

MILLENNIALS

A NEW KIND OF CHRISTIANITY



EXCHANGED LIFE & THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION

dr. stephen r. phinney

THE HOLY WORD OF GOD

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MILLENNIALS

A NEW KIND OF CHRISTIANITY

Dr. Stephen Phinney

EXCHANGED LIFE & THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION

You have now entered the twilight zone. Welcome to the world of Emergent Millennial Christianity.

Who are these Millennials anyway? You might have heard them referred to as the **Hipsters**, **Generation Y**, the **Echo Boomers**, the **Next Generation**, the **Boomerang Generation**, or my favorite, the **Peter Pan Generation**. Regardless what name is used to describe Millennials, the conservative branch of the Church considers them to be the most difficult generation in human history to evangelize and/or lead into a discipleship relationship. As a researcher, I must ask, “Why?”

Recently, I have been given the challenge by two leading Exchanged Life ministries to develop a media campaign focusing on *reaching the Millennials*. After several years of probing the issue, I agree with a multitude of others - the Church has a problem. We are losing our **Next Generation**. Since this generation claims that their key identity marker is *be your own person*, the Church’s message of “Not I, but Christ” is not only difficult, but is outright impossible to impart without the power of the Holy Spirit. The **Echo Boomers** quickly pour their time, efforts, and funding into the new Millennial church, which is a *feel good, ‘I’ centered, and concert-seeking fellowship*. What is a traditional Bible-founded Church to do? Before we answer that question, let’s review the history leading up to our monster-sized Emergent Millennial church.

The term Millennials originally described the grandchildren of the ever-so-popular Hippy movement, or *Hipsters*. I was one of them! The early blooming *Millennial Hipsters* became the new **Generation Y**, who wanted to bring back the overtly casual mystics of independent thinking; counterculture; progressive politics; an appreciation of dark art and indie rock; creativity; secondhand intelligence (versus straight from the traditional “old school” Bible); and witty banter in the form of texting, face postings, and picture captures.

As with most *anti-parent* culture groups, the Millennials detach from their parents’ traditions, religious beliefs, and political positioning, and tend to cling to each other like ticks on a dog. One of the primary reasons this self-identified group roots itself in the “hippy” culture is that these sub-cultural types casually deal with life, while maintaining a

high degree of distinct fashion. Keep in mind that their goal is to go from “sub-culture” to primary culture.

Millennials tend to reject culturally-ignorant attitudes (those who don't change with the times) of mainstream society by pretending to be on the cutting edge of the intellectual community. As with many sub-culture groups, they hide their ignorance in a twist of arrogance. They often are caught wearing vintage and thrift store inspired fashions, tight fitting jeans, old school sneakers, and sometimes thick-rimmed glasses, as a statement of not forgetting the past, while making it clear that they will forget the conservative religious and political values of their past – or should I say, their parents’ past. They are quick to reinvent old styles with a post-modern flair, purposing to separate themselves from "culturally-sheltered mainstream thinkers.” Here lies our problem. Surveys prove that the Millennials have become the mainstream thinkers. Any “old school” thinker who attempts to challenge their beliefs is challenging them to a fight – thus, violent protests erupt.

Even though most Millennials claim to be atheist, this simply is not true! Most of the 80+ million Millennials in America tend to cement their religious beliefs in their own personal discoveries ABOUT god; thus, forming their own god, which is typically acquired through their education. They often have liberal arts degrees, or degrees in the math and sciences, which promote their anti-Christian liberal science beliefs.

Over the past decade, the "Millennial" *anti-parent* culture has moved itself into the Christian community. Christian Millennials are pretty much "carbon copies" of the Atheist Millennial clan, but throw their beliefs of this new *millennial* "Jesus" into the mix. They are drawn to emergent churches (a blending of a comprehensive neutral network of thinkers simulating original thought, while clearly maintaining a separation from the traditions of such thought). The emergent church is simply a “Christian” (Christ follower) movement of the late 20th and early 21st centuries that crosses several theological boundaries. Participants are described as Protestant, post-Protestant, evangelical, post-evangelical, liberal, post-liberal, conservative, post-conservative, Anabaptist, reformed, charismatic, neo-charismatic, Muslim (Chrislam), post-charismatic, and the list goes on from there. Theologically, they fall into the category of *millennial Arminianism*, which is open-ended Deism (free will; belief in the existence of a supreme being - specifically of a creator who does not intervene in the universe, particularly its people – establishing a passive, impotent, and democratic god that works for the people). Many researchers believe it is this single factor that led the “modern church” into emergence. Therefore, most Millennial "Christians" tend to support homosexual pastors, women in pastoral positions, spiritual formation (Christ following) vs. re-birth in Jesus Christ (Christ in you), fifty-fifty marriages, salvation through freedom of intellectual choice, the acceptance of all forms of faiths, revisionary authority, experience-driven “Christianity,” ecumenical peace, socialism and, and, and ... It is one thing to evangelize/disciple a people of

individualism; but it is a completely different animal when individualism morphs into culture. It simply becomes the greatest challenge of today's Church.

Overall, this Millennial Christianity is a rebellion against old school evangelicalism and its fuddy-duddy conservatism found in Grandpa's traditionally translated Bible - resulting itself in their newfound gender and animal friendly bibles of social justice. I have been told that if a Millennial is going to read a "bible," this bible better be one of those "Millennial trans-bibles" – one that openly accepts individual choice of belief and lifestyle.

Most religious Millennials prefer to call themselves "Christ followers" rather than indwelt Christians. They cringe at the thought of public repentance, altar calls, and evangelizing the world by telling people they will go to Hell without a conversion to the indwelling Jesus.

Here Is Our Crisis: To keep up with this new "Millennial Generation," the lion's share of pastors from most denominations are becoming "hip" – preaching on sermon topics that sound more like movie titles: *Sexuality of Jesus; God Sex; Grooving with Jesus; Jesus and Homosexuality*; and some so rude, I refuse to repeat.

Since their churches have become organizational home bases for *social justice, policy formation, and creation care*, they tend to post film clips from R-rated movies at the same pace as the traditional church would post Bible passages. Their "bible studies" are known for being held at local microbreweries and cigar shops. Church services tend to be more like a trending rock concert – blending sound and belief as if there is no difference. It is important to keep in mind that social justice has now become the Western civilization's religion – meaning, the fair and just relation between the individual, one's beliefs, and the society one protects. This is classically measured by the percentage of conversions to their liberal views of wealth distribution, opportunities for personal activity, individualized religious beliefs, and social privileges – mostly accomplished through picketing, demonstrations, and social technology.

Relational Crisis: Most researchers quickly discover the primary difference between the **Millennial Generation** and their grandparents is their mode of communication. Grandma and Grandpa typically invited friends over for coffee and dessert – spending hours talking, laughing, and bonding through face-to-face communication. Their grandkids, on the other hand, prefer to communicate through technology – texting, social posting, and image transferring. I won't bore you with the statistics, but the greater percentage of our Millennials today prefer to text, post, and image transfer over "old school" face-to-face communication. These same statistics show us that the level of "social awkward/retardation" in our country today has never been this high. The crisis is

that most of those “socially awkward” Millennials have no clue they are suffering from the worst form of side-effect erupting from social justice - when someone lacks the social skills that are formed through human contact by way of face-to-face communication and social activity. They have missed out on “old school” communication and socialization because they have been more interested in relationships through technology – excessive internet use being the dominant cause.

Millennial Christians think they are intellectuals of modern faith. But if you engage with them in biblical theology, they are completely lost, finding themselves quoting postings rather than the Word of God. Their "bible prophets" oftentimes are leaders like Rob Bell; Joel Olsteen; Rick Warren; Robert H. Schuller; Tony Campolo; Andy Stanley; and quote from RELEVANT magazine, like it is some kind of "holy-inspired word." Most drink beer, mark their bodies with tattoos, go clubbing, and eat raw and organic foods. They tend to be activists on global issues, and without question, vote for liberal politicians.

Then there is the **Next Generation** - the up-and-coming leaders of tomorrow’s church, those who are quickly becoming the prolific young voices for this “new kind of Christianity.” But make no mistake: The leaders of our authentic old school churches, ministries, and theologians have not gone away, nor has the moving of Christ in the true believer. He is very much alive, and certainly reinforcing that *“Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world”* (1 John 4:4). Instead of going with the flow of the Millennial’s new kind of Christianity, through repackaging the old with a blending of the plurality of religious thought, by way of slick media marketing formulas and programs helping pastors “get with the Millennials,” we need to reclaim the true Church and reestablish the Holy Spirit’s ways, truth, and life (indwelling Jesus). After all, He has used these “traditional” forms of reaching the lost for generations, methods that have provoked the enemy to form a “new kind of Christianity.”

Consider going through this doctrinal checklist to discover your level of emergence:

- I don’t see much of a difference between “playing church” vs. functioning as the Church (Body of Christ).
- I believe in the blending of religious thought, or that multiple paths can lead the seeker to the same god.
- I believe that a person who has not asked Christ Jesus into their lives can go to Heaven if they pass the “good person” checklist?
- I support the idea that today’s church needs a “new kind” of Christianity.
- I believe the church needs to adjust and attempt to reach those in the changing post-modern culture, by re-facing the church to fit into this culture.
- I believe it is appropriate to use technology, i.e., video, slide shows, the internet, as the primary way of releasing the Gospel.

- I believe it is biblically sound for the church to use a broader approach to worship, i.e. using candles, icons, images, sounds, smells, etc.
- I support the local church integrating or merging various, and sometimes contradictory, belief systems within the Millennial Generation.
- I support the church placing its emphasis on experience and feelings over the absolutes of God's Word.
- I believe it is appropriate to concentrate on relationship-building over and before proclamation of the Gospel.
- I believe being a "Christ Follower" is the same thing as being indwelt by Jesus Christ Himself.
- I believe it is biblical for modern believers to shun stale traditionalism in worship, church seating, music, etc.
- I support the local church de-emphasizing biblical absolutes and traditional doctrinal creeds that are against social gospel issues, i.e. same-sex marriage, female pastors, homosexual clergy, etc.
- I support a re-evaluation of the place of the Christian church in society.
- I believe it is appropriate to re-examine the authenticity of the Bible (its characters, stories, and teachings) through means of scientific findings and documentations.
- I believe it is relative and important to merge all forms of religion into one single belief system, under the banner of "Christian."
- I question the traditional belief that there is a Hell!
- I don't believe traditional Christianity has a place in our present world.

I would be shocked if a true believer, one who has Christ Jesus living within them, checks a single box on the list above. Although, I acknowledge the fact there are many true indwelt Christians who are gravely uninformed, particularly when it comes to sound biblical doctrines. Even in knowing this, it forces us to face a serious problem with ministering to the Millennial church today.

Keep in mind that the Millennial Church, in part, believes that the way to reach and convert hurting people in our culture is through the social gospel – members establishing relationships with these people; going where they are; meeting them on their level; and then later, presenting doctrinal truths after they have become part of their lives. The problem with this theology is it is in reverse of what Jesus said, *"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest"* (Matt. 11:28). The second issue is most "believers" don't even have the Life of Christ living within them to sustain such temptations our world's demonic culture offers. For those who have the Life of Christ in them, disciplers will tell you that human flesh rarely sustains such temptations. Interacting with a culture is much different than adopting a culture. This is a truth our post-modern church, or should I say Millennial church, does not understand – *'Be ye separate, oh My people'* (2 Cor. 6:17).

In future issues, we will be unfolding some of the practical elements of how to reach the Millennial generation without adopting their ways and beliefs. The Body of Christ needs to find the balance between interacting with a culture, without adopting the demonic elements of a culture. We need to listen to Christ carefully from within – listening for the ways to reveal to them the power of the Cross (Not I, but Christ).

Here are some highlights to look forward to:

1. Be intentional in engaging their culture, i.e. learn to understand them – all without adopting their self-indulged lifestyle, religious thought, or environment
2. Be real by showing them the Life of Christ in you – not the human church
3. Offer training, teachings, and doctrines that come directly from the Word of God – preferably from translations printed before 1999
4. Offer to conduct Christ as Life mentorship/discipleship classes
5. Use their world of technology to reach them, but not join them
6. Find ways to maintain Christ's presence in their culture

I would like to close with a quote from 2 Timothy 3:12-17:

“Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

I think the self-proclaimed god of the people (Satan) might say it like this:

Indeed, all who desire to live a self-centered life in and of themselves will be shamed by the traditional Christian church. Please consider them ‘haters’ and impostors of true unity and the universal church. They will only go from bad to worse as I unfold my one world unity, and will attempt to deceive you with their one ‘way,’ one ‘truth,’ and one ‘life’ stuff. You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them – me! Always remember that from your childhood you have known the writings I provided for you that were to make you love yourself and feel good. It is a kind of human wisdom that leads to salvation per your own individual beliefs, which is in me as well. Remember, never buy into the traditional Christian scriptures that they claim to be inspired by God; they are not. Man wrote them and science proves this. They will tell you that these scriptures are profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness. But I say to you – these words are hurtful, condemning, and narrow-minded. Remember to follow what

your heart tells you to do, and believe – your experience and feelings are your true guide to life and are rarely wrong.

Welcome to the Millennial Generation! We have so much work to do...

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