Whitesel and Hunter (2000:162) assert that "comfort" is one of the most important reasons that churches choose to emphasize homogeneity when confronted with diversity. Within the American church context, it is not difficult to understand why this has become an issue. The presence of diverse generational groups can be profoundly disruptive to the comfort of the congregation. As Rendle (2002:49) suggests, "the more fully a congregation is able to include new generational cohorts in its membership and leadership, the more it is institutionally contributing to its own discomfort." This experience of discomfort is a source of concern for many within the church, as it "stands in stark contrast to the comfort and agreement that congregations are remembered to have enjoyed only a few decades ago." This is particularly true for members of the Silent generation, who, as Codrington and Grant-Marshall (2004:237) explain, want their churches to be "a place of calm and stability in a chaotic, shifting world," and for the members of the G.I. generation who want their churches to emphasize the importance of their heritage and opinions (Whitesel & Hunter 2000:75).

In many bimodal congregational contexts, this discomfort has given rise to tension and outright conflict. Sadly, the generational cohorts present within a bimodal

congregation tend "all too quickly" to assume "judgmental and defensive positions" when they encounter the differences between them (Rendle 2002:109). This tends to divert the agenda away from learning about and negotiating differences "to the task of assigning blame—which becomes a contest between 'right and wrong.'" In recent decades, the "worship war" has come to be one of the focal points of this struggle within the church, as the generations have struggled over the right to tailor the corporate worship gathering to their particular style and musical tastes (Schaller 1999:17,133). Certainly, as Conder (2006:100) suggests, the "worship wars" must be understood as an expression of the market mindset described above:

> I believe the real cause of this conflict is our culture of entitlement and the theological sanctification we give to our personal preferences. Our affluent, consumer-driven, multi-option society revolves around the market that provides outlets to suit our preferences…For church attendees, worship style can be just another place where we want to have it 'our way.'

However, as Rendle (2002:112) notes, this desire of each generation to "have it their own way…heightens the tension by moving people more quickly toward win-lose solutions." At the centre of such conflicts frequently lies the concern for who will exercise authority and control (Carroll & Roof 2002:4).

Rendle (2002:126) notes that the tendency to move quickly toward a problem-oriented strategy for dealing with conflict is limited in effect because "many issues that live on both sides of the cultural watershed have solutions that are right for one generation and wrong for the other…A search for winners and losers encourages people to engage in reflexive fight/flight behavior." This response to conflict between the generations can be quite detrimental, if not entirely destructive:

> If competition is the only mode of coexistence, if winners and losers must be found, then in any time of scarcity in the environment, one species will overwhelm and destroy the other. One generational value system will attempt to dislodge and force the other out. If insufficient resources or opportunities are available to nourish both, competition will enforce a 'solution' that eliminates the weaker or lesser partner in the system.
>
> (:127)

Those who are familiar with the life of the American church in recent years can attest to the reality that this prospect has been all too frequently realized. Unfortunately, these "win/loss" struggles have constituted a significant part of the history of established churches in recent decades.

Many observers conclude that these developments have had a profound and enduring impact on the way in which the American generations experience church. Roof (1999:53), for example, observes the following:

> Age-based religious patterns are now more visible than at any time since mid-century; then such differences were quite small and hardly noticeable, but in the sixties they began to widen and continued to increase during the 1970s and 1980s. Today patterns seem to have stabilized even as the younger cohorts have grown older. "One result of the religious transition of the sixties," writes sociologist David A. Roozen, "appears to be the creation of an enduring stratification of religious expression by age."

While, as we have seen, the HU Principle has contributed to the formation of new, generation-driven churches, its influence also has created pressure on established churches as they strive to remain competitive within the broader religious market. In some ways, we can assert, the HU Principle has acted like an accelerant in the emergence of conflict between generational groups asserting their homogeneous preferences. As a result of the changes that have occurred through this era of struggle, Van Gelder (2007:52) notes, "we now find generational, multicongregational congregations that segment the population around particular age groups." Thus, for the first time in the church's history, the segregation of age groups within the church has extended even into the adult population.

5.3 The Experience of Generation Xers with the Church
5.3.1 A Lack of Religious Socialization

The above discussion of complexity and conflict within established congregations poignantly demonstrates how challenging it has been for generations to share life together in the church during recent decades. We turn now to a consideration of how this context of struggle has impacted the ability of established churches to respond to the post-modern transition by transmitting their traditions to Generation X, the first post-modern generation.

It must first be noted that fewer numbers of Xers were raised within the church than was the case within previous generations. This generation, which we have already identified as "the first post-modern generation," has also been described as "the first

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completely post-Christian generation in the history of our culture" (Hahn & Verhaagen 1996:17). Hudson (2004:15) notes that Generation X "is the first generation that, en masse, was not taken to church." Carroll and Roof (2002:25) assert that this generation was "brought up with less exposure to religious institutions than was true for either of the preceding ones" (cf. Long 2004:200). Thus, the influence of the church's intergenerational traditioning practices was absent from the lives of many Xers. As Hudson (2004:4) insists, "a whole generation of young adults has grown up without any religious background at all." Even among those who did grow up in the church, Menking (1999:154-155) identifies "the reality of a thoroughly post-Christendom, secularized society" as a key factor influencing the religious attitudes and behaviours of the members of this generation. It will be helpful to consider briefly how this has come to be.

As the members of the first post-modern generation passed through their formative years amid vast cultural changes, the intergenerational dynamics described above tended to define their experience of life within the church. As Codrington and Grant-Marshall (2004:243) note, Xers grew up in churches dominated by the struggle between Boomers and the older generations. As a result, the experiences of many simply mirrored the brokenness and marginalization this generation encountered within society at large. These early experiences forced young Xers to witness G.I.'s, Silents, and Boomers battling over styles of worship, preaching, structure, and governance (:152). This fostered a cynical view of the church's relevance in the minds of many young Xers (:245).

While these conflicts preoccupied the attention and energies of adults, the church's attitude and approach toward Xers tended to reflect the antipathy of society at large. Scifres (1998:46) provides a poignant description of how this marginalization within the church followed the members of this generation throughout their formative years:

> Regrettably, many of the churched children in this generation were raised in churches where children were truly seen and not heard. In the 1970s, a new trend emerged in American churches: Sunday School became a substitute for worship. Children no longer attended worship with their parents; rather, they attended Sunday School with their friends. Then, a funny thing happened when they and their friends reached the adolescent years: Sunday School became irrelevant and worship was boring, so they started sleeping in late on Sunday mornings.

(cf. Vanderwell 2008:9; Glassford 2008:73)

In essence, suggests Regele (1995:137), while the church is the one environment in which one would expect greater concern for children, in reality the emphasis was on "adults and their spiritual development more than on children." Thus, when many Xers did attend church, notes Scifres (1998:46), "it was all too obvious to them that other church members were not comfortable with the presence of teenagers in worship."

Kew (2001:62) suggests that the church's limited efforts in promoting religious socialization among Xers were the result of "outdated notions of youth ministry." He explains, "Taking our cue from the 1960s and 1970s the view has prevailed that we should let them go away and sow their wild oats, and they will be back as they get older. This mindset has provided an excuse in many mainline congregations for youth ministry to be allowed to slide." However, this failure of churches to give attention to effectively socializing the members of this generation into their faith traditions further reinforced the impact of the youth culture "incubator," through which vast numbers of Xers developed their values outside the church (Dychtwald 1999:214). More specifically, this enabled pop culture to play a potent role in shaping the values and perspective of this generation. Beaudoin (1998:21-22) suggests that, for the members of this generation "who had a fragmented or completely broken relationship to 'formal' or 'institutional' religion, pop culture filled the spiritual gaps." As we saw in chapter four, this world of pop culture was overrun with the emerging influence of post-modernism.

Beaudoin (1998:13) describes his own experience with pop culture and religious disillusionment: "My increasing immersion in popular culture was coupled with a diminishing religious participation over the course of the 1980s. Televangelists' clanging decline and fall and the mainline Churches' more silent slip into irrelevance hastened my departure." This disillusionment with religious institutions was widespread among the members of this generation, he asserts:

> Many members of our generation who belonged to various religious traditions (myself included) waded into pools of agnosticism, apathy, or cynicism as the gap grew between the preaching and the practice of religious institutions. Members of our generation expressed their cynicism about religion by assuming one of two stances: either playfully ironic or completely dismissive. I found these postures

appropriate, as Churches seemed laughably out of touch; they had hopelessly droll music, antedeluvian technology, retrograde social teaching, and hostile or indifferent attitudes toward popular culture. For my peers, this distancing from religion often wasn't new at all, because their families had treated religion as a disposable accessory…[T]he step from religion-as-accessory to religion-as-unnecessary was a slight shuffle, not a long leap.

(:13)

As a result, notes Tapia (1994:5), many Xers came away from these early experiences with the sense that certain pop cultural forms of expression were more in line with their concept of religious expression than were "traditional evangelical modes." This formative passage caused the members of this generation to be shaped by a distinct culture, one that was quite different from the culture of most established churches.

5.3.2   A Cultural Disconnect
5.3.2.1 The Disconnect between Doctrine and Experience

These formative experiences with the church have led many Xers to view the realities represented within established churches as irrelevant to their understanding of the world. For example, the experiential orientation of this post-modern generation has engendered within them an attitude of ambivalence toward the modernistic doctrinal frameworks employed by many traditional churches. Moore (2001:133-134) explains that, "Because this is a generation with no fundamental belief in absolutes, too many of our traditional church practices put them off. They want an experience-oriented faith and are slow to embrace a firm position on doctrinal issues" (cf. Ford 1995:147).

To the members of this generation, suggest Carroll and Roof (2002:77), "Abstract formulations of deity seem cold, distant, and unconvincing...experience and feelings are the means of discerning the reality and presence of God."   Noting this fundamental attitude of suspicion, Miller and Miller (2000:8) similarly assert that "experience replaces reason, feeling is more important than form." Thus, as Flory (2000:235) articulates, Xers tend to value the experiential and participatory dimensions of spirituality "over the more passive, rationalistic, or propositional form of previous generations." Many Gen Xers want their experience of God to be unencumbered by doctrine. As Hahn and Verhaagen (1997:87) insist, "Perhaps no other generation has been so disinterested in a systematic exploration of the Christian

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faith;" for Gen Xers, the fundamental question is that of "Does it matter?" (Celek & Zander 1996:30, 104).

The Xer assessment of traditional Christian doctrine is complicated by the fact that "by the time Generation X had grown up religious pluralism was deeply embedded in their consciousness" (Carroll & Roof 2002:40). Beaudoin (1998:58) concludes that the coupling of the post-modern plurality of religious options with the theological notions of pop culture has fostered Gen Xer disillusionment with the traditional church. Research conducted by Miller (1996:151) reveals that their immersion in this diverse religious environment has not resulted in Xers being attracted to religious traditions other than Christianity in any significant numbers. However, interaction with a pluralistic context has caused even many of those who were raised in the church and exposed to biblical teaching to demonstrate a tendency to "cut and paste" their religious views (Hahn & Verhaagen 1996:17). Beaudoin (1998:149) employs the term "bricolage" in describing this tendency. Bricolage refers to "an improvised, rough assemblage of whatever tools are at hand to solve a problem." Says Beaudoin, "Xers are frequent bricoleurs, piecing together religious systems from available images, symbols, doctrines, moral codes, and texts." Wuthnow (2007:15) also employs the term "bricolage," but prefers to describe post-modern young adults as a "generation of tinkerers."

Beaudoin (1998:74) further observes that, because many Xers are concerned with personal spiritual experience and "feel a sense of freedom and personal responsibility in regard to their spiritual lives," they generally will not accept religious truth "paternalistically" from those in positions of religious authority (cf. Barna 1994:185; Miller & Miller 2000:8; Lynch 2002:117). For Xers, what counts as authentically spiritual must meet the ultimate test: that of personal experience. However, posits Beaudoin (1998:141-142), Xers have rarely heard from religious leaders and institutions about the role of doubt and uncertainty in the life of faith. Celek and Zander (1996:111) insist that they "aren't looking for answers as much as people to identify with their questions." Most Xers prefer to interact in an atmosphere in which individuals are free to express their opinions, and in which space is provided for individuals to hold contradictory views (Hahn & Verhaagen 1998:39). However, the attitudes of many churches have left some Xers with the impression that their

fragmented lives and improvised belief systems are evidence that they could never be people of faith: "We assume that stable, unitary faith comes only from a stable, unitary person" (Beaudoin 1998:141-142).

Moore (2001:133-134) credits this disconnect between the desire for an experiential basis for spirituality and the practices of many churches as being one explanation why, at the time of his writing, there were one-third fewer converts among Gen-Xers than there had been among Boomers at the same period in their generational life-cycle. As Schroeder (2002:55), a post-Christian Xer, proclaims, "Experience—spiritual experience—was exactly what we did not get at church." In essence, it seems that the two key facets of faith formation surveyed in chapter two, religious socialization and religious experience, were not effectively achieved in the lives of so many members of this generation.

5.3.2.2 The Disconnect between Institution and Authenticity

It is fair to suggest that the credibility of the church among Xers has suffered in part as a result of the broader suspicion toward institutions that characterized their formative years (Tapia 1994:2). Beaudoin (1998:41) observes that Gen X popular culture fostered within its participants a "deep suspicion of religious institutions." Beyond this, however, as Moore (2001:14) indicates, Xers have tended to apply their scepticism toward "the institutions and materialistic systems that led them to inherit a debt-laden, divorce-riddled society…to the Church." This assessment is similar to that advanced by Zustiak (1999:76): "For the most part, Xers are wary of all organized religion. It is their parents' religion and those who control the 'power' in society; the very same people who neglected and abused them. It is part of the system, and they don't trust the system." This being said, it seems that it would not be appropriate to excuse the Church as merely the victim of unfounded generalizations.

In light of the experiences and influences at work within their ranks, it is perhaps understandable that many Xers do not feel bound by a conventional commitment to religious institutions in the way that the generation of their grandparents did (Beaudoin 1998:58). Some Xers have come away from their early experience with

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the church feeling manipulated or exploited (Mays 2001:69). Many simply have gained the impression that the traditional church is boring, irrelevant, and "out of touch" (Scifres 1998:45; cf. McIntosh 1997:45). In turn, they conclude that they have better things to do with their time than to participate in church.

Nonetheless, it would be an error to misconstrue this as evidence that Xers are uninterested in spirituality. As Jackson (2000:28) suggests, there is a danger inherent in labelling this first post-modern generation, as though "post-modern man" is some kind of "human mutation, a new sub-species that will be impervious to the gospel" because his "God gene" has been removed. Contrary to this, many Xers possess a deep fascination with spirituality. Throughout recent decades, discussions of "secularization" have abounded in an effort to account for the changes in people's attitudes and behaviours toward religious institutions. Integral to this theory is the understanding that people's lives have become increasingly dominated by the values of a "secular" worldview devoid of spiritual beliefs and values. In recent years, however, this theory has been subjected to significant critique (Avis 2003:1-10). For example, Ward (2005:35-37) presents a compelling case for understanding secularization not as the end of belief, but rather the breaking free of belief from institutional structures. As Barna's controversial *Revolution* (2006) has demonstrated, however imperfectly, considerable evidence exists to suggest that this trend is present among Xers.

Miller (1996:152) asserts that what made religion vital to the grandparents of Gen Xers does not apply to the members of this generation: "Rather than take an institutional approach to religion, most [Xers] are more interested in developing their own spirituality." For the members of the G.I. Generation, there exists a neat divide between the secular world and the world of religion. For Xers, however, "the words 'secular' and 'religious' have lost their meaning," while "the religious and secular spheres have collapsed in a society that is highly spiritualized and mystical" (Miller 1996:152, 153). Thus, as Ford (1995:139) suggests, many Xers are not interested in the church as an institutional gathering place offering comfort and absolute moral authority. They are looking for a faith that works. Similar to Boomers, "Rather than buy into the needs of religious institutions to perpetuate themselves," Xers "seek to make an authentic connection with God" (Miller (1996:160, 161).

In section 4.4.1.3, we noted that Xers are sceptical toward the consumerist forces that were so prevalent throughout their formative years. Nonetheless, it would be unfair to characterize the Xer spiritual quest as immune from the influence of consumerism. As we have seen, the young adults shaped by post-modernism have also been greatly influenced by this culture of consumerism, one that teaches us to define ourselves fundamentally as consumers (Lynch 2002:107). In addition, we have seen above how this culture of consumerism has come to extend even into the realm of religion (Veith 1994:212). Young adults are now acculturated into a "Consumer Christianity" focused on individual choice (Lynch 2002:107). One powerful implication of this is that the allegiance of the members of rising generations cannot be assured, but rather must be won (Anderson 1990:47; Lytch 2004:191). Notes Flory (2000:243-244), much like Boomers, Xers "demonstrate the power of a religious consumption ethic; that is, individuals can 'shop' for whatever group seems to fit their desires and needs."

This being said, it is essential to clarify that the fundamental impulse of Xers to pursue community, which we discussed in section 4.5.4, gives rise to significant differences in the nature of the spiritual "seeking" and consumer impulse of these two generations:

> Xer seeking is more than just a quest for an individualistic spiritual experience—Xers are instead looking for and creating community, belonging, and authenticity, which can only be measured within the religious community. The desire seems to be first for community and belonging, and second for personal fulfillment or, perhaps more accurately, personal fulfillment comes through commitment to the community, and through the experience of belonging to such a religious/spiritual community…This is not community in the abstract, as with many churches that seek to develop community through various small group programs, but is a lived reality for Xers.
>
> (Flory 2000:243-244)

Flory and Miller (2007:215, 217) employ the term "expressive communalism" to describe this concept of spiritual experience taking place within a body of believers and only being meaningful as it is experienced in that context. They assert that, while this approach to spirituality is related to the individualistic spiritualities described by sociologists as having been prevalent in past eras, its focus upon community also causes it to be distinct (:217).

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Against the backdrop of the brokenness and fragmentation that characterized their formative years, the members of this generation yearn for an expression of community that is truly holistic (Ford 1995:116). For Xers, as we have seen, the choice is based more on finding a group with a perspective compatible with one's lifestyle and how one understands one's personal identity (Flory 2000:243-244). In large part, what Xers are looking for is others like themselves who will provide verification that there is something within a particular congregation or community that makes it worthy of their participation (McIntosh 1997:45). Thus, the nature and role of "community" becomes a clear point of distinction between the spiritual quest of Xers and that of their Boomer predecessors (Tapia 1994:4).

Many Xers have not assessed established churches as a very viable venue for finding this experience of authentic community. In one early 1990s study, Barna (1994:112, 141) indicated that, while Xers awarded the church high marks for "friendliness" and clergy concern, only twenty-nine percent viewed church as a source of friendships. Other observers have characterized the Xer experience of established churches in an even less optimistic light. Ford (1995:187), for example, suggests that Xers have experienced the church as cold and institutional. Cunningham (2006:62) similarly asserts that churches are sometimes perceived as unwelcoming, particularly to those who are unlike the majority of their attendees. Lynch (2002:119) insists that many Xers expect to experience more meaningful relationships through a range of other activities than through the church.

Schroeder (2002:56), endeavouring to speak on behalf of those Xers who have rejected their evangelical upbringing, identifies the church's shortcomings in the area of relationships as the fundamental problem. He insists that, while the evangelical church does display "both love and compassion…There is another legacy, of a dark current cruising beneath love's radar. Deep down we all know it—the trio of undertow: judgement, guilt, and fear." One example of this is Beaudoin's (1998:8) convincing description of how, "As churches ostracized their divorced mothers, many [Xers] were alienated from religious institutions and drew the conclusion that the church is no different than any other human organization." These experiences have left young adults doubting the church's claims to be an inclusive community. In fact, notes Cunningham (2006:25), among the members of this generation for which

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diversity is both a value and a normal part of life, "many of them think the church is exclusive to a fault."

5.4 The Church's Ineffectiveness in the Post-Modern Transition
5.4.1 Xer Church-Leaving

The experiences and impressions formed by Gen Xers have had a profoundly detrimental impact upon their church participation as adults. As Hahn and Verhaagen (1996:17) indicated in the mid-1990s, "Our generation avoids the organized church like no other before it." These authors cite one survey that found that, while approximately two-thirds of Xers claimed to consider a close relationship with God to be important, only one-third indicated assigning any import to church involvement (:44). A separate study conducted during this same period, which compared the attendance patterns of Xers with those of the three elder contemporary generations, found that Xers displayed the most significant evidence of decline in religious involvement (Regele 1995:146-160). Later studies further displayed the reality of this trend and heralded the likelihood of its continuation (Lynch 2002:12). For example, a study from the year 2000 revealed that only twenty-eight percent of Xers claimed to attend church services, in striking distinction from the fifty-one percent of older adults who claimed to do so at that time (Mays 2001:66).

More recently, the continuation of this trend was demonstrated by a study conducted by Woolever and Bruce (2002:13) among thousands of church members drawn from a broad range of denominations. This study found the average age of a worshiper to be fifty years old, six years older than the age of the average American. At the time of their writing, people aged forty-five to sixty-five comprised twenty-eight percent of the population and thirty-six percent of all worshipers. Those aged sixty-five and older accounted for only sixteen percent of the population, yet twenty-four percent of worshipers. Meanwhile those falling into the age categories of fifteen to twenty-four year olds and twenty-five to forty-four years old accounted for eighteen percent and thirty-eight percent of the population, respectively. However, these two groups only constituted ten percent and thirty percent of worshipers, respectively.

In summary, when one compares the age distribution within the church to that of the society at large, this reveals a sixteen point disparity between the two. Furthermore, perhaps quite predictably, people sixty-five years of age and older attend services more frequently than the average worshiper, while younger adults between twenty-five and forty-four years of age attend religious services less frequently than worshipers in other age groups (:63). Meanwhile, the Barna group (2004), noting that the average age of unchurched adults in America is six years younger than the median age of all adults, report that the number of adults who do not attend church has increased by 92 percent between 1991 and 2004 (www.barna.org). Summarizes McNeal (2003:3), "The further down you go in the generational food chain, the lower the percentage each succeeding generation reports going to church" (cf., Kew 2001:60-61; Hammett & Pierce 2007:62). As Regele (1995:107) notes, while a higher proportion of older people than the national average are filling mainline congregations, the number of Gen Xers in these contexts is "significantly below the national average." Recent data published by Wuthnow (2007:51-53) chronicles the persistence of this trend.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, this decrease in church attendance has been accompanied by a decrease in the societal influence enjoyed by established religious institutions. Russell (1993:207) observes that the proportion of Americans who expressed confidence that religion could address most of "today's problems" declined from eighty-two percent in 1957 to sixty-three percent in 1990. During those same years, the share who felt that the influence of religion on society was increasing fell from sixty-nine to thirty-nine percent. Russell (:209) also reports that, by the early 1990s, while more than seventy percent of mainline Protestant church members aged sixty or older identified the church as the institution that helped them most in finding meaning and purpose in life, among those in their twenties, it was a considerably more modest forty-four percent. In contrast, private religious experience was deemed most helpful to fifty percent of those in their twenties.

Gibbs (2000a:190, 230) expresses concern that "a disturbingly large number of Gen Xers has given up on the church…For the most part [Xers] are not looking to Christian churches to meet their spiritual needs" (cf. Tapia 1994:2). More recently, Cunningham (2006:25) has noted that some Xers "question whether attending a local

church has anything to do with a person's faith. They wonder if sitting in a sanctuary once a week is a valid marker of transformation or spiritual growth." Observing these vast numbers of Gen Xers who could justifiably be described as "the floating, the disillusioned, and the indifferent" in their relationship to organized religion, Regele (1995:165-166) suggests that these young adults are the largest failures of the church. While "dropping out" is a common American religious phenomenon, with roughly one-half of all attendees becoming inactive at one point or another (Roof 1993:155), it is evident to many observers that what is taking place among these younger adults is of another order. Regele (1995:165-166), for example, predicts that these Xers, the first post-modern generation, represent the direction that institutional religious faith in America is moving and that an increasingly greater percentage of the overall population may reflect such a disposition in the future. Projecting this disillusionment with religion into the future, Regele (1995:143) speculates that, "if the current decline in faith involvement continues…around the year 2013 less than half of all Americans will still hold to some level of active faith." While it is difficult to know whether this forecast will be realized, it is important to recognize that such a prospect exists.

Many Xers would actually choose to classify themselves as "former" Christians:

> These are people who attended church and Sunday school as children and in early adolescence, but for whom religious faith is no longer important. This is a different phenomenon from "taking a vacation from church," common among young adults of previous generations….I believe we find among Generation X a vast multitude who are genuinely "post-Christian" people.
>
> (Mahedy & Bernardi 1994:61)

Millions of young unchurched people now have no interest in church, even if it is "contemporary" in style. To these people, embracing church is counter-cultural and counter-intuitive. Their interests, perceptions, and experiences make it very difficult for many established churches to reach them. As a result, the mission field that now lies before the church is no longer "over there," but rather located right outside its own doors (Mead 1991:25; Kew 1999:127; Hudson 2004:15).

5.4.2   The Condition of Liminality

Riddell (1998:29) notes that the church has not encountered a circumstance like the one it presently faces before: a culture "which has known and dismissed Christianity

as an option." Riddell further posits that the church is not facing so much a lack of comprehension or opposition toward its message, but rather "a massive indifference," a widespread sense that "Christianity lies in the past of the culture" (:7-8). Drane (2000:9, 12) similarly notes the perception that Christianity is part of the old cultural establishment and, thus, part of "the problem." While this may not necessarily constitute an outright rejection of the figure of Jesus, it certainly entails a rejection of the institutional expression of the Christian faith as manifested in the modern church (McManus 2001:29). As a result of this, assert Hammett and Pierce (2007:xii), "No longer are North American churches living and serving in a churched culture."

Miller (2003:133) notes that, "In North American culture, we see a dramatic change from the religion of the 1950's to the way people view religion today." Within established churches, this has fostered a broad, chronic sense of uncertainty (Roxburgh 2005:40). As Mead (1991:42) suggests,

> Congregations—like clergy, laity, and executives—are living in a time in which landmarks have been erased and old ways have stopped working. We also live in a time when the answers have not yet become clear. It is a time that calls for steadiness and perseverance through uncertainty. Such a time generates energy for change, but it also generates intense anxiety that makes partial answers attractive, so long as they are quick.

To describe this condition, Roxburgh (2005:23) employs the term "liminality," which "describes the transition process accompanying a change of state or social position." As Roxburgh (:24) explains, "liminality is the conscious awareness that as a group (or individual) one's status-, role-, and sequence-sets in a society have been radically changed to the point where the group has now become largely invisible to the larger society in terms of these previously held sets." In the American religious context, the state of liminality has come to be experienced as a crisis and loss of social function by churches that can be described in two parts: "first, the caretaker days of the churches are over; and second, modern culture—in which the churches find themselves—is itself undergoing fundamental transformation" (:3).

Roxburgh (2005:41) suggests that the church's acquaintance with this condition of liminality demonstrates the relationship between *change*, the outward reality, and *transition*, our internal response to that outward state. The experience of liminality, he explains, should rightly be viewed as a "threshold experience", a "paradoxical state

of both death and renewal, confusion and opportunity" (Roxburgh 1997:43). However, he notes, while liminality may pose opportunity for creative response, initially the crisis and anxiety that it creates for a given group "makes it difficult to initiate the reflection required to think in terms of alternative frameworks." A danger in such periods is the tendency "to become so preoccupied with self that one cannot step outside oneself to rethink, reimagine, and redescribe larger reality" (Frost 2006:9; cf. Gibbs 2000a:13). In recent times, says Butler Bass (2004:31), church leaders and members have indeed felt "alarmed by the changes brought on by fragmented and detraditionalized culture." Because the experience of loss and marginalization is so overpowering, alienating, and anxiety inducing, the impetus within a given group is often focused upon returning the system to balance (Roxburgh 2005:64).

Many churches do seem to have responded to the challenges of the present moment by attempting to restore a sense of normalcy. As Hudson (2004:4) expresses, amid the recent shifts occurring within our society, the participants within established churches "clutch desperately to the familiar. They strive to re-establish what has worked in the past. They want to stabilize the situation." This desire within the church to feel as though it has maintained something of importance is perfectly understandable. Riddell (1998:38, 39) notes that, as the church endeavours to cope by "find[ing] enough that is familiar to act as a substratum, while other aspects of our world are rearranged…many Christians have clung to the rock of their Christianity to give themselves a foundational still point." However, as Riddell explains regarding much of the church in the West, "they may have at times mistaken the forms of devotion with the content of it…This is the unique temptation of the community of faith: to confuse the container of the treasure with the treasure itself." As we explored in section 2.6.3, this is precisely the tendency that militates against the vitality of a tradition.

In many cases, churches seem to have chosen to respond to the changes in culture by operating as though little of significance is happening (Hall 1997:4, 20). As Kitchens (2003:24) expresses, "The landscape in which we seek to be faithful to our calling has radically shifted beneath our feet, and yet we have managed so far to act as if nothing had changed." McNeal (2003:2) similarly asserts that "the North American church largely has responded with heavy infusions of denial, believing the culture will come

to its senses and come back around to the church" (cf. Murray 2004:206). As a result, as Kew (2001:33) suggests, many congregations continue to function as if this were the middle of the twentieth century, rather than the beginning of the twenty-first. White (2001:177) similarly concludes that "many churches operate on a 1950s American middle-class methodology and mindset."

In part, posits Hunter (1996:23-25), this causes established churches to conduct themselves "as though most people in our communities are Christians, as though ministry is merely the nurture and care of existing Christians" (cf. Barrett 1998:112). Meanwhile, those churches that are evangelistically engaged tend to employ approaches to "propagating the gospel" (e.g., the Sunday evening evangelistic service, the Sunday school, the revival, the camp meeting, the crusade, and one-to-one confrontational evangelism) fitted to a mid-twentieth century culture. However, says Hunter, these are "spent forces" that produce "declining yields." In reality, efforts at evangelism are proving to have little impact outside of the church (Shenk 1996:66), beyond those who already share the fundamental worldview espoused within the church (McManus 2001:52).

Some established churches are disenchanted amid the changes they are experiencing and frustrated by the struggles associated with inspiring young people to embrace the faith. However, many simply are unsure of a better way forward (Drane 2000:viii). Concludes Mead (1991:18), "We are surrounded by the relics of the Christendom Paradigm, a paradigm that has largely ceased to work. But the relics hold us hostage to the past and make it difficult to create a new paradigm that can be as compelling for the next age as the Christendom Paradigm has been for the past age." As a result of this captive state, as insists Hunter (1996:23-25), "many traditional churches are no longer able to reach, receive, retain, and grow the receptive people in their ministry area."

Some of these congregations suffer from "goal displacement," a process that involves the primary mission of an organization being "replaced by operative goals that have little, if anything, to do with the organization's original reason for being" (Hadaway 2001:7). Hadaway observes that this "is rarely the result of conscious decisions to change the purpose and operational goals of an organization." However, programs of

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ministry rooted in the past have a way of becoming ends unto themselves and proving increasingly ineffective (Butler Bass 2002:10). Nonetheless, some of these churches are held captive by the hope that significantly different results can be produced by attempting to repeat the same actions or by simply doing "the same things better" (Frost & Hirsch 2003:196). Church leaders sometimes assume that renewed effectiveness can be accomplished through merely "tweaking" programs (Mead 1991:22; Kitchens 2003:28-29). As a result of this, it should be little surprise that, as Miller (2004:187) observes, "We seem locked into a vicious cycle of diminishing returns."

Hadaway (2001:4-6) notes that, while many churches attempt to remain the same, rather than change, they actually do a fairly poor job of succeeding at this. As he explains, "All organizations are in a state of constant evolution, as members and leaders grow older, move out, move in, and as the group necessarily adjusts to a changing context." Thus, their supposedly static nature is merely an illusion. In reality, while churches often are blamed for being oriented to the past, this is not entirely the case. Rather, many churches simply strive to conform to a self-created image of "the way things ought to be done around here" born out of an idealized version of traditional practices and normative forms. Such a vision is not actually rooted in reality, nor could it actually be recreated. Nonetheless, such congregations do change, but always in the direction of trying to recreate the church as it is remembered. Ward (2002:21) notes that this is proving problematic in the context of a culture that is moving toward greater "fluidity." As churches endeavour to do "the same kind of things that we have always done," in reality, "Few if any of us are immune from cultural change."

Minatrea (2004:7) notes that some churches are responding to the isolation from society they are experiencing and the "associated lack of belief in capacity to have significant influence" by embracing a "maintenance mentality." He adds,

> The culture in which the church exists is a changing river, charting its own path without regard to the preferences of previous generational or cultural systems. Members of today's churches, who once felt that they held the high ground in a vast Christian nation, now feel cut off and isolated—islands in a fast-flowing stream. Clearly, the Christian church in North America no longer possesses a home-court advantage.

Thus, the "maintenance mentality" of which Minatrea writes is motivated by something entirely different than that which was described in section 3.2.1.1 as native to the church within the world of Christendom; it is not one issuing from comfort and familiarity with *serving* the predominant culture, but rather from a desire to *survive* amid the discomfort and alienation produced by this culture (cf. Jackson 2002:1; Roxburgh 2005:151). However, notes Van Gelder (2007:136), when survival becomes the primary goal of any organization, something clearly has been lost in terms of the rationale for its existence. Many of these churches are immobilized, suggests Hadaway (2001:8), "having done little positive mission or ministry in their communities in years."

The practices of many established churches increasingly become "living expressions of worship from another era," suggests Ward (2002:27), thereby taking on "a historical character." However, particularly in a context of rapid social change, rather than being "a turn-off, for some people the weekly visit to church is attractive precisely because it offers a slice of living history." Ward explains,

> Worship has become part of the culture industry. The value of church is that it preserves the traditions of the past and makes them accessible to new generations…Ministers and people are willing to see gradual change, but every effort is made to respect the weight of tradition…The emphasis lies upon preserving for future generations that with which we have been entrusted.

However, cautions Ward (:28-29), this "mutation of solid church into heritage, refuge, and nostalgic communities has seriously decreased its ability to engage in genuine mission in liquid modernity." The "nostalgic community" touts itself as the one place in society where "young and old gather together in ways they never do outside of church." While this sort of thinking "makes us feel good about our congregation," in reality, for the most part this is more myth than reality. Congregations are generally "monocultures reflecting the tastes of one or perhaps two different types of people."

Ward (2002:25) suggests that these churches do "mutate." As he notes, "Whereas once they reflected a social reality beyond themselves, now this is less likely to be the case. This means that since church does not reflect a wider community it must in some way compensate for this lack." Ward explains that, in a culture that emphasizes church-going as a matter of a personal lifestyle choice, "solid churches" have found it

essential to make adjustments in order to be successful. "As a result churches have gradually adapted to a new, more fluid market environment while generally denying that such changes have taken place," suggests Ward. However, he asserts, those who choose to attend church do so with a different set of social needs than many within the broader culture. As a result, "mutation has adapted the church to relate to some of the needs of those who are willing or able to fit their basic pattern, but they are unable or unwilling to change this solid way of being church to connect with those who find it unacceptable or unattractive."

In reality, assert Benke and Benke (2002:6-7), many congregations have become "caretaker churches." While not having accepted or adapted to the changing reality around them, such churches remain inwardly-focused, continuing to minister to the Christian culture of churched believers and their families, while being "virtually devoid of conversion growth because of the absence of any meaningful outreach to the masses of unchurched adults that compose the postmodernist cultures" (cf. McNeal 2003:32-33). These authors suggest that caretaker churches make only "limited attempts" to come to terms with the postmodern reality:

> Their programming tends to remain much the same as it has been over past generations, with perhaps some modest changes….[F]or the most part, programming, leadership methods, and attitudes are a carryover from the past when the church played a somewhat different and more prominent role in American family life and in the community (:35).

Benke and Benke (:37) suggest that the limited growth that does occur in these churches is usually by transfer growth from churchgoers moving into the community or by "church hoppers." While these traditional church congregations do continue to show some evidence of being multigenerational, "they are composed almost entirely of long-established churchgoing Christians and their families" (:88), those who "feel comfortable in a ministries setting that has carried over for many years" (:7).

In summary, we can conclude that many established churches have preferred practices and programs rooted in the past over the option of responding adaptively to contemporary culture (Carroll & Roof 2002:137). McLaren (2000:44) suggests that many churches have been hindered by the perception that their "wineskins" were actually equivalent to the biblical pattern and, thus, cannot be changed. In reality, however, much protestant ecclesiology is based more on tradition than on scripture

(Peterson 1992:43; Snyder 1996:50). Furthermore, many of these "traditional" patterns, as we saw in chapter three, are not particularly that old. As Beaudoin (1998:154) notes, much of what is called "tradition" within our contemporary context "is really an innovation little older than our grandparents." What is particularly ironic is that some mainline churches actually have been willing to change their core teachings while resisting innovations in form (Butler Bass 2004:43-44).

As we have seen, these forms have become "outmoded" (Frost & Hirsch 2003:65). They have come to be characterized by standardization, predictability, comfort, convenience, and control, rather than life (McManus 2001:14); as a result, they no longer are proving meaningful to many young adults (Butler Bass 2004:48). Structures that were developed for the purpose of mediating grace, suggests Mead (1991:43), have actually come to hinder its availability (cf. Long 2004:117). The lack of connection between the church's entrenched patterns and a changing culture has contributed to its failure in assimilating young adults:

> In a wave of social change (and often unreflective resistance to it), many congregations lost their ability to retain younger members or attract new ones. Congregations often suffered because of the gap that developed between their internal inherited practices and external cultural realities. And, more than occasionally, they suffered because their particular pattern of congregational life was considered coterminous with "Christian tradition" or "orthodox faith," hence confusing a historical movement in American culture with theological vitality and scriptural truth. In short, many mid-twentieth century churchgoers enshrined the pattern of social congregations as something akin to revealed truth!
>
> (Butler Bass 2004:21)

This leads McManus (2001:31) to offer the potent assertion that many churches, while keeping their traditions, have lost their children (cf. Rouse & Van Gelder 2008:59).

5.4.3 The Established Church in Decline

In recent decades, the issue of congregational "decline" has been much discussed. Shenk (2001:5) notes that, while concern toward evidence of waning religiosity "has weighed on thoughtful church leaders for more than a hundred years," this concern has intensified in the concluding years of the twentieth century. Throughout many Western nations, decline is an empirical reality (Ward 2005:35). Writing from a British perspective, Jackson (2002:2-11) provides an astounding list of indicators of

the "bad news" in the Anglican church, including declines in baptisms, confirmations, church marriages, stipendiary clergy, churches open, giving, membership, frequency of church attendance, midweek churchgoing, and the disappearance of children from many churches. While the marginalization of the church in the US has not been nearly as pronounced as in many of its European counterparts (Lynch 2002:11), many of the indicators of decline Jackson identifies are relevant within the American situation, as well (Wuthnow 2007:51).

Many mainline denominations, though appearing to have maintained relatively steady membership since the mid 1960's, actually have suffered a forty-five to fifty percent decline as a percentage of the total US population (Roozen, Carroll, & Roof 1995:78; Whitesel & Hunter 2000:16-17).   Despite this, Finke and Stark (2005:3, 55, 247) insist that "mainline decline" is not a new issue, nor a complete account of the American religious situation. Decline cannot be explained away as indicative of a lack of interest in religion more broadly, but rather must be seen as the impact of the changing shape of the religious landscape upon particular religious institutions (cf. Miller 1997:3-4; McNeal 2003:11). They argue that decline had already begun at the time of the American Revolution in 1776, largely the result of the inability of mainline churches to adjust to the entrance of "upstart sects" like the Methodists and Baptists into the religious market. Thus, they assert, the mainline market share was in decline long before actual membership numbers began declining. In fact, by the account of these authors, the rate of religious adherence has actually been on the climb since Revolution era rates, which they estimate to have included roughly seventeen percent of the population (Finke & Stark 2005:22, 281). Thus, they conclude, the story of "mainline decline" is rooted in a narrative that consigns new Christian groups to historical insignificance (:8).

Having drawn this conclusion, Finke and Stark (2005:248) insist that "It is pointless to search the 1960s for the causes of a phenomenon that was far along by the War of 1812." We can acknowledge the valuable contribution that these authors provide for one seeking a well balanced understanding of the issue of decline. Certainly, their thoughts about the relationship between decline and a failure to innovate are consistent with what we have stated above regarding the ways that many established churches are responding to a changing culture. However, we might not feel

compelled to go as far as these authors in diminishing the significance of the events that have occurred since the 1960s for the issue of declining adherence to the Christian faith. Indeed, we might do well to contemplate how the "disestablishment" that has occurred since the 1960s may have radicalized a dynamic that, as Finke and Stark properly note, has long been operative within our society.

Hudson (2004:15) observes that, though the American adult population increased and interest in spirituality seemed to grow throughout the 1990s, the church still experienced a net loss of membership. Toward the conclusion of that decade, more than one-half of those Protestant congregations that had been in existence since 1955 had shrunk in size in terms of average worship attendance, while an average of more than sixty Protestant congregations per week were choosing "to dissolve, disband, or merge into another congregation" (Schaller 1999:74, 88). This trend was not limited merely to those churches that historically have been understood as comprising the "mainline." Rather, as Woolever and Bruce (2002:1-5) have reported, this pattern has been observed in a broad and diverse range of denominational groups.

Roozen, Carroll, and Roof (1995:68) suggest that a number of factors can be identified to account for this decline (e.g., high concentrations of congregations in areas of stagnant population growth and a shortage of new church development) (cf. Burgess 2005:6). These factors, each surely worthy of exploration in its own right, have contributed to an overall pattern of decline across all generations (Carroll & Roof 2002:19; Lynch 2002:11). One recent study suggests that actual attendance numbers within American congregations may be considerably lower than conventionally believed (Olson 2008:28). Nonetheless, the evidence clearly demonstrates that this decline is associated most markedly with the decreasing rate of adherence to organized religion among the younger generations (Twenge 2006:34; Wuthnow 2007:52, 75).

Perhaps partly in reaction to the excesses of some within the CGM, some church leaders respond to this decline by employing any of several commonly used arguments to justify a lack of interest in "numbers." Jackson (2002:17-21) outlines four primary arguments that he frequently encounters:
   1. The kingdom matters, not the Church.

2. It is a matter of quality, not quantity.

3. Small is often beautiful.

4. The church is for others; thus, service, not growth, is the key.

Jackson (:21) insists that, if we look at these four arguments closely, we may find a more fundamental attitude behind them: "It may be that the reason some people refuse to take the problem of the decline in church attendance seriously is not because of theological conviction at all but because of despair—despair that anything can be done about it." This "failure to look decline in the face and do something about it," argues Jackson (:22), constitutes one of the most serious impediments to growth in the church.

Many observers predict that, barring dramatic changes to the current trends evident in many congregations, church closings will continue at an alarming rate. As many as eighty to eighty-five percent of the congregations in American have been identified as plateaued or declining in size (Whitesel & Hunter 2000:14; Hammett & Pierce 2007:102). Drawing upon the research of Wagner, Kew (2001:43) notes that approximately 18,000 Protestant churches in the US are "terminally ill." Says Kew, "Some might be treated and cured, yet the majority are likely to go out of existence." Hammett and Pierce (2007:57) estimate that more than 50,000 churches will close their doors by 2010. Projecting further into the future, Kew (2001:59) notes that some researchers predict that as many as sixty percent of existing congregations will be closed by 2050. In a statement echoing the list provided by Jackson above, Kew asserts that both "church attendance and then the more detailed information that is hidden within the other arrays of statistics that are available tell some alarming stories."

Whitesel and Hunter (2000:16-17) insist that the church is experiencing "a crisis of aging" and identify the primary cause of this development as being "the church's failure to assimilate younger generations to the same high degree it has successfully incorporated older generations." This is consistent with the range of statistics cited by Regele (1995:107) to demonstrate that "while the overall U.S. population is greying, the historic Protestant institutions are greying faster," as well as Van Gelder's (2007:83) observation that the median age of members in many Mainline

denominations now exceeds the national median age by twenty years or more. Carroll and Roof (2002:1) similarly suggest that Protestant churches are faced with an "imbalance" of those over the age of sixty.

McNeal (2003:1) assesses the long-term prospects of this generationally-borne trend in explicitly grave terms:

> The current church culture in North America is on life support. It is living off the work, money, and energy of previous generations from a previous world order. The plug will be pulled either when the money runs out (80 percent of money given to congregations comes from people aged fifty-five and older) or when the remaining three-fourths of a generation who are institutional loyalists die off or both.
>
> (cf. Hammett & Pierce 2007:57)

Regele (1995:52) is perhaps no more charitable in his assertion that "there are literally thousands of churches across America that are old and dying. In many churches, the average age of its members is between sixty-five and seventy. More and more these churches can no longer financially support themselves, and they will not recover." Indeed, Miller (1997:16-17) expresses concern that many of these churches, lacking young families and young adults, will barely be able to maintain their physical structures.

These congregations that have enjoyed such a rich heritage are faced with a painful reality as they waver on the verge of extinction. Truly, says Rendle (2002:50), in many cases, "net losses from deaths will continue in the immediate future at a level that cannot be exceeded by gains from births and new members to achieve net growth." While this seeming inevitability could provide the impetus for change, Benke and Benke (2002:36) express concern over what strikes them as the greater likelihood that, the older these churches become, the more they will be devoted to "survival for the sake of itself."

5.4.4 The Cultural Challenge

Perhaps equally as significant as the demographic factors associated with the church's decline is their widening inability to connect with a changing culture. Lynch (2002:120-121) suggests that, as the membership and influence of churches weakens,

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these churches are at risk of losing touch with what form the pursuit of meaning is taking in the contemporary world. Through its failure to effectively transmit its faith tradition to Gen X, the first post-modern generation, the church is experiencing an increasing cultural gap in relation to post-modern culture. Many churches are "two steps removed" from those who have been shaped by a post-modern culture, suggests Van Gelder (1996:43). These churches "simply have not continued to reach even [their] own adult children who are now bearing their own children, let alone reach the significant number of younger families who are part of the general population" (Rouse & Van Gelder 2008:59). Thus, as Scifres (1998:42) notes, Xers pose a predicament for the future of the church; not only they, but also vast numbers of their children, are likely to be beyond the reach of many established churches.

Kew (2001:63) observes that Xers present churches with a challenge that is not so much generational as philosophical in nature: "They are thoroughly Postmodern in their worldviews…The gap between the churches and the young is widening as churches' Modern, Enlightenment-shaped approach to ministry speaks to a smaller and smaller percentage of people." Butler Bass (2004:21) similarly writes of a widening "gap between cultural change and congregational life" with the arrival of Generation X into adulthood:

> Many of these younger Americans grew up disengaged from any form of traditional faith community and their worldviews differed sharply from those of their parents and grandparents regarding religious practice. While the previous generations' social churchgoing reigned as the dominant form of establishment Protestantism, their children largely rejected that style and its patterns of practice as irrelevant to their lives.
>
> (cf. Regele 1995:196)

In light of this growing cultural gap between the church and young adults, asserts McIntosh (2002:22), failure to understand and respond to the changes taking place among the generations in the United States may have a negative impact on churches and their ministries. He argues that the membership of churches that are cultivating an understanding of the changes evident among the generations appear to be growing, "while those that cannot understand and adjust to the changing generations are on the decline." Thus, recognizing that post-moderns "will increasingly become the American norm and will make up the greater percentage of the population" in years to

come, Kimball (2003:57-66) insists that, "[f]or their sakes we must rethink our approach to ministry."

5.4.5   Congregational Ageism toward Xers

Despite all that is at stake with this generation, numerous authors concerned to advocate for this generation note that Xers have been largely ignored or forgotten by many established churches. Many of these churches, furthermore, are in denial of this reality. Scifres (1998:40) and Householder (1999:42) both observe that, at the conclusion of the 1990s, church-goers remained largely oblivious to the fact that a generation was missing from their ranks. Responding to this reality of the relative absence of the post-modern generations from the pews of many congregations, Reifschneider (1999:35) explains the attitude evident in many churches: "Many church members think that young adults are missing because we have not settled down with a job, spouse, and family. They still believe that Xers will come to church when we have children. We don't." More recently, McNeal (2003:3) has offered the following tongue-in-cheek observations: "[O]f course, churches are launching an all-out effort to reach Gen Xers. I wish! Most churches have actually just written them off, waiting for them to grow up and learn to like what the church has to offer" (cf. Kimball 2003:57-66).

Tragically, it seems as though the elder generations within many churches have adopted all too uncritically the caricatures and stereotypes of Xers born out of the intergenerational struggle that has been unfolding within society at large. Writing in the mid-1990s, Ford (1995:48) indicated that many churches were influenced by bad stereotypes of Xers. More recently, Howard Merritt (2007:6) has taken note of the blatant and ironic ageism in mainline churches that have exercised such care in avoiding sexism and racism, evident most notably in the criticism that Xers have been forced to endure: "Maybe the ageism is acceptable in our churches because it's utterly rampant in our society. There's an idea that people under forty should never have any leadership or opinion on anything." Howard Merritt (:14) adds that, within local churches, Xers have been "inevitably compared disparagingly to Baby Boomers, the civil rights movements of the sixties, and were eternally dwarfed in that Boomer-looming shadow." She responds to this by asking, "How could the church understand

young adults if it continually looked at them through the tinted spectacles of older adults?" Some churches have contemplated whether they should merely "write off" the members of this generation altogether (Hadaway 2001:1). However, Schaller (1999:48, 60) suggests that this dismissive attitude toward Xers is most certainly contributing to the shrinking of older parishes.

In the mid-1990s, Mahedy and Bernardi (1994:136-137) and Ford (1995:30) noted that, while churches everywhere seemed to be using strategies and marketing techniques aimed at appealing to Boomers, little attention had been demonstrated toward Xers. At the turn of the Millennium, Rich Hurst (quoted in Rabey 2001:4) asserted that, while most churches had programs that met the needs of middle-aged people, "they [had] little that meets the needs of the average young adult, making this population the most unchurched portion of American society." Howard Merritt (2007:30) more recently has offered a similar assessment:

> [A]s younger people 'shop around' for a church, they might see that we have a Sunday school program and a smattering of things for children, but too often church leadership, social events, and fundraisers are geared toward people who are over sixty. In our highly segregated and ageist culture, younger generations get the message that since the church is for another generation, then it's not for their children, and it's definitely not for them.

Reflecting upon the evidence of such overt neglect, Moore (2001:13) expresses concern toward "[t]he very real danger…that we current leaders will altogether skip over Gen-Xers in favor of their younger siblings."

5.4.6 Congregational Marginalization of Xers
5.4.6.1 The Challenges of Complexity

Though not in great abundance, a sizeable minority of Xers does remain in established congregations (Wuthnow 2007:2). Kimball (2003:57-66) notes that some of these young adults are at home there because they remain adherents to the modern worldview, which he identifies as being largely the result of their having been raised in Christian homes. Thus, modern churches are still attracting modern young people. Benke and Benke (2002:31) seem to be attempting to explain the continued church involvement of these young adults by suggesting that Christians "across all generational categories" are not affected by modernism and post-modernism in the

same way as the rest of society. As they posit, "The Christian belief system translates into a separate cultural orientation altogether."

This might lead us to suspect that the influence of post-modernism is perhaps not operative among many of the young people who remain in the church. Rendle's (2002:6) suggestion that "the length of one's membership in a congregation is the stronger determinant of one's behavior and preferences" might seem to lend support to this suspicion (cf. Armour & Browning 1995:177). Nonetheless, Rendle (2002:6) adds the clarification that "there is obviously a generational corollary" to this. In other words, contrary to Benke and Benke's assertion, we can expect to find evidence of the influence of post-modernity among many of the young adults within the congregation. At the very least, the Xers within the congregation often are more conversant with the culture of post-modernism.

This adds complexity to an already complex situation in many congregations. Notes Gibbs (2000a:20), churches now contain a mix of those who have been influenced by traditional religious forms, those who are guided by modern assumptions, and those who are post-modern (cf. Hammett & Pierce 2007:35). Essentially, all of the generation-specific cultural changes that have been surveyed over the preceding chapters now come to bear cumulatively upon the intergenerational praxis of the church within the praxis of society. Hammett and Pierce (2007:30) reflect upon the challenges this poses for many congregations:

> For the first time in history, most churches face the challenge of ministering to five or more generations at one time. Americans are living longer. And what pleases one generation often doesn't satisfy the next generation, much less the third, fourth, or fifth….generations have different preferences for how they worship, learn, lead, relate, do ministry, and interact with one another. They have different personal preferences and lifestyles, styles of music, and attire.
> (cf. Loper 1999:2-3; Schaller 1999:17, 133)

Indeed, suggests Vanderwell (2008:2), because Americans are living longer, the age difference represented within the pews of established churches is greater than it has been in earlier years, even a generation ago.

In this sort of context, cross-generational ministry has become decidedly cross-cultural (Moore 2001:139). As a result, notes Hawn (2003:6), "generational differences have some of the same effects as varied ethnic perspectives within a

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congregation. Younger members have been shaped by a set of historical events different from those that formed older members." As we have seen, most Xers "are from a world with different values, traditions, rituals, and personal preferences—a different culture" (Hammett & Pierce 2007:4). Rendle (2002:45) reflects upon the challenge that this poses to the life of many congregations:

> The bottom line is that otherwise similar people of different ages can have sharply contrasting life experiences, even as they live side by side in the same family, community, or congregation. Representing several generations, the people in our congregations are brought together by a choice to be with one another; but then they are confounded by their inability to understand one another or to find ready agreement on even the most basic questions…[T]hey are baffled by subtle and shaded differences that allow them all to use the same words but to impute different meanings to them, that allow them to have common goals but to disagree on strategies to accomplish them.

As these differing, and often competing, generational values are brought to bear on the life of the church, suggests Rendle (2002:56), "discomfort below the surface commonly makes sharing worship, program planning, or decision making difficult across generations."

As we have seen in preceding sections of this study, many congregations have adopted structures and attitudes that foster generational segregation and separation. As Allen (2005:319) notes, "Though church leaders endorse intergenerational approaches in theory, in practice American mainline and evangelical churches generally conduct many of their services and activities...in age-segregated settings." As a result, it has become more and more difficult for the generations to serve one another's needs within the life of the church. Whitesel and Hunter (2000:7) describe this reality:

> The Christian church is polarized along generational lines, and the generation gaps are intensifying this divergence….[G]enerational tensions in our churches separate young people from the maturity and experience that senior members can impart. In addition, the fresh energy and new ideas that younger generations can bring are being forfeited.

Codrington and Grant-Marshall (2004:234) go so far as to assert that "[t]here are few areas in our lives where the generation gap is greater than it is in the church" (cf. Gambone 1998:1). Hilborn and Bird (2003:162) describe a form of "intergenerational antipathy," which "involves an age-related breach in the unity of God's people." It seems as though the "pure market" mindset surveyed in section 5.2.2.4 above has

become more pronounced and problematic. It is almost as though the intergroup dynamics experienced within these churches have caused the spirit of generational "identity politics" at work within broader society to define the intergenerational praxis of local congregations. Clearly, the interactions, activities, sentiments, and norms evident among the generations within local established congregations have caused the bonds of intergenerational solidarity to be significantly weakened. Thus, as Regele (1995:238) insists, in many congregations considerable anger exists between the generations.

In far too many congregations, this situation has been particularly detrimental to the standing of Xers. In chapter two, we surveyed two key components of the intergenerational traditioning process: 1) passing the good deposit to each generation and 2) empowering them to impact its shape. As has already been demonstrated compellingly above, far too commonly established churches have not been effective at reaching this generation. However, they also are not proving effective at granting this generation the opportunity to contribute to the shape of the congregation's tradition. Though the members of this generation offer a knowledge of the culture of post-modernism that could be of service to their congregations, and though they are actively engaged in significant cultural production in other areas of life (Flory & Miller 2007:202), the post-modern young people within the congregation frequently are disempowered and devalued (Whitesel & Hunter 2000:19-20; Conder 2006:39). As Carroll and Roof (2002:138, 207) assert, younger people essentially participate on the terms dictated by their elders, rather than because of efforts at negotiation across generational lines or a willingness on the part of the elder generations to adapt programmatically.

Whitesel and Hunter (2000:41) argue that most churches "are staffed, programmed, and envisioned to reach one generation." McIntosh (2002:13) similarly identifies a monogenerational focus as a widespread phenomenon and guiding assumption among many churches. More specifically, as we have seen, many churches are focused upon ministering to the adults who are already established within the congregation (Regele 1995:137). To describe this tendency toward cultural homogeneity within the church, Whitesel and Hunter (2000:32) employ the creative term, *ethnikitis*. They explain that the concept "could apply equally to Generation X, Boomers, or Builders in addition to

those groups distinguished by racial, tribal, or class differences…'Cultural ethnikitis' and 'tribal ethnikitis' would thus be two 'strains' of the general category 'ethnikitis'." Whitesel and Hunter (:42) caution that, while generational like-mindedness does propel assimilation, when it is allowed to mutate into "generational exclusivity," it can unintentionally stunt growth by creating a one-generational church. It can cause churches to become "malfunctional enclaves of bias and prejudice" (:97). In many established congregations, the influence of *ethnikitis* promotes something of an unconscious tendency on the part of older members to impose their cultural assumptions upon the post-modern young people in their midst. Writing from a secular marketing perspective, Smith and Clurman (1997:8) employ the term "generational myopia" to describe essentially the same phenomenon: "the shortsighted application of the values and attitudes of your own generation to the development of strategies for reaching another generation."

This tendency often is motivated by good intentions. Whitesel and Hunter (2000:161) follow Wagner in speaking of "cultural overhang," the tendency of the preferences and affinities of one culture to overhang or protrude into another. Observing that cultural overhang tends to affect the approach taken to worship services, these authors insist that the suggestions of older generations "are based upon a sincere longing to see these spiritual experiences reoccur in younger generations…What they may not realize is that their cultural overhang is widening a generation gap, and making it difficult for the good news to cross over to the younger worshipers" (:163). As we have noted previously, older generations tend to assume mistakenly that the differences between themselves and younger generations are merely a matter of "maturity." As Rendle (2008:58) expresses, "The assumption is that once the younger people 'grow up,' they will behave more appropriately." However, as we have seen, these are not merely issues of maturity but of genuine cultural differences, even of a redefinition of the marks of "maturity." The result of these good intentions, unfortunately, is all too often a widening of the generation gap, even "an extensive rift between generations" (Whitesel & Hunter 2000:85).

5.4.6.2 The Pre-Boomer Generations

Whitesel and Hunter (2000:32) suggest that many established congregations suffer from a very specific brand of *ethnikitis* they describe as *geriatrophy*, which results from the combination of an aging population and atrophy (a wasting away or failure to grow). *Geriatrophy,* they posit "may be the chief killer of churches in America because of the inability of many congregations successfully to reach across the generation gaps to youthful generations." These churches are at risk of becoming little more than an institution for the elderly to bond, caution Codrington and Grant-Marshall (2004:250). All mono-generation churches "will eventually be faced with a challenge of passing the baton of leadership" and likely "will eventually die of geriatrophy" (Whitesel & Hunter 2000:97).

In some congregations, leaders are urged by their members and boards to "do something" to attract new people, only to find that these very same members actively resist efforts at bringing about changes aimed at reaching post-modern young adults. Howard Merritt (2007:31) notes that efforts to reach younger people, while sometimes effective, "often alienate older members while they attract younger members." Hammett and Pierce (2007:4) similarly note the challenges of keeping the "over sixty crowd" satisfied while also reaching those under forty. Webb (1999:122) suggests that these efforts to contextualize local church ministry present a challenge not so much because post-modern people are hostile, but rather because they simply are *different*. The differences between these cohorts can lead to tension, resistance, and confusion. This prospect is particularly acute in small (less than 100 people in weekly attendance) and mid-sized (between 100 and 350 people) congregations. These churches have limited resources by which to provide for the various "pure markets" in their midst (Rendle 2002:31). As a result, more is at stake within these congregations and conflict more readily arises.

Rendle (2002:49) notes that the task of mediating these differences tends to fall "inordinately to staff and to key lay leaders." He reflects upon the challenges these leaders frequently face:

> [C]ultural changes are commonly resisted, and new ways of speaking about
> and sharing faith are challenged rather than embraced. Traditions and

practices that strengthened and supported one generation are held tightly rather than being adjusted or replaced to strengthen and support faith in the next generations. Key leaders in congregations spend their time and energy trying to understand cultural shifts and the needs of new generations, only to be resisted or opposed by the generations well established in the congregation. Rather than finding appreciation for experimental practices that might speak to new generations seeking faith, leaders not uncommonly discover that such experiments can easily become the evidence used against them when members of the established generations challenge their leadership.

<div align="right">(:2-3)</div>

Kitchens (2003:4) offers a similar characterization:

> We puzzle over why older members want to hold on to forms of church life that may have inspired them when they were young, but that do not meet the needs of today's 20-somethings...We feel as if we're beating our heads against an invisible wall, trying to help our congregations understand that if they want to remain healthy, they must be open to change.

In the face of such realities, leaders often feel at a loss to know how to guide their congregations into meaningful change.

Mead (1991:59-60) chooses to group the impediments to change at work within congregations into two primary and inter-related categories: "structural resistances" and "personal resistances." First, "structural resistances" are born out of the fact that, as has already been explored above, the systems employed in many congregations "affirm fixed patterns of congregational life and discourage efforts to do things that are off the norm." Loper (1999:30-31) suggests that older generations continue to demonstrate a concern for structure, the health of connectional systems, the buildings, and the polity of the church. Reflecting upon the members of the G.I. generation, Regele (1995:118-119) notes, "They are the last full generation of the Industrial Age. Conformity, bigness, a top-down management, and massification, all characteristics of industrialism, reached their apex in builders' programs." Silents similarly are accustomed to a ministry focused on "building the institution and creating programmes and structures" (Codrington & Grant-Marshall 2004:238).

Howard Merritt (2007:91) notes that these generations continue to exercise considerable power within local churches. Even beyond retirement, she suggests, "their grip seems to tighten around their positions." Rendle (2002:91-92) notes that G.I.'s are accustomed to hierarchical approaches to organizational life employing

levels of authority, committee meetings, and governing board structures that are well suited to the value they place on deferred pleasure and the pursuit of consensus. These elders "have an authoritarian approach to leadership and use bureaucratic structures to enforce their own style on the rest of the church, relying on positional authority and claims of biblical truths, rather than on relationships and winning people over to their way of thinking" (Codrington & Grant-Marshall 2004:239; cf. Whitesel & Hunter 2000:19-20; Raines 2003:136). As we have seen, these forms are inherently resistant to change. Furthermore, they are fundamentally incongruous with the values of Xers who, as we saw in chapter four, prefer "flatter" organizational processes, desire participatory decision making, expect to be directly involved, carefully guard their time, and prefer a more informal and relational approach to "doing business" (Miller 2004:203).

Eeman (2002:34) notes that "Silents currently hold power within their faith communities or are just passing leadership (in many cases) to the coming Boomers." For many within this generation, this passing of leadership responsibility to the Boomers is something of a source of relief, since, as Gambone (1998:12) suggests, many have considered themselves "interim leaders." This is consistent with the social role that many in this generation adopted as young adults. As Strauss and Howe (1992:283) express, while "America has looked to Silents to comment and mediate", our society has not expected them to lead. The members of the Silent generation have continued to uphold the values of calibration, manipulation, respect, and aversion to risk (Strauss & Howe 1997a:164). Strauss and Howe (:213) characterize their accomplishments in the following light: "adding new definitions of fairness, new layers of process, new levels of expertise, and new categories of diversity." Elsewhere, these authors suggest that many within this generation "would much prefer to discuss process than outcomes" (Strauss & Howe 1992:291). As Codrington and Grant-Marshall (2004:203) note, Silents have been known for leading "by delegation, by getting everybody on board through teamwork and shared vision."

This being the case, as some Silents have functioned in leadership capacities within local congregations, they have endeavoured to stress acceptance and tolerance as important Christian themes (Eeman 2002:36). Says Eeman (:35-36),

They practice inclusivity, and genuinely appreciate the strengths of multiculturalism. [Silents] strive for consensus to weld the diversity articulated at the leadership table into a whole greater than the sum of its parts. They believe a good process with promote consensus. If the process is well designed, and takes into account all the contingencies, then fairness can be embodied, and inclusiveness is the result.

However, Silent leaders often have failed fully to appreciate precisely how time-consuming and difficult relational issues and consensus-building can be within the church (:38). Scifres (1998:37) describes the impact of this upon Silent leaders:

This generation is often accused of sitting on the fence…However, experience teaches that they sit on fences only in the hope of caring for the generations that surround them. [Silents] are often ambivalent about the current state of the church, wondering whether it shouldn't be more like the church they grew up in or more like the 'modern' church they read about in newspapers and magazines.

As one consequence of this, while Silents have been able to promote justice, peace, and inclusion in many arenas of life (Loper 1999:30-31), we are left to question to what degree they have succeeded in bringing these themes adequately to bear on the structural resistances that shape the intergenerational dynamics of the church.

Second, "personal resistances" frequently are rooted in the reality that "facing the changes of leaving one age of the church and discovering another may be most analogous to a kind of death" (Mead 1991:59-60). Granberg-Michaelson (2004:110) suggests that two common fears arise when change is being proposed within the life of a congregation: some fear that, after their congregation puts forth its best effort, it will experience the disappointment of discovering that *nothing* has changed. In this case, the discomforts of change and pain resulting from the loss of old ways would prove to have been unnecessary, while the experience of failure might merely reinforce the congregants' feelings of despair. Conversely, many of these same church members fear that *everything* will change.

Thus, Rendle (2002:60) is careful to insist that the "GI-oriented fold are not mean-spirited people trying to defeat the opposition unfairly." They often simply do not understand why cherished parts of their traditional religious experience need to be changed and can even feel as though they have been disempowered in the decisions being made about such changes (Mead 1991:36). Smith and Clurman (1997:31, 34)

assert that G.I.s are proud of their achievements in old age. It is difficult to avoid the perception that a new vision essentially constitutes a corrective to, if not an outright denunciation of, all that they have built (Riddell 1998:92; Rendle 2002:9-10). Suggests Mead (1991:36), "they sometimes feel that their strong concerns about those cherished parts of the past are ridiculed and denigrated by clergy and denominational leaders" (cf. Whitesel & Hunter 2000:19-20). Particularly in the wake of their protracted struggle with the Boomers, G.I. elders are sometimes afraid of being "forced out" (Whitesel & Hunter 2000:23-24).

Codrington and Grant-Marshall (2004:34) suggest that some Silents evidence "a 'hip' and friendly style" towards younger generations that enables them to stay in touch with young people. Others, however, are resistant toward change because of their preference for "order, structure, even the decorations in the church they've been attending for decades" (:239). This actually is consistent with what we noted in section 3.5.2.6 regarding the decision of some members of this generation to "side" with their elders and others to identify more closely with the rising generation during the period of the 1960s and 1970s. However, because of their emphasis on security, some Silents are even more resistant than their G.I. elders. Codrington and Grant-Marshall (:238) note that many Silents "feel that church is no longer churchy, they feel abandoned. The world where religion had always been a solid foundation is, some feel, now lost to them." Thus, they tend to be resentful toward new forms.

Rendle (2002:11) asserts that, when congregational leaders attempt new approaches to ministry, established members frequently "are looking over their shoulders telling them they are 'doing it wrong.'" When these new practices are introduced into a congregation that is accustomed to established forms of worship and congregational life, "the new practices are likely to be evaluated by old standards—and found wanting" (:12). Thus, the factors hindering an innovative response to the changes within the larger culture are "mundane, but no less powerful" (Riddell 1998:39). Riddell cites worship forms, the maintenance of buildings, the barrier of group dynamics, internal policies of the institutions, allegiance to a code of behaviour, and the nostalgia for status as ties that frequently "hobble" a congregation. Attempts to alter these components of the life of a congregation can be the source of great controversy and anxiety. As Gibbs (2000b:53) suggests, "In churches with long

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histories there are usually a group of older members with long memories who are prone to make unfavorable comparisons by idealizing the past."

Furthermore, due to their formation in the world of Christendom, for older generations, "the primary target for mission or social welfare is the 'other'" (Rendle 2002:86). Because of the value these elders place on convention and collegiality, a primary goal within their understanding of mission has been to change "others" to help them become like the group. Rendle explains that, while "[n]ot consciously seen as an imposition on the other, mission work was offered as an extension of a value system in which people wanted to share an important group identity and belonging." As one consequence of this, however, there was little focus on changing the self through missional efforts, since the self already belonged as a part of the group. Thus, while older generations may be "[c]hampions of commitment (often of the lifetime variety), duty, and self-sacrifice" (Smith & Clurman 1997:23, 24), the reality that they tend to equate religion with "church going" significantly hinders their capacity to adapt to change (Strauss & Howe 1992:160). For these generations, the church is primarily "a place where they expect to be spiritually fed and have their needs met" (Rouse & Van Gelder 2008:59).

McNeal (2003:51) provides the fascinating observation that this lack of a missional perspective is a major contributor to the conflict that arises in many churches in the midst of change. He suggests that the "worship war," a focal point of change in so many congregations, commonly is largely devoid of a missiological dimension. As a result, "absent a missiological center, North American theological reflections can easily drift toward figuring out who's right and who's wrong rather than who's going with the gospel, who's listening, and who's responding." Further, suggests McNeal, those without a missiological perspective tend to resent attempts at cultural relevance and tend to be plagued by a prideful preoccupation with their particular religious culture rather than the mission of Jesus. As a result of this reality, "Member values clash with missionary values…One of these value sets will triumph over the other. They do not coexist peacefully." In fact, as Mead (1991:79) suggests, some members of congregations feel that their leaders are asking them to support activities "that the members themselves do not understand to be mission." This poses a challenge for the renewing of the church's mission among post-modern young adults.

5.4.6.3 The Boomer Generation

Wuthnow (2007:1) insists that "Baby boomers are no longer the future of American religion." However, this is not a notion that many Baby Boomers seem eager to embrace. The prominence of Boomers within many established churches continues to make it difficult for Xers to be able to contribute meaningfully and equitably within congregational life. As we noted in the preceding chapters, the Boomers have constituted a "lead cohort" throughout their life course. Strauss and Howe (1997a:224) observe that "Boomers have been busy respiritualizing American culture and resacralizing its institutions. Even as they wreck old notions of teamwork, loyalty, and fraternal association...they are trying to restore a new foundation for public virtue." At present, the dominance of this generation is very much evident within the life of established churches. Earlier this decade, Barna (2004) asserted that "Even within the local church, Boomers rule the roost." As evidence of this, Barna notes that sixty-one percent of Protestant Senior Pastors were from that generation. Among the current lay leaders, fifty-eight percent were Boomers. Furthermore, he adds, "And if money talks, then we have the floor: 50% of the money given to churches last year came out of the pockets of Boomers. (That's more than double the amount given by any other generation.)" (www.barna.org).

Barna (2004) suggests that the generational interests of Boomers are likely to continue to contribute to the marginalization of Xers within the church:

> Unfortunately, we are not good at sharing. If we are the richest generation the world has ever encountered, we are also its most selfish. And we are driven by the one value that defines us and on which we are willing to squander our money: power. We believe so deeply in our decision-making capacity, and we enjoy the control and perks of calling the shots so much, that we have no intention of relinquishing that power, regardless of traditions, expectations, reason or future interests.
>
> (www.barna.org)

Barna reflects further upon this Boomer fixation with power: "The sticking point is our core value: power. We love power. We live for power…Whether it is because of an unhealthy desire for control, a reasonable concern about maintaining quality, a sense of exhilaration received from making pressure-packed, life-changing decisions or due to other motivations, Boomers revel in power" (www.barna.org).

For Xers within the congregation, this poses at least two crucial challenges. First, churches dominated by Boomers may simply become havens for the members of this generation and thus fail to create a place for other generations to find a niche (Codrington & Grant-Marshall 2004:242). Drury (1996) explains what this is likely to mean for the members of Generation X:

> The Xers will be crowded out, marginalized, ignored. Most boomer ministers don't even know what busters want. Or care. They are tired of changing. Like old warriors they now preach peace once they've moved in the army of occupation...And what of the rest of the boomers. They'll never even notice. Their congregations will age into the 50's and 60's in peace. They'll like their church. It will be pleasant there.
>
> (www.drurywriting.com)

Drury assesses this prospect by cautioning that many churches are at risk of becoming little more than "evangelical boomer nursing homes." Essentially, the predilection toward homogeneity at work among this generation may be difficult to overcome.

Second, Boomers are not demonstrating a concern toward passing the mantle of leadership to Xers. Notes Barna (2004), "The sad result is that most Boomers—even those in the pastorate or in voluntary, lay-leadership positions in churches—have no intention of lovingly handing the baton to Baby Busters." Barna adds that, if Boomer leaders desired to do so, they would be "hard at work implementing the world's most sophisticated and superbly executed transition plan to install the new strata of leaders" (www.barna.org). However, this simply is not the case. As Codrington and Grant-Marshall (2004:244) note, "Boomers are not mentoring Xers. Neither are they standing aside to allow Xers to develop their leadership skills and make changes." As evidence of this, one 1999 study produced by the Episcopal Church Foundation revealed that that denomination was continuing predominantly to ordain the same generation that they had been ordaining a quarter of a century ago earlier, "except they [were] now in their later forties rather than mid-twenties" (Kew 2001:60-61).

Kew (2001:76) notes that Boomers are not expected to relocate upon retirement as many within past generations have done, but instead to remain active and engaged in their present contexts well into their latter years. Some authors are predicting that the Boomers will in some meaningful sense "redefine" retirement. Smith and Clurman (1997:67), for example, posit that the Boomer search for significance and fulfilment

will impact their retirement years. Thus, within the life of the church, as in other institutions, this is likely to have significant bearing on the ability of Xers to contribute meaningfully. Wuthnow (2007:1) offers the following assessment:

> With the greying of America, they will be the most numerous group in the typical congregation. They will have more time to serve on committees and more money to put in the collection plate. They will also be the members who lament that things are no longer as good as they were in the 1960s (or 1980s). They will not be sure that change is a good thing, especially if it is being advanced by someone considerably younger than they are.

One *Washington Post* article assesses the Boomer mindset by suggesting that "we've just assumed the baby boomers would hand on to power until it was pried from their cold grasp some decades hence" (cited in Howard Merritt 2007:6).

5.4.5.4 The Likely Results

Mead (1991:22-23) suggests that many of the younger Christians caught up in the intergenerational dynamics of established churches are "suffering" as a result of the "dichotomy" of "being born into a new paradigm and unable to communicate with [those] who inhabit the old," and thus are "running away from the pain." Because of their own cultural orientation and because of the dynamics at work in many churches, says Rendle (2002:48), "the GenXers and millennials will have even more trouble finding a comfortable home in many established congregations than their baby-boomer parents have had." As Scifres (1998:47) observes, even "many churched Busters are hesitant to offer an invitation to their friends when they know that there is not much being offered in the church that will be helpful or relevant to their friends."

Several observers suggest that the eventual outcome of this marginalization of Xers within congregational life will be, as Barna (2004) expresses, "Widespread [Xer] flight from the institutions and movements we have labored for so long to build up" (www.barna.org). Drury (1996) explains that Xers are "not very good revolutionaries, so it's unlikely they'll lead a revolution and take over...like their parents did" (www.drurywriting.com). Codrington and Grant-Marshall (2004:245) similarly assert that, within the local church, most Xers, "by nature a non-confrontational generation, have felt that taking on the Boomers was NOT the best route to go." Thus, many churches are not experiencing tension over efforts to reach

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Gen Xers precisely because they no longer have any younger adults who are engaged enough to care. As Hammett and Pierce (2007:35) note, "Sadly, in many churches nearly everyone under forty has given up being actively involved in the church." These young adults have found the church irrelevant to their spiritual quest and their desire to impact their communities as ambassadors for Christ (Rouse & Van Gelder 2008:59-60). As a result, many aging congregations watch their youthful members go elsewhere (Whitesel & Hunter 2000:7).

In section 4.5.4, we noted how the marginalization of Gen X has led members of this cohort to adopt an entrepreneurial style. Several observers note that the members of this generation are responding to their experiences within the established church by asserting this same propensity. Zustiak (1999:231), for example, suggests that, as they "find themselves at odds with church policy, leadership or tradition," Xers may be tempted "to rebel and work around or against the institution." Zustiak further suggests that this "is sure to get them branded as 'troublemakers' and 'disloyal.'" As Hilborn and Bird (2003:164-165) note, "it is always likely that zealous younger leaders will arise who will challenge the perceived status quo embodied by their elders, and that this will lead to friction, and in some instances, to a parting of the ways….[I]n the increasingly entrepreneurial milieu of modern-day evangelicalism, they will now be as likely to establish new churches and organizations of their own." Writing in the mid-1990s, Drury (1996), predicted that Xers would respond to the dominance of Boomers by starting their own churches (www.drurywriting.com). Codrington and Grant-Marshall (2004:245) similarly describe the prospect of Xers "leaving and starting their own inclusive churches."

In classic Xer fashion, some have already become active in "creating new groups in the marketplace for themselves, regardless of whatever might have been provided for them by existing religious groups" (Flory 2000:243-244). A recent study by Flory and Miller (2007:215) found that many of these "innovators" cited the "overly institutionalized" and "inwardly focused" nature of the established church as their reason for starting new initiatives. These new churches tend to emphasize a communally oriented spiritual quest. This is expressed through a commitment to build community, to foster a committed life of discipleship, and a balancing of inward experience and outward expression of spiritual. In addition, these churches

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demonstrate a commitment to "outreach initiatives" aimed at engaging the culture and "serving the city" (:214). Finally, these churches evidence a clear disinterest in established institutional forms of religion and a preference for non-hierarchical authority structures (:213).

Hilborn and Bird (2003:162) suggest that this "intergenerational schism" promises to impact the leadership transition within the church adversely. Hammett and Pierce (2007:68) demonstrate this same concern as they describe what they see occurring in many contexts:

> All churches will soon, if they haven't already, realize that younger adults are largely missing from their leadership. In the average church in America today, most leaders are fifty or older. Adults in their twenties often are not asked to take leadership roles. When they are, older leaders who work alongside them generally don't approve of their new ideas or the thought processes that led to what they suggest.

Many churches are destined to "lament" over a leadership crisis, the result of the blindness of older adults toward the potential leaders in their midst (Howard Merritt 2007:92, 94; cf. Kew 2001:83). However, asserts Barna (2004), rather than taking concerted steps to address this matter, Boomers are likely to cast themselves as "the saviors compensating for a younger generation of irreverent and incompetent wanna-be's." The result of this, he predicts, is likely to be "the further dilapidation (and, in some cases, collapse) of the local church as we know it today" (www.barna.org).

In essence, the withdrawal of Xers from established churches threatens the very existence of these congregations. As Whitesel and Hunter (2000:7) observe, "many of these older churches and their proud legacies are doomed to die, if something is not done immediately." As more and more members of the G.I. Generation pass away, the number of participants within established churches continues to dwindle (Hammett & Pierce 2007:30). Whitesel and Hunter (2000:49) suggest that many within the G.I. generation are awakening to the recognition that "the generation gaps are threatening to separate them from an intact legacy." However, "too often the days to reach out to the younger generations pass them by before they are aware of the quandary they face" (:34). The aging members of these congregations are facing a crisis of spiritual generativity that reflects what is occurring within society at large and that threatens the ability of the congregations they have built to sustain their

witness through this transitional period. A failure to "take younger adults more seriously," insists Wuthnow (2008:17), could jeopardize the very future of American religion.

5.5   Conclusion

In this study, we have been developing the theme that, as American society journeys through the post-modern transition, many established churches are struggling to respond to culture change within a complex generational context. We furthermore have been considering the claim that the resulting ineffectiveness of these churches in transmitting their faith traditions to Gen X, the first post-modern generation, threatens their ability to sustain their witness through this transitional period.

While we have spent several chapters exploring this theme, the theoretical strands that have been developed across the preceding chapters have culminated in the present chapter, which has constituted the very heart of our presentation of the problem. In this chapter, we have brought together the following realities in demonstrating this problem:

1. Many established congregations have been ill prepared to respond to the challenges of post-modernity because of the marriage of Christendom and modernity that has shaped their existence.
2. The changing and increasingly complex intergenerational dynamics of established churches also have contributed to their failure to give adequate attention to the religious socialization of Generation X, the first post-modern generation.
3. In large part because of these factors, Generation Xers have not found the established congregation to be a meaningful place to gain spiritual experience or to gain a sense of belonging. As a result, vast numbers of them are now "unchurched."
4. Despite this reality, the traditions, structures, and intergenerational dynamics of these congregations, together with their tendency to reflect ageist attitudes toward Xers, have caused these churches to demonstrate an astounding lack of concern toward their need to reach Xers or to empower the members of this "missing" generation.

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5. As a result, these churches grow increasingly distant from the realities of a changing culture and face the prospect of extinction.

This chapter has demonstrated that this is a very real and very pressing matter. Much is at stake for the established churches under consideration here. Is this a situation with which we should be satisfied? If not, what hope can be offered to these congregations? It is to this very consideration that we will turn in chapter six.

6. MISSIONAL RENEWAL AND THE ESTABLISHED CHURCH

6.1 Introduction

Throughout chapters two through five, we have been engaged in a hermeneutical exercise devoted to helping articulate the central problem under consideration here. We have been asserting that,

> As American society journeys through the post-modern transition, many established churches struggle to respond faithfully to culture change within a complex generational context. The resulting ineffectiveness of these churches in transmitting their faith traditions to Generation X, the first post-modern generation, threatens their capacity to sustain their witness through this transitional period.

Throughout this study, we have been concerned with the praxis of the church within the praxis of society. Essentially, the preceding chapters have been devoted to identifying a significant problem plaguing the intergenerational praxis of the church as it attempts to live and serve within a changing culture.

In chapters six and seven, we will extend this hermeneutical process by endeavouring to articulate a hypothesis. In other words, we will propose a solution to the problem that has been developed above. In these two chapters, we will advance the following hypothesis:

> 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.

The present chapter will facilitate the development of this hypothesis through an exploration of the following themes:

1. In section 6.2, we will reiterate an understanding of the notion that the church presently faces a critical juncture, one in which it must choose whether or not to respond adaptively to the changes occurring within the broader culture.

2. Section 6.3 will be devoted to an exploration of the church's need to experience renewal. This will be shown to be fundamentally the work of the Holy Spirit and to be integrally connected to the church's traditions. We will emphasize *mission* as the central focus of the renewal needed within the

church today, a reality that we will describe through the use of the term *missional renewal*.

3. In section 6.4, attention will be lent to the crucial role that Gen X is postured to make in helping the church to experience this missional renewal.

4. In response to the reluctance of many established church members to change and of Gen Xers to embrace the institutional church, section 6.5 will demonstrate the need of local churches to give careful consideration to the processes by which they endeavour to promote missional renewal. This section will conclude with an emphasis on the need for the processes employed within established churches to be appropriately attentive to both the spiritual and sociological dimensions of the church's existence.

This chapter will help to set the stage for chapter seven, in which we will argue that, from both a spiritual and a sociological perspective, the church's efforts to experience missional renewal in the post-modern transition must entail a commitment to intergenerational reconciliation and justice. Following that, in chapter eight, we will subject this hypothesis to empirical testing conducted among established churches. Before advancing to that step in the practical-theological process, however, we will proceed in the pages that follow by beginning to develop our hypothesis.

6.2   A Crucial Juncture

In chapter five, we explored the reality that many established churches presently are in an at-risk state.   Many of these churches are either in denial regarding the changes that are taking place around them or struggling to grasp how to respond faithfully. Furthermore, many churches are aging, declining, experiencing financial crisis, and facing the prospect of closure.

Meanwhile, there has emerged a broad consensus to the effect that the old ways have run their course (Drane 2000:104). As Conder (2006:8) suggests, "We live in a new age, and what we've known as solid and sure are no longer true and valued." Stated simply, our society is not going back to its former ways. As Anderson (1990:5) articulates, "Humpty-Dumpty is not going to be put back together again." The fact that post-modernism is still emerging makes is unlikely that we can predict the exact

form that this "future thought" will take (Best & Kellner 1997:254). Nonetheless, post-modernism now seems destined to dictate the governing worldview of society (Miller 2004:139). Best and Kellner (1997:15) go so far as to assert that the post-modern discourse is extending throughout the world (cf. Anderson 1990:6). While not everyone will accept the implications of post-modernism, Anderson (1990:253) suggests that no one will remain untouched. This challenges us to come to terms with the reality that "we may be reaching the half-way point" where the balance of society is shifting permanently toward a new cultural matrix (Riddell 1998:101). McNeal (2003:59) argues that, even if post-modernism is merely the "last gasp of modernism" as some suggest, it will be some time before it is revealed what comes next. Thus, we must acknowledge and respond to it.

McManus (2001:17) suggests that the church was designed by God to be "on the edge of change" and at "the center of history," and therefore is meant to "thrive in a radically changing environment." Furthermore, suggests McManus, the church should be compelled by "apostolic momentum" not merely to keep up with the times, but to change the times. The church's place is not merely to anticipate the future, but to play a leading role in shaping it (Hadaway 2000:6). However, as we have seen in the preceding chapters, while the reality of change has always constituted one component of the world within which the church exists, the pace simply has accelerated in recent times. Anderson (1990:254) suggests that the post-modern transition actually has come to constitute a change in "the way things change." As a result, as Conder (2006:8) posits, we now live in a new age characterized by "too many variables spinning too rapidly in trajectories that are beyond the existent models of prediction." Sadly, as we have seen, far too many churches have found themselves unprepared to respond faithfully to this complex new reality (McManus 2001:64).

That being said, Kitchens (2003:5) suggests that the church has reached a critical juncture in which "[w]e really don't have much choice about whether we are going to deal with these changes…We can adopt a whole range of strategies—from deciding to make wrestling with the meaning of this shift a cornerstone of our ministries to ignoring the cultural changes altogether and doing ministry just as we have in the past" (cf. Hudson 2004:13). The latter alternative, he insists, provides "a way of being the church that no longer makes much sense to younger Christians entering the

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church" (:31). Kitchens (:30) further cautions that, "If we wait until we are confident in our understanding of the newly emerging cultural context, American society will have moved beyond us." He adds,

> Americans will be living out their postmodern 21st-century lives while we offer them worship, education, and fellowship more suited to the mid-20th. If we wait until we are sure we know what to do, the church will have missed its best opportunity to proclaim the gospel in ways that postmodern Americans can hear. The longer we speak in the cadence of modernity, the less interested postmoderns will be in making the effort to translate what we're saying.

Kitchens (:36-37) posits that the likely outcome of this, as we demonstrated in chapter five, will be that "young Christians and seekers of all ages…will increasingly find our congregations less-than-faithful expressions of God's mission in the world."

As we saw in chapter five, this has become a matter of "life and death" for the church (Regele 1995:193). "If we choose to follow the status quo strategy," suggests Regele (:51), "the church as we have known it will be crushed in the seismic waves of change that are rattling our lives." Frost and Hirsch (2003:81) similarly assert that a "steadfast refusal or resistance by the church to seriously contextualize the gospel" will be a grave mistake that will only "hasten its declining influence on Western society." This is difficult for many of the established churches that have been accustomed to being "entrenched in and colluding with middle-class culture." The modern value of inevitable progress causes many of these congregations "to assume that they have an inalienable right to an infinite existence" (Beaudoin 1998:59).

Nonetheless, the challenges of the day are not going to be resolved by romantic "traditionalism" that seeks to preserve old cultural patterns intact (Anderson 1990:27). As Miller (2004:81) insists, "Our best intentions using the old paradigm are no match for the new conflicts of a highly complex, rapidly shifting world." White (2001:177) notes that "the culture of the 1950s has obviously long since passed, and we can't use yesterday's tools in today's world and expect to build a church for tomorrow." Conder (2006:8) also emphasizes this point: "We can't go back, and we can't hold on to old practices as if they will protect us from the uncertainty ahead. We can't keep doing the same old thing for another 30 years and expect the results will magically change."

Gibbs (2000a:32) insists that the church is faced with a "strategic inflection point," a moment in which fundamental changes are necessary. Properly responding to this critical moment requires vision for a different future and a fuller understanding of the present (:34). In part, this means that the church must reflect honestly upon its own decline or prepare to face the prospect of its continued descent into a "death spiral" over the next twenty to thirty years (McNeal 2003:54). As Jackson (2002:1) counsels, "We can face the truth of decline head on. We can examine it, learn from it, and know it thoroughly. And then we can apply the lessons we have learned and the encouragements we have discovered to break free of the cycle of decline." This will require that the church be prepared to examine what we do and how we do it, to ask difficult questions of ourselves, our values, and our priorities, and to open ourselves to the transforming work of God (Hudson 2004:16-17).

Adjustments of this sort can be shocking, acknowledges Murray Zoba (1999:16). Our exploration of "liminality" in section 5.4.2 demonstrates how such periods of transition can be the source of considerable anxiety and pain. Many church members grieve the loss of Christendom (Murray 2004:208-209). Some resist change because of their discomfort with the post-modern transition (Conder 2006:81). As Junkin (1996:310) observes, these reactions evidence the reality that the world, our institutions and our hearts are all inextricably linked, and thus bear the marks of change; together, they point to our being on the way toward something new.

Nonetheless, to the degree that we have failed to change ourselves in response to the transformation occurring around us, we now must (McManus 2001:29). Hadaway (2001:4-6) suggests that we cannot fully anticipate the changes that will affect us or plan ahead effectively for the challenges they bring. However, he insists, we must embrace "the naturalness of change and escape the resistance/catch-up, resistance/catch-up in which most churches find themselves enmeshed." Kew (2001:37) cautions that the church cannot afford to wait for a major crisis to provide the motivation for change. The present period is not one in which a "wait-and-see" attitude will constitute an adequate response, he insists. Thus, as Conder (2006:8) asserts, "Even if we are terrified and confused, we have to stumble forward and create and reform new models to engage our transitional age."

McLaren (2000:189-190) suggests that the church should view post-modernism less as a problem to be solved and more as a transition lasting generations (cf. Riddell 1998:101). If the latter perspective is embraced, he asserts, the post-modern transition may in fact constitute a great opportunity for the purposes of God's reign. Hunsberger (1998:77, 78) similarly suggests that the changes occurring offer great potential for the people of God, yet must involve the church's rediscovery of its identity in this new world. This necessitates that churches adjust to their new reality and learn to "navigate" the emerging culture (Sweet 1999:17; Ward 2002:15). This is sure to entail a process of reworking, revisioning, and reinventing (Junkin 1996:310). Many observers insist that a new understanding of the church's role already is emerging (Regele 1995:186; Butler Bass 2004:15-20). In the pages that follow, we will advance one account of what this might mean.

6.3   The Need for Missional Renewal
6.3.1   The Reduction of Tradition

Over the preceding chapters, we have identified the reduction of tradition as one crucial facet of the problem in many congregations. As Petersen (1992:146) articulates,

> Our contemporary church walks the razor's edge between tradition and traditionalism. Although we may affirm our commitment to the Scriptures as our sole authority, things are not that simple in practice. Most of us regularly lose our balance and fall into traditionalism. We get stuck in the past.

As we noted in section 2.6.3, the tendency to reduce our understanding of the Christian faith to the product of the interface of gospel and culture within one's particular context is perhaps inevitable. However, we also noted that the tendency toward *reductionism*, which entails preserving this particular expression of the faith through dynamics of control, is rooted in the "flesh" rather than the Spirit of God. Riddell (1998:67) notes that the desire for control and power, while "very human expressions," are not characteristics of the Christian life. He further cautions that, "Whenever the church drifts towards institutional form, it is drifting away from the one who was sent for crucifixion by the religious authorities." Thus, if, as Van Gelder (1998:72) has suggested, the church's structures are intended to function in support of its true essence and ministry, simply managing established forms cannot be equated to being truly the church.

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The church that has ceased to be compelled by the mission of Christ has lost sight of its true identity. As Shenk (2001:86) asserts, "Whenever the church takes its identity from its sociohistorical context, rather than its covenant with God, it loses its distinctive vocation." In fact, suggest Frost and Hirsch (2003:209), churches that lose sight of their accountability to Christ as the basis of their missiological mandate and allow their own designs to determine their sense of purpose and mission "never really engage in mission and so lose touch with Jesus." Instead, suggest these authors, such churches "become closed sets as a result, and their experience of Jesus at the center fades into a memory of the time when they were really doing something. It becomes a matter of history rather than an experience of mission now."

This is a tragic thing for, as Nel (2003:7) posits, apart from God's purposes for it, the church has no right to exist. Thus, we must entertain the relevance of the potent observation by Barth (1962:874) to the effect that "a Church which is not as such an evangelizing Church is either not yet or no longer the Church, or only a dead Church, itself standing in supreme need of renewal by evangelization."   Whatever we might make of this claim, we have been presented in the previous chapter with compelling evidence demonstrating the lack of attention by many established churches to their need to reach the rising post-modern generation with the gospel of Christ. As we have seen, this threatens the very ability of these churches to sustain their witness through the post-modern transition.

6.3.2   Renewing the Tradition

So, if many established churches have come to be bound by a reductionistic traditionalism that compromises and threatens their intergenerational praxis, what hope exists for such churches? In section 2.6.2, we advanced an understanding of the need for the church to engage in an ongoing process of the intergenerational traditioning of the faith. As we saw, this necessitates that the church be willing to entertain a certain tension regarding how its tradition is expressed. Furthermore, it requires that the rising generation be empowered to place its own distinct stamp onto the faith tradition. However, once this process has been compromised, what must

such churches do in order to renew their effectiveness in perpetuating their tradition intergenerationally?

In contrast to the many churches that have clung protectively to their traditional forms, another liminal response being embraced by some church leaders is simply to abandon tradition. This may seem to some like a reasonable and effective way for the church to locate its praxis within what has been described by some as a "post-traditional" society, one in which "inherited traditions play less and less decisive roles in the way that we understand and order our lives" (Carroll 2000:10). As was noted in section 2.4.3, during periods of rapid social discontinuity, the abandonment of tradition can be a very real temptation. Furthermore, as we noted in section 3.2.2.2, a preoccupation with the "new" is a mark of the modern worldview. Thus, some church leaders, upon determining that their traditional institutional frameworks are not working, merely choose to adopt utilitarian values: "What works?" then becomes the crowning question (Mead 1991:40, 41). This often is expressed as a concern to be on "the cutting edge" (Leith 1990:37).

However, a growing body of evidence suggests that the members of the younger generations actually desire to be a part of a renewed tradition, properly understood (Kew 2001:29). For these young people who have been formed in a post-modern world offering few stable reference points, tradition provides a source of orientation (Butler Bass 2004:32). Carroll and Roof (2002:55) reflect upon this:

> Among generation Xers especially, there are mixed feelings about tradition. There is a longing for answers to religious questions—for a "bedrock against this whirl of change," as one person told us—yet an insistence on tolerance, understanding, and openness to other points of view even while asserting their own point of view….[T]here is a paradox in their many spiritual expressions, described simply as wanting an anchor for their lives yet not wanting to be overly tied to it.

As one manifestation of this desire among Xers, Gibbs (2000a), Carroll (2000), Langford (2001), and Webber (2002) each notes a trend among Gen Xers toward embracing the liturgical worship of the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Episcopal churches. As Gibbs (2000a:161) observes, "This attraction is highlighted by the desire of young people to establish deeper roots to compensate for the transience and fragmentation of the world in which they grew up." These young

adults desire to be connected to a larger history and, thus, find ancient symbols, rituals, and practices to be meaningful (Flory & Miller 2007:204). Some of these young people desire to play a role in reinvigorating longstanding traditions. This being so, the outright abandonment of tradition may actually rob the church of one of its richest resources in engaging this generation.

In addition, when efforts are made simply to brush aside tradition, the older members of the congregation tend to respond defensively. Thus, tradition must not be seen merely as something to be dismissed. Furthermore, while leaders sometimes view it in this light, neither should it be seen as a formidable obstacle to change. Rather, tradition should be embraced as an asset to be mined, one that "carries deeply held values embedded within the life of an organization" (Granberg-Michaelson 2004:172). Webber (1999:17) insists that the goal of "honestly incarnat[ing] the historic faith in the emerging culture….will not be accomplished by abandoning the past, but by seeking out the transcultural framework of faith (i.e., the rule of faith) that has been blessed by sociocultural particularity in every period of church history." While the core of the faith must not change, says Webber (:15), the wineskins we employ must be changed to respond to the emerging paradigm. Thus, he asserts, "Our calling is not to reinvent the Christian faith, but, in keeping with the past, to carry forward what the church has asserted from its beginning. We change, therefore, as one of my friends said, 'not to be different, but to remain the same" (:17). So, how might this come about?

Visser't Hooft (1956:109) expresses grave concern over the church's "confusion of forms", by which he means the institutional and organizational aspects of its existence, with its understanding of its own "holiness." His assessment is that, "once that step has been taken, real renewal becomes a practical impossibility." He further indicates that the "self-imprisonment" of the church in institutionalism, characterized by the aims of self-preservation and self-assertion, generates forces of "inertia" that work against renewal. This inertia, he insists, is an "almost insuperable obstacle to renewal" (cf. Shenk 2005:75). This is a very sobering assessment. Surely it introduces into the present discussion a profound awareness of precisely how difficult it can be for some established institutions to experience renewal.

Because of the considerable difficulty of the objective of renewal in established congregations, notes Hadaway (2001:1), some Christian leaders have chosen to "'write off' older, plateaued, or declining churches in order to focus on newer, more healthy congregations for which change comes more easily." However, he suggests, this strategy "may be shortsighted…because the majority of churches in North America are stable or declining." Surely there is something more that the Living God would have us to consider for these churches. As Benke and Benke (2002:38) suggest, the resources that these churches have make them ideal launching platforms for ministry to new generations. That being said, if we choose not merely to dismiss the ongoing relevance of these churches, "we are faced with the problem of what to do about them." Says Hadaway (2001:1), "The problem is one of change, or better yet, transformation" (cf. Roxburgh & Romanuk 2006:18).

6.3.3   The Work of the Spirit

Some established church members, inspired with hope by age-old stories of revival, may respond to the challenges of this moment by praying for a fresh outpouring of the Spirit. Underlying this desire is often a hope that such a work of the Spirit would restore the church to its prior glory. Leith (1990:11-13) notes that it is correct to view the renewal of the church as being rooted in an utter dependence upon the renewing presence of the Spirit in its midst. However, while throughout recent centuries numerous movements of "revival" have sought to give attention to this renewing work of the Spirit, as Shenk (2001:32) suggests, the reality that this series of renewal movements has "failed to change the church at the core" has become a "nagging historical question." In reality, he argues, reform efforts undertaken in the modern era "have not availed to deliver the church from enfeebling compromise."

The reason for this, he asserts, lies with what has been the church's prevailing understanding of its relationship to the broader culture. Within the context of the Christendom paradigm, Shenk (2001:61) suggests, "it made sense to speak of 'revival,' vivifying the spiritually moribund without radical critique of their worldview and the structures of their society." Thus, by the 1840s, the term "conservative" had come to be employed to describe the special relationship whereby Christianity was the "true conserving and developing power of a nation" (:59). This

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tended to cause revivals to be a "backward looking" phenomenon, one devoted to restoring ideals of vitality and morality rooted in the past (Murray 2004:207).

Shenk (2001:62) suggests that "the conjunction of Enlightenment anthropology and revival preaching that emphasized the individual—without relating this to society/church—undermined the meaning of church…This put a premium on program rather than the formation of a community of disciples." Revival campaigns or crusades were planned and became routinized for the purpose of energizing Christians. These gatherings, note Finke and Stark (2005:89), "persisted year in and year out." The key became finding the right methods and techniques and organizing campaigns or crusades (Shenk 2001:62). As a result, however, the effectiveness of these revivals tended to be limited and their impact short-lived (Murray 2004:182, 224). Perhaps this lesson from history might lead us simply to conclude what Visser't Hooft has asserted above: the near impossibility of the renewal of established institutions. Before drawing this conclusion, however, let us continue our consideration of what the renewal of the church might mean today.

If these efforts at renewal have been largely limited in effect, how might we find a better way? We must begin by returning again to the fundamental principle that the renewal of the church is the result of the Spirit's outpouring, a gift from God for which the church must wait: "Hence a renewed and vital church cannot be programmed, arranged, planned" (Leith 1990:11). In the biblical witness on this subject, notes Visser't Hooft (1956:23, 89-90), renewal is not something brought about by the church or by religious leaders, but rather by God. He suggests that the church tends almost inevitably to fall into the worldly way of "going through the motions" of church life and, therefore, essentially becomes a part of the world (:91). When viewed from the perspective of the church's relation to God, this amounts to rebellion, self-seeking, and egocentricity (:23-24). For Visser't Hooft, these struggles with the "forces of the old age" are simply a manifestation within the life of the church of the continued tension between the "already" and "not yet" aspects of God's reign (:30-31). Genuine renewal, thus, is not an act of the church, but rather the work of God affecting the victory of the new age over the old (:90).

Visser't Hooft (1956:84) argues that the entire existence of Christianity on earth is a matter of "a continuously renewed creation." In fact, as Mead (1991:vi) expresses, God is always calling the church to be more than it previously has been. This reality is vividly captured in a quote from Ellul (in Visser't Hooft 1956:84):

> The whole history of the Church is the history of the reformation of the Church by the Spirit....[T]he permanent reformation of the Church is therefore the obedience of the Church to the Spirit; it means accepting that God leads his Church forward and changes it, that the Church does not settle down in a revelation which it treats as if it were its own property, but rather that it is constantly on the lookout to receive the new order which the Spirit brings.

Thus, the story of the Church is a story of many resurrections (Visser't Hooft 1956:67). Through the gift of the Spirit, the church is enabled to remember and recover its identity, not by returning to its past, but rather by returning to its origins in the call of God in Christ (Leith 1990:15-16, 27).

If our most fundamental assertion regarding the renewal of the church is that it is the gift of God through his Spirit, what role, if any, might the church have in promoting renewal? Is there anything the church can do to help foster the conditions for renewal? Leith (:12-13) insists that, while renewal may be a gift of the Spirit, it also entails "human works": "While waiting for the Holy Spirit, we can be at work claiming God's promise…The renewal of the church begins on the human level with….a remembering of what has been bequeathed to us." Visser't Hooft (1956: 34) suggests that the New Testament emphasizes the human role in the renewal process by weaving together three complimentary themes: 1) while the Christian is "a new man," 2) he or she is being renewed, and 3) is to seek renewal. He insists that our struggle with the forces of the old age, the great contradiction between our calling and the reality of our life, should cause us to desire and pray for our renewal (:38-39). Furthermore, our desire for renewal should cause us to be continually on the watch for God's initiative (:91).

Integral to this process is the church's listening to the authoritative voice of scripture. Visser't Hooft (1956:94) suggests that the church's loss of a proper eschatological perspective and its succumbing to the temptation to make its own existence an aim in itself is a tragic by-product of not giving the Bible its rightful place. The church's capacity for radical self-criticism and the renewal of life is lost. Thus,

> If the church which seeks to renew itself takes its lead from some new religious or cultural development or some new technique, it remains in fact within the closed circle of the old world. If it turns for inspiration to some period of its own past it is not directly in touch with the source. It can only break out of the old world and enter into living touch with the new world by submitting itself to the judgement and inspiration of God's revelation itself.
>
> (:92)

Visser't Hooft (:93) insists that it is through listening to the Word of God that God's design, the very *raison d'être* of the church, is rediscovered.

Visser't Hooft (1956:95) also argues that true renewal inexorably entails repentance. Truly, if the church is to have a renewed impact in any era, the call to conversion must begin with the repentance of the one doing the calling (Drane 2000:12). Thus, all genuine movements of renewal have been movements of repentance. As the Spirit, through the testimony of the Word, reminds the church anew of its true identity and calling, the church is challenged to turn from the path of this world and to let itself be renewed (Visser't Hooft 1956:47). Repentance involves this "turning from the old world to the new, from the past to the future, from the closed world to the open heaven, from egocentricity and church-centredness, to God's kingdom" (:96). Thus, repentance is not only an individual practice, but one in which the entire church must engage, for the entire congregation stands under the judgement of God (:58). A repentant church, in its turning from the "old ways," is renewed in its capacity to live by the power of the new age (:47). Repentance constitutes "a positive and creative turning toward the source of life and renewal in God" (Anderson 2001:180).

Above, we have described movements of revival that have been of limited, even short-lived effectiveness. Surely these efforts at renewal were well intentioned. Surely they were born out of an authentic desire to experience the movement of God's Spirit, to live in obedience to the authoritative voice of scripture, and to turn from worldliness. How, then, might contemporary churches desiring to experience renewal fare any better? Certainly, as we will see in the pages that lie ahead, the contemporary renewal of the church will be no less concerned with the work of the Spirit, the voice of scripture, or a willingness to repent. That being said, what might we learn from the example of these previous efforts that could be instructive to the

church in the present and help to promote the renewal of its faithfulness and effectiveness?

Before proceeding with this question, it will be helpful to provide a word of clarification from Howard Snyder (1989:267-313), arguably one of recent decades' leading students of the history of Christian renewal movements, regarding the characteristics of the movements of renewal that have had a sustained impact. Through his extensive analysis, he has determined that, in order for renewal efforts to be of lasting significance, the renewing work of the Spirit, the counsel of the Word, and the commitment to change must come to impact the life of the church in five distinct, yet interrelated categories: the 1) personal, 2) corporate, 3) conceptual, 4) missiological, and 5) structural dimensions. Anderson (2001:182-183) demonstrates a similar perspective in insisting that renewal must entail theological, spiritual, and social repentance, categories that he links closely with a concern for the church's missiological and structural integrity. The renewal movements that have proven to be of lasting impact are those in which all five of these domains ultimately were touched and co-implicated by the work of the Spirit. Snyder (1989:267-313) points to the Wesleyan revival as one example of this. Those efforts that have fallen short of long-term transformational impact have lacked this full-fledged expression (Visser't Hooft 1956:83, 86-90). If the desire for renewal at the present moment in the church's history is to be fulfilled, how might these five dimensions need to come together in contributing to the shape of a renewed church?

6.3.4   The Missional Focus

In this chapter, we are arguing that, if the church is to sustain its witness through the post-modern transition, this must entail a process of *missional* renewal. Essentially, we are asserting that the church has entered into a moment in history in which it is faced with a pivotal opportunity to embrace the implications of the Spirit's work of renewal in all five of the categories outlined by Snyder above. As we have suggested throughout the preceding chapters, established churches find themselves in their current state in large part because of the impact of Christendom era notions of missiology, modern concepts of the Christian faith, and the way in which these two

primary modes of thought have shaped the personal, corporate, and structural dimensions of Christian experience in the modern Western world.

In section 5.2.1, we noted the observation by Hall (1997:1) to the effect that the post-Christendom turn is a development "of reverse proportion" to the changes that occurred in the fourth century. Unfortunately, it does not seem that the solution to a challenge of the magnitude of that which the church presently faces can be reduced to the instantaneous intervention of the Holy Spirit. Thus, as the church seeks its own renewal amid such profound changes, it remains essential that the work of the Spirit, the authoritative counsel of the Word, and a willingness to turn from old ways be permitted to impact the missiological, conceptual, corporate, personal, and structural dimensions of the church's life. Yet, we might feel compelled to ask, how is this to be expressed within our contemporary context?

Fundamentally, the present moment calls for an experience of renewal that entails fresh attention being given to the missiological dimension of the church's life. McNeal (2003:15) asserts that the church in North American "is suffering from severe mission amnesia," having "forgotten why it exists." He adds, "Too many of us have forgotten….Even worse, many of us never have known" (:19). Thus, in a post-Christendom world, the rediscovery of the church's missional identity is the central concept with which the Christian community must grapple (Newbigin 1986:2-3; Goheen 1999:2-3). Shenk (2001:32-33) reflects upon this critical issue: "[T]he church of modern Western culture lives out of the inheritance of Christendom, a church severed from mission. Renewal that does not result in a church renewed in mission is not genuine."

Rather than using the prevailing model of the church, one that Shenk (2001:35) describes as "lacking theological and conceptual integrity," as its starting point in the pursuit of renewal, the church's present circumstances require a change in conceptual perspective that is theological in nature (Gibbs 2000a:31). Schmiechen (1996:96) suggests that, while theological reflection "cannot produce reform or renewal," it can help "turn our attention to the church's true treasure." Thus, as Shenk (2001:72) asserts, "Theology that is worked out as a community-building response to the contemporary situation will be lifegiving." Many commentators who share this

perspective see the crisis of the present moment as an exciting and powerful opportunity. While many Christians grieve the sense of loss that has accompanied the decline of Christendom, others find hope in the prospect that "the end of this epoch actually spells the beginning of a new flowering of Christianity" (Frost 2006:7).

From a theological perspective, the missional renewal of the church lies not in a commitment to *missions* as understood in the Christendom era, nor necessarily in whether the church itself possesses a clearly articulated mission statement, but rather in its relationship to the mission of God. As Shenk (2001:32) asserts, "The sole source for renewal of the church is the *missio Dei* as the basis for its life in relationship to the world." Riddell (1998:18) posits that the mistaken notion that "God has given the church the task of mission is bordering on blasphemous." The theme of mission cannot properly be understood primarily as a derivative of the nature of the church, nor as something that somehow emerges alongside its existence.

Mission, as Bosch (1991:390) suggests, "is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God." The *missio Dei* actually precedes the existence of the church. Mission constitutes the very rationale for which the church was created, the essence of its calling; it is integral to the reality into which the church has been invited to participate (Nel 2003:16-18; Riddell 1998:118; Guder 2000:51). Understanding this can help us appreciate the logic of Brunner's (in Bosch 1995:32) bold statement to the effect that "The Church exists by mission as fire exists by burning." Stated simply, mission constitutes an integral ingredient in the church's true identity. As Hunsberger (1998:82) suggests, "the church's essence is missional, for the calling and sending action of God forms its identity." Wright (2006:24) explains that the term *missional* is "an adjective denoting something that is related to or characterized by mission, or has the qualities, attributes, or dynamics of mission." In the case of the church, it denotes "our committed participation as God's people, at God's invitation and command, in God's own mission within the history of God's world for the redemption of God's creation" (:23).

Apart from engaging with a missional theology, insists Bosch (1995:32), "we will not achieve more than merely patch up the church." In essence, this moment presents the church with the challenge of moving to a new paradigm of mission, one that is able to

address the fundamental issues associated with the magnitude of the cultural shifts taking place (Mead 1991:58; Van Gelder 1996:27, 28). Roxburgh (1997:4) suggests that the church's experience of marginalization presents the opportunity for a "radical reformation" consisting of a renewed missionary encounter with culture. McNeal (2003:18) colourfully describes the church as needing "a missional fix….a rebooting of the mission, a radical obedience to an ancient command." The shift in thinking this will entail is "so profound that it resembles a deconversion, a deprogramming that we typically associate with helping people escape the clutches of a cult" (:11). Thus, while the church's liminal condition provides a tremendous missional opportunity (Roxburgh 1997:2, 4), the structures and thought patterns with which the church is acquainted pose immense challenges for the task of missional renewal (Riddell 1998:12-13; Miller 2004:188).

Van Gelder (2007:15-26) notes that the growing recognition of the need for the missional renewal of the church in North America has indeed emerged from theological origins. He sees the renewed interest in foreign missions that occurred during the period of 1811-1910 and the maturing development of a missiology of foreign missions during the period of 1910-1950 as important precursors to the rediscovery of the church's missional nature in North America (:14-19). Beginning in 1950, the conversation surrounding the theology of mission began to shift toward a focus upon the *missio Dei* and the reign of God. Notes Van Gelder (:20), "The concept of the *missio Dei*, though not without controversy, has proved to be a Copernican revolution within the discipline of missiology." This began to set in motion a change in focus from a theology of foreign mission to a theology of mission (:20).

As one result of this development, among missiological scholars, "churches and their congregations everywhere began to be conceived as being in a mission location" (2007:23-24). However, as we have seen, many churches during this era demonstrated an unwillingness or inability to engage in God's mission. In addition, missiologists struggled to bring their insights to bear on the need for strategic transformation of the North American church. Van Gelder (:24-26) sees the church's preoccupation with church growth thinking during the period of 1975-1995 as a divergence from the advancement of a missiological understanding of congregations.

However, since 1995, inspired by the legacy of Leslie Newbigin, a new conversation has emerged in the North American context. Notes Van Gelder (:27), "[T]his new movement is much more explicit about bringing the connection of the *missio Dei* with the kingdom of God into conversation with particular congregations with respect to the emerging postmodern context."

In light of where we find ourselves at this present moment in the historical unfolding of God's mission, we certainly can affirm what has been articulated above regarding the cruciality of the Spirit's work in enabling the church to experience missional renewal. Shenk (2005:78) asserts that mission "is the work of the Spirit, who indwells the church." Guder (2000:50) insists that the Holy Spirit's presence in indwelling the church has always been integrally linked with the purpose of mission. The giving of the Spirit at Pentecost "may also be celebrated as the divine event which turned the people of God into a missionary people, opening their ranks to receive men and women of all nations, tongues, races, and classes….and empowering them to move out into all the world" (cf. Bosch 1991:40). Thus, from Pentecost forward, "the church must be understood primarily and centrally in terms of its mission as God's people….for this purpose the promised Holy Spirit is given to it" (Guder 2000:51).

In emphasizing the role of the Spirit in both renewal and mission, we furthermore can affirm McNeal's (2003:27) identification of a vital "missional spirituality" as a key ingredient that is necessary if the church is to reach its culture. The contemporary North American church, he suggests, lacks such a spirituality. There exists a deep need for the Spirit of God to impart to the church a heart for the things of God (Jackson 2002:31, 53). If the Spirit of God authentically brings about a work of renewal within the church, insists Riddell (1998:118), this will move the church toward missional engagement. As he explains, "The Spirit is at work in the world, drawing the world toward Christ; actively luring people who have no contact with the institutional church." The genuine work of the Spirit in the hearts of the church, thus, ought to redirect the faith community from a preoccupation with themselves toward a concern for being the people of God for others. The very concept of the renewal of the church, we can assert, implies the rediscovery of its apostolic missionary character (Visser't Hooft 1956:100). As Moltmann (1978:109) articulates, "the renewed church

is one engaged in mission, participating in the action of God for the liberation of man."

This renewed heart for the mission of God will generate within the church a fresh sense of needing to prioritize evangelism (Kew 2001:39; Shenk 2001:72-75). Visser't Hooft (1956:101) chooses to describe mission and evangelism as the "normal task" of the whole church. Thus, the church cannot rest in its past evangelistic accomplishments. Embracing "the evangelizing task" more fully must be understood as a key factor enabling the church to "realize its integrity" more wholly (Shenk 2001:72, 73). As Shenk (:73) explains, "The church cannot sustain its own conviction for the gospel only on the basis of history. The world will not feel challenged by a body that is nostalgic for a time now gone. The church's own experience of the gospel gains vitality in direct proportion to its engagement in witness now." This is consistent with Lohfink's (1999:136) assertion that the church cannot be renewed if it does not accept "the 'todayness' of what has happened to it." Lohfink insists that this requires the church to believe that God's promises can be fulfilled in the present and that he is at work in the world today.

In contrast to conventional modern notions of witness, we must be careful to emphasize that the missional renewal of the church calls for its witness to be understood in a holistic light. The church has been empowered and liberated by the Spirit to manifest an "alternative social order", one that bears witness to God's redemptive purposes for the world (Dietterich 1998:146-147; Guder 2000:58). In essence, God's intent is that the church might point beyond itself as a sign, instrument, foretaste, and agent of the reign of God (Bosch 1995:33; Hunsberger 1996:15-16). The church, says Guder (2000:67), is God's "means to an end."

When witness is viewed in this holistic light, Guder (2000:62) suggests, it must be understood as entailing "*far more* than particular oral messages." Witness involves the tangible demonstration in the life and activity of God's people of the fact that God's rule is breaking in among the disciples of Jesus Christ (:62). Christian witness thus has "a profoundly ethical dimension" that accompanies the church's spoken witness (:70). Essentially, suggests Guder (:89), the people of God "translate the gospel into practices that demonstrate the meaning of God's love in Christ." The

totality of the church's life, as well as that of each member of which it is composed, is meant to provide an embodied witness to the good news (:56). This being the case, says Barrett (1998:128), witness is not only what the church does, but what it *is*. The life of the church is the "primary form of its witness" (Guder 2000:68). A full-fledged understanding of witness, thus, must be seen as entailing the *being* of witness, the *doing* of witness, and the communication ("*saying*") of witness (:70).

A renewed commitment to its identity as a witnessing people will foster a fresh concern within the church to engage its context. Following in the way of Jesus, the church will strive to be related incarnationally to its community (Frost & Hirsch 2003:12, 37) and to reach out to all people (Gibbs 2000a:19). Thompson (2003:186) notes that this will pose a profound, and perhaps painful, challenge for many congregations:

> The more a congregation is different from its context, the more renewal that will be required…Congregations that are more committed to doing what they are doing now rather than adapting to new mission opportunities are less likely to take two necessary steps. One is to look at their context and themselves with eyes wide open. Another is to entertain important options in light of honest self-assessment.

Nonetheless, the missional renewal of the church must be rooted in an appreciation of the contextuality of its ministry (Van Gelder 2007:122; Hastings 2007:42). As Van Gelder (:127) notes, "A Spirit-led congregation will learn to adapt and recontextualize its ministry to address the challenges and opportunities that it faces [within a changing context]—always forming and reforming." He further suggests that the church must embrace "a dynamic relationship between a congregation and its local context" (cf. McNeal 2003:33).

In turn, this renewed engagement with a changing context will challenge the church to discover fresh insights regarding its call to proclaim and embody the gospel. Guder (2000:71-204) insists that this reflects the "continuing conversation" of the church. In other words, he explains, through the transcultural process, the church itself is repeatedly "evangelized." This requires the church's own members to hear and be challenged by the present implications of the truth of the gospel. The logic of this, explains Guder (:37), is rooted in the reality that the church's understanding of the good news of God's reign within any single context is always partial. The call to

continuing conversion draws attention to the comprehensiveness of the church's missionary calling. If the gospel is intended by God to be translated and adapted into the particularity of every culture, then the limitations in understanding native to any single context must constantly be stretched (Guder 2000:83; Shenk 2005:74). Thus, as Riddell (1998:118) insists, the church that is being renewed in missional focus will turn from resting upon expressions of faithfulness born from a passing era for the sake of moving forward in obedience to God's call in Christ. As he asserts, "Mission always requires leaving behind the shelters of false religious orthodoxy, and treading the virginal unexplored lands of discovery."

This is not meant to be understood as an endorsement of some sort of pragmatic "compromise" of the church's core beliefs or an abdication of its cherished tradition, but rather as a call to faithful innovation (Finke & Stark 2005:251). This necessitates that the church strive to discover what it means to live within an appropriate tension between faithfulness and relevance in relation to its cultural context. Barrett (1998:114) describes the redemptive tension that the missional church must strive to cultivate in its relationship to its context:

> The vast majority of the church's particular communities share with their neighbors a primary culture or cultures, which include their language, food, perhaps styles of dress, and other customs. But they are called to point beyond that culture to the culture of God's new community…[T]he church is always bicultural, conversant in the language and customs of the surrounding culture and living toward the language and ethics of the gospel. One of the tasks of the church is to translate the gospel so that the surrounding culture can understand it, yet help those believers who have been in that culture move toward living according to the behaviors and communal identity of God's missional people.

For the church to compromise its faithfulness to the gospel in favour of cultural "relevance" is to abdicate its proper place as a community of "resident aliens" (Hauerwas & Willimon 1989:11-13). At the same time, the promotion of faithfulness at the expense of relevance represents a failure to live in accordance with the incarnational nature of the gospel message. Thus, asserts Hunsberger (1998:79), "The struggle to be both faithful and relevant is constant for every church. It is the church's calling to embody the gospel's 'challenging relevance.'"

In maintaining this tension, the church follows the example of Christ. Describing Jesus, Shenk (2001:46) suggests that "He approached the culture of his day with infinite compassion and courageous truth telling…he started where people were and pointed them to life renewed through God's loving redemptive power." Shenk (:53) notes that the call to follow in the way of Christ caused the early church to be charged by their contemporaries with "upsetting the world, a charge that was undoubtedly true, for as a result of their preaching people turned against the accepted ways of their culture in response to a new authority." The witness of the early church "resulted in disruption of socioeconomic structures and inspired people to give their highest allegiance to Jesus the Messiah." Similarly, suggests Shenk (:54), if a contemporary church lives "under the inspiration of its head" and truly believes the gospel, "the conviction that the world is on a course that leads to death" will cause it to have "no other choice than to invite men and women to become a part of God's new order, the kingdom of life." Such a church addresses "the heart of matters and lays bare the injustice and evil that mark personal and social relations" (:55).

The challenge of embodying the redemptive tension between gospel and culture also invites the church to grapple with the relationship between its tradition and the task of innovation (Butler Bass 2004:44-45). It calls the church to demonstrate a readiness to change by reaching into the present in an effort to achieve renewed relevance. It also invites the church to employ a "chain of memory" to reach into the past, in order that it might rediscover and reengage the vital essence that once gave shape to its tradition (:42, 47, 50). As Butler Bass asserts, "anamnesis, the 'recalling to memory of the past,' must be central to congregational life" because, if a community is to be enduring, it must entail some notion of tradition.

This will require the congregation to exercise theological imagination as it lives out the biblical tradition within community (Butler Bass 2004:47). As it does so, some aspects of the church's particular tradition may, in a new context, be found to be inconsistent with the essence of the faith. However, while challenging what needs to be challenged, the church also must find ways to appropriate the best of its tradition in the present (Conder 2006:82). This enables the tradition to be "fluidly" and freshly reinterpreted and re-appropriated. It furthermore will challenge the congregation to consider innovative approaches to framing its practices, rituals, and symbols to be

meaningful in a changing culture. While this is sure to entail the experience of pain accompanying the loss or changing of cherished elements of the tradition, it also is the path to life (:82).

The missional renewal of tradition will have definite implications for the structure of the church (Jackson 2002:68). As Guder (1998:228) posits, authentic submission to the Lordship of Christ will gain structural manifestation. This is necessary because the church is simultaneously both a spiritual and a sociological phenomenon, a concrete social entity (Van Gelder 2000:25). Nel (2003:67) notes that the church "always remains more than a mere sociological reality. It is, above all, a theological reality." However, while the church may be a people constituted and called by the supernatural power of the Spirit of God, this does not mean that it is has been delivered from the "the general laws of social mechanisms." Thus, as a social entity, the church must be conscious of the unavoidability of its need to introduce some means of organization into its life and efforts. Snyder (1996:136) insightfully observes that churches must be structured in a way that promotes the work and life of the Spirit within the church; while structure cannot produce life, he notes, the lack of such structure frequently precedes death. However, as Visser't Hooft (1956:77) notes, contrary to Luther's assertion that the "Word will do it," meaning that the Word would somehow bring its own forms into existence, this process does not occur without considerable care and intentionality.

As a people called to exist in service to the mission of God, the church also must be careful that its approach to organizational structure be conceived in a manner consistent with its missional nature and able to functions in support of its true calling (Van Gelder 2000:37; 158). As Van Gelder (2000:37) expresses, "The church is. The church does what it is. The church organizes what it does." Van Gelder asserts that keeping these three aspects in the correct sequence is crucial to the church's structural integrity. Furthermore, as a local congregation seeks to organize its shared life in a manner consistent with the marks of the reign of God, this actually serves as an vital expression of the holistic witness of that congregation (Guder 1998:226-227); essentially, the structure employed by the church constitutes an "incarnational" translation of the transforming message of the gospel within the particularity of a given sociological context (:222, 227).

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The church truly seeking to be renewed cannot stop short of this "incarnational" transformation. Shenk (2001:83) cautions that, though the church, "like all human enterprises, readily looks to its structures to ensure the continuity of the faith," it must recognize that these structures also are time-bound. Thus, recognizing that "[i]nvariably structures undergo change in response to the environment, which itself is continually changing," church structures must remain "flexible and adaptable" if they are to avoid being regarded as "obsolete" and ultimately "discarded" (:84-85). As churches strive to remain vitally connected to their changing cultural contexts, they will find it essential to dismantle "archaic forms that impede missionary witness and the devising of new structures that support the mission" (Shenk 2005:78). Indeed, as Gibbs (2000a:58) cautions, "New wine cannot be poured into old wineskins or a new patch sewn onto an old garment" (Matt. 9:16-17). Thus, because Jesus "brings a newness which cannot be confined within old forms," structures that "inhibit the expression and advance of the Gospel…will need to be replaced by those which facilitate the expression of life" if the church is to avoid "fossilization" (cf. Snyder & Runion 2002:54).

This human activity of cultivating the church's institutions and practices over time must be understood as an arena of the Spirit's ongoing activity (Smith 206:130). Nel (2003:2-9) helps us to appreciate this through his compelling description of the renewal of the church as a forward looking process of "upbuilding." "Upbuilding" is much more than merely "an ordinary social process of change" (:67). It is fundamentally the work of God's Spirit. However, the process of "upbuilding" is not exempt from the challenges native to any human organization. This being the case, the church must remain attentive to the question of what God wants to do in and through its life. The human effort of building up the church is meant to occur in service to God's activity (:16-18). It is a matter of constant, responsible reformation in the congregation's life and operations: its thinking, attitudes, and functioning (:68). Notes Hall (1997:42), "God permits and commands the church to be involved in its own self-assessment and change." Through adapting to the plan and work of God, the church is able to experience true stability and continuity (Visser't Hooft 1956:84). As Jackson (2002:53) expresses, "only a Church that reforms or revolutionizes itself in

response to the Spirit's promptings is able to be a channel and enable renewal to work its way through the life of the body of Christ."

Barrett et al (2004:xii-xiv) offer the following summary of the patterns of life that will characterize a church striving to embody a renewed commitment to missional faithfulness:

1. A commitment to the church's missional vocation. This will cause the church to redefine "success" and "vitality" in terms of faithfulness to God's calling and sending.

2. An emphasis on biblical formation and discipleship. The authoritative voice of scripture will factor prominently in the life of this congregation.

3. A willingness to take risks as a contrast community. This church understands itself as different from the world because of its participation in the life, death, and resurrection of its Lord. It strives to grapple with challenging questions about the church's cultural captivity and with the ethical and structural implications of its missional vocation.

4. The exercise of practices that demonstrate God's intent for the world. A missional church is indicated by how Christians behave toward one another.

5. An understanding of worship as public witness to the in-breaking reign of God.

6. A vital dependence upon the presence and power of the Holy Spirit within the congregation.

7. An awareness of pointing toward the reign of God. In part, this means that the church is conscious of the fact that its own response it incomplete and that its conversion is a continuing necessity.

8. An understanding of missional authority as the shared authority given by the Holy Spirit to the entire body.

So, what will it look like for these patterns to gain expression contextually within those established churches that endeavour to experience missional renewal within the post-modern transition? What specific implications will arise for the approach that the church takes to its life, practices, and structures? Rendle (2002:137) notes that renewal requires the redefinition of purpose, while Riddell (1998:90) suggests that it requires new vision and imagination. As the Spirit of God causes local congregations

to gain a renewed missional vision and sense of purpose at this moment in its history, what fresh expressions will this cause to emerge? Clearly, the renewed church cannot look the same as the pre-Christendom church, for it cannot separate itself from the residue of the Christendom era (Murray 2004:205). But, what will it look like?

Conder (2006:85) posits that the transition into the emerging culture of post-modernism is indeed an opportunity for the church to rediscover its mission and for its traditions to be re-enlivened. As he asserts, "Our goal is not to be a postmodern church or to affirm postmodernism any more than our goal is to reject any all things associated with this worldview. Our goal is to embody the gospel of Jesus Christ authentically as a community in an ever-changing culture" (:43). This will necessitate the "deindigenization" of the gospel from its assimilation into the prevailing culture of modernity (Turner 1993:63).   It also will require the adoption of a missional hermeneutic that shapes and guides the continuing formation of the church in a changing society (Guder 1998:227). As the church finds ways to span the "yawning gap between the Christian message and the quest and questions that mark our culture," it will be enabled "to draw individuals, households and communities into the life of grace that marks the Church" (Avis 2003:17).

Riddell (1998:18) notes that "God's missiological adventure proceeds within history, and as many as are willing are invited to share in it. It is an open river which flows where it will, into which we may plunge if we have courage enough." However, Hall (1997:39) questions whether the church will merely allow the current period of transition to "happen to us", or whether we will take an active role in influencing the process. As he proposes, intentionality may be the great key to the church's future: "[E]ndings can also be beginnings; and if we are courageous enough to enter into this ending thoughtfully and intentionally, we will discover a beginning that may surprise us" (:43, 51). McManus (2001:89) would like to see the church serve as a "catalyst of change" for the sake of God's reign within the broader society. However, in order for this to occur, the church will need to experience both an "inner" and an "outer" transformation (Goheen 1999:4). This can only come through struggle and through a conversion in our understanding of the church and its role in the world (Shenk 2005:75).

6.4   The Need for Generation X

In section 5.4.1, we discovered that one of the most blatant effects of local churches' failure to engage effectively in change amid the post-modern transition is the increasing absence of Gen Xers from their pews. As we have seen, many of these churches have merely chosen to dismiss the members of this generation in a manner that uncritically mirrors the broader mood of society. Nonetheless, a central assertion of this study is that, if established churches are to make serious efforts at missional renewal in the post-modern transition, they must come to recognize the essentialness of reengaging the members of this dismissed and denigrated generation. Within this transitional passage, Generation X provides an essential link in at least two critical respects.

First is a simple matter of pragmatics. As was articulated in the preceding chapter, the capacity of established churches to sustain their witness into the future is jeopardized by the absence of this generation. As Householder (1999:44-45) observes,

> The church body has need for all parts to be active in order to be whole. Yet, if we take an honest look at many of our congregations, we will discover that we are missing some very important parts. Generation X is, generally speaking, missing in action!

In order to avoid a doubtful future, roughly twenty-five percent of the church needs to be composed of young adults (Long 2004:36). Thus, as Shawchuck and Heuser (1996:257-258) insist, congregations failing to renew their connections with the rising generations "will find their homogeneous pool drying up and will be confronted with…the slow decline to extinction." They add that those congregations that attempt "to just skip over problem generations like Generation X, and wait for the next generation to come along…will likely not survive beyond 2025."

As was already suggested in section 5.4.5, churches may simply look with hope to the greatly esteemed, allegedly neo-traditionalist Millennials as their hope for the future. This mindset is reinforced by the work of Eemen (2002:104), who employs Strauss and Howe's cyclical generational model (see Appendix B) in arguing that there is a predictable ebb and flow to the religious patterns that occur among the generations.

This model essentially provides the assurance of the inevitability of future renewal, with the Millennials destined to be the next generation to lead the way in achieving this. However, this cyclical model of Strauss and Howe has been subjected to significant critique. One criticism is that this view is not entirely compatible with a Christian view of history. More significantly for this present discussion, while this theory may provide intriguing speculation regarding the relationship between generations and the social and spiritual dynamics of society, it does not adequately address the implications of a change of the magnitude of a vast paradigm shift. Surely, the church cannot rest assured that the future offers them an inevitable generationally-driven cycle of renewal.

There are some clear indications that the religious behaviour of Millennials is worthy of optimism. Benke and Benke (2002:82) assert that, while, "as postmodernists they are open to all religious persuasions and have a pick-and-mix attitude," and while they seem to question the exclusive claims of Christianity, Millennials are displaying evidence of being more open to the church than their Xer predecessors. In Smith and Denton's (2005:32) extensive study of Millennial teens, the vast majority of respondents identified themselves as "Christians." This study also revealed that, in contrast to the "spiritual seeker" description that seems fitting for many Boomers and Xers, Millennials are participating in considerable numbers in conventional religious traditions. This conclusion is supported by other studies of Millennial involvement in religious organizations. In one poll cited by Howe and Strauss (2000:34), Millennial teens identified "religion" as the second-strongest influence in their lives, behind parents, but ahead of teachers, peers, and the media. Howe and Strauss further observe that, "The share of kids who regularly go to church is down a bit from Gen Xers at the same age-but in an era when churchgoing is becoming an increasingly family-oriented activity, it may be rising relative to all other Americans." Miller (2003:108) references one survey conducted among 217,000 Millennial sixth through twelfth graders in which sixty-three percent listed a religious community as an asset in their lives.

This being said, while there are many reasons to be optimistic regarding the future contribution that Millennials may make within the established church, there also are manifold reasons to remain cautious. Forecasts regarding the future of their

involvement in such institutions are mixed. According to Smith and Denton (2005:67), of those teens presently belonging to a congregation, 77 percent indicated intending to be a part of that same kind of congregation at the age of twenty-five. At the same time, while a survey conducted in 2002 found 44 percent of ninth grade males and 73 percent of ninth grade females involved in a religious community, this same survey revealed that only 39 percent of males and 31 percent of females identified such involvement as high school seniors (Miller 2003:19). This decline in involvement through the high school years is consistent with what some observers are forecasting regarding the future religious behaviour patterns of the members of this generation. For example, Howe and Strauss (2000:183) suggest the following: "Millennials expect to focus more on outer-world achievement, and less on inner-world spiritualism, than their Boomer parents. By the time they reach their parents' age, they expect to spend less time on religion, roughly the same amount of time on family matters, and more time on careers, government, and technology." While it would be difficult to know entirely what to make of the validity of these forecasts, it seems clear that established churches cannot merely count on future Millennial involvement as the solution that will stem the tide of decline.

Second, we must acknowledge that, if churches desire to engage in renewed mission within a post-modern world, Gen Xers will provide an important link. Even if we think entirely without reference to intergenerational issues or post-modern culture, we can affirm that the effectiveness of churches in reaching Xers is an indication of their missional vitality. As Shenk (2005:74) notes, "There are no people to whom [the church] is not responsible to witness concerning God's saving purpose." This means that, if a church is to be engaged in truly contextual ministry, it should be striving to mirror the full social mix of the community in which it is located (we will return to a more penetrating exploration of this point in chapter seven) (Van Gelder 1998:70). Thus, we could expect that effective missional churches would be striving to reach Gen Xers and to see the members of this generation constitute a percentage of the congregation comparable to the makeup of the community at large. Shenk (2005:75) suggests that the proof of the church's missionary character "will be demonstrated by its response to the world." Demographically speaking, Xers clearly comprise a significant part of the world in which many established churches find themselves.

Beyond this, however, we can recognize that Gen X plays an important role in helping local congregations respond to the changes associated with the emergence of a post-modern world. The church presently is being provided an opportunity to recast its faith and practices in ways that are meaningful for a new culture (Roof & Clark 2002:214). Nonetheless, as was demonstrated in chapter five, it is difficult for many church members and their leaders to understand or respond to the post-modern realities by which they are surrounded (Hudson 2004:16-17). Thus, "For the church to be effective and authentic in this day," suggests Conder (2006:43), "we must better understand postmodernity, become conversant with postmodern people, and be able to function in the midst of many postmodern assumptions."

This being said, Kitchens (2003:36) suggests that we may be tempted to wait several decades until we have a much clearer grasp of the changes in our culture before beginning to marshal a response to post-modernity. As Schaller (1999:75-76, 77) notes, history has shown there to be "a normal lag of two or three or four decades between the introduction of a culture-changing concept and the time when the churches begin to adapt to a new way of life." However, posits Kitchens (2003:36), we already have the resources we need to begin this process of discernment immediately. Prominent among these resources is the presence of post-modern young adults within the church (cf. Reifschneider 1999:36; McLaren 2000:180). Hudson (2004:11) posits that "Generations X, Y, and Z will always be more comfortable in the postmodern world than their elders will." Thus, the more that the presence of young adults in the church is taken into consideration, suggests Kitchens (2003:76), "the more clarity the church as a whole will have about the boundary between its worldview and values and those of the surrounding culture."

Nonetheless, as we saw in chapter five, the established members of many congregations struggle to understand post-modern young people (Drane 2000:117). As we also have seen, this has manifested itself within the church in a number of unfortunate ways. Nonetheless, Rendle (2002:6) argues that, "unless congregations learn to manage the current generational differences and expectations, they will have to struggle even harder to pass on the faith to the generational cohorts that are beginning to line up behind those now in the congregation" (cf. Hammett & Pierce 2007:6). The accelerated pace of cultural change makes it essential to keep up with

what is occurring within the emerging generations (Twenge 2006:8). Therefore, the very differences that can cause conflict within congregations can also be seen as opportunities for creative response (Raines 2003:44).

Gibbs and Bolger (2005:22) suggest that a preoccupation with generational differences "has done much more harm than good for those churches that believe the church's main problem is a generational one." They note, as we have done, that "[g]enerational issues are imbedded in the much deeper cultural and philosophical shift from modernity to postmodernity." Thus, as churches become attentive to the widespread demographic trends occurring around them, it is essential that they grasp the reality that the changes taking place, though manifested generationally, are not merely generational (i.e., Xer) trends, but rather larger worldview changes (Kew 2001:68; McManus 2001:56).

Nonetheless, it is precisely for this reason that the much maligned Xer generation is needed desperately during this time of transition (Regele 1995:225; Conder 2006:182). As Corpus (1999:14) asserts, though it often fails to do so, the need for the church to listen to the members of this generation is great. Some Gen Xer Christians, notes Kew (2001:26-27), have come to describe their place within the church as a generational "interim ministry." Because of their chronological proximity to the post-modern transition, Kew (2001:26-27, 126) insists, Xers should be recognized as a "catalyst generation" and "hinge generation," one that might help the church to deal with the tensions surrounding the transition beyond modernity. A rejection of them, he suggests, constitutes a denial of the true circumstances in which the church finds itself. The members of this generation provide the church with a "transitional case study" for its movement into ministry in the post-modern world (Long 2004:59). Thus, as Drane (2000:117) asserts, the challenge associated with engaging the emerging post-modern generations constitutes an issue of central importance in the church's mission today.

Fowler (1995:10) explains that the contribution of the rising generation actually plays an important role in promoting the renewal of a tradition: "The cumulative tradition is selectively renewed as its contents prove capable of evoking and shaping the faith of

new generations...As these elements come to be expressive of the faith of new adherents, the tradition is extended and modified, thus gaining fresh vitality." Integral to this process is the capacity of young people to foster sensitivity to neglected needs in the face of institutional entrenchment. This has been a recurring theme throughout church history (Strommen et al 1972:245). In every generation, insists Shenk (2001:12), "The tension produced by the discrepancy between churchly reality and official creed has concerned people…to press for renovation of the church so that it might live wholly under the lordship of Jesus Christ rather than in subservience to worldly power, and that the church might demonstrate in its own life a commitment to righteousness/justice" (cf. Visser't Hooft 1956:112).

At the present moment, the perspective offered by young adults is as significant and essential as ever. Mahedy and Bernardi (1994:146) advocate the need for the elder generations to understand and appropriate the vision of Gen X as a critical consideration: "The tendencies we see arising among the Christians of Generation X are enormously important, because they represent an intuitive and practical effort to live as Christians in this technological civilization." Thus, As Mahedy and Bernardi (:48) observe, "Humanly speaking, upon the excruciating difference between the intuitions of Generation X and those of its immediate predecessors rests the hope of the earth's future." Truly, they add, "Generation X stands at a historical juncture…The first postmodern generation can also be the first 'post-Constantinian'" (:50). Tapia (1994:2-3) anticipates that Xers eventually will "rewrite" the rules of society, including the church. Thus, the more proactive a stance the church can take toward the insights of this generation, the better it will be served as it prepares to embrace the future.

Kitchens (2003:83) expects that, as a result of their ready awareness of the "divergence" between the values of the church and those of the larger culture, missional engagement with the world "may be the one [arena] in which our postmodern members will most naturally take the lead." Mahedy and Bernardi (1994:50, 51) offer valuable insight into such a prospect:

> The postmodern world requires a radical, profound Christian life and witness. We believe this is the vocation to which God is calling the Christians of Generation X…Christian Xers, deprived of much that their elders took for granted, and with little esteem in the eyes of many, are well placed by God—

precisely because they lack so much—to become the foundational generation of the post-Constantinian Church.

Because of this, predicts Kew (2001:30), these young adults will place a greater focus on integrity of mission in a way that challenges "those ideas, doctrines, ethnicities, and issues that previously separated us." As we saw in section 4.5.4, the members of this generation are hungry to be engaged in a sense of mission that makes a tangible difference within their circles of friendship, neighbourhoods, and communities. For these young adults, mission "is more of a verb rather than a noun" (Howard Merritt 2007:84).

Furthermore, while many Millennials may share the same disdain toward the stereotypical Gen X slacker as the rest of society (Howe & Strauss 2000:56), it is expected that this younger generation still will look to Generation X for pragmatic guidance (Gambone 1998:15); thus, while elder generations may be tempted to ignore the significance of Xers and opt to focus on the Millennial cohort, these generations would do well to take to heart Regele's (1995:224) observation that "the most likely generation to put it together [in this revisioning period] and make it work on a practical level" is Generation X. Thus, in light of all that stands to be gained from a genuine openness to this generation, Reifschneider (1999:36) seems to offer a sensible proposal in suggesting that the Gen Xers are "the group of people to start with" in bringing about change amid the post-modern transition.

Roxburgh (2005:67) suggests that the shift through which society presently is passing likely may take two or three generations (cf. McLaren 2000:189-190). This being the case, "The processes of change we're all involved in is more than a battle between two groups over style or generational difference." He suggests that the generation that will give concrete shape to new forms of missional life might not even be born yet (:138). Roxburgh indicates that those who are situated differently within this transition, those whom he describes as "liminals" and "emergents" need one another. While not speaking directly to generational distinctions *per se*, we can assert that this distinction does have a generational corollary. Thus, his observations certainly are applicable here. In the face of the struggle to understand how to be the church in a radically changing context, these groups can help each other "lead church systems through discontinuous change."

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6.5 The Importance of Process

The things articulated above are deeply important and exciting to envision. Clearly, the present moment requires the church to open itself to change if it is to be faithful to its true calling (Anderson 1990:140; Peterson 1999:160; Conder 2006:12). Furthermore, traditional patterns clearly are not likely to be effective in engaging many Xers (Fickensher 1999:67). Thus, notes White (2001:177), "In our modern world, method and style must be brought kicking and screaming into the twenty-first century or else we will lose our full potential for reaching the postmodern Generation X and beyond for Christ." However, therein rests the problem. As we saw in chapter five, all too often efforts at change within established churches are indeed accompanied by "kicking and screaming." As was evident in that chapter, this has its origins in the church's rootedness in the marriage of Christendom and modernity, the values of the generations currently in leadership, and the specific ways in which the church has chosen to order its intergenerational praxis in relation to the intergenerational praxis of society. To a large degree, the church has looked critically, even dismissively, upon Xers and has prevented them from an experience of full participation in the life and leadership of the church. In the face of this reality, we might be compelled to ask how established congregations can come to recognize and embody the value of engaging the members of Generation X.

Furthermore, we have seen that, from the vantage point of Generation X, the church is a place in which they expect to experience brokenness and marginalization similar to that which they have experienced within the broader society. This has been shown to be an offence to some of the most strongly held values of this generation. As a result, many Xers have left the church altogether, while many of those who remain are disillusioned and disengaged. Thus, it is nice to assert in theory that established churches should reconnect with Generation X. However, the conspicuous absence of this generation from the ranks of many established churches poses a significant challenge. How can these congregations reach the members of a generation that has developed such scepticism toward the established church? Pursuing renewed ties with Gen Xers is not something that is going to happen automatically. Furthermore, missional renewal is not likely to come about as a result of an instantaneous intervention by God's Spirit. How then might local churches engage in a process of

change that is faithful to God's purposes, that responds appropriately to the barriers described above, and that invites all generations to journey together in a way that fosters missional renewal?

6.5.1   The Shortcomings of Strategy

Clearly, the church is in need of such a process. As we saw in section 5.2.2.2, in recent decades, the Church Growth Movement has tended to provide the chief script by which churches might choose to respond to the questions posed above. Van Gelder (2007:26) notes that, though church growth thinking was largely discredited in the academy by the early 1980s, "Within much of the broader church in the United States today, the ethos of church growth is still very much present and represents the functional missiology of many congregations." As a result, notes Roxburgh (1997:21), standard pastoral responses to marginalization tend to reflect "the immanent values of modernity." As an example of this, he cites "the cultural values of instrumental rationality, expressed in 'if it works and is successful then it is true,'" as guiding much pastoral strategy (:20).

Within this framework, it follows that challenges like the absence of Xers can be addressed through identifying and adopting new strategies for "church growth" (Van Gelder 1998:72-73). While these do accomplish some good, these strategies often are merely tactical attempts to regain a sense that the church is accomplishing something of significance, "to breathe new life into old structures" (Regele 1995:183). As Roxburgh (1997:20) articulates, "Technique is the primary method for re-establishing the church's place in the culture." Van Gelder (2000:68-69) notes that, as a result of this mindset, the focus on engaging in strategic action *on God's behalf* causes "endless attention" to be "invested in developing, redeveloping, and adjusting the form of the organization to achieve ministry effectiveness."

In reality, the assumption that a "technique" or "strategy" can be found to solve the challenges of ministering in a post-modern world betrays precisely how bound many established congregations are to the values of modernity (Shenk 1995:56, 97; Roxburgh 1997:21). Miller (2004:60) notes that many church growth strategies are rooted in an era that is foreign to post-modern people. Such approaches are of limited

effectiveness in a profoundly changing world (Frost & Hirsch 2003:62-63). Often, they reflect a lack of appreciation of the alien nature of the church (Shenk 1996:23). Snyder (1996:23) provides the following assessment of the church's strategies for responding to a changing culture:

> One the one hand, much of the institutionalized church talks to itself in a corner about how to be relevant and usually comes up with a theology that has as its unstated premise, "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em." Too often it presents a "theology" of political and/or social causes so hopelessly ties to passing cultural fads that its demise precedes that of its promoters.

This is an inadequate response to the new reality with which the church has been presented (McManus 2001:26; Miller 2004:178). As Roxburgh (2005:143) asserts, twentieth century systems and leadership capacities are no longer adequate for leading churches toward God's next step.

Many of these strategies reflect "symptom thinking," rather than addressing the deeper, core aspects of cultural change (Miller 2004:135-136; cf. Mead 1991:70). In contrast to the dynamics of resistance described in chapter five, the effort to employ technique for the purpose of quickly regaining a sense of place within culture is an equally inadequate response to the experience of liminality (Roxburgh 2005:23). Rather than learning and responding adaptively, the rush to employ a technique represents a desire to resolve the anxiety and uncertainty associated with these times of transition. When the church oversimplifies its present situation and the questions it poses toward this situation, it does injury to itself and the viability of its witness (Conder 2006:40). Gibbs (2000a:113) suggests that, "If there is one thing worse than a church not having an agreed philosophy of ministry, it is a ministry statement designed to respond to yesterday's ministry needs and opportunities." Thus, it is essential for us to recognize with McNeal (2003:xvi-10) that the methodological preoccupations of the church have tended to be rooted in the wrong questions. While the pursuit of wrong questions "will continue to turn the wheel of the church industry," McNeal predicts that it will render little service to the reign of God.

Clearly, the process by which missional renewal is pursued within established churches must entail something more than merely employing technique-oriented solutions. Guder (1998:238) suggests that, while the fruit of the church's liminal efforts, such as mission statements, goals, and objectives, are good, we now need a

more radical critique of the church's cultural captivity. Frost and Hirsch (2003:15-16) similarly assert, as we have noted above, that the challenges of the present moment call for more than a "reworking" of the existing ecclesiological and missiological assumptions presently guiding many churches. Thus, as McNeal (2003:23, 24-25) advocates, the church must transition from its preoccupation with competition, strategies, survival, and success. As we have noted, this transition must not be fundamentally about programs, but rather about adjustments in thought and theology (Conder 2006:15). Notes Roxburgh (1997:2), "What are required at this point in the dialogue about a missionary encounter are not so much solutions and strategies for engagement, as models that enable the churches to locate better their social reality on the new cultural map of North America." This being the case, the genuine missional renewal of the church will entail the prioritization of the interests "of the long haul rather than the quick fix" (Frost & Hirsch 2003:11). How might this be reflected in the processes employed within established churches?

6.5.2   The Sensitivities of Xers

Furthermore, the expectation that Xers will be drawn by strategic endeavours that fail to address some of their most fundamental criticisms of established churches betrays a lack of penetrating insight. Rabey (2001:20) expresses concern that, while there is an element of good in the efforts of churches to employ marketing strategies in offering the message of hope to Xers, "uncritically adopting the marketer's depiction of a generation may have blinded some churches to the true soul of the emerging generations." This is a serious matter; as Reifschneider (1999:32) asserts, the members of this generation "are tired of people putting on a show to try to sell us something." Miller (2004:129) employs somewhat more graphic terms in suggesting that Xers have a "B.S. meter, a finely tuned ear for authenticity; a not-so-delicate way of seeing through the images and words; like bloodhounds sniffing out the trail of reality." Rather than being treated as a religious "target market," Xers desire to be valued as complete persons and want to be respected as being capable of making their own decisions (Hicks & Hicks 1999:260; Mays 2001:68; Howard Merritt 2007:137). This being the case, as Smith and Clurman (1997:90) observe, "They get quarrelsome when they think they are being narrowly classified." Thus, even those interested in

exploring church participation will "run away from overblown promotion and shrink back from a hard sell" (Moore 2001:132).

As we saw in the preceding chapters, because of their experiences with the church, many Xers are sceptical toward both its claims about itself and its underlying motivations. Fickensher (1999:83) suggests that many Xers feel as though churches "are only concerned about themselves." Unfortunately, many churches have sought to employ ministry programs and strategies without substantively addressing some of the factors at work in their midst that most potently and painfully impact the lives of Gen Xers. Hahn and Verhaagen (1996:64) caution that the church is in error to assume that it will be able to succeed merely by employing an approach akin to replicating MTV. While these efforts may be well-intentioned and somewhat helpful, the help they provide is largely superficial and destined to be of limited effectiveness (Kitchens 2003:71; Howard Merritt 2007:137). Rainer (1997:179) suggests that, while the members of this generation may appreciate the efforts of churches to make cultural accommodations for them, "they want to know that there is more to the church and to the faith it represents." Rainer cautions that Xers will leave the church suddenly if they discover that little substance exists beneath the cultural sensitivity.

In a post-modern world, the church's own life must serve as the plausibility structure by which its message is validated (Dockery 2001:16; Long 2004:206). In other words, "the medium is the message" (Long 2004:206). Thus, suggests Gibbs (2000a:30), the church's witness among post-modern young adults needs to be "self-evidently altruistic." Frost and Hirsch (2003:154) reflect upon this theme:

> If we take seriously that the medium is the message, then there's no way around the fact that our actions, as manifestations of our total being, do actually speak much louder than our words. There are clear nonverbal messages being emitted by our lives all the time. We are faced with the sobering fact that we actually are our messages. Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher, called this "existence-communication" by which he meant that our lives—our very existence—is our communication.

Thus, as Taylor (quoted in Frost & Hirsch 2003:155-156) has observed, in a post-modern world, all means of communication are futile "unless they are actually born out of the very truth they are meant to convey." Of course, this is consistent with the vision of the missional church articulated above. This necessitates that the church

give much thought to both what it endeavours to do in engaging Xers and how it chooses to go about it. Again, this challenges us to lend careful attention to the processes employed by the church in its pursuit of renewal.

6.5.3   The Struggles with Change

In addition, conventional thinking about strategy and technique frequently fails to demonstrate appropriate sensitivity to the struggles established church members often experience in adjusting to change. Rendle (2002:9-10) suggests that, while much of the literature that is produced on the subject of generational ministry would be easier to employ if the church were concerned with reaching only one cohort, in reality ministry in established congregation settings is "much messier than that." Benke and Benke (2002:87) note that launching new ministry endeavours intended to engage emerging cohorts often involves major changes. Thus, they caution, "Churches must precede these with appropriate preparation...At best, some leaders and members of these churches have a vague understanding of postmodernism, while most have no understanding at all." Unfortunately, as Rendle (2002:22-23) notes, despite the wealth of resources that has been published on contemporary ministry, "virtually nothing has been written about the processes of change necessary to introduce these new patterns" in congregational settings where the approach to ministry has been developed in response to the preferences of older generations.

Though Gen X may play an important role in this time of transition, this does not provide a justification for church leaders to be sensitive and responsive to this generation only. Not only they, but also their elders must be afforded proper care and consideration. As we saw in chapter five, older members of the congregation may be prone to resist efforts to promote change in the name of reaching the young. However, does this resistance justify the marginalization and victimization of older members of the congregation as a means of accomplishing the desired ends (Hammett & Pierce 2007:4)? Law (2002:26) suggests that many advocates of change characterize those who resist change "as if they were the enemy." He adds, "Some even talk about giving up on them and starting over somewhere else. I can't do that. They are members of the body of Christ, too." Hilborn and Bird (2003:53) insist that we must be conscious of our need to strive to reach out to the younger members of

society without disenfranchising the older members of the congregation or promulgating ageism.

In some cases, the concerns of older church members are not altogether ill founded. Particularly in the wake of the protracted struggle between pre-Boomers and Boomers in many congregations, the resistance of some church members is informed by negative past experiences with efforts at change. All too often, a key problem when change efforts are undertaken is that the leaders tend to "push" or "jump" without proper attention to pace or process. Nel (2003:68) suggests that some leaders undertake change merely for the sake of change, which invariably is an unhealthy and dangerous proposition. At times, this simply amounts to the "tyranny of the new" (Mead 1991:77). Often leaders move too quickly toward the implementation of new ideas (Rendle 2002:14-15; Nel 2003:68) or fail to "install" changes well (Mead 1991:77).

If a leader jumps ahead in an effort to institute ministry endeavours geared toward engaging Gen Xers without first negotiating the generational cultures present within the congregation, this "may throw the whole congregation into conflict" (Rendle 2002:141). Note Whitesel and Hunter (2000:36), "The church leadership may feel the pastor does not possess a clear and concise plan that will reach out to the younger generations while protecting the traditions and practices that mean so much to the older generations." As we noted in chapter five, this prospect is particularly acute in congregations of less than 350 attendees, in which limited resources cause established members to perceive that more is at stake.

Unfortunately, the emergence of win/loss scenarios is all too frequently the result of a failure on the part of congregational leaders to appreciate the complexity of the shared life of a congregation. For example, Shawchuck and Heuser (1996:141-145) explain that an organization is composed of structures ("the sum total of the ways in which organizational effort is divided into distinct tasks and the means by which coordination is achieved among these tasks") and a belief system ("a widely shared mental model of how the organization governs its relationships, expectations….The belief system also includes deeply held, often unconscious, assumptions espoused by the people which strongly influence their actions and their expectations of one

another."). They go on to explain that many of the expectations that compose the belief system of a congregation are implicit and unwritten. Shawchuck and Heuser caution that both belief system and structure need to be addressed in change efforts, though they rarely are. All too commonly, the underlying belief systems of a congregation are not adequately considered. As a result, these authors point out, attempts to focus exclusively on organizational structure foster conflict and dissention, and frequently fail. Mallory (2001:54-56) similarly cautions that it usually is pointless to attempt to introduce change into a congregation's organizational structure "and not address its underlying culture." Thus, as Granberg-Michaelson 2004:78 suggests, the religious organizations that will be equipped to address the challenges posed by changes in our culture will "have intentionally learned how to instill steady and deep change in their organizational culture."

Hammett and Pierce (2007:143) note that this issue of the underlying culture of the congregation is one key reason that changing worship styles is frequently not the solution to reaching young adults. As they observe, this effort frequently is founded in the misconception that "simply changing the way they do worship will show that people under forty are welcome." Conder (2006:96) suggests that, because of the church's roots in the assumptions of Christendom, instituting changes in worship services often constitutes a liminal response to the absence of young people from the pews. However, if the leadership does nothing to change the church's values or culture, assert Hammett and Pierce (2007:143), "their net numbers way well be negative. Those over sixty will leave, and those under forty in the neighborhood may not even know that the church is trying to appeal to them." Thus, changing the church's worship style is often precisely the wrong point at which to begin (Conder 2006:96; Howard Merritt 2007:137).

Woolever and Bruce (2002:72) offer the intriguing suggestion that reports of an unwillingness to change among parishioners constitute a "myth trap." In their extensive research among American parishioners, they found many expressing "ample willingness to try new things (61%)," while "many believe their parish or congregation is already considering or implementing new directions (51%)." In comparison to this, only thirty percent of respondents expressed uncertainty regarding whether their congregations were ready to change, while only nine percent said that

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their congregations were not presently ready (:76). A question regarding "your opinion of the future directions of this congregation" bore the following results:

Need to get back to the way we did things in the past	5%
Faithfully maintaining past directions	12%
Currently deciding on new directions	17%
Currently moving in new directions	34%
Need to rethink where we're headed	6%
Unclear or doubtful	2%
Don't know	23%

(:77)

These results strike a rather positive tone. Nonetheless, as Rendle (2002:4) suggests, *expressing* a willingness to change and *demonstrating* a willingness to live with its consequences must be appreciated as two distinct phenomena.

This being said, we would do well to question how extensively these respondents are prepared to change. Are these parishioners prepared to embrace the implications of missional renewal for the approach to church and life with which they are acquainted? Some insight into this query is provided by responses generated in answer to another question. When asked to identify the "main roles" of the pastor, only sixteen percent of congregants surveyed viewed "training people for ministry and mission" (Woolever & Bruce 2002:74). This paled in comparison to other more traditional pastoral duties native to the world of Christendom. This reflects the reality, as we have chronicled throughout the preceding chapters, that the perspectives and expectations of many established church members have been formed by the marriage of Christendom and modernity. In reality, notes Regele (1995:219), many within the congregation find it difficult to accept that the local congregation must become the primary unit of mission in the twenty-first century. As Kew (2001:36) suggests, "Breaking deeply ingrained, 1,500-year-old Christendom habits requires extraordinary re-education and enormous effort." Rouse and Van Gelder (2008:60) express that "helping those in the older generations....cultivate a more missional vision" seems to be the "biggest challenge." This being so, how might those church members who are comfortable with the church as it is be helped to learn their way into a new culture and new values in a way that does not alienate or degrade them?

Granberg-Michaelson (2004:152-153) suggests that, in many cases, church leaders simply do not know how to guide this sort of transformational change process. Others,

however, fail because they value organizational cohesion above all else and fear the anticipated impact of efforts at change. Some leaders struggle to understand how to lead from a position of consensus in settings in which they are not invested with sufficient authority to foster such consensus. As Rendle (2002:24) notes, "Our leaders have the complex task of building consensus in volunteer systems where participants can 'take it or leave it,' can participate or not....in which members always have the choice of belonging or not belonging, supporting or not supporting."

At the same time, in light of the tensions that seem inevitably to arise between the generations, it frequently proves to be the case that pretending as though everyone can simply live together is an inadequate approach (Rendle 2002:118). Even the notion of "compromise" frequently proves ineffective. However, many leaders find themselves feeling as though they do not know how to find a better way forward (:22-23, 51). The failure to cultivate common understanding or to demonstrate a clear plan can lead to upheaval, and can even precipitate the end of a pastor's tenure within the congregation (Whitesel & Hunter 2000:36). However, insists Nel (2003:79), harmony at all costs simply does not constitute a valid objective.

The question is not so much a matter of whether conflict is likely to arise within the congregation, but rather what will be done with this conflict (Nel 2003:75). In fact, it likely is necessary for growth (:80). Ammerman (1998:119) notes that, while the presence of conflict is sometimes seen as the death knell of established congregations, not peace, but indifference, should be seen as the opposite of conflict. She insists that conflict is most likely to arise when people care about, and are committed to, the congregation. Thus, it is actually the *absence* of conflict that could signal impending demise in some congregations. As Armour and Browning (1995:24) note, a congregation with no creative tension lacks the spark for vision, imagination, and fresh insight. For any church that endeavours to undertake innovation, conflict is likely to be a natural by-product of the process; while this is not always so, it may actually be a vital indication that there is hope for the congregation (Ammerman 1998:76). The challenge is less a matter of avoiding tension than finding a way toward fostering "understanding about the emotional intersection where the generations meet" and developing a "clear, workable strategy" by which the

generations can peaceably co-exist and engage in ministry together (Whitesel & Hunter 2000:14).

This being said, we can recognize, as Rendle (2002:7) suggests, that established congregations facing these challenges and conflicts offer much of value to the broader body of Christ during this passage from modernity to post-modernity. Indeed, he insists, there is much to learn from such congregations, because the tensions they face "are driven largely by generational differences that leaders must learn how to negotiate if the congregants are to move with confidence into the future." As Rendle explains,

> We are also reminded that we have not yet reached the destination in this transition that is not only generational but also global and cultural. As ample as the evidence may be that we are well on our way to post-Christendom and postmodern health, we are still assuredly not further along than the uncomfortable middle stage of transition…the 'neutral zone,' the time between letting go of our old ways of 'doing' faith and the claiming of new beginnings.

This being the case, we must be conscious that established congregations provide precisely the sort of laboratory setting in which we can learn about what it means to shape and transmit the Christian tradition from one generation to another in this new era; indeed, they may provide a "snapshot" of what it will mean to progress toward the "once and future church" (:6). Suggests Rendle (:117), "The disputes encountered, the decisions made, the practices altered are all steps taken to prepare living faith traditions to address the people of the future."

6.5.4   Spiritual and Systemic Indicators of Healthy Process

As we have noted above, all of the challenges being catalogued here call our attention to the importance of the *process* by which missional renewal is pursued within the church (Van Gelder 2007:154). Clearly, any efforts to pursue renewal within the congregation must provide for the church to reflect penetratingly upon its cultural location, for interaction between the generations to be fostered, and for established church members to be helped to grapple with the implications of cultural change. Ample attention must be given to the various ways in which the renewing work of the Spirit, as he invites the church into renewed engagement with God's mission, comes

to bear on the individual, corporate, conceptual, and structural aspects of the church's experience.

In essence, in light of what we have affirmed above, as we contemplate the "means" or "processes" by which missional renewal is promoted within the church, we must reiterate the necessity of appreciating both the spiritual and the human nature of the church (Van Gelder 2000:25; Nel 2003:67). As our reflections in this chapter have suggested, neither of these dimensions can be neglected if the church is to experience the renewal of its mission in the post-modern transition successfully. Both of these dimensions must be permitted to inform the church's hopes and aspirations and the indicators it employs in measuring its progress and "success." Thus, in the pages that follow, we will briefly offer some broad categories to help identify what a healthy process might look like from the vantage point of each of these two closely related dimensions, the spiritual and human natures of the church. This enables us to address the need of the church and the members of which it is composed to experience the Spirit's renewing work, while also addressing the individual and corporate humanness of both Xers and their elders within the congregation in light of their particular socio-historical locations.

6.5.4.1 The Spiritual Perspective

First, we can assert together with Snyder and Runion (2002:130) that every part of the church is to bear the "DNA" of Jesus. As they express, "the church's whole life should itself be witness of God's kingdom." (:50-51). We can take this to imply that not only the desired ends of the church, but also the means it employs, are to bear the marks of the reign of God. As Dawn (2001:155) asserts, "we represent before the world this unity between ends and means." Thus, we can join Schmiechen (1996:27) in offering a critique of the modern instrumentality that separates means from ends: "Is there no sense in which these acts embody the presence of God and are of value in and of themselves?" The upbuilding and growth of the church, suggests Leith (1990:15), is a matter of "the church's simply being what it says it is, the people of God."

If the church is to engage in a process of missional renewal through which both means and ends holistically bear the marks of the reign of God, this desire is perhaps best captured in the biblical concept of *shalom*. Schreiter (1998:53) insists that the idea of shalom "is a rich one." As he explains, it refers to "the state in which the world is meant to be. It is the best description of what the reign of God will be like: a place of safety, justice, and truth; a place of trust, inclusion, and love; a place of joy, happiness, and well-being." Reflecting upon this concept, Steinke (1996:84) notes,

> The primary meaning is "wholeness." Shalom is a condition of well-being. It is a balance among God, human beings, and all created things. All parts are interrelated. Each part participates in the whole. Thus, if one part is denied wholeness (shalom), every other part is diminished as well.

This means that shalom is more than merely the "cessation of violence and conflict" (Schreiter 1998:53) or "the absence of war" (Volf 2005:189). Far more than this, it describes "the flourishing of the community and of each person within it" (Volf :189).

Swartley (2006:424) notes that God "wills peace (*shalom* in its fullest sense)." The New Testament, he asserts, "overwhelmingly enlists us" in the service of seeking to be peacemakers (:420). Certainly, this has profound implications for any "means" that the church might undertake. However it is particularly important for any church truly desiring to gain an authentically renewed engagement with God's mission. As Swartley (:424) notes, "[P]eacemaking unites us to God in sharing the divine mission, the *Missio Dei*." This being said, true wholeness can only be experienced as "God's gift." As Swartley (2006:424) expresses, "*peacemaking* is not simply done by human effort, but by the power of God's Spirit and living humbly under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Otherwise, peace efforts soon wear down the best intentioned people. Jesus Christ is both our peacemaker-prototype and our living Lord who by his Spirit and Word empowers us." The gift of God in Christ, by the power of the Spirit, enables the members of the church to learn the new patterns of the new creation (:416). As Dietterich (1998:147) notes, "The spirit empowers this community to manifest love, to work toward peace, to express patience, kindness, and good news, and to exhibit gentleness and self-control (Ga. 5:22). In this way, the Holy Spirit alone is the antidote to the works of the flesh." This commitment to the well-being of all, the "fruit" of "the Spirit's bearing in and through the believing community's life" (:148),

has profound implications for any means that the church employs toward its desired ends.

6.5.4.2 The Systemic Perspective

In complement to this vision of God's Spirit causing the process of missional renewal to be permeated with the marks of shalom, we must consider a human counterpart. Throughout this study, we have been chronicling the ways in which the structures employed in the church have impacted its life. Furthermore, we have suggested that, if established churches are to experience missional renewal of a lasting nature, this will have structural implications; this is an expression of the realty of the church's sociological or human nature. However, as we have seen, efforts to transforms the structures of the church often lead to tension and conflict. This leads us to acknowledge that, if the church is to engage in processes of change healthily, issues of organizational structure must be recognized as secondary to "systems thinking." Armour and Browning (1995:7) argue that the human systems within the church and how they intermesh are of far greater significance than structure. Similarly, Galindo (2004:52) asserts that "[v]iewing a congregation primarily as an organization, management system, or institution leads ultimately to toxic approaches to congregational leadership and to tragic ministry practices." The "hidden" systemic life of congregations, he insists, "is where so much of how a congregation 'really works' lies" (:51).

Since this term, "system," already has been used a number of times throughout this study, we must be careful here to be clear in defining the specific sense in which we are employing this term at this point. Steinke (1996:3) explains the essence of "systems theory":

> It is a way of thinking about how the whole is arranged, how its parts interact, and how the relationships between the parts produce something new. A systems approach claims that any person or event stands in relationship to something. You cannot isolate anything and understand it…All parts interface and affect each other.

Elsewhere, Steinke (1992:9) notes, "Systems thinking instructs us to look at how the world is wired together." Robinson (1996:25) explains that, within human groups, the systems model gives rise to "the recognition of the connections between people." It

reflects an appreciation of the fact that participants can only be understood fully within the context of their relationships. As Robinson articulates, "No one lives or acts in isolation, and we are all affected by each other's behavior" (cf. Steinke 1996:7).

Within humans systems, interactions become repeated, patterned, and predictable (Parsons & Leas 1993:7). "As the interaction is repeated, it is reinforced," notes Steinke (1992:6). With time, the pattern itself comes to regulate the way in which the parts function. Suggests Steinke, "It's as if the pattern has a life of its own." These established patterns are described as *homeostasis*. A system's tendency toward homeostasis moulds the behaviour of its members into predictable patterns, "making it possible for us to 'get along,' to do work, to find safety, to trust" (Parsons & Leas 1993:7). The parts of a system are arranged into a whole through the positions in which they function. By functioning in a particular way, each participant contributes to the balance of the system. As Steinke (1992:6) notes, "As long as everyone functions in the same way, the arrangement is stable." Apart from this tendency, the members of a human system would have to reinvent their relationship every time they came together (Parsons & Leas 1993:7). Galindo (2004:52) notes that the dynamics of how the church handles and expresses emotions, how energy is exerted, how the church organizes its life, how control is exercised, and how relationships function are all integrally linked with this "hidden" facet of the congregation's life.

Within any congregational system, a number of factors help to sustain the experience of homeostasis. Steinke (1992:6) specifically cites the keeping of traditions and the following of rules as homeostatic forces within the congregation. Parsons and Leas (1993:9-11) caution that these traditions and rules may not necessarily be stated or defined explicitly. Nonetheless, they may be "tacit." In other words, while not written or openly discussed, they may come to be expected and agreed upon in the minds of the congregation's members. As Parsons and Leas (:11) note, "[T]acit rules can be subtle, but they are known at some level. And the keeping or breaking of the rules influences the system as a whole." These authors note that tacit rituals also abound in the church. These "are the rites we engage in with little or no conscious awareness of what we are doing or why" (:17). We only tend to be conscious of these rituals when "someone does 'it' wrong." In addition, congregational systems develop

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tacit goals, which are "established through the agreements that people make nonconsciously about what they are trying to do." In fact, it is possible for a system to have formal goals and tacit goals that directly contradict one another. If an organization has stated goals that contradict its tacit goals, "the tacit goals will probably win out." While the formal goals are written on paper, the tacit goals are written "in people's hearts" (:17).

When changes occur in one part of the system, it produces changes in all other parts (Steinke 1996:4). This can generate problems as the various parts of the system interact in dealing with the process of change. In turn, this commonly gives rise to anxiety within the system (Steinke 1992:25). Though we have not consistently employed systems language to describe these dynamics up to this point, throughout preceding chapters we have encountered considerable evidence of the impact of systemic functioning within established churches as they struggle to respond to change. Parsons and Leas (1993:18) note that, when one part of the system believes that it is the most important or finds it difficult to empathize with the needs of other parts of the system, it becomes very difficult to work together.

Reflecting upon the impact of systemic dynamics within congregational life, Steinke (1996:10) suggests that health is evidenced by the congregation that "actively and responsibly addresses or heals its disturbances, not one with an absence of troubles" (cf. Hanson 2005:133). In fact, a healthy congregation may actually create tension by fostering an atmosphere in which diverse voices and approaches are honoured. As Parsons and Leas (1993:22-23) note, "The tension becomes something life-giving, creative, and renewing." In essence, suggests Steinke (1996:19), "The health of a congregation is multifaceted. It is a power-sharing arrangement. Attitudes count. Working together counts. Faithfulness matters. Mood and tone are significant…Healthy congregations are spirited. They are graced and gracious, generous with each other and outsiders." However, notes Steinke (:25), health is a process, not a static condition: "It is ongoing, dynamic, and ever changing." Indeed, he adds, "it is a direction, not a destination."

6.5.4.3 The Relationship between These Two Dimensions

Steinke (1992:x) observes that some people assume "that the church's relationship system is different from the human interactions experienced elsewhere in our lives" because of the presence of the Holy Spirit within the church's ranks. However, he cautions, this does not negates the reality of human nature: "The church is more than its emotional processes, but it is never less than these processes….We are urged to control the powers of human nature, but that is not the same as denying their reality." That being said, we can identify a close knit and positive correlation between the Spirit within the congregation and the spirit *of* the congregation (its *esprit de corps*) (Shawchuck & Heuser 1996:125). As Barger (2005:135-147) argues, the Spirit of God is able to bring about a "new and right spirit" within the patterns of human interrelatedness within the congregation. Conversely, the presence of a healthy spirit within the congregation provides conditions that welcome the continuing work of God's Spirit.

Snyder and Runion (2002:14) posit that, when the church's self-awareness is rooted in the "genetic" language of systems thinking rather than merely in organizational categories, "we are actually closer to Scripture, and to the way God works in nature and in society." However, they note that strategic endeavours all too frequently have failed to reflect an appreciation of the church's systemic nature:

> The church is a totality of complex factors, not a linear cause-and-effect system…Far too much church programming assumes that the church is a linear cause-and-effect system…Many of us have felt intuitively for years that this approach is wrong…The church is a body, not a machine or a corporation…The church is a body, and the body is a complex system with unique DNA…We get into trouble when we try to program the church, just as we do when we try to program a teenager, or the love between two people, or the life of a family.
>
> (:37-38)

The change-related challenges outlined above in sections 6.5.1 through 6.5.3 bear testimony to the fact that, when processes of change are undertaken in an intergenerational context, it often is precisely the struggle to discern the systemic dynamics of the church appropriately that hinders the Spirit's work. At the same time, proper attention to the interrelationship of this dimension of the church's existence and the work of the Spirit may actually provide the best hope that the

process of missional renewal will be able to have a lasting impact upon the way in which the congregation structures its life.

How might this insight regarding the interplay between the spiritual and sociological dimensions of the church's life be applied more specifically to the challenges associated with the process of missional renewal in the post-modern transition? As we have seen, the intergenerational implications of this process alone present a significant challenge to the church. In chapter seven, we will endeavour to respond to this reality at some length. We will posit that, from both a spiritual and sociological perspective, if established churches are to renew their mission within the post-modern transition, the process of renewal must entail a commitment to intergenerational reconciliation and justice. Only then will these churches be able to engage Gen Xers effectively and faithfully.

6.6   Conclusion

In this chapter, we have begun to advance the following hypothesis:

> 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.

The present chapter has contributed to the development of this hypothesis through an exploration of the following themes:

1. In section 6.2, we emphasized the notion that the church presently faces a "critical juncture," one in which it must choose whether or not to respond adaptively to the changes occurring within the broader culture.

2. Section 6.3 was devoted to an exploration of the church's need to experience renewal. This was shown to be fundamentally the work of the Holy Spirit and to be integrally connected to the church's traditions. We emphasized *mission* as the central focus of the renewal needed within the church today, a reality that we described under the banner of "missional renewal."

3. In section 6.4, our focus was upon the crucial role that Gen X is postured to make in helping the church to experience this missional renewal.

4. Finally, section 6.5 responded to the reluctance of many established church members to change and of Gen Xers to embrace the institutional church. This section demonstrated the need of local churches to give careful consideration to the processes by which they endeavour to promote missional renewal. This section concluded with an emphasis on the need for the processes employed within established churches to be appropriately attentive to both the spiritual and sociological dimensions of the church's existence.

Having explored these themes, we now are prepared to proceed with chapter seven. The chapter that follows will help us to grasp that, from both a spiritual and a sociological perspective, the processes by which the church endeavours to promote its own missional renewal in the post-modern transition must entail a commitment to intergenerational reconciliation and justice.