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Convergent Commensality: Towards Generational Reconciliation Through Differentiated Table Fellowship

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

CONVERGENT COMMENSALITY:
TOWARDS GENERATIONAL RECONCILIATION THROUGH
DIFFERENTIATED TABLE FELLOWSHIP

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY
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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY DANIEL PROFFITT

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

Daniel Proffitt

has been approved by
the Dissertation Committee on February 24, 2016
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Spiritual Formation.

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ABSTRACT

The generation gap, as it is classically defined, maintains postures of ideological polarization between generational cohorts. In a congregational context, the pendulum of societal projection diagnoses obvious differences in generations as a means of dealing with systemic anxiety inhibiting differentiation.

The temptation of self-reactivity, destructively compensating for a lack of self-identity – through blame, shame, control, and escape/chaos – results in overgeneralization of the generation gap as a response to formational violations of love and trust, and a perpetuation of unresolved anxiety that leads to homeostasis of the generation gap. The family systems model frames generational research as a bifurcating tendency between the Boomer, Gen X, and Millennial cohorts as a way of identifying how the generational gap is a misplacement of anxiety.

Biblically, God initiates a process of creation, un-creation, and recreation individually and communally through reconciliation that begins with the foundations of creation, through the People of God, into the Gospels and New Testament as identity formation towards becoming a differentiated non-anxious presence.

The theology of table fellowship identifies Jesus as an embodiment of the dividing tension between cultural rejection (anti-symposium) and cultural assimilation (symposium) by remaining a differentiated non-anxious presence in postures toward reconciliation. Jesus invites convergent commensality—table fellowship that brings together varieties of people with differing ideals—demonstrating in each generational role postures for differentiated non-anxious dialogue that foster the reconciliation of generations within congregational context.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Mind the Gap

His new office faced south. It included a window that seemed architecturally designed to allow the sun to shine through in such a way that no matter where his desk was, he could not escape the light. There seemed no way to avoid the sun's work. Needing some time to think without having to perpetually squint, the new college pastor approached the window to shut the blinds. The light was so bright, his steps were careful as not to trip over what he could not see; the way a person approaches the edge of the Grand Canyon. Peering out over the vast empty space outside the window, his half open gaze met a massive parking lot. The distance spanned where Josh stood inside his office within the college ministry building and the main church building. Josh remembered that expanse once seemed much smaller. Things were different now, and that made any walk across the parking lot seem more like a trek. Josh remembered a time when crossing the parking lot felt no different than a few steps, like a familiar visit to a next-door neighbor, but that was before the split.

Fellowship Church had once had a thriving college ministry, in the building across the same parking lot. At that time, Josh oversaw the youth department, so he knew the former college staff, and was still friends with many of them. Then it happened. The college staff resigned from Fellowship Church and planted another church. There was little salvageable from the split and the ripple effect was still being felt, years later. Now, there were questions at Fellowship Church about the viability of a college ministry at a church of 8000 and suspicions that no matter how it was run, any college ministry would end up in exactly the same boat.

As Josh squinted a little harder, the illusion of the main building moving towards him wishfully articulated something deep in his heart. “How do we make this parking lot small again? This is not just a generation gap, this is a generational chasm!”

Preliminary Information

The great temptation in generational research is the isolation of an individual generation for identification and understanding. Such isolation has resulted in evaluative differences between generations that are classically held as the “generation gap.” Assessing generational differences can function like pop psychology, as The Pew Research Center points out, “[Generational Research is] too easy because most readers don’t need a team of researchers to tell them that the typical 20-year-old, 45-year-old and 70-year-old are likely to be different from one another.”¹ Obvious generational differences enmeshed with complex formative influences has led to abundant research in the last several decades, regarding generations. An onslaught of commentary can also be found regarding diagnosing groups, particularly from adolescence into early adult life, and this research has been used to prescribe identity and how to deal with each group.

The concern, then, is how the generation gap is currently viewed. The polarization of individual generations by overemphasizing the obvious, only furthers the disconnect. As a case in point, a quick Google search on Millennials, the group generally defined as born after 1980 (some suggest 1982), will cover everything from judgmental perceptions,

¹ The Pew Research Center, “Millennials: A Portrait of Generation Next,” February 2010, 12, accessed July 2015, <http://pewsocialtrends.org/assets/pdf/millennials-confident-connected-open-to-change.pdf>.

how to lead them, problems with, and more recently, how to join them. In a humorous *Huffington Post* article, Millennial writer Emmanuel Happs points out failed attempts by a Boomer author to be relevant² by including suggestions in his writing for Boomers to insert a comment about “Insta” when talking with someone from the Millennial cohort³ as a means to establish credibility.⁴ Prescriptions of this nature only propagate stigmas about generations and further entrench gaps between the old and young.

Perpetuating the temptation within congregational contexts, the polarization of generational cohorts can manifest in reactions to various pedagogical approaches. For example, the evangelical mega-church movement has regularly divided ministries by age demographics, a practice built ideologically on targeting, connecting to, and engaging specific formative groups. The mega-church is often critiqued for recapitulating the societal norms that identify and separate generations. The merited critique is often associated with “attractational ministry” utilizing popular worship styles, mixed with trendy décor as an attempt to engage culture in much the same way as consumer marketing. One reaction to the mega-church pedagogy is to swing the pendulum in the opposite direction by holding to more “high church” liturgical practices and integrating generations in congregational and small-group settings rather than dividing them.

Tensions exist in both approaches, and the pendulum swing of preference is often

² Emmanuel Happs, “Huffington Post’s Tips On Impressing Millennials Read Like the Onion,” *KQED.org*, July 24, 2015, accessed November 14, 2015, <http://ww2.kqed.org/pop/2015/07/24/huffington-posts-tips-on-impressing-millennials-read-like-the-onion/>.

³ Cohort is the term used in identifying a generation. William Strauss and Neil Howe, *Generations: The History of America’s Future, 1584 to 2069* (New York: Quill, 1992), 437.

⁴ For instance, a Boomer might note a particular Instagram account that has gained popular momentum like “socialitybarbie” when engaging in conversation about how people tend to portray an ideal life that is actually “plastic” through social media.

overemphasized to establish who is right and who is wrong. The result is often a demonized church pedagogy and a lack of addressing the undercurrent of anxiety within a system. Other points of contention may be church size or ecclesiology,⁵ but again they are only examples of differing opinions and approaches that miss the point in the generational dialogue. The question remains, what drives the generation gap and is reconciliation possible?

Family Systems Methodology

The aim of this research is to suggest that what drives the generation gap is an undifferentiated family system. The generational family system includes Boomers, Generation X, and the Millennials. Much has been written about these generations, and it appears many of the presuppositions and findings about these cohorts fit within the societal projection process of the diagnosed entity.

Systems theory is an approach to the generation gap that can help identify the issue rooted in the conversation. Rather than approaching the tension through an individual theory that isolates the person as a patient for diagnosis, a systems approach assumes that individuals are inherently linked in systems, be they family, work, or congregational.

Murray Bowen, forerunner of systems thinking, suggests complex circumstances are pervasive in families and society, saying, “All of the people who were, or who are,

⁵ Scott Thumma and Dave Travis, *Beyond Megachurch Myths: What We Can Learn from America's Largest Churches* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 1. Though not exempt from critique, the myths of the mega-church deal with the same broad overgeneralizations that generational cohorts do.

members of families replicate the same emotional patterns in society. Family and societal emotional forces function in reciprocal equilibrium to each other, each influencing the other and being influenced by the other.”⁶ Edwin Friedman extends the connection with family systems to the congregation, describing how the key point of tension in systems is differentiation or the capacity to be an “I” while remaining connected.”⁷

Building on Bowen and Friedman’s research, the application of family systems theory to generational cohorts and their interaction as a family system helps to frame the context for the discontinuity between generations within a church.

Family-systems theory provides a lens through which generations are examined as parts of a whole, in society, and more specifically, within a church. Bowen identifies the aim in family systems approach to be: “a person with a high level of differentiation of self or identity or individuality, one who can be emotionally close to others without emotional fusions or loss of self or loss of identity, because he [she] has attained a higher level of differentiation.”⁸

In *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems*, Peter Steinke further addresses systems theory as a way of thinking that “organizes our thinking from a specific vantage point. Systems thinking considers the interrelatedness of the parts, and systemically, we cannot understand one thing without

⁶ Murray Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1993), 438.

⁷ Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (Colorado Springs, CO: The Guilford Press, 2011), 27.

⁸ Bowen, 109.

the other.”⁹ Understanding how the parts, as generational cohorts, are interrelated helps clarify “who,” “where,” and “when,” within a contextual mega church. This is due to a direct correlation in the replication of emotional patterns in individuals within the family unit and individuals within organizations.¹⁰

Generationally, the issues must be examined on a much broader scale. In *Polarization and the Healthier Church: Applying Bowen Family Systems Theory to Conflict and Change in Society and Congregational Life*, Ronald Richardson states, “We live in polarizing times both in our churches and in our society. In order to engage in this process [of creating healthier conflict and change], we need a larger understanding of how human beings function in society and in our relationships with one another, especially in an atmosphere of emotional intensity.”¹¹ Bowen addresses the need for a broader perspective on the overarching tension:

Society appears to be much more similar to a family with an intense “undifferentiated family ego mass,” than the less intense emotional fusion of twenty-five years ago. The members of society are fused into each other and are more emotionally dependent on each other, with less operating autonomy in the individual. Emotional events are more similar to those “within an ego fusion” than to events between relatively autonomous people. A relatively differentiated self can live a more orderly life whether alone, or in the middle of the human pile. A poorly differentiated person is not productive alone ... Society has been gravitating into the human piles in large urban centers where the individual may become more alienated from his fellowman than before ... Group activity, including encounter groups and promiscuous sexuality become panicky pretenses to overcome the alienation of too much fusion proximity to others.¹²

⁹ Peter L. Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2006), 3-4.

¹⁰ Bowen, 438.

¹¹ Ronald Richardson, *Polarization and the Healthier Church: Applying Bowen Family Systems Theory to Conflict and Change in Society and Congregational Life* (Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012), 2.

¹² Bowen, 440.

Bowen's grounding for ego fusion comes from post-World War II shifts creating a functionally smaller world that continues currently through the global economy. Dealing with the evaporation of land frontiers affects the social and psychological boundaries in relational systems. The over-closeness pushes families to be more mobile, jobs to be more transient, and people to search for ways of finding space to deal with the inner tension.¹³ Being on-the-move creates a loss of identity. Richardson cites the difference individually and systemically: "In the individual model, there is little sense of people's interconnectedness or of how one's own behavior can affect that of others. In the systems model, there is recognition of the connection between people. It says people can only be understood fully within the context of their relationships."¹⁴ In the family systems model, the individual is inseparable from others regarding self understanding, and Bowen concludes that this is a result of a societal regression "which may be cyclical in nature but which appears to be in a gradual downward decrease in differentiation of self since WWII. How ever this low level of functioning came to be, it is a critical factor in any teamwork effort by the total of society."¹⁵

Part of this downward cycle is the passing on of anxiety within a system. Regarding anxiety, Edwin Friedman applies family systems to congregations in *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*. Friedman argues, "Rather than conflicts and anxieties due primarily to the makeup of personalities,

¹³ Bowen, 441-443.

¹⁴ Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church*, 25.

¹⁵ Bowen, 448.

individual problems have more to do with relational networks, the makeup of other's personalities, where one stands within the relational systems and how one functions within that position."¹⁶

Furthermore, Friedman suggests that a family system "locates a family's problem in the nature of the system rather than in the nature of its parts. A key to that relocation is the concept of homeostasis: the tendency of any set of relationships to strive perpetually, in self-corrective ways, to preserve the organizing principles of its existence."¹⁷ When a system becomes troubled, the resistance to change is a move to maintain balance; where-in anxiety in the system is pushed onto an identified problem through homeostatic resistance. This becomes what systems theory calls triangulation. A basic emotional triangle, as described by Danny Russell in his dissertation on congregational leadership transmission, includes,

one type of relationship that develops between three individuals or entities. Person A can have an issue with Person B. If these two people cannot work through the issue, a person may be dragged into the issue to strengthen one person's side of the issue. Person C may choose one person over the other. As a result, the issue that was between Person A and Person B is not resolved and now also between Person A and Person C (if Person C agreed with Person B). When people try to pass on their anxiety to someone else, they create an emotional triangle to absorb the anxiety instead of addressing the issue themselves. An example is the children absorbing the dysfunction of an unhealthy marriage. The parents are not willing to address the necessary work in their own marriage, so they pass on their frustrations by the way they interact with their children. Then the children try to keep the peace by appeasing their parents and accepting their family dysfunction.¹⁸

¹⁶ Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 11.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 23-23.

¹⁸ Danny Wayne Russell, "Congregational Leadership Development through Mentorships: Preparing Each Generation for the Church's Future through Family Systems Theory" (2014), Doctor of Ministry, Paper 82. <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/82>.

Triangulation shifts the focus of blame onto a third party, leaving them holding the anxiety within a given system. Friedman describes triangulation in the family system: “typical emotional triangles found in families are mother-father-child; a parent and any two children; a parent, his or her child, and his or her own parents; a parent, a child and a symptom in the child; one spouse, the other, and the other’s dysfunction.”¹⁹ Furthermore, work-system triangulation may involve:

any position of responsibility, someone you oversee, and the person who oversees you. Triangles typical of clergy work systems are the religious leader, the ruling body of lay people, and the rest of the congregation; a member of the clergy, the congregation, the budget deficit or theological issue; a member of the clergy, the congregation, and any other professional religious leader in the same congregation.²⁰

The research suggests that generational triangulation can also occur between Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials. Each role does not have to be an individual or group *per se*, as noted above. Triangulation may include everything from the issue at hand to other groups or people whether present, absent, dead, or alive.

At its heart, triangulation does not get caught up in content as much as in process, identifying what is important without getting lost in the details. As Friedman clarifies, “It has been said, ‘what Peter says about Paul tells you more about Peter than it does about Paul.’ In the concept of an emotional triangle, ‘What Peter says to you about his relationship with Paul has to do with his relationship with you.’”²¹ Bowen agrees that the individual is not the problem:

¹⁹ Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 36.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

family theory would say that the negative side of the triangle is merely a symptomatic expression of a total family problem, and to focus on issues in one relationship is to misidentify the problem, to convey the impression that the problem is in this one relationship, and to make the triangle more fixed and less reversible.²²

The need to address one's inner anxiety individually, rather than transfer that anxiety, is the process of differentiation.

Symbiotic attachments between individuals within a system have a cyclical nature wherein individuals can be so close they are like emotional Siamese twins and at other times so distant and hostile they repel each other. When viewed in an individual framework, the focus is only on the individual and the problematic outcomes of the individual, rather than the systemic relational formation of the family. In family systems theory then, a family is interconnected. Children grow up to achieve varying levels of self-differentiation from the undifferentiated family ego mass. The aim is to achieve well-defined boundaries that allow an individual to be emotionally close without taking responsibility for the anxiety of another person, which blurs the line of the individual identity of the self. When individuals become too intimately fused, differentiation from each other becomes impossible. In the closeness phase of fusion, individuals can accurately know the thoughts and feelings of another member to such a degree that stress in one individual results in physical illness in another. In the distancing phase, repelled individuals have a tendency to fuse with another person already in the system, or by bringing the other into the system, thus making them a part of the problem.²³

²² Bowen, 489.

²³ Bowen, 118-123.

Part of fusion into the undifferentiated family unit is the projection process where “the family weakness is projected to the patient who resists noneffectively and then accepts it.”²⁴ An important part of family projection is “the lack of responsibility for the ‘self’ in those who participate in the projection process. A ‘blamer’ who projects his problem to others is not responsible for self. The ‘self-blamer’ is equally irresponsible. He blames himself to relieve anxiety and not assume responsibility for himself.”²⁵

The lack of responsibility of the individual works into the dysfunction. “It is factual that dysfunctioning and overfunctioning exist together. On one level this is a smooth working, flexible, reciprocating mechanism in which one member automatically overfunctions to compensate for the dysfunction of the other.”²⁶ Bowen suggests that the one significant mechanism for sustaining equilibrium, one that maintains an undifferentiated ego mass, is rejection:

At one point in the family process someone makes a fuss about rejection and the “debate” starts. At a point when rejection is present throughout the family, the one who claims “rejection” is usually more rejecting of the other, rather than the obverse being true. Positive statements about the presence or absence of “love,” with reactions and counter reactions, can occupy the scene while there is no objective evidence of change in “love.”²⁷

In family systems, parental anxiety feeds the projection process. In the social system, or congregation, the anxiety of those in power feeds projection. Generationally, power can shift, but power will most often be associated with authoritative position based

²⁴ Ibid., 12.

²⁵ Ibid., 131.

²⁶ Ibid., 155.

²⁷ Ibid., 154.

on monetary earning or cultural positions with high regard.²⁸ Bowen's three steps in the family projection process are: "1) thinking of the triangled one as sick, 2) diagnosing the triadic one and designating him/her 'patient,' and 3) treating the 'patient' as a sick person."²⁹

Modification of Bowen's projection process from the individual family unit into the social unit or congregation parallels the process by applying the projection process of "individuals within the family unit" to "generations within the larger social unit." The anxiety within the generational system results when one generation has been labeled by the other generations as the "problem," in that they do not conform to the group or they disrupt homeostasis. The groups then diagnose the triangled generation, identifying that cohort as the source of emotional issues. Finally, the group treats that generation as sick, effectively trying to fix or dismiss the "problem" generation. Terry Hargrave, a pioneer in the study of intergenerational families, in contrast, suggests that dissonance within systems theory in the projection process is linked to self-reactivity. Hargrave defines self-reactivity "to mean that the individual is prompted to have to cope with the unloving and untrustworthy situations by compensating, albeit destructively, for what is lacking in the sense of identity and self."³⁰ The lack in self-identity, resulting from formational violations of trust and love,³¹ points to the internal individual issue that is projected onto others.

²⁸ Ibid., 135.

²⁹ Ibid., 131.

³⁰ Terry Hargrave and Franz Pfitzer, *Restoration Therapy: Understanding and Guiding Healing in Marriage and Family Therapy* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 37.

³¹ Ibid., 41.

A place must be found where generations as a family system can come together and begin the reconciliatory process, a space that allows an individual to become differentiated within the system. To be clear, convergent is defined as; “to come together from different directions so as eventually to meet; to come from different directions to meet at a place.”³² This paper assumes that Jesus invites convergent commensality³³—table fellowship that brings together different types of individuals with oppositional values and experiences—as an embodiment of the tension at the table. Jesus demonstrates in each generational role, postures that help individuals become more differentiated and move individuals toward non-anxious dialogue that can foster the reconciliation of generations within congregational context.

Underneath It All

While Josh remained at the window facing the empty lot, the warmth from the sun made his hair stand on end. It was a good feeling, a moment of peace. He would love nothing more than for someone to simply tell him how to navigate the canyon that seemed to separate the group he now worked with from the men and women who had so invested in his family’s life. It was not all that long ago that Josh and his wife had moved back from California; at least it seemed like yesterday.

³² *Pocket Oxford American Dictionary and Thesaurus*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 170.

³³ “Commensality as a way of defining who eats what with whom is one of the most powerful ways of defining and differentiating groups.” See Dimitra Gefou-Madianou, ed., *Alcohol, Gender, and Culture* (London: Routledge, 1992): 81, accessed February 26, 2016, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1525/maq.1996.10.3.02a00120/abstract>.

At the time, Josh's wife was being interviewed for a job at Fellowship Church. Josh remembered the interview so clearly, because it was so painful. Josh's wife thought she was coming in to interview for one job, but through a classic bait and switch tactic, she was offered a different job entirely, one of lesser responsibility, a lower level of leadership and meager pay. The interview infuriated Josh! The former job had been on the table for months of discussion. If this is how an organization handled people who did not even work there yet, how do they handle those who are already in the system? Josh was certain they would not be moving forward with Fellowship Church.

Through a series of what felt like invitations from God, Josh and his wife agreed that she should take it, despite everything in him that wanted to walk away entirely. It was then that Josh determined to find out what type of people were leading this church. So, one by one, as Josh was introduced to elders in the church, he would ask them to lunch. He planned on being cordial, but his operative was to find out the type of men that sat at the helm. What Josh found underneath everything was not what he expected. Each time he asked one of these prominent men in the church and community to lunch, he was met with a yes. At every table conversation, Josh was met with listening ears, caring conversation, and a communicated disposition that these leaders were "for" Josh and his family. In fact, the twelfth of twenty-four elders he called met with him for coffee one morning a week for nearly four months. This was a man, Josh later found out, who was raising three kids with his wife while also heading up a Fortune 500 company. That one hour of coffee was the elder's personal time with the Lord, not to mention that one hour of this man's time was literally worth more than Josh made in a year. Yet, the elder gave it willingly to a punk kid who had a hundred questions and a chip on his shoulder.

That was enough; Josh had no need to continue with his mission. The findings were in, and despite what had happened in getting them there, Fellowship Church was being led by an elder board of some of the wisest and most caring men Josh had ever met. As for the bait and switch, six months following the interview, the staff member who had overseen the process of hiring Josh's wife came to the end of a long and careful disciplinary process, and was let go.

As Josh remained there in front of the window, he knew he hoped his experience with the older generations could help him bridge the gap between the college students he was going to be working with and the main congregation. What drove him to reach toward those older men? He needed to identify the driving force in the gap.

The Complexity

The generational gap within the Christian context, as it is generally discussed, is much deeper and more complex than the typical polarized conversation of overt generational differences. The complexity of the "hidden heart" plays a significant role in the societal projection process of systemic patient identification. This leads to the scapegoating of generational cohorts as a means of dealing with internal anxiety.

Robert Saucy, former American biblical scholar and professor of systematic theology at Biola University, describes the complexity within an individual's hidden heart as it relates to social interaction:

The reality of a hidden depth in our heart is also the answer to a common problem: our lack of understanding of why we behave or feel the way we do. We have certain conscious thoughts and attitudes, but our experience doesn't seem to

correlate with them. The truth is that other thoughts and attitudes deep in our heart—of which we are not fully conscious—are actually driving our life.³⁴

The hidden heart, described further in Chapter 5, provides insight into systemic interaction as a complex result of deep beliefs, emotions, and formative influences flowing out of the hidden heart. For now, suffice it to say that the hidden heart is described as such because the individual responds out of the depths within the heart in ways that are not always immediately recognizable, and thus remains hidden.

With the hiddenness of the heart in mind, there are problems with apparent conclusions about generational differences. First, the underlying presupposition that a generation can be objectively evaluated is connected to the hidden heart of the evaluator. Projecting characterization onto an entire group overgeneralizes the population and truncates the ability for individuation. The result dehumanizes individuals within a generational cohort by scapegoating. Bowen calls this a societal projection process:

The family projection process is as vigorous in society as in the family. The essential ingredients are anxiety and three people. Two people get together and enhance their functioning at the expense of a third, the “scapegoated” one. Social scientists use the word “scapegoat.” I prefer the term projection process to indicate a reciprocal process in which the twosome can force the third into submission, or the process is more mutual, or the third can force the other two to treat him as inferior.³⁵

Regarding the approach in this research, the three “people” represent the cohorts of Boomers, Gen X, and Millennials. Societal projection or scapegoating, a mimetic

³⁴ Robert Saucy, *Minding the Heart: The Way of Spiritual Transformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2013), Kindle, loc. 1704-1707.

³⁵ Bowen, 204-205.

contagion of rivalry³⁶ as a means of reconciling the community, is described by French Philosopher René Girard this way:

As mimetic rivalries intensify, during mimetic crises, they gradually erase all existing cultural differences and turn the best-ordered communities into undifferentiated mobs. Beyond certain intensity, the objects of desire are consumed, destroyed, or forgotten. The mimetic frenzy refocuses on the antagonists themselves. The same human beings, who, a little before, could not stop fighting because they shared the same desires, now share the same antagonists and the same hatred. Paradoxically, when mutual love is absent, the only sentiment that can reconcile human beings is its opposite, a common hatred.³⁷

Mimetic rivalry, in Girard's use, suggests a society or generational system that turns on a single identified scapegoat within the system, believing reconciliation can come through violence against the identified "problem." The myth of redemptive violence is also found in the biblical narrative. With the emergence of the family in Genesis comes the beginning of humanity's coping with violations of love and trust. Adam and Eve's fall in Genesis 2 elicits painful reactions of blame, shame, escape, and control. These self-reactive tendencies are then passed on generationally to Cain and Able, where Able becomes the "problem," or reason that Cain's offering was not acceptable to God. As the narrative continues, of course, Cain kills Able as a means of dealing with his own inner turmoil in an act of redemptive violence. Reckoning, in the

³⁶ Mark T. Miller, "Desire in René Girard and Jesus." *Theological Studies* 74, no. 4 (December 2013): 1009-1011. Girard's "first work, *Desire, Deceit, and the Novel* (1961), examines modern literature and concludes that human desire is mimetic and dangerous: we want what others want because they want it, and this leads to increasingly violent rivalries. The second discovery, made in the context of cultural anthropology and presented in *Violence and the Sacred* (1972), is of the way mimetic rivalry can lead to scapegoating and how such sacrifice of innocents provides the foundation for myths, rituals, and other elements of human civilization. *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (1978) discusses the Bible's unique revelation of the innocence of victims and how this revelation has produced spontaneous sympathy for victims and set up communities based on imitation of divine love."

³⁷ René Girard, "Violence and Religion: Cause or Effect?" *The Hedgehog Review*, 6. no.1 (Spring 2004): 8.

narrative, is thought to come through violence enacted upon another. This becomes a way people cope with their inner angst in an effort to bring peace.

Second, societal projection, in the context of generational transition in the local church, can manifest as transference of past violations of love and trust onto authorities that embody parental roles in a system. Using obvious differences between people twenty or so years apart in age as the problem misses the point. Friedman calls this “diagnosing the patient:”

The diagnosis of individual family members stabilizes family homeostasis and makes it more difficult for the diagnosed member to change. Diagnosis in a family establishes who is to be the identified patient. It is inherently an anti-systems concept. It is linear thinking. It denies other variables that are present in the system. Existentially, it makes someone “other,” and allows the remainder of the family to locate their troubles in the diagnosed member. It also disguises opinions and judgments; in an intense “congregational family” struggle, this hidden effect adds to the polarization.³⁸

The diagnosed patient for this research is not an individual, but a generation, and the problem is generally seen as simple sociological differences, when in fact, anxiety within the system is transferred from one group onto another.

Diagnosing the patient destroys the diagnosed member’s identity by fusing the label with the patient. Nonsymptomatic members also form a fixed view of the “patient’s” capabilities.³⁹ The projection process in the generation gap almost always leads to a diagnosis of others when anxiety rises for the person doing the diagnosing. In fact, Friedman suggests that “if you catch yourself diagnosing someone else, there is probably something in you that you are trying to hide.”⁴⁰

³⁸ Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 56.

³⁹ Ibid.

Historically, societal projection of a generational cohort swings back and forth like a pendulum. Fredrick Schmidt gives some helpful clarity, describing the swing “between the generations and the spiritual values that surface and resurface over much longer periods of time. For example, there is a kind of generational conceit that believes a given era has made discoveries that no other generation has ever made.”⁴¹ Diagnosis in this case can look like a younger generation blaming the older, or vice-versa.

Schmidt leans heavily on Robert Wuthnow, who in his overview of spirituality in America identifies a shift in the 1960s with strong spiritual reactions to significant social events, resulting in the undermining of authoritative institutions.⁴² Doubt in authorities often triggers memories of past violations of trust and love, starting the snowball of self-reactivity as reactionary formation experienced by younger generations during a crisis in a family system.

What remains to be seen is whether or not there will be a generational showdown. According to Jeff Gordinier, an Xer himself, “Since Xers grew up in the leviathan shadow of the Boomers, a sense of apartness played a role in forming [Xer] identity from the start and all the while, the Boomers bred, and their solipsistic progeny⁴³ have arrived

⁴⁰ Ibid., 57.

⁴¹ Frederick W. Schmidt, *Conversations with Scripture: The Gospel of Luke* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2009), 19-21.

⁴² Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s* (Berkeley: University of California, 1998), 1.

⁴³ P. M. S. Hacker, *Insight and Illusion: Wittgenstein On Philosophy and the Metaphysics of Experience* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 186. “Solipsism is the doctrine according to which nothing exists save myself and mental states of myself.”

just in time to serve Generation X a second helping of anxiety.”⁴⁴ The perceived shadow and anxiety it creates only heightens the possibility of a diagnostic reaction from younger generations.

Eyes to See, Ears to Hear

The road moving forward is not completely clear. Hargrave suggests that “the three-generation context of family violations makes responsibility for the violations difficult to ascertain.”⁴⁵ Violations of love and trust are passed down from one generation to the next, so responsibility cannot simply be identified solely in one group. Rather than dealing with systemic anxiety by diagnosing, the tension must be approached differently.

Church history has time and time again seen groups that have come into a conflict only to split, leaving the Protestant church with over 30,000 denominations.⁴⁶ Declining Generation X attendance in religious activities⁴⁷ and controversial data on Millennials⁴⁷ make it all too easy to give in to the temptation to make the generation gap about an ecclesiology, pedagogy, theology, or any other bifurcating worldview that forces an either/or stance of who is in and who is out, who is right and who is wrong.

⁴⁴ Jeff Gordinier, *X Saves the World: How Generation X Got the Shaft but Can Still Keep Everything from Sucking*, Reprint ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), xvii, xxi.

⁴⁵ Hargrave and Pfitzer, 85.

⁴⁶ David Barrett, George Thomas Kurian and Todd M. Johnson, *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 5. This is dated information and the WCE is being updated and set for a 2020 release.

⁴⁷ Susan Mitchell, *American Generations: Who They Are and How They Live*, 6th ed. (Ithaca, NY: New Strategist Pub., 2008), 415.

The points above suggest a need for reconciliation, not so much because the generations are against each other, as much as because they are *not hearing* each other. The Boomers are hearing the Millennial protest through their own filter of “the campus upheavals and street rallies of the late 1960s that carried chants and angry cries of generation war. ‘Never trust anyone over 30.’”⁴⁸ Whether this results in a generational showdown or not, the tension between these groups is tangible. Is generational reconciliation and unity possible? Can we hope to bridge and build a system that might even thrive?

What appears to be a historical flexing of muscles between young and old, or a language barrier riddled with irresolvable conflict, can be addressed from another paradigm, one that requires a framework for establishing a way of self-identifying beyond the temptation of the societal projection process. The necessity of engaging the conflict in a manner that leads toward unity can be found in how Christ prays for his followers.⁴⁹ For the Christian church, made up of generational cohorts, to be unable to be unified in Christ’s love has implications for how we demonstrate the capacity to love those outside the church. Furthermore, the foundation of Christ’s church includes the tension between the vibrancy and energy of the young, bonded to the wisdom and patience of the old.⁵⁰ What must first be established is a formational dialogue—a way to

⁴⁸ Paul Taylor, *The Next America: Boomers, Millennials, and the Looming Generational Showdown* (New York: Public Affairs, 2014), Kindle, loc..1004-1008.

⁴⁹ Jesus’ prayer in John 17:22-23, “The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.”

⁵⁰ Titus 2:2-6, “²Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. ³Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, ⁴and so train the young women to love their husbands and

engage God, self, and others—that contextualizes the systemic tension and helps the local church reconcile generations.

In Chapter 2, generational research will illuminate the historically bifurcating tendencies between the Boomers, Generation X, and Millennial cohorts in an attempt to identify the generation gap as a projection process in the family system and tendency to diagnose. Chapter 3 will discuss the biblical foundation for reconciliation. The biblical narrative is filled with examples of societal projection leading up to a model of actual reconciliation in Christ. In response to the cycle of violence, Christ comes to reconcile humanity to God and to each other through his life, death, and resurrection. Another way to describe this process as it is seen throughout Scripture is Joseph Blenkinsopp’s use of creation, un-creation, and recreation.⁵¹ From this perspective of reconciliation, a working understanding of individual reconciliation as a differentiation process will be examined. Chapter 4 lays out the theology of table fellowship that presents the table as the place where individual tensions come together. Jesus remains differentiated and a non-anxious presence in the midst of the converging tension at the table. In Chapter 5, Jesus is seen as the embodiment of differentiated postures at the table in each generational role, while in the midst of the dividing tension as convergent commensality. Thus, the thesis of this research is that convergent commensality provides individuals with ways to remain differentiated at the table for the reconciliation of generations in the local church.

children,⁵ to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.⁶ Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled.”

⁵¹ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Creation, Un-Creation, Re-Creation: A Discursive Commentary On Genesis 1-11*, Reprint ed. (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2011), 1-19.

CHAPTER 2: HISTORY OF GENERATIONS

The Dark Ages

Generational tension was not unheard of in the forty-year history of Fellowship Church. Long before the former college ministry split away, there was an attempt at the church to transition leadership from one generation to another. Josh had heard other staff members refer to this time as the “dark ages.”

As was the trend for many evangelical churches roughly 15 years prior, around 2001, an attempt was made at transitioning church leadership to the next generation, one that came on the heels of discussions throughout the country¹ revolving around reaching Generation X, as well as transitioning leadership from Boomers. Over the course of two years the college pastor at that time was promoted to the senior pastor role, an example of a major attempt at such a transition, from a Boomer leader to a Generation X leader.

The transition may have seemed smooth to the outside observer, but the internal narrative was entirely different. The incoming Gen X pastor had a painful history, including overall absence and abuse from his father. Being poorly differentiated, he functioned as a leader who was suspicious and controlling. These self-reactive behaviors included blaming former leadership for anything that did not go as planned, and attempts at controlling the staff and elder board through manipulation. He even went so far as to have the locks on the building changed to keep out the former senior pastor, who was still an elder. This was a classic case of projecting internal anxiety from past pain onto a

¹ For an overview of the 1990s and 2000s shift towards relevance regarding the new generation of leaders, see Steve Rabey, *In Search of Authentic Faith: How Emerging Generations Are Transforming the Church* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2001).

system, and it manifested in an attempt to wrestle the church out of the hands of Boomer leadership.

In less than two and a half years, the elder board chose to remove the new pastor. To add fuel to that fire, many of the young men who were identified as leaders and put into key pastoral roles during the attempt at transition, eventually made up the college ministry staff that would later split away from Fellowship Church.

Josh knew the “dark ages” were behind them as a church, but it still informed much of where the church was. A failed leadership transition linked with the former college ministry split created a highly anxious system. It seemed like the aftermath of it all had left the generations suspicious of each other. The older generations wondered if the younger generation could be trusted and would stick around. The younger generations wondered if there would ever be a time that they would be invested in and trusted to lead again. Josh found himself squarely in the middle of the tension.

Generations as a Family System

Family-systems theory provides the lens through which generational cohorts will be viewed. In the same way individuals within a family make up a system, so do the individuals within a congregation make up a system, and the generational cohort groups as individuals also make up a generational system. Russell describes how passing on anxiety within a church system occurs:

Emotional triangles can increase the anxiety within a church as well. The stress within the church can rise by sustaining generational differences through passing on each other’s responsibility of the problems in a church and the stress of those problems. The anxiety within a system is increased by people placing blame of the anxiety on someone else. Through one’s limited understanding, it is easier to point out what others are doing wrong instead of discerning how one is

contributing to the problems. One way the individual perspective sustains dysfunction is through the thinking that if the younger generation would become more committed, then the church could move forward. Another example of the individual perspective is the thinking that if the older generation would let go of its power, then the church could move forward. Each generation sustains the individual perspective by interpreting the church's context through its own limited understanding.²

Russell points out a system where individuals are unable to differentiate. The result is a projection process that places the systems anxiety onto an identified generation who remain “the problem.” Accordingly, a poorly differentiated system is evidenced by societal projection onto the individual. This is true for the family system, the congregational system, and in generational studies, the cohort system.

This chapter will identify the importance of grouping generations in cohorts in order to identify similarities within the group regarding their formative upbringing. First, four generations are examined: the Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials. Second, a stratification of each generation explores the cohort's general formational influences as well as their present role within the system. Finally, a reframing of the generation gap as a societal projection process provided through family systems theory challenges the conventional dialogue regarding the overarching generation gap.

Family and Cohort Generations Defined

William Straus and Neil Howe have been studying generations and written at least four books covering generational identification and emerging patterns. They acknowledge two lenses that might be used to evaluate generations—the genealogical model or the cohort model. In the genealogical model “family generations live only in

² Russell, 97.

‘family’ time, a rhythm of births unique to each lineage and having no lasting connection to historical or ‘social’ time. There is no intelligible way to apply the concept to an entire society.”³ Identifying specifics within a family, genealogy works fine, but for most observations, especially regarding large- scale generational patterns and schemes, the genealogical model proves to be little more than anecdotal. The genealogical model may prove to be less helpful than a cohort model when attempting to identify social historical effects on groups of people born at roughly the same time in history. In contrast, the cohort generation is defined as,

everyone who is “brought into being” at the same historical moment—that is, everyone who belongs to the same cohort-group . . . all members of the same cohort generation live in the same social or historical time. At any given moment, members of a cohort generation can all be found in a common age bracket. They all share both a special history and a special type of personality and behavior shaped by that history.⁴

Strauss and Howe go on to draw the conclusion that cohort generations are to society what family generations are to families, including the layering of patterns they label as “generational constellations.” These constellations demonstrate what role any given cohort in a society plays at a particular moment in history. Furthermore, they demonstrate what role in a family an individual holds within a given time. The cohort model maintains generational constellations as a single thread throughout social time whereas in the genealogical model, familial generations get mixed through lineage layers.⁵ The correlation to families is an important one, considering the nature of family

³ Strauss and Howe, *Generations*, 437.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 437.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 441.

systems theory and triangulation previously discussed in Chapter 1. However, the cohort constellation of the Silent, Boomer, Gen X and Millennial generations are the focus of this study.

Stratification

With generational constellations as the focus, Strauss and Howe identify cohorts based on their phase of life as defined by central roles:

- Elderhood (ages 66-87). Central role: *stewardship* (supervising, mentoring, channeling endowments, passing on values).
- Midlife (age 44-65). Central role: *leadership* (parenting, teaching, directing institutions, using values).
- Rising Adulthood (age 22-43). Central role: *activity* (working, starting families and livelihoods, serving institutions, testing values).
- Youth (age 0-22) Central role: *dependence* (growing, learning, accepting protection and nurture, avoiding harm acquiring values).⁶

Approaching the present constellation in this format, the Silent, Boomer, Gen X, and Millennial cohort groups straddle two central roles, with the younger half in one role and the older half in the next. What follows is a constellation view of these cohorts.

As of 2016, The Silents, in the role of *stewardship*, are halfway through Elderhood—entering a legacy phase where they are beginning to walk out their end of this journey called life. Boomers, in the role of *leadership*, are halfway through Midlife, and the older part of the cohort is already in the role of Elderhood. Gen Xers, in the role

⁶ Ibid., 60-61.

of *activity*, are halfway through Rising Adulthood; the older ones of the cohort have transitioned into the role of Midlife. Millennials are straddling Youth, in the role of *dependence*, and Rising Adulthood, defined by *activity*. Post-Millennials are yet to be stratified.⁷

The scheme described above can be problematic. For example Millennials, as a part of Rising Adulthood, would ideally be between ages 22-43, yet there is debate about where the Millennial generation begins and where it ends. Strauss and Howe suggest they emerged “in or after 1982—the ‘Babies on Board’ of the early Reagan years, the ‘Have You Hugged Your Child Today?’ sixth graders of the early Clinton years, the teens of Columbine, and...the much-touted high school Class of 2000.”⁸ Dr. Tim Elmore, recognized as a leader on this particular generation,⁹ identifies the cohorts in this way:

The latest wave of what is commonly called Generation Y, or the Millennials, generally defined as those born between 1984 and 2002. The younger Millennials, born after 1990, resemble their earlier Gen Y counterparts in many ways, but in volumes of other ways stand in stark contrast to them. More than any previous group, this younger population has been defined by technology—which is why I believe it’s accurate to call them Generation iY.¹⁰

⁷ Norwegian Futurist and researcher Anne Boysen has written several articles and a chapter in *The Future of Business: Critical Insights into a Rapidly Changing World from 60 Future Thinkers* by Rohit Talwar. She also hosts <http://afterthemillennials.com/> which provides helpful information regarding her work studying the Post Millennial generation, one which she suggests, appropriately has yet to be named. Often labeled as the Post-Millennial, Generation Z, or Post (i.e., post 9/11, post 1st black president [Obama in office], post social media influence, post iPhone.).

⁸ Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York: Vintage, 2000), Kindle, loc. 77-79.

⁹ Dr. Elmore is the founder of *Growing Leaders*, an Atlanta based non-profit created to help emerging leaders. <http://growingleaders.com/>.

¹⁰ Tim Elmore, *Generation iY: Our Last Chance to Save Their Future* (Atlanta: Poet Gardener Publishing, 2010), Kindle, loc. 13.

The divergence identified within a given cohort accounts for the straddling of two different phases of life and their accompanying roles. Older Millennials already in the Rising Adulthood phase and activity role make different choices with their time, money and resources than younger Millennials wrestling with dependence.

The tension here is the non-empirical means utilized to identify generations. Cohort identification is helpful for discussing generalized classifications of people, much the way political groups, faith communities, and humanity at large stratify themselves in order to have a conversation about the parts of the whole. How delineation of cohorts happens then becomes important.

Cohorts are set apart by social moments, which are identified best when lived through, as they naturally change the landscape of how people think, interact, and respond to the world. Strauss and Howe point out that,

... a social moment is an era, typically lasting about a decade, when people perceive that historic events are radically altering their social environment. How do we know a social moment when we see it? The best way is to live through one, or to listen to someone who has. It is an era when everyone senses—at the time and afterward—that history is moving swiftly, that the familiar world is disappearing and a new world is emerging.¹¹

The importance of living through an event is palpable to anyone who has actually lived through one. For example, describing life on September 11, 2001 is an easy task for an older Millennial, much like a Boomer might describe the Kennedy assassination or a Gen Xer, the Berlin Wall. More specifically, Strauss and Howe identify two types of social moments, secular crises and spiritual awakenings. Secular crises occur “when

¹¹ Strauss and Howe, *Generations*, 71.

society focuses on reordering the outer world of institutions and public behavior,”¹² and spiritual awakenings occur when “society focuses on changing the inner world of values and private behavior.”¹³

Social moments do not arrive at random. For example, a secular crisis and a spiritual awakening never occur back to back. Nor does half a century ever pass without a social moment of either type. Instead, social moments arrive on a rather regular schedule. Social moments normally arrive in time intervals roughly separated by two phases of life (approximately forty to forty-five years), and they alternate in type between secular crises and spiritual awakenings.”¹⁴

Just like the assessment of a cohort, overall evaluation of generational differences does not come without its own set of problems. There are several reasons why generational demographic research is difficult. According to Pew Research, “Try as we might, we know we can never completely disentangle the multiple reasons that generations differ. At any given moment in time, age group differences can be the result of life cycle events, period effects and cohort effects.”¹⁵ With such a wide range of factors influencing cohort personalities, a generalized overview of each cohort will provide a sense of the individual identities within each one.

The Generations

Despite the difficulties found with generational study, it is important to evaluate the social and individual implications of cohort identity. Jose Ortega y Gasset, a philosopher in Spain in the 20th century, discusses generational study as “a dynamic

¹² Ibid., 71.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ The Pew Research Center, “Millennials,” 12.

compromise between mass and individual, and is the most important conception in history. It is, so to speak, the pivot responsible for the movements of historical evolution.”¹⁶ Whether or not the pivots of history hang on the concept, the examination of interconnectedness of generations as a family system is merited. What follows is an overview of the Silent, Boomer, Gen X, and Millennial cohorts.

The Silent Generation

The name *Silent* was coined by *Time Magazine* in 1951:

Youth today is waiting for the hand of fate to fall on its shoulders, meanwhile working fairly hard and saying almost nothing. The most startling fact about the younger generation is its silence. With some rare exceptions, youth is nowhere near the rostrum. By comparison with the Flaming Youth of their fathers and mothers, today’s younger generation is a still, small flame. It does not issue manifestoes, make speeches or carry posters. It has been called the “Silent Generation.” But what does the silence mean? What, if anything, does it hide? Or are youth’s elders merely hard of hearing?¹⁷

The Silent cohort’s perceived silence may be attributed to the idolization of older generations and how loudly the Boomers came onto the scene. Pew Research described the Silent generation as “adults born from 1928 through 1945. Children of the Great Depression and World War II, their ‘Silent’ label refers to their conformist and civic instincts. It also makes for a nice contrast with the noisy ways of the anti-establishment Boomers.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Jose Ortega y Gasset, *The Modern Theme* (New York: Forgotten Books, 2015), 15.

¹⁷ *Time Magazine*, “The Younger Generation,” November 5, 1951, accessed August 25, 2015, <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,856950-10,00.html>.

¹⁸ Paul Taylor and Scott Keeter, “Millennials: A Portrait of Generation Next,” February 24, 2010, accessed July 23, 2015, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2010/02/24/millennials-confident-connected-open-to-change/>.

Primarily influenced by their parents, the Lost Generation and G.I.s (or Greatest Generation), the Silent spent most of their energy trying to grow up to be like their parents, and did so just as the mid-1960's came with its idolatry of youth.

Perpetually stuck in the middle, overlooked, and undervalued ... the Silent have never succeeded in experiencing the snap of catharsis felt by G.I.s or Boomers. Where the G.I.s did great things and felt one with history, where Boomers found ravishment within themselves, the Silent have taken great things for granted and looked beyond themselves—while worrying that, somehow, the larger challenges of life are passing them by.¹⁹

These factors produced a quiet demeanor that is self reflective, and an understanding of social engagement and consequences. “Lacking an independent voice, they... adopted the moral relativism of the skilled arbitrator, mediating arguments between others—and reaching out to people of all cultures, races, ages, and handicaps.”²⁰

Born before 1928, the Silent generation “shared coming-of-age experience in the Depression and World War II.”²¹ Just as Japan surrendered, the older members of the Silent generation turned sixteen, and drastic changes came with the end of the war. From having a family brought into the war full tilt, possibly having an absent father in the war and a full-time working mother, this generation would have experienced a dramatic shift both in family and in society as men returned home from war.

The return home from the war for WWII vets brought significant changes. The country was economically positioned for war production, the lingering fear of the Depression and unemployment was marked in the psyche of the nation, and yet,

¹⁹ Strauss and Howe, *Generations*, 282.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 256.

²¹ Taylor, Kindle, loc. 755, 785-787.

Veterans mustered out without any hint of riot, cheered by hometown welcomes that didn't stop when the parades were over. As the triumphant mood lingered, few wanted to re-wage old political or cultural arguments. Instead, returning vets wanted to get married, have kids, and move into nice homes and productive jobs.²²

The disposition of returning veterans had a significant effect on the role for a generation with no apparent voice. The Silent generation “produced virtually every major figure in the modern civil rights movement—from the Little Rock children to the youths at the Greensboro lunch counter, Martin Luther King, Jr., to Malcolm X, from Cesar Chavez’s farmworkers’ union to Russell Means’ American Indian Movement.”²³

According to David Kinnaman, author of *You Lost Me* and president of The Barna Group, and Aly Hawkins, freelance writer and editor, contemporary Silents describe their cohort using words like “‘World War II and Depression,’ ‘smarter,’ ‘honest,’ ‘work ethic,’ and ‘values and morals.’”²⁴ The Elderhood’s central role becomes stewardship. This includes overseeing and passing on wisdom and values through mentoring relationships. There is a dynamic tension in this phase and role:

... (it is) the winter of life, time for engaging in leisure and reflection, for retiring from the exhausting duties of career and family, and for passing the reins to younger hands ... Yet this is also a time for setting standards, passing on wisdom, making endowments, and taking advantage of society’s highest leadership posts. Liberated from the grinding burdens of work and family, many elders are able to step back and provide the strategic wisdom every society needs.²⁵

²² Strauss and Howe, *The Fourth Turning*, Kindle, loc. 2793-2797.

²³ Strauss and Howe, *Generations*, 284.

²⁴ David Kinnaman with Aly Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church--and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), Kindle, loc. 492-495.

²⁵ Strauss and Howe, *Fourth Turning*, Kindle, loc. 1117-1121.

There is still much to gain and share as the Silents approach the sunset of their epoch and Boomers transition into a stewardship role.

Boomers

The Baby Boomer cohort is arguably the most recognizable of the generations, as they have been a part of the national conversation since the time of their arrival. “The Baby Boomer label is drawn from the great spike in fertility that began in 1946, right after the end of World War II, and ended almost as abruptly in 1964, around the time the birth control pill went on the market. It’s a classic example of a demography-driven name.”²⁶ The demographically shaped name drew the attention of sociologists as well as marketers, who recognized significant earning potential. Matt Thornhill, Founder and President of Generations Matter and the Boomer Project,²⁷ and a leader in marketing to Boomers suggests,

Baby Boomers were the first to be raised in front of the TV during the Cold War and Vietnam. They remember the deaths of JFK, RFK and MLK Jr.. Images and memories of protests against the war and for Civil Rights, Watergate, *M*A*S*H*, *All in the Family* and Elvis have been burned upon their collective consciousness. Boomers have been driving the engine of the American economy since they came of age in the 1970s. Since they made up the bulk of the 18-49 year old demographic group, they have been the focus of practically everything, including virtually all marketing and advertising as well as books, movies, and TV shows. It truly was “all about them.”²⁸

Such focus from a consumer standpoint suggests a societal system pushing the inner anxiety of a post-war America onto Boomers. Massive shifts came with the end of

²⁶ Taylor and Keeter, 4.

²⁷ <http://www.boomerproject.com/>.

²⁸ Matt Thornhill and John Martin, *Boomer Consumer: Ten New Rules for Marketing to America's Largest, Wealthiest and Most Influential Group* (Great Falls, VA: LINX Corp, 2007), 13.

WWII. Anxiety rose as the post-depression economy's dependency on the war machine evaporated with the war. Women who had established careers faced the prospect of a return to the home or an attempt to fight for positions as returning veterans looked for work, which was a new possibility with the public release of the birth control pill.²⁹ America's entrance into Vietnam, a host of civil-rights shifts, and high profile assassinations all resulted in an anxiety-ridden system triangled by a situation where generations were not hearing each other at home. A *Time* magazine article in 1965 shed some light on many Boomers' formative influences:

Adults who lived through a great depression, a shattering war, an anxious peace, and the whole onslaught of existentialism are less inclined than ever to proclaim what Margaret Mead calls "parental imperatives." But much of the diminishing tension results from parental intent as well as parental abdication.³⁰

Time further documented marketing toward Boomers that shifted children from being family assets to liabilities.³¹ There is little wonder that the ideal marketed to this generation was toughness. Tamara J. Erickson is a McKinsey Award-winning author and widely respected expert on collaboration and innovation,³² and she describes the 1960s and 1970s as a decade of unrest worldwide:

The sense of unrest was pervasive in many parts of the world. Nearly three hundred thousand boat people fled Vietnam; the Cultural Revolution was underway in the People's Republic of China; there was rioting in France, Germany, and Italy and a revolution in Czechoslovakia. Not surprisingly, growing

²⁹ Released by the Food and Drug Administration to the public in 1960 and a part of the significant shift in culture and Christianity, according to Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 113.

³⁰ *TIME Magazine*, "On the Fringe of a Golden Era," January 25, 1965, accessed November 13, 2015, <http://time.com/3680943/on-the-fringe-of-a-golden-era/>.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Nathan Bennett and Stephen A. Miles, *Your Career Game: How Game Theory Can Help You Achieve Your Professional Goals* (Stanford: Stanford Business Books, 2010), 59.

up amid these events caused many Boomers, regardless of political persuasion, to conclude that the world was not working all that well—that it needed to be changed.³³

Systemic anxiety was not found just in the home; it extended throughout the nation and around the world. American author and editor Landon Jones suggests how Boomers internalized the anxiety:

Isolated by age and education, abetted by television, they were whipsawed between high aspirations and low motivation. They wanted, but were kept (by their own numbers) from reaching. They had little appreciation for the role of sacrifice and commitment in life. The hope of the sixties, when the generation thought that it just might change the world, turned into a generational malaise of frustration and anxiety. And the worst of it was that they were not sure what their aspirations were supposed to be. The affluence of their fathers proved impossible to sustain. But they had been looking for something beyond affluence. They had expected to be the masters of change, but now change had mastered them. Other generations had mapped their experience by such signposts as wars, revolutions, plagues, famines, and economic crisis. The plague of the baby boom was uncertainty.³⁴

The barrage of focus on the self and the tension of uncertainty are reflected in Strauss and Howe’s evaluation. “Boomers have always seen their mission not as constructing a society, but of justifying, purifying, even *sanctifying* it,”³⁵ and with that mission, emotional triangles form (between Boomers, older generations, and the problems that need fixing).

The shift from children as “commodity for labor” to “liability as consumer” produced an image in the mind of adolescents that the world was about them, for them, and centered on them. An inward disposition can be an attempt to deal with pain and

³³ Tamara Erickson, *What’s Next, Gen X? Keeping Up, Moving Ahead, and Getting the Career You Want* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2010), Kindle, loc. 49-50.

³⁴ Landon Y. Jones, *Great Expectations: America and the Baby Boom Generation* (New York: Coward McCann, 1980), Kindle, loc. 6520-6526.

³⁵ Strauss and Howe, *Generations*, 301.

uncertainty. As Henri Nouwen wrote in an article in 1970, “No authority, no institution, no outer concrete reality has the power to relieve them of their anxiety and loneliness and make them free. Therefore, the only way is the inward way. If there is nothing ‘out there’ or ‘up there,’ perhaps there is something meaningful, something solid ‘in there.’”³⁶

Strauss and Howe identify that “even as the society-wide generation gap receded in the 1970s, the Boom ethos remained a deliberate antithesis to everything associated with their predecessors: spiritualism over science, gratification over patience, negativism over positivism, fractiousness over conformity, rage over friendliness, self over community.”³⁷ Though there may not have been an overt gap, triangulation between ideologies, Boomers, and G.I.’s continued, as Boomers turned inward.

Since Boomers found nothing authoritative to hold onto except what was internal, Erickson suggests they

developed skeptical, even cynical, attitudes toward authority. Their world was one in which authority figures were suspect. Many concluded that they needed to get personally involved. Their logical desire was not to join a world that was by and large headed in the right direction, but to change a world that had clearly gone off course.³⁸

As a result, the Boomers, finding no valid authority, adopted “the mantra, ‘Don’t trust anyone over 30,’ a slogan attributed to several, but most likely stated by Jack Weinberg of the Berkeley Free Speech movement.”³⁹ The mantra led the Boomers’

³⁶ In a 1970 article for *Commonweal* and later published in Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (New York: Image Books, 1979), 32.

³⁷ Strauss and Howe, *Generations*, 2.

³⁸ Erickson, Kindle, loc. 50.

³⁹ Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s*, ed. Peter Braunstein (New York: Routledge, 2002), 254.

skepticism [to] challenge all institutions and values. The government, the church, the military, the professions, and the schools have all been reformed in one way or another by the Baby Boomers. The work ethic itself was examined by this generation and found wanting. Authority everywhere remains in decline.⁴⁰

The Boomers' reaction to previous generations and their desire for reform established an internal dissonance that passed on the cycle of poorly developed individual identity that could still remain connected, despite "[describing] their generation with terms like 'work ethic,' 'respectful,' 'values and morals,' and 'smarter.'"⁴¹ Boomers find themselves now as leaders halfway through midlife. They have faithfully led businesses and churches through a number of difficult transitions and financial hardships. As the Baby Boom approach the stewardship role, transition of leadership is on the horizon.

Generation X

The term "Generation X" has been associated with Douglas Coupland's work by the same name and refers to anyone born between 1964 and 1982. A 1995 article in *Details* magazine identified the "true" inspiration for Coupland's book title:⁴²

The book's title [*Generation X*] came not from Billy Idol's band, as many supposed, but from the final chapter of a funny sociological book on American class structure titled *Class*, by Paul Fussell. In his final chapter, Fussell named an "X" category of people who wanted to hop off the merry-go-round of status, money and social climbing that so often frames modern existence. The citizens of X had much in common with my own social disengaged characters; hence the title.⁴³

⁴⁰ Jones, Kindle, loc. 6567-6569.

⁴¹ Kinnaman and Hawkins, Kindle, loc. 492-495.

⁴² Christopher Doody, "X-plained: the production and reception history of Douglas Coupland's *Generation X*." *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada* 49.1 (2011): 5+, accessed August 15, 2015, <http://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/bsc/article/view/21940/17797>.

⁴³ Douglas Coupland, "Generation X'd," *Details*, June 1995, accessed July 12, 2010, <http://Coupland.tripod.com/detailsl.html>.

Also referred to as “Busters” in Kinnaman’s work, the 1964-1982 cohort self-describe themselves by using “these terms: ‘technology use,’ ‘work ethic,’ ‘conservative/traditional,’ ‘smarter,’ and ‘respectful.’”⁴⁴ This is an interesting self-diagnosis, as “Buster” is a direct association to Boomer, a link Gen X has tried hard to part with. Strauss and Howe suggest adding “13er” to the list of names as,

the worst part of this “Baby Bust” nomenclature is how it plants [them] squarely where they do not want to be: in the shadow of the “boom” ... These eighty million Americans need a non-label that has nothing whatsoever to do with Boomers. So take a number. Thirteen... Counting back to the peers of Benjamin Franklin, this generation is, in point of fact, the thirteenth to know the American nation, flag, and Constitution. More than a name, the number 13 is a gauntlet, a challenge, an obstacle to be overcome.⁴⁵

Whatever the name, when Strauss and Howe wrote *13th Gen*, the cohort known by the name Gen X happened to be

the most diverse generation—ethnically, culturally, economically, and in family structure; the only generation born since the Civil War to come of age unlikely to match their parents’ economic fortunes; and the only one born this century to grow up personifying (to others) not the advance of, but the decline of their society’s greatness.⁴⁶

No matter which of the above three labels is applied to this cohort, there are suggestive undertones; “X” is the undefined coefficient; “Buster” is the antithesis of the Boom; “13er” is the superstitious integer. Rather than asking where anxiety *is* found, it is more appropriate to ask where it is not found in relation to Gen X. Strauss and Howe highlight the anxiety of this cohort:

⁴⁴ Kinnaman and Hawkins, *Kindle*, loc. 492-495.

⁴⁵ Neil Howe and Bill Strauss, *13th Gen: Abort, Retry, Ignore, Fail?* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 16-17.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

Meet the 13er “boomerang child”—yet another addition (along with “latchkey child” and “throwaway child”) to the sad lexicon of the 13er youth era. Among those who leave home with a high school degree or more, fully 40 percent (and well over half of the men) “boomerang” back to their parents’ home—and kitchen and laundry—at least once.”⁴⁷

This cohort is the first to display the pattern of returning home after significant milestones like graduation of high school or college, and one that Millennials will pick up on. The boomerang pattern will continue and has as much to do with the moral or ideology of a generation as it does with the fears and ideologies of the generations that precede them.⁴⁸

The generational systemic anxiety embodied at home formed a type of melancholia or angst that developed into an attitude of reaction. The attitude identified with Gen X led to an affinity for deconstructionism, a pride in a move toward post-modern thinking, and the formation of their own churches and business in their own way. A brief look back into consumer culture points to such an attitude. For example, “grunge rock,” led by music icons Kurt Cobain and the band Nirvana, and characterized by baggy, tattered jeans and flannel, and N.W.A. (Niggaz Wit Attitudes),⁴⁹ with their lyrical bluntness and public persona, were similar types of reactions to systemic anxiety. Anthropologically, Strauss and Howe agree regarding the push back in pop culture and in the home:

⁴⁷ Ibid., 105.

⁴⁸ See information below regarding the systemic issue of the Gray ceiling, Boomers remaining in their careers longer, which closes off higher-level jobs and leadership roles to younger generations, effectively stalemating the experiential growth of a generation.

⁴⁹ Miles White, *From Jim Crow to Jay-Z: Race, Rap, and the Performance of Masculinity* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 52. Miles White, former *USA Today* staff writer, suggests the N.W.A. changed the art and form of Hip Hop Culture as a seminal influence.

No other generation in living memory has come of age with such a sense of social distance—of adults doing so little for them and expecting so little from them. Lacking the ego strength to set agendas for others, 13ers instead react to the world as they find it. They're proud of their ability to poke through the hype and the detail, to understand older people far better (they sense) than older people understand them.⁵⁰

Understanding, but not feeling understood, is a result of the gap that was both externally driven by consumer culture and internally wrestled with at home. The resulting disassociation produced a tendency in Gen X to blame others, especially older people who did not understand them. The lack of differentiation within culture established an animosity between generations, whether psychologically, physically, or some combination of both. Such separation results in reactive formation, or “self-reactivity” as already defined, meaning “the individual is prompted to have to cope with the unloving and untrustworthy situations by compensating, albeit destructively, for what is lacking in the sense of identity and self.”⁵¹ Coping, through fight-or-flight reactivity, manifests psychologically and physically when a person, group, or generation begins to move towards shame, blame, control, or escape/chaos⁵² as a means of dealing with the inner anxiety from a poorly defined self and without the tools to self-regulate emotional dependency.

Strauss and Howe identify the following coping strategies that come across as defensive postures in the Gen X cohort:

...re-erecting age-old defense mechanisms: platonic relationships, group dating, and a youth culture (reminiscent of Lost-era street life) in which kids watch out

⁵⁰ Strauss and Howe, *Generations*, 323.

⁵¹ Hargrave and Pfitzer, 37.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 64.

for their own safety and for the physical integrity of their own circle of friends. . . . 13ers have acquired an adult like fatalism about the weakness and uncertainty of elders—and question their ability to protect the young from future danger. . . . Confronted with these facts of life, 13ers have built a powerful survival instinct, wrapped around an ethos of personal determinism.⁵³

Herein lies a similar inward movement within a generation that has not found hope, as Nouwen suggests, “out there” or “up there.”⁵⁴

Gen X is not the sole participant of systemic anxiety, a possible explanation why their rejection of authority may not be entirely unfounded. Anne Fisher, a columnist for *Fortune* magazine, and Kate Bonamici, a former writer for *Fortune*, point out,

An entire generation is bumping against something no amount of youthful vigor can match. Call it the Gray Ceiling. The Gray Ceiling is purely a function of mathematics. . . . and sandwiched in between [Boomers and Millennials] is the Baby Bust, or Generation X. Known variously as the laziest generation and the most entrepreneurial, they are unambiguously the smallest generation since the Great Depression. Though that worked to the benefit of Gen Xers when it came to slots in elite schools—and will once again work to their benefit when the Boomers finally leave the workforce—right now it’s holding them back. Increasingly, younger workers are finding that no matter how many hours they put in or how much their bosses rave about their work, they’re just plain stuck. Generation X, it would seem, is in danger of turning into the Prince Charles of the American workforce: perpetual heirs apparent awaiting the keys to the kingdom.⁵⁵

Erickson confirms the issue, noting that Xers leave corporations because there is a “Boomer ceiling,” put firmly in place by “Boomers who always have to get theirs but don’t know how to share. The fundamental concern with Boomers involves their lack of faith and trust in the X generation.”⁵⁶ Trust issues are reminiscent of significant life

⁵³ Strauss and Howe, *Generations*, 322.

⁵⁴ Nouwen, 32.

⁵⁵ Anne Fisher and Kate Bonamici, “Have You Outgrown Your Job?” *Fortune* 154, no. 4 (August 21, 2006): 46-56. *Business Source Complete*, accessed September 25, 2015, http://archive.fortune.com/magazines/fortune/fortune_archive/2006/08/21/8383654/index.htm.

⁵⁶ Erickson, Kindle, loc. 25.

events where violations of love and trust have the potential to trigger reactivity. For Boomers, control is a social projection of anxiety through mistrust. The stress of a bottlenecked job market has systemic repercussions on the age at which Xers marry, become homeowners, and parents. The Boomers create one side of a generational sandwich that is being met by the “next boom” of Millennials. Just as Boomers may be leaving the higher spots open, the squeeze of queue-jumping Millennials is here.⁵⁷

There is little argument whether Gen X has been entrenched in an anxious system. They bought homes at peak values as home-buying Boomers drove up prices, and they entered leadership roles when the challenges could hardly be more difficult. Through it all, this sandwiched group has demonstrated, according to Erickson, a deep commitment to parenting and remained uncommonly loyal to friend circles.⁵⁸ Gen X has made an “unparalleled contribution to two related phenomena: innovation and humor.” Despite heavy criticism, they maintain “long life expectancies and many more years ahead, facing choices and challenges.”⁵⁹

Generation X currently finds themselves straddling the phases of Rising Adulthood and Midlife, and central roles of leadership and activity. With a portion of this demographic moving into key leadership roles within the church, how transition is navigated between Boomers, Xers, and Millennials depends on how the present generation gap is addressed beyond individual societal projection.

⁵⁷ Ibid., loc. 21.

⁵⁸ Ibid., loc. 22.

⁵⁹ Ibid., loc. 21-22.

Millennials

Millennials have been referred to as “the next boom,” an appropriate label, considering the surge in literature about Millennials, with topics ranging from how to raise them, work with them, and what is wrong with them. According to Kinnaman and Hawkins at Barna,

The Millennials use these five phrases to describe their generation: ‘technology use,’ ‘music and pop culture,’ ‘liberal/ tolerant,’ ‘smarter,’ and ‘clothes.’ Where has respectful gone? Where is work ethic? ... This shows that the next generation is not just sort of different; they are discontinuously different ... the cultural setting in which young people have come of age is significantly changed from what was experienced during the formative years of previous generations ... no generation of Christians has lived through a set of cultural changes so profound and lightning fast.⁶⁰

Millennials are different, and the cause for alarm has moved some who work directly with the young cohort to assert strong critiques. Mark Bauerlein, a professor of English at Emory University, gave Millennials the title, “The Dumbest Generation,” and by doing so perpetuated the cycle of blame begun by previous generations’ labeling of their protégés. Bauerlein’s stinging critique finds Millennials having no regard for books and reading,

No generation trumpeted *a-literacy* (knowing how to read, but choosing not to) as a valid behavior of their peers.... and in comparison to other generations; Boomers had enough intellectuals of their own to avoid it, Gen X with its slackers and grunge chose not to boast in their “disaffections.” Today’s rising generation thinks more highly of its lesser traits. It wears anti-intellectualism on its sleeve, pronouncing book-reading an old-fashioned custom, and it snaps at people who rebuke them for it.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Kinnaman and Hawkins, *Kindle*, loc. 496-499.

⁶¹ Mark Bauerlein, *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future (Or, Don 't Trust Anyone Under 30)* (New York: Tarcher, 2009), 40-41.

No doubt many who work with this younger crowd will experience deep frustration because of this dismissal of core values formed by life experience and confirmed through time. Bauerlein is not the only professional with critiques. Dr. Tim Elmore, a recognized Millennial leader and president of Growing Leaders in Atlanta⁶² comments in his book *Gen iY*, “These students have far too much confidence and far too little experience to be left to their own devices.”⁶³ Though Elmore does not call them the dumbest, he does observe the current phenomena of information overload. No longer do the young have to approach the old for information; they simply Google it.⁶⁴ Elmore adds that they are “the most eclectic and diverse in our nation’s history, as well as the most protected and observed. They are also the first generation that doesn’t need leaders to retrieve information; they have electronic access to every piece of data you can imagine.”⁶⁵

Taylor describes Millennials’ most distinct traits as “two seemingly incompatible characteristics—their slow walk to adulthood and their unshaken confidence in the future.”⁶⁶ There is more to Taylor’s assessment than meets the eye. While staving off responsibility, Millennials want the position and power that typically only comes with walking through pain and difficulty. The critique from Taylor at Pew Research does not end there.

⁶² <http://growingleaders.com/>

⁶³ Elmore, Kindle, loc. 18.

⁶⁴ Ibid., loc. 117.

⁶⁵ Ibid., loc. 19.

⁶⁶ Paul Taylor, *The Next America: Boomers, Millennials, and the Looming Generational Showdown* (New York: Public Affairs, 2014), Kindle, loc. 478-479.

[Millennials are] America's most stubborn optimists. They have a self-confidence born of coddling parents and everyone-gets-a-trophy coaches. They have a look-at-me élan that comes from being humankind's first generation of digital natives (before them, nobody knew that the whole world wanted to see your funny cat photos). And they have the invincibility of youth. For all those reasons, Millennials are far more bullish than their better-off elders about their financial future. Even as they struggle to find jobs and launch careers, even as 4 in 10 describe themselves as being in the lower or lower middle classes (a higher share than any other generation), nearly 9 in 10 say they already have or one day will have enough money to meet their financial needs. No other generation is nearly as optimistic.⁶⁷

The critique does not go unfounded and may not be all that surprising considering their grand entrance as “liberal, diverse, tolerant, narcissistic, coddled, respectful, confident, and broke. If timing is everything, Millennials have known a mix of good and bad fortune.”⁶⁸ They are also the first generation to have at least half of its constituents unable to consciously remember life without cell phones.

Furthermore, this group has internalized “a fierce competitive sense.” They want to be the best. From the time they're small, they've been told that they are the best—they are special, they have unlimited potential. Trying to live up to those expectations is inherently stressful.⁶⁹ That internal stress is met with the external stress of dealing with their “helicopter” parents, made up of Boomers and older Gen Xers.⁷⁰ Erickson points out,

In contrast to the external world, and perhaps in part because of it, Y's have been blessed with an almost cocoon level of parental attention—immersed in a very pro-child culture—in contrast with the latchkey childhood of many X'ers. This is a generation that grew up eating off red plates with “You Are Special Today” on

⁶⁷ Ibid., loc. 481-487.

⁶⁸ Ibid., loc. 604-607.

⁶⁹ Elmore, Kindle, loc. 20.

⁷⁰ Taylor, Kindle, loc. 634-637.

the rim; one that was continually reminded that they could do anything they set their minds to.⁷¹

The response to such stress from the outer world and internalization of parental anxiety results in Millennials making the technological age their virtual playground, attempting to become the next YouTube sensation, or adopting perfectionist tendencies within their own realm.⁷²

Millennials' access to a paralyzing amount of information combined with internal anxiety from the family and the external anxiety of competition has resulted in a cocktail of reactivity. Millennials question authority and truth; their participatory role is to challenge others' thoughts instead of simply consuming them. The sense of connection on a global scale through instant technological access creates a paradoxical experience of connection and isolation.⁷³ Access to others via social media convolutes emotional connection and results in withdrawal from the social institutions that undergird society. This results in "alienation—very high levels of isolation from family, community, and institutions."⁷⁴

As a group, Millennials are overwhelmed, over-connected, overprotected, and over-served. That's not the whole picture, of course. They can also be energetic, confident, and capable; they dream big, care about their friends, and thrive on activity.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Erickson, loc. 54.

⁷² Elmore, loc. 25.

⁷³ Kinnaman and Hawkins, loc. 579-582.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, loc. 603-605.

⁷⁵ Elmore, loc. 28.

Don Tapscott, the man who coined the term “Net Generation” in the 1990s, conducted a massive study of almost eight thousand young people in twelve countries. Tapscott raises an important point:

Summing up all these criticisms, there is a collective point-of-view that is fraught with contradictions. The Boomers’ children are supposed to be over-programmed, super stressed overachievers—but in the same breath they are described as slackers and moochers. Which is it? They have ADD and can’t focus; yet at the same time they sit for hours in front of the screen, their eyes focused like a laser on a game or their social networking activities. They don’t give a damn, but at the same time they want to change everything—from how their company is run to who’s the president of the country. They are selfish, egomaniac control freaks but at the same time they are slavishly dependent on their parents. They are lost and confused, but their self-esteem and confidence has reached pathological levels of narcissism.⁷⁶

Tapscott ultimately suggests that this group may not fit the same mold, but nonetheless are “smarter, quicker and more tolerant of diversity than their predecessors.” Although he acknowledges they can have a “dark side,” Tapscott paints a positive picture of a generation that loves freedom, appreciates individuality and choice, and values integrity and openness. Accordingly, his definitive research suggests “not only are the kids alright, but as a generation they are poised to transform every institution of society—for the better.”⁷⁷ Whether or not Millennials are actually smarter is not conclusive, but what must be acknowledged is the bi-polar nature of the evaluation they receive from previous generations.

Much has been made of the emotional development of Millennials. Elmore points out a strong longing to belong, for acceptance. “They would rather join and belong to a small affinity group before they embrace the beliefs of that group. Their basis for making

⁷⁶ Don Tapscott, *Grown up Digital: How the Net Generation Is Changing Your World* (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2009), Kindle, loc. 5840-5846.

⁷⁷ Tapscott, loc. 5510-5512.

decisions is more relational than logical. If you hope to get them to embrace an idea—embrace them first,”⁷⁸ which may point right to the Millennials’ Achilles heel. The generation is advanced biologically, cognitively, and technologically. “When it comes to emotional maturity, however, this generation is not nearly so advanced. In fact, our studies show they are behind previous generations in this area.”⁷⁹ Other generations have experienced various messes, both handed down and of their own creation, but Kinnaman and Hawkins “doubt many previous generations have lived through as compounded and complicated a set of cultural changes as have today’s Christians in the West.”⁸⁰

These critiques seem quite accurate with the Millennials’ stage of life. As a cohort, they sit between Adolescence and Rising Adulthood. The paradoxical tension between central roles of activity and dependence would be enough to cause anxiety, if that were all they faced. Dealing with the anxiety of the core identity formational process is not an excuse, as every generation before them has gone through it, and all who come after will. Yet it remains, and research suggests, that adolescent dependence is being extended. Jean Twenge has identified a “social trend—so strong it’s a revolution—that ties all of the generational changes together in a neat, tight bundle: do what makes you happy, and don’t worry about what other people think. It is enormously different from the cultural ethos of previous decades, and it is a philosophy that GenMe [the Millennial

⁷⁸ Elmore, loc. 49.

⁷⁹ Ibid., loc. 63.

⁸⁰ Kinnaman and Hawkins, loc. 496-505.

Generation] takes entirely for granted.”⁸¹ Conversely, Julie Lythcott-Haims, former admissions director at Stanford University, notes the role that parenting has played in generational anxiety. “Hell-bent on removing all risks of life and on catapulting them into the college with the right brand name, we’ve robbed our kids of the chance to construct and know their own selves. You might say we’ve mortgaged their childhood in exchange for the future we imagine for them—a debt that can never be repaid.”⁸² Millennials, though not off the hook, have, like other generations, been dealt a particular, formative environment, that stems from generational anxiety. To put things into context, younger Millennials are still experiencing significant life events that will be experienced as violations of love and trust. The pain from these violations result in having to cope with their internal and external world. Their identity formation journey has just begun. Older members of the cohort are entering the formative process of family and parental life. The fact that as a cohort, Millennials are still in the midst of their formation does not excuse the emotional and psychological immaturity, but such a state of development does provides plenty of anxiety, as anyone who has lived through junior high will attest. Like many generations before, as they rise out of the stage of adolescence, they are being diagnosed as the patient in a system.

⁸¹ Jean M. Twenge, *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled--and More Miserable Than Ever Before* (New York: Atria Books, 2014), 24.

⁸² Julie Lythcott-Haims, *How to Raise an Adult: Break Free of the Overparenting Trap and Prepare Your Kid for Success* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2015), Kindle, loc. 1441-1443.

Generation Gap

Defining a gap between generations is no simple task. Steven Wilson Roecklein, a researcher of possible generation gaps as far back as the Boomer generation, suggests evidence of tensions, though they are more so regarding institutional and social values than within the family of origin. His postulation of selective continuity among the generations was substantiated, and if there was a gap between generations, it depended upon the issue being examined.⁸³ Perhaps institutional or social values are more likely to show generational differences than the more personal process values within family generations. The former are more likely to be connected with cohort considerations and the latter with lineage affairs. However, both may be influential in the values of any individual depending upon the issue at hand, be it institutional or personal, and may prove to be an integral part of the complexity of delineating the generation gap and the relationship of cohort and lineage effects upon it.⁸⁴

Frederick Schmidt, director of the Institute for Spiritual Formation at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, further argues that part of the problem of generational tension is focused too much on the generation gap, providing some helpful clarity to the generational pendulum swing:

Generational patterns of this kind are interesting, but they are not particularly instructive or significant in and of themselves. What is of great significance is the pendulum-like swing between the generations and the spiritual values that surface and resurface over much longer periods of time. There is a kind of generational conceit that believes a given era has made discoveries that no other generation has ever made. ... Spiritual needs have a universal and perennial character that reassert themselves in spite of the claims that any one generation may make. [For

⁸³ Steven Wilson Roecklein, "Values in Three Generations of Families" (PhD diss., Iowa State University, 1981): 95, accessed December 15, 2015, <http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/rtd/6941>.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 101.

example,] while one generation may value seeking over belonging, that does not mean that a sense of spiritual belonging has become somehow obsolete. In fact, the tendency to rediscover the need to belong suggests a completely different possibility. Perhaps spiritual belonging nurtures the kind of security that makes seeking possible, while seeking is by definition the search for a new sense of belonging.⁸⁵

Schmidt's note regarding overemphasizing the generation gap is a form of the societal projection process described by Friedman in Chapter 1. The projection of a generation gap ignores the anxiety of society.

Schmidt's attention to the system of swinging back and forth in a reactive, undifferentiated manner correlates with Friedman's assertion of systemic diagnosis:

Diagnosis in a family establishes who is to be the identified patient. It is inherently an anti-systems concept. It is linear thinking. It denies other variables that are present in the system. Existentially, it makes someone "other," and allows the remainder of the family to locate their troubles in the diagnosed member. It also disguises opinions and judgments; in an intense "congregational family" struggle, this hidden effect adds to the polarization.⁸⁶

The pendulum swing itself implies judgments placed on the "other," a dehumanizing effect noted by Friedman:

Within the personal family, the labeling effect of diagnosis destroys the person. It decreases, in the diagnosed member, a sense of control over the situation, increases his or her dependency, and thus lowers their pain thresholds. The effect on non-symptomatic members is that it fixes their perception of the diagnosed person's capabilities. Eventually a family member's label will become confused with his or her identity. Diagnosis also tends to concretize. It makes everything and everyone more serious.⁸⁷

Identity confusion is wrapped up in the pendulum diagnosis of the blamed individual. , The result is a poorly defined boundary of personal responsibility with caustic effects on

⁸⁵ Frederick W. Schmidt, *Conversations with Scripture: The Gospel of Luke* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2009), 19-21.

⁸⁶ Friedman, 56.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

the degree of attainable self definition. This makes up the fabric of the blame game going on between generations.

Hargrave defines how people react within a system that produces such identity confusion as “self-reactivity.”⁸⁸ Violations of love and/or trust in a person, or a group within a system, result in feelings of being either unloved or unsafe. The reaction to these violations includes blaming others, shaming self, controlling behavior, or escape/chaotic behavior.⁸⁹ In essence, Boomers are pushed into “seeking” out of a desire for “belonging,” based on cultural shifts and changes. “Seeking” influenced heavily the leadership of Boomers but, just as a generation was named aptly for its reaction to the Boomers, Gen X finds itself, based on literature, feeling overlooked and outgunned, stuck between the Boomers and the Millennials.⁹⁰ Gen X pushed the pendulum from “seeking” to “belonging” once more, and the same is true for the Millennial swing back to a “seeking” for “belonging.” Responses to violations of love and trust have embodied the same pendulum-type swing from blaming others to shaming self, much like Bowen describes the over-function and dysfunction within the family system, and the generational system Schmidt defines as the pendulum swing of seeking and belonging.

⁸⁸ Hargrave and Pfitzer, 37. “...to mean that the individual is prompted to have to cope with the unloving and untrustworthy situations by compensating, albeit destructively, for what is lacking in the sense of identity and self.”

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁹⁰ Paul Taylor and George Gao, “Generation X: America’s Neglected ‘Middle Child,’” *Pew Research Center*, June 5, 2014, 1, accessed June 22, 2015, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/06/05/generation-x-americas-neglected-middle-child/>.

In his book, *The Wounded Healer*,⁹¹ Henri Nouwen describes a generation without fathers. Interestingly enough, the chapter that includes the section “Generations without Fathers” was first published in an article for *Commonweal Magazine* June 12, 1970, with Boomers in mind. Nouwen’s book is still being used in Hargrave’s program at Fuller Theological Seminary to describe the current state of Millennials. In addition, the book is a reminder that in order to help others heal, a therapist must be aware of their own violations of love and trust. The state of generational cohorts as part of undifferentiated ego mass within the systems of the church requires reconciliation. The pendulum swing is why those characteristics apply both to the Boomers and Millennials. The proverbial pendulum has swung.

Conclusion

The evidence regarding cohorts’ formational influence upon one another leading to systemic reactions that only perpetuate poorly differentiated individuals is substantial. The tensions between old and young as well as the patterns of blame and diagnosis that have kept the cyclical nature of the projection process active between generations are evident. Forging ahead, the study will now examine a biblical view of reconciliation, framing how differentiation – a self that remains connected yet self-regulated and self-identified from a undifferentiated ego mass – can happen.

⁹¹ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (New York: Image Books, 1979), 34, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/generation-without-fathers>.

CHAPTER 3: BIBLICAL RECONCILIATION

Invitation to the Table

Being keenly aware of the depth of the history that separated generations at the church, Josh began to think of some ways to bring the two sides of the proverbial chasm together. While sitting at his desk that morning preparing for the church wide staff meeting, one of his mentors dropped by on his way to the same meeting. John, an elder at Fellowship, had married Josh and his wife. Josh had spent many lunches over the years firing questions at John to plumb the depths of his wisdom. It suddenly dawned upon Josh, he had spent time getting to know John and many of the other elders at Fellowship Church, and all of those interactions seemed to be at lunch or coffee. Why not invite some of these men to come to the college ministry service to sit down with some of the students? Every Tuesday night, the college ministry gathered for a worship service that was followed by a meal. The meal had become a staple of the ministry program, so much so that the auditorium was filled with round tables rather than rows of chairs for the service. This liturgy of sorts created the perfect setting for dialogue following the teaching, which transitioned nicely into a meal. “That would be the perfect setting to invite an elder and his wife to be a part of the evening,” thought Josh. Would it work? Would it help? Who knew, but at least there would be some interaction. At that point, what did he have to lose?

Over the course of the next year, Josh invited an elder and his wife to the college service every month. Once again, his invitations were warmly received and accepted. Over time, Josh noticed a subtle but significant change in how the college students began to talk about the older generation at Fellowship. Instead of terms like “they” or “them,”

the students began to use language that referred to “us” and “we.” The elders were now no longer an unnamed disassociated group, but individuals with names and stories much like their own. The subtlety was enough to know that something significant was happening at the table.

The Doctrine of Reconciliation

The doctrine of reconciliation fits within the broader context of the doctrine of atonement. Millard J. Erickson, author and professor of theology, describes atonement as “the sacrifice, propitiation, substitution, and reconciliation in the relationship of God and humanity.”¹ Atonement theories are traditionally identified in three overarching categories. Daniel Migliore, Professor Emeritus at Princeton, describes each of three categories and the interconnectedness therein as satisfaction theory, moral influence theory, and Christ the Victor theory. All three lean on the various biblical metaphors that stress the work of God in Christ for humanity and can be connected to Calvin’s roles of Christ as Prophet (moral influence), Priest (satisfaction), and King (Christ as Victor).² Atonement theory then, opens the conversation regarding what Biblical reconciliation is, how reconciliation relates to the relationship between God and humanity, and the implications for reconciliation between individuals. Paul Tillich, the German American Christian existentialist philosopher and theologian suggests that “the atoning work of

¹ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998), 818.

² Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 182-186.

God in Christ has significance for individuals, society, and the entire cosmos,”³ and as such, the value and necessity of exploring reconciliation as it relates to generational division is paramount. David Turner, professor of New Testament Studies, in his study of 2 Corinthians, makes note of its complexity when he states, “The doctrine of reconciliation involves individual, corporate, cosmic, and eschatological dimensions which make it extremely challenging theologically.”⁴ The breadth of writing on Paul’s ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:11-6:2), is more than can be covered in this work.⁵ However, this work will align with the work of Ivar Vegge who did his doctoral thesis work on reconciliation in 2 Corinthians. He argues that

Paul’s use of idealized praise and threats as devices for exhortation and correction [are] the central theme. . . . But both praise and threats are such universal and basic pedagogical devices that one can expect them to be used in a variety of literary genres. Given the fact that the whole of the ancient Mediterranean world was a definitive shame-honor culture, one can assume that both Paul and the Corinthian church would have been particularly sensitive with regard to such use of praise and threats (criticism).⁶

Praise and threat set the stage for Paul’s argument toward reconciliation, utilizing a literary vehicle that would have translated to his audience.

³ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Vol. 2: Existence and the Christ*, Pbk. ed. (New Haven, CT: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 77, 173-176.

⁴ David L. Turner, *Paul and the Ministry of Reconciliation in 2 Cor. 5:11-6:2*, *Criswell Theological Review* 4.1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Grand Rapids Baptist Seminary, 1989), 77-95.

⁵ Scholars are divided on the interpretive basis of 2 Corinthians with its shifts in tone, and the interpretive camps of partition and unity theories for the letter as a whole are beyond the scope of this work.

⁶ Ivar Vegge, *2 Corinthians, A Letter About Reconciliation: A Psychological, Epistolographical, and Rhetorical Analysis* (Tübingen, Deutschland: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 34.

Vegge argues “the appeal for reconciliation with God in 5:14-6:2 in the light of the historical context where Paul is asking the Corinthians to be reconciled to himself,”⁷ has direct implication for reconciliation between the Corinthian church and Paul. Vegge explains further,

From Paul’s perspective, a criticism of and distancing from him as apostle implies also a distancing from God. For Paul is Christ’s apostle “according to God’s will” (1:1), he “spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him” (2:14, 4:6) he is a servant of the new covenant (Ch. 3), he is an envoy for Christ, through whom God himself exhorts (5:20, also 13:2-4), and he is given authority from the Lord for building the Corinthians up, not to tear them down (10:8, 12:19, and 13:10). Paul’s opponents in Corinth are, on the other hand, “false apostles” (11:13, 11:4). That reconciliation with God is synonymous with reconciliation with Paul is made clear by the fact that the appeals for reconciliation in 5:14-6:2 are framed by implicit and explicit appeals for reconciliation with Paul (1:7, 13-14; 2:3, 5:11; 6:11-13; 7:2-4; 7:5-16) In this way, the appeal for reconciliation with God in 2 Cor. 5:14-6:2 gives the appeals for reconciliation with Paul greater weight and significance.⁸

Vegge is claiming a direct link in the reconciliation between the Corinthian church and God and the universal “Church” and Paul. The implication then is that reconciliation with God is not divorced from an individual or group’s relationship with others, and as such, reconciliation is directly linked to the gap between generations.

Vegge is not alone, or the first, to consider the wider implications of reconciliation between God and humanity as it is related to reconciliation in human relationships. Rev. Donald Houts, professor of Psychology and Pastoral Care at St. Paul School of Theology, provides pastoral insight into 2 Corinthians:

⁷ Vegge references the following authors, all requiring linguistic study save Fitzgerald, see R. Bieringer (1986) 332 and 707; J. Schroter, (1993) 271, R. Sarkio (1998) 29-42, especially 36-39; and J.T. Fitzgerald (2001), 257.

⁸ Vegge, 52.

This reconciliation with God is neither static nor apart from the fellowship of those whom it is being consummated, and in this sense it is appropriate to say that there is ‘no salvation outside the church’ ... Reconciliation with God can only be understood by men in terms of human reconciliation. Otherwise, there is no reason for men to become ‘ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.’ But we ought to make no mistake about the fact that for Paul, no reconciliation between any two men can be fully understood apart from the deeper purpose and power of God.⁹

There is great support for the idea of reconciliation between God and humanity being connected to the reconciliation between humans. Jacobus Kok, theological faculty member at the University of Pretoria, provides clarity by defining the distinction between spiritual reconciliation and social anthropological unity. “Paul’s exhortation of social and anthropological unity is done from a theological basis, rooted in God’s initiative and missional plan of reconciliation. For Paul, spiritual unity will and should result in outwardly expressed social and anthropological unity in the midst of diversity, without relativizing plurality.”¹⁰

Even with Kok’s clarification of terms, the two are still deeply connected.

The ministry of reconciliation fundamentally links humanity’s relationship with God and others, providing a precedent for all facets of the church, from macro to micro, local to global, establishing or moving toward reconciliation, including between generations. Kinnaman and Hawkins support this idea as they emphasize the need to rediscover the metanarrative of the gospel, which includes, “showing how the life and

⁹ Donald C. Houts, "Sensitivity, Theology, and Change: Pastoral Care in the Corinthian Letters." *Pastoral Psychology* 20, no. 4 (1969): 25-34.

¹⁰ Jacobus Kok, “Mission and Ethics in 1 Corinthians: Reconciliation, Corporate Solidarity and Other-regard as Missionary Strategy in Paul.” *HTS Teologiese Studies* 68 (2012):1, accessed September 16, 2015, <http://www.hts.org.za/index.php/HTS/article/view/1222>.

death of Christ brings reconciliation with God, neighbor, creation, and self.”¹¹ Kinnaman and Hawkins go on to explain the scope of reconciliation:

The Christian community is one of the few places on earth where those who represent the full scope of human life, literally from the cradle to the grave, come together with a singular motive and mission. The church is (or should be) a place of racial, gender, socioeconomic, and cultural reconciliation—because Jesus commanded that our love would be the telltale sign of our devotion to him (see John 13: 35)—as well as a community where various age demographics genuinely love each other and work together with unity and respect.¹²

Reconciliation, then, is as much about an interpersonal reconciliation with God as it is about humanity’s reconciliation with each other.

Biblical Foundations of Reconciliation in Creation

Reconciliation is at the heart of the biblical narrative and finds a place in its beginning. The creation account has been read and understood through multiple perspectives. The scope of this research is limited, yet the necessity of a brief word on hermeneutics regarding Genesis is in order. Richard J. Clifford, professor emeritus of Old Testament, provides a brief glance into an ancient hermeneutic of the creation account. Clifford contends,

The ancients saw things differently. Process often meant wills in conflict, hence drama; the result was a story with a plot. The mode of reporting corresponds in each case to the underlying conception of the process. . . . Yet to the ancient, who saw creation as involving wills, story was the way of reporting the struggle. Emphases and perspectives were conveyed by selection and omission of narrative detail and by development of plot. The ancients’ tolerance of several versions of a single basic plot is traceable to this approach. Gen 1:1-2:3 is deliberately prefatory to the whole. As the self-conscious beginning of the Pentateuch, the

¹¹ Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church—and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), Kindle, loc. 3442-34441.

¹² *Ibid.*, loc. 3215-3219.

passage adumbrates the major themes to be developed in its sections. It is a preamble not only to the first major section of the Pentateuch, Gen 2:4-11:26, the origin of the nations, but also to the second section, Gen 11:27-50:24, the patriarchs of Israel, and indeed to the entire Pentateuch as a unified work. Analysis of the account shows it to be an overture.¹³

A preamble establishes the approach of the ancients to the creation accounts, setting the tone for reconciliation to move from the rest of Genesis to the familial generations in the patriarchs and eventually toward Christ. Clare Amos, Director of Theological Studies for the Anglican Communion, produced a full-length commentary on Genesis where she identifies key aspects of reconciliation in Genesis:

It is the question of the relationship between the one and the two, the one and the other. The theme is written into the very fabric of creation. Indeed without it creation could never have come into being. It is fascinating to realize how significant duality is in the structure of creation in Genesis. Throughout Gen 1:1–2:4 a creation proceeds through a series of bifurcations. Light is divided from darkness, day from night, heavens from earth, seas from land. Then in turn each of these different parts of the inanimate creation are mirrored by the creation of moving beings that are somehow linked to them. So the light and darkness of Day One is reflected in the moving lights created on Day Four, the waters and the firmament of Day Two somehow give birth to the sea-creatures and birds of Day Five and the Earth, which has been the focus of Day Three, is linked to the land-creatures of Day Six. Throughout the entire chapter the steady refrain at the end of each day, ‘And there was evening, and there was morning’, further helps to emphasize the ‘twoness’ of creation.¹⁴

Creation, for Amos, is a compounding list of division that describes the natural order of relationships, or degree of proximity from one to the other. From divisions come new aspects of creation. Worked into the fabric of creation is the differentiation of the created order. Division symbolizes unique identity, and the birth of something out of the

¹³ Richard J. Clifford, “The Hebrew Scriptures and the Theology of Creation.” *Theological Studies* 46, no. 3 (September 1985): 507-523, accessed June 22, 2015, http://jbburnett.com/resources/clifford_hebscrip-creat.pdf.

¹⁴ Clare Amos, “The Genesis of Reconciliation: The Reconciliation of Genesis.” *Mission Studies: Journal of the International Association for Mission Studies* 23, no. 1 (2006): 9-26, accessed June 22, 2015, <http://booksandjournals.brillonline.com/content/journals/10.1163/157338306777890466>.

two coming together symbolizes the interrelated nature of creation. It could be argued that divisions of creation provide the platform for relationship with God and each other.

Amos goes on to make the link to the creation of humanity:

It is also suggestive that human beings are both described as being ‘in the image of God’ and are (uniquely in Gen 1) subdivided into the categories of male and female. I believe that the author of Genesis intends us to see a connection between humanity’s status as a reflection of the divine and the plurality that is implicit in our sub-division as gendered persons. One could suggest that we are being reminded that human beings are only in the image of God in so far as they affirm the reality of plurality—expressed here in terms of gender. That surely has consequences both for God—and for humanity. The necessity of right relationships with those who are ‘other’ to ourselves thus becomes an essential part of what it means to be a human being.¹⁵

Laying a foundation for right relationships with others as essential to humanity sheds light on the nature of reconciliation woven into the fabric of God’s identity and thus into humanity as his image bearers.

Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann’s comments on creation’s rhythm of life are germane to this study as well. He connects the heart of reconciliation into the fabric of humanity, and the process of daily life:

Creation theology permits us to acknowledge and appreciate that human life is embedded in ongoing daily processes of generation and decay, of birth and death, of alienation and embrace, of work and rest, of rise and fall (Eccles. 3:1-8). And of course, it is these daily turns of reality that claim most of our energy and attention and produce the structures and relationships of meaning whereby we exist as identifiable, self-conscious creatures.¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibid., 13.

¹⁶ Walter Brueggemann, *The Book That Breathes New Life: Scriptural Authority and Biblical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 93.

Foundational to reconciliation is the differentiated nature of creation, which allows all aspects of creation to have a unique identity while remaining inherently connected in the rhythm of life and death.

Joseph Blenkinsopp, professor of biblical studies, writes in-depth about the rhythm of *Creation, Un-creation, Re-creation* found in Genesis 1-11.¹⁷ He offers significant insight into the idea of assumed death before the fall when he suggests,

Even before the transgression humanity was not perfect. The first couple did not enjoy an idealized existence. True, once they had been created, God pronounces all of creation “very good” (1:31a), yet *prima facie* this denotes neither immortality nor fully realized human perfection. Naked and unashamed (2:25) they may have been, but fully actualized human persons they were not. In effect, the scriptural account does not portray two sharply contrasted states of the human person, one (perfected, immortal, sinless, united with God) before the transgression and the other (fallen, mortal, sinful, separated from God) after. It describes, rather, a process, whose starting point is not perfection but nascence.¹⁸

Nascence, according to the *Oxford Dictionary*, means, “just coming into existence and beginning to display signs of future potential.”¹⁹ The future potential imbedded in pre-transgressed humanity makes room for the possibility of not meeting that future potential from the onset.²⁰ Furthermore, his assumption draws on a thematic approach that does not isolate the Creation Story from the rest of Genesis, but instead proposes that

¹⁷ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Creation, Un-Creation, Re-Creation: a Discursive Commentary On Genesis 1-11*, Reprint ed. (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2011), 1.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁹ Angus Stevenson and Maurice Waite, eds. *Oxford Dictionaries, Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 12th ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 953.

²⁰ An interesting yet much too complex question asks if the rhythm of life and death is not necessarily bound up solely in humanity’s transgression, but rather the means of latent possibility. This is beyond the scope of this research.

“Genesis 1-11 was conceived as a distinct composition with its own structural and thematic integrity.”²¹

Blenkinsopp also points out a literary structure, *toledot*, translated always in the plural both for the introduction of genealogical material as well as straightforward narrative. The pentad arrangement pivots on the third and central heading in the five:

- Gen. 2:4 Heaven and earth (1:1-4:26)
- Gen. 5:1 Adam and his line (5:1-6:8)
- Gen. 6:9 Noah and the deluge (6:9-228)
- Gen. 10:1 Noah’s three sons and their descendants (10:1-11:9)
- Gen. 11:10 Shem and his line (11:10-26)²²

The pentad provides the framework for meaning, and,

especially in ancient compositions, it seems that this fivefold arrangement was adopted to indicate the central thematic importance of the deluge by its position at the center of the pentad. What this means is that the theme of Genesis 1-11 is not just creation but something more overarching, something like creation-uncreation-re-creation.²³

²¹ Themes with which Genesis 1-11 is a differentiated whole include: The steep decline in longevity in transition from the archaic to the ‘historical’ period the use of symbolic names (Adam, Eve, Abel, etc.) and symbolic geography (Eden, Nod, etc.), an emphasized list of firsts; first creation, first acts of worship (Gen. 4:26), first population boom (Gen. 6:1), first cultivation of the vine (Gen. 9:20), first empire builder (Gen 10:8) and the first city (Gen. 11:6). There is also a complete lack of cross-reference found in the Hebrew bible save references drawn specifically from the text itself. Paul mentions Adam in distinction from Christ, but not again. Furthermore, there is no history of Israel, especially in Genesis 10. Blenkinsopp, 2-3.

²² Blenkinsopp, 4.

²³ Blenkinsopp, 4-5. Blenkinsopp noted a similar theme throughout the longer section of Genesis:

| | |
|------------------|---------------------------------|
| Gen. 11:27-25:11 | Terah (Abraham) |
| Gen 25:12-18 | Ishmael/Arabs |
| Gen 25:19-35:29 | Isaac (Jacob) |
| Gen 36:1-37:1 | Esau/Edom |
| Gen 37:2-50:26 | Jacob (Joseph and his brothers) |

Again, the pivotal unit is the “exile of Jacob for 20 years in Mesopotamia. As a kind of destruction and re-creation, this central *peripateia* corresponds structurally and thematically to the deluge in the preceding segment.” Furthermore, “The fivefold structure also imitates the structure of the Pentateuch as a

The pattern of creation, un-creation, and re-creation established in Genesis 1-11²⁴ provides some necessary insight into the “time between the times” or the time from re-creation to restoration. From Noah until the transition to the history of the Jewish people beginning with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, humanity struggles within the new creation, culminating in the tower of Babel. In his work on the various interpretations of Genesis 11, focusing on the tower, Phillip Michael Sherman explains an important point about the tower regardless of whether a historical interpretation or redaction is held:

Given that the Tower of Babel was concerned with an abortive attempt at the formation of community, it is not surprising if an increasingly fragmented Jewish community saw a reflection of their contemporary challenges in the narrative. That many of the translations of the tower examined in this study were composed during formative moments in Jewish antiquity does not seem to be by chance. The narrative of Babel occupies a liminal position within the biblical canon and its construction of Israel’s place in the larger world; Babel is the last moment, the final act, before the genesis of the elect.²⁵

Sherman’s key point connects un-creation and re-creation in the “abortive attempt at the formation of community” as the final act before the historical transition to the people of God. By demonstrating the same pattern of creation, un-creation, and re-creation set in the fabric of the elect, a predestined reconciliation is necessitated in the generational lineage. The narrative of the people of God begins, and God covenants with

whole...with the centrally important Sinai event beginning in Exodus and departure in Numbers.... The speculation is the final editors, presumably temple priests, placed Leviticus as the central pivot holding its prescriptions for the holy life, and for the life of Israel as a holy people in primacy.”

²⁴ The pattern follows throughout, beginning with creation and leading up to the fall, the population of the earth. Then, Noah and the death of humanity by water (save Noah and his family), to a new created order with similar mandates as creation. The new creation leads up to ten generations from Noah’s son Shem.

²⁵ Phillip Michael Sherman, *Babels Tower Translated: Genesis 11 and Ancient Jewish Interpretation* (Leiden, NLD: BRILL, 2013), 333.

Abraham. Reconciliation becomes tied to the generations of the people of God, and the lineage of Christ leads to his life (creation), death (un-creation), and resurrection (re-creation), reconciling humanity to God and each other.

David Clines, addresses two possible readings of Genesis 1-11. The first is where “humankind tends to destroy what God has made good. Even when God forgives humans sin and mitigates the punishment, sin continues to spread, to the point where the world suffers un-creation. And even when God makes a fresh start, turning back on un-creation forever, the human tendency to sin immediately becomes manifest.”²⁶ The second of the two readings of Genesis 1-11 rests on the premise that,

No matter how drastic human sin becomes, destroying what God has made good and bringing the world to the brink of un-creation, God’s grace never fails to deliver humankind from the consequences of their sin. Even when humanity responds to a fresh start with old pattern of sin, God’s commitment to his world stands firm, and sinful humans experience the favor of God as well as his righteous judgment.²⁷

Genesis 1 can be read as a preamble that sets the beginning of a generational concern woven into the fabric of the created order, where the tension of plurality and individuation in creation is found in humanity. In Genesis 1:26-31, God creates humanity in “their image,” and humanity, male and female, are commanded to be fruitful and multiply—to come together and create. A fruitful creation is in the image of the Creator God.

Christian anthropology attends to and takes its cues from the richness of Genesis 1-11. This anthropology requires, at its center, an understanding of humanity oriented

²⁶ David J. A. Clines, *Theme of the Pentateuch (The Library of Hebrew Bible/old Testament Studies)*, 2 ed. (Sheffield, England: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 1997), 83.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 83.

around (1) the differentiation connectedness yet uniquely separate nature of man and woman; (2) the complex but highly productive and dangerous interdependencies of men and women; and (3) the interdependencies—hierarchical, providential, and otherwise—of man and woman with the earth/ground and with the creatures who also inhabit it.²⁸ An image of reconciliation is a part of the fabric of creation and built into the relational order with the intent of generational reproduction. Reconciliation is intended to hold together the tension between the individual and the collective identity. It is first seen through the relationship between created and creator, the God-human relationship, also found in the God and marriage relationship resulting in the paternal and offspring relationship that produces the generations. To be reconciled is to be uniquely connected.

Reconciliation with the People of God

From the establishment of creation, a paradoxical motif of inherently connected yet uniquely separate created beings is described throughout Genesis. As Thomas Brodie, a Dominican Priest, notes,

What is essential is that Genesis is not a collection of episodes that are loosely connected or poorly edited ... it uses episodes and episodic technique as gradual steppingstones within a larger narrative development of moving from myth to history, from obscurity to clarity, from the fragmented world of expulsion and murder to a unified account of acceptance and reconciliation.²⁹

²⁸ Patrick D. Miller, *The Way of the Lord: Essays in Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 310.

²⁹ Thomas L. Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue: A Literary, Historical, and Theological Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 15.

Even within the transition from the preamble in Genesis to the establishing of the people of God, from myth to history, a relational connection that is also uniquely separate exists, much like the aim of reconciliation.

The theme of reconciliation continues as God establishes a covenant with the generational fathers in Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Reconciliation with Abraham is foundational, as Canadian Professors Neil Remington Abramson and Yaroslav Senyshyn point out. Six critical incidents encapsulate the relationship between God and Abraham, showing the use of punishment and forgiveness in God's attempt to rehabilitate and reconcile Abraham.³⁰ In the first incident, after responding to God's call to go, and the promise to make Abraham the father of a great nation, Abraham lies to Pharaoh about his own wife in an act of self-interest rather than leaning on God's promised protection. Second, Abraham acts in distrust of God's promise by taking Hagar as a second wife and having a child. Hagar is ill-treated by Sarah and flees. God persuades Hagar to return, promising her son will have many descendants, and punishes Abraham by not speaking with him for a number of years. Third, God offers forgiveness by offering a revised covenant with conditions for Abraham, including all males circumcised and a name change from Abram. Abraham and Sarah fall short this time through laughing at the possibility of God's promised son, and God responds with punishment. Fourth, Abraham responds to Abimelech out of fear and self-interest, lying about Sarah as his wife. God responds by requiring Abraham's intercession for Abimelech to lift the curse. God seemingly forgives Abraham, as the promised son quickly follows. A fifth incident

³⁰ Neil Remington Abramson and Yaroslav Senyshyn, "Effective Punishment through Forgiveness: Rediscovering Kierkegaard's Knight of Faith in the Abraham Story," *Organization Studies* 31, no. 5 (2010): 555-81.

parallels the second when Abraham acquiesces to Sarah and casts Hagar and Ishmael out in the desert with little provision until they almost die. As a result, God does not speak to Abraham for another stretch. Finally, God punishes³¹ Abraham by requiring Isaac's sacrifice. Abraham, without deviating, follows God's instructions. God intervenes, now finding Abraham to have finally emerged as righteous. True forgiveness and reconciliation followed repeated punishment for continued retreating from self-sacrifice to self-interest in the face of fear.³²

Following Abraham's reconciliation, the short account of Isaac demonstrates how a "clash with the Philistines—a clash involving property, envy, expulsion, and reconciliation—intimates much of what will happen between Jacob and Esau, namely the taking of the blessing, anger, expulsion, and eventual reconciliation."³³

Jacob's story involves the tension found in reconciliation that is external as well as internal:

It is the thesis of some Jungian scholars that one aspect of Jacob's story, especially his struggles with his twin Esau, involves a portrayal of the process of individuation. Esau is like Jacob's shadow, like the other part of himself. In dealing with Esau he wrestles and journeys, and finally, after many years and struggles, reaches reconciliation (Chap. 33). The mysterious struggle at Peniel, on the night before reconciliation (32:23-32), is a climactic step in the process of reconciliation.³⁴

³¹ This is the view of scholars Abramson and Senyshyn on the order to sacrifice Isaac by Abraham as punishment. Neil Remington Abramson and Yaroslav Senyshyn, "Effective Punishment through Forgiveness: Rediscovering Kierkegaard's Knight of Faith in the Abraham Story," *Organization Studies* 31, no. 5 (2010): 555-81.

³² Ibid..

³³ Brodie, 295.

³⁴ Ibid., 105.

Genesis culminates in a restoration of the original promise to the forefathers as well as within the immediate descendants as Jacob's sons.

The loss of Eden ended with troubled departure (Cain, 4:17); the reconciliation in Egypt ends with an orderly arrival (47:11). Jacob's journey also involves a final trial, akin in some ways to the final trial in which Abraham was asked to sacrifice Isaac. As Abraham embraced one aspect of God's death-related providence, so Jacob embraces another. While Abraham was tested in his old age and was required to undertake a journey that brought him and his son face to face with death (Chap. 22), so Jacob and his sons set off not only for the journey to meet Joseph (46:1-30), but also to answer the trial-like questions of Pharaoh (46:31-47:10).³⁵

Furthermore, Joseph's "murderous brothers achieve reconciliation. Part of that reconciliation is seen already in Jacob's return to meet Esau, but only in the Joseph story does brotherly reconciliation reach completion."³⁶

Out of the generational establishment of the reconciliation motif comes the story of the Exodus; a creation of the people of God, leading to the un-creation of slavery in Egypt, and the re-creation of the Exodus. Jon Douglas Levenson, professor of Jewish Studies at Harvard University, notes the connection at the beginning of the Exodus story and invokes a view of the divine who is concerned for his people in slavery, having heard their cries and seen their affliction.³⁷ "There are suffering slaves everywhere, but [God] intends to take action only on behalf of these slaves, and that is because he had made a promise to their ancestors, sworn to them in a solemn covenant (Gen. 15:18-21; 17:1-

³⁵ Ibid., 391-392.

³⁶ Ibid., 13.

³⁷ Exod. 3:7-14.

8).³⁸ A covenant of this nature defines the divine human reconciliatory relationship that is carried forth from generation to generation.

Although reaching toward the reconciliation of people, God remains distinct from them in sharing his name.³⁹ God's response to Moses is a good example, "In this figure of speech resounds the sovereign freedom of Yahweh, who, even at the moment he reveals himself in his name, refuses simply to put himself at the disposal of humanity or allow humanity to comprehend him."⁴⁰

Here, God chooses to act with the people with whom he has established his covenant. Gowan notes the importance of the preposition "with,"

that represents a solidarity not found in God being present to the world as a subject of contemplation and worship only. He is certainly that, but the preposition "with" conveys that he is on our side as we endeavor to make sense and value out of the world. . . . Yet the minimal distance preserved in the presence with, which would be lost in presence in, is the distance which gives both God and us a measure of independence even in relationship.⁴¹

Relationship and reconciliation includes an independent yet connected form. God reconciles himself to his people and all of humanity by means of remaining differentiated. He is connected yet independent of creation. That pattern is sustained throughout the historical, wisdom, and prophetic literature of the Old Testament.

³⁸ Jon Douglas Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism: Jews and Christians in Biblical Studies* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 151-53.

³⁹ Exod. 3:13-14.

⁴⁰ Walther Zimmerli, *Old Testament Theology in Outline* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1978), 20.

⁴¹ Donald E. Gowan, *Theology in Exodus: Biblical Theology in the Form of a Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 75.

Reconciliation in the New Testament

James Earl Massey, of Anderson School of Theology, provides an exploration of four uses of the word reconciliation in the New Testament. The first is found in Matthew 5:21-23 as *diallaso*, or, contextually, the hostility toward another. In the midst of the sermon on the mount, Jesus teaches that,

True worship is blocked whenever and as long as hostility rages within the heart against another human. As vs. 23-24 states, reconciliation between the aggrieved parties must take place before God will accept our worship. The instruction is “be reconciled,” meaning that the one who seeks to please God must take the initiative to remove whatever blocks a right relation with the other person.⁴²

Worship is about the association of right relationships between humanity and right relationship between God and humanity. Humanity is called to be at peace with each other when approaching God for worship.

Even if true worship may be blocked by a lack of reconciliation, Miroslav Volf states,

at the core of the doctrine of reconciliation lies the belief that the offer of reconciliation is not based on justice done and the cause of enmity removed. Rather, the offer of reconciliation is a way of justifying the unjust and overcoming the opponents’ enmity—not so as to condone their injustice and affirm their enmity but to open up the possibility of doing justice and living in peace, whose ultimate shape is a community of love.⁴³

God offers reconciliation in the face of enmity and that must be acknowledged when addressing hostility within human relationships.

⁴² James Earl Massey, “Reconciliation: The Biblical Imperative and Practical Implications,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 37, no. 1 (Spring 2002), 8.

⁴³ Volf, Miroslav. “The Core of the Faith.” *The Christian Century* 115, no. 7 (1998): 239, accessed September 16, 2015, <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA20412572&v=2.1&u=newb64238&it=r&p=AONE&sw=w&asid=a99cef3aaeb616276882f5405e0d568f>.

The second word referring to reconciliation, *sunallaso*, is found in Acts 7, during Stephen's speech to the Sanhedrin as he presents the story of Moses' interjection between two quarreling men. The connection between Stephen and *sunallaso* reaches back to the Exodus account.⁴⁴ John Calvin suggests of the quarreling Hebrew slaves and particularly the person in the wrong, that "He ought to have received Moses as if he had been an angel of God, on account of such a proof of his zeal and piety; but, turning the benefit into an accusation, he not only hatefully taunts him with what it would have been just to praise, but even threatens him."⁴⁵ Again, there is a connection between the reconciliation of humans and that of humanity to God. Calvin suggests that because of who Moses was, he should have been accepted as one from God. The Israelites should accept Moses, either out of his royal position or because of his intervention in the situation, as a person accepts a message or messenger from God. The correlation suggests a Hebrew nation unaccepting of each other is an unacceptance of YHWH. This is also demonstrated in the Exodus account when people turn on themselves as they complain in the wilderness (Exod. 16.3-4).

The third word used is *katallasso*, a meaning that "denotes a relation that has undergone a change for the better. It is one word among many in a family of images that set forth to us the meaning of a changed relation. The changed relation is made possible by someone acting toward someone else with concern to effect that change."⁴⁶ Paul uses

⁴⁴ Massey, 9.

⁴⁵ John Calvin, "Commentary on Exodus 2:1" *Calvin's Commentary on the Bible*, 1840-57, accessed August 25, 2015, <http://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/cal/view.cgi?bk=1&ch=2>.

⁴⁶ Massey, 11.

this word in 1 Corinthians 7 in the context of marital strife and giving instructions on how to proceed. Massey explains,

The image in the word shows something having been set aside [*kata*]: an attitude, a grievance, a position, a deed, a distance, a result, in order to induce or bring about a change for the better. A new disposition is exhibited, a new stance is assumed, a new framework is established granting a rich togetherness where enmity and distance previously were the order.⁴⁷

Out of a position of relational distance comes the vision of proximity, but it is not simply proximity of spatial dimension, but from polarized positions and lives into a vision that transcends oppositional disposition. Paul also uses *katallasso* as a noun in Romans 5.

Turner points out,

Paul's words here take the form of two arguments, the first "lesser to greater," and the second "greater to lesser." If dying for a righteous or good man is praiseworthy, how much more is Christ's death for helpless sinners (5:6-8)? This magnifies God's mercy in providing reconciliation through Christ's death. Second, if Christ went so far as to reconcile his enemies, will he not in the end save his friends (5:9-11)? This provides assurance that God will ultimately complete what he has begun in Christ. It is interesting to note the close connection between justification and reconciliation in the protasis of v 10 and 11 respectively. Eschatological salvation is the consummation of redemption already begun. The "already" (justification and reconciliation) assures believers of the "not yet" ("we shall be saved.")⁴⁸

For Paul, Christ's reconciliation has a two-part focus, for those against Christ and those who are for Christ. The eschatological point Turner emphasizes is Christ's active reconciliatory pursuit of both those for Him and against Him. Christ pursues reconciliation with those who are his enemies, and at the same time, there is a reconciliatory process continuing with those already found in Christ, as Christians are

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Turner, 89.

called to continually be transformed by the renewal of their minds⁴⁹ and in the context of unity “put off the old self and put on the new” self in Christ.⁵⁰

The last use by Paul is *apokatallasso* in Ephesians⁵¹ and Colossians,⁵² focusing on the social dimensions of reconciliation and specifically on the division between Jew and Gentile:

We see Paul’s discussion of reconciliation as it relates to the removal of the previous division that existed between Jews and Gentiles, a division based upon not just one but several separating factors: religious differences, legal differences, cultural differences, racial and social differences. In a bold and declarative announcement, Paul states that God’s reconciling deed in Christ has changed that division altogether and has made the two groups one in his sight.⁵³

Turner also notes, “The experience of reconciliation through Christ radically redefines vertical and horizontal human relationships, as there is now peace between mankind and God and peace between Jew and Gentile ([Eph.] 2:14, 17). Both are built into one dynamic dwelling of God through the Spirit ([Eph.] 2:19-22).”⁵⁴

The implication of reconciliation, then, is wide. In Christ the religious, legal, cultural, racial, and social hierarchy of oppositional groups, Jew and Gentiles, have merged into one; therefore it is a safe assumption that the scope of reconciliation should be not limited in its application to oppositional generations. Reconciliation in the New Testament is thus modeled in God’s extension of reconciliation to humanity in Christ

⁴⁹ Rom. 12:1-3.

⁵⁰ Eph. 4:17-32.

⁵¹ Eph. 2:11-22.

⁵² Col. 1:1-17.

⁵³ Massey, 13.

⁵⁴ Turner, 91.

prior to addressing any hostility, and humanity's imperative is to follow that example. An individual cannot divorce reconciliation to God from reconciliation to people; they inseparably affect each another. Finally, reconciliation includes an extension towards those for and against, including extending as far as one's oppositional other.

Paul's Praxis of Reconciliation

Paul approaches reconciliation in several ways when dealing with conflict. As a framework, his statement, "For the sake of the gospel, the strong must accept and not despise the weak, and the weak must accept and not judge the strong (Rom. 14:1-3),"⁵⁵ seems to suggest the responsibility of all to allow space for variance in others. Reconciliation, accordingly, seems to have a degree of flexibility. There is room for utilizing wisdom regarding how individuals navigate choices and interactions based on how those decisions may affect others. However, Hinson goes on to point out,

It might appear that we have found the apostle's formula for reconciliation. Before we celebrate a solution, however, we must observe the very different way Paul reacted toward those who would substitute another gospel, which cannot be a gospel, for the gospel, Christ himself. Here he made no concessions (Gal. 1:8, Phil 3:2-4:1) ... Against such, Paul insisted, the Philippians must "stand fast in the Lord."⁵⁶

Hinson emphasizes the importance of submission to one another in Christ,⁵⁷ while being unmoved from the gospel of Christ.

Paul's address in both letters to the Galatian and Philippian churches is a more specific take on Pauline reconciliation. The *IVP Dictionary* identifies both letters

⁵⁵ E. Glenn Hinson, "Reconciliation and Resistance," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 37, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 29.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁵⁷ Eph. 5:21.

addressing the temptation to turn back the clock and grasp for the covenant at Sinai rather than rest in the Abrahamic promise as a substitute gospel:

From this hermeneutical origin, Paul's discussion of the Law takes two directions. The first, which not surprisingly consumes most of his energy, is that the national markers of circumcision, Sabbath keeping and dietary observances, or "works of the Law" as Paul calls them (Gal. 2:11-16), cannot make one righteous before God. ... The second reason that "works of the Law" cannot place one within this harmonious covenant relationship with God is that the covenant of which these works are part was temporary. Unlike the promise made to Abraham, which constituted a permanent covenant fulfilled in Christ (Gal. 3:15-18), the Sinaitic covenant was established "on account of transgressions." By this last phrase Paul probably means that God gave the Law at Sinai in order to reveal clearly Israel's sin, to transform it from something ill defined and inchoate into specific transgressions against God's will. Paul is probably alluding here to a well-known irony: at the very moment God gave the Law to Moses on Sinai, Israel was on the plain below already violating its first stipulation.⁵⁸

When Paul addresses this "other" gospel that must be dispelled, he is dealing with a reestablishment of prior boundaries that divided Jew and Gentile. The gospel obligates an approach to one another, whether Jew or Gentile, while submitting in love, and demands zero tolerance for any gospel that abandons Christ as central. Those things that once set God's people apart – hygienic boundaries of circumcision, the temptation to overwork self and others in Sabbath keeping, and dietary safeguards in clean and unclean foods – have now become acts of exclusion. "Paul's quarrel is with the imposition of old and temporary structures upon the new eschatological age of reconciliation; structures whose purpose was to condemn sin and to sequester the Jew from the Gentile (Eph. 2:14-18)."⁵⁹ Now, rather than condemning sin and separation, God in Christ conquers sin and death, initiates reconciliation, breaks down barriers, and invites all to participate in a

⁵⁸ Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1993), 538.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 539.

death and rebirth in Christ. The eschatological work of Christ invites everyone to the table.

Paul's submission to one another in Christ is founded in loving your neighbor as yourself,⁶⁰ and unity in the Gospel of Christ. "Hence faith, not 'works' prescribed by the Mosaic code, brings righteousness, and Abraham serves as the prototype not only of the believing circumcised Jew but of the believing uncircumcised Gentile as well. In this way Paul demonstrates that far from nullifying the Law, 'the righteousness of God' is consistent with the principle of faith found in the Law itself,"⁶¹ a principle that is unifying in Christ at its core and loving of neighbor.

Individual and Social Reconciliation and Forgiveness

Practical engagement of reconciliation requires identifying its various forms. Robert J. Schreiter, a priest and author on reconciliation,⁶² suggests the sequences of repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation are different in the individual and the social settings. The essential difference has to do with when reconciliation takes place in the sequence. In its individual form, reconciliation takes place internally within the victim and leads to the social consequence of forgiving the wrongdoer with the hope of leading the wrongdoer to repentance. Social reconciliation is a public process that seeks repentance and forgiveness at key points along the way to a final point called

⁶⁰ Gal. 5:14.

⁶¹ Hawthorne, Martin, and Reid, 541.

⁶² <http://www.ctu.edu/academics/robert-schreiter-cpps>.

reconciliation.⁶³ Furthermore, philosopher Keith E. Yandell makes a distinction that “forgiveness is an element of reconciliation, not reconciliation that is included in forgiveness.”⁶⁴

Author and psychologist Nathan Frise, along with author and psychologist, Mark McMinn, identify the distinct yet connected form as part of a continuum process with key differences in forgiveness psychologically and theologically:

Looking at these concepts of forgiveness we see the psychological community emphasizing the intrapersonal level and the theological community emphasizing the relational level. There is value in integrating these constructs as the views of both groups of scholars describe a fundamental process and activity that occur in human life. One solution we propose is to allow for and embrace these two distinct different processes by conceptualizing forgiveness as an act that occurs on a continuum. At one pole of the continuum is *subjective* forgiveness and at the other pole, *relational* forgiveness; by moving along this continuum forgiveness is seen as an act that occurs from the inside out. Both levels of forgiveness have implicit value. Subjective forgiveness is emphasized in the research and therapies of psychology and is related to the process of inner healing. Relational forgiveness is emphasized in theological works, and involves a restoration of the offender and a reconciliation of relationship.⁶⁵

The distinction between subjective/intrapersonal and relational/interpersonal is put to practical understanding in Ondina America Cortez’s dissertation aimed at reconciling Cuban immigrants. She walks a specific group of individuals through a process that deals first with intrapersonal reconciliation and forgiveness setting the foundation for interpersonal reconciliation and forgiveness. The process, she states, “is

⁶³ Robert J. Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation Spirituality and Strategies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), Kindle, loc. 1873-1876.

⁶⁴ Keith E. Yandell, “The Metaphysics and Morality of Forgiveness,” in Robert D. Enright and Joanna North, eds., *Exploring Forgiveness* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 35-45.

⁶⁵ Nathan R. Frise and Mark R. McMinn. “Forgiveness and reconciliation: the differing perspectives of psychologists and Christian theologians.” *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 38, no. 2 (2010): 83-90, accessed October 10, 2015, <https://www.questia.com/library/journal/1G1-231530217/forgiveness-and-reconciliation-the-differing-perspectives>.

fundamentally about fostering mutual understanding and respect for difference, which calls for a social space where this can happen.”⁶⁶

So reconciliation begins individually and subjectively and includes forgiveness as an aspect on a spectrum. The movement arises on the inside and moves outward relationally requiring social space. The specific delineation is the reconciling of individuals to God and self that involves forgiveness. From there, a generational process of reconciliation can be worked out.

Individual Reconciliation as Non-anxious Presence

In light of reconciliation taking the shape of creation, un-creation, re-creation, reconciliation begins subjectively for the individual in this process of un-creation and re-creation as has been noted scripturally in a call to die to self and live as a new creation.⁶⁷ Regarding generations in the subjective process, Mano Singham, theoretical physicist at Case Western Reserve University, acknowledges in his dealing with teaching various generations and types of students,

stereotypes are usually based on some reality. But even if different populations exhibit, on average, their own distinct traits, large populations like nations and generations include so many deviations from the norm that stereotypes are of little use in predicting the traits that any given person is likely to display.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Ondina America Cortes, “Communion in Diversity: Exploring a Practical Theology of Reconciliation Among Cuban Exiles.” PhD diss., (St. Thomas University, 2013), 88.

⁶⁷ Phil. 1:21; Gal. 2:20; Rom. 6:6; Eph. 2:15 and 4:22-24; and Col. 3:9-11.

⁶⁸ Mano Singham, “More Than ‘Millennials’: Teachers Must Look Beyond Generational Stereotypes.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 56, no. 08 (2009), accessed September 16, 2015, <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA209545703&v=2.1&u=newb64238&it=r&p=AONE&sw=w&asid=d5cb9192c4f8e85847ec0a9a1b2e81fe>.

Sigham points to the need to address the individual within the generational cohort to gain any actual footing on moving towards the reconciliation of generations. What follows is an exploration of reconciliation as an individual's invitation to un-creation and re-creation through family systems and specifically towards a capacity to remain a non-anxious presence.

The individual is not an isolated phenomenon. Individuals, according to family systems theory are part of a whole. As Friedman has pointed out, the differentiation of an individual includes self-definition as the refusal to take responsibility for another's anxiety as well as the ability to remain connected and self-regulated, or taking "maximum responsibility for one's own density and emotional being."⁶⁹

As previously mentioned, Murray Bowen describes the key to change in a family system is self-differentiation as it is exhibited in previous generations and passed on. "This multigenerational notion helps explain the 'individual' factors in creating and overcoming homeostatic resistance, but also because it provides a theoretical framework for strategies of healing."⁷⁰ Differentiation of the self provides the platform and understanding for interaction in a system creating the space for reconciliation generationally.

As a part of a system, a person receives a level of individuation passed down from their family of origin. Thus, a beginning point is established intrinsically within the generational system, but not in isolation from others. The goals then for the self, in accordance with family systems theory, is toward a differentiated non-anxious presence

⁶⁹ Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 27.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

and “to be as much of a ‘self’ as is possible for me ... and to permit the others as much latitude as possible toward developing their selves.”⁷¹

Maintaining a non-anxious presence is great as an ideal, but, as Friedman has identified in Bowen,

Where one falls on the scale, according to the theory, is determined in large part by where our parents, their parents, etc., were on the scale, with various children in each generation being slightly more or less mature than their parents ... [being more or less] equipped to deal with crisis, and by the nature of the case, would respond more quickly to redress the balance if the homeostasis of the family were disturbed, particularly if the disturbance were caused by another member trying to achieve a higher level of differentiation (maturity). Such a scale might be used to describe homeostatic forces in any partnership, husband and wife, or clergyman and congregation.⁷²

Those forces are not beyond the reach of generational cohorts within a contextual system like the local church. Accordingly, the individual resides on a continuum of differentiation based on his/her own family system of origin, and in the face of crisis and anxiety, the attempt to move more toward becoming a non-anxious individual disrupts homeostasis within a system, affecting others. The extension of family systems to generations is in line with Bowen’s point, “differentiation in any system functions on a surprisingly similar plane as it does in the family.”⁷³

Beyond the connectedness to the system, the internal process of identifying and navigating undifferentiated areas of the self is not a simple task. Robert Saucy, former systematic theologian at Biola University, describes the complexity that is the individual:

What defines us most as human persons is that each of us is a self, created in God’s image with the capacity of personhood that enables us to have a

⁷¹ Bowen, 463.

⁷² Friedman, 28.

⁷³ Bowen, 464.

relationship with him and with people. It is this inner self to which the word “heart” in Scripture overwhelming refers. The heart is the seat of our desires, intentions, and will (e.g., Isa. 10:7; 2 Cor. 9:7), our various intellectual activities such as knowing and thinking (e.g., Deut. 8:5; Matt. 9:4), and our feelings and passions (e.g., Isa. 1:5; Acts 2:26). The impressions from everything that we encounter along life’s journey all meet together in our heart— impressions from various circumstances, contacts with people, and especially our relationship with God. Our responses to these circumstances likewise come out of our heart. The bottom line is that human life is heart life.⁷⁴

John Coe, the director of the Institute for Spiritual Formation at Biola University, describes the undifferentiated areas as the hidden heart.

The hidden heart represents the repository of the collected beliefs, desires and feelings that are embedded in the habits of the heart as the repressed material we do not want to see or experience about our self, and has been habituated in certain patterns of unhealthy deep beliefs and desires that have a long history and etiology.... The degree to which the deep beliefs and desires have not been brought to conscious awareness and dealt with is the degree to which one is not in control of them.⁷⁵

Bringing the deep beliefs to the surface is not simple, but a vital task toward becoming a differentiated non-anxious presence.

Terry Hargrave provides a model of interpersonally negotiating the neurological process of hidden heart. He describes the hidden heart as crisis, emotion, and “self-reactivity”⁷⁶ for which damage to yourself, others, and the relationship has already been done.⁷⁷ Hargrave establishes what relationships actually do for the individual in this process:

⁷⁴ Saucy, Kindle, loc. 653-659.

⁷⁵ John H. Coe and Todd W. Hall, *Psychology in the Spirit: Contours of a Transformational Psychology* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010), 300-303.

⁷⁶ Hargrave and Pfitzer, 37. Self-reactivity as defined in Chapters 1 and 2 means “the individual is prompted to have to cope with the unloving and untrustworthy situations by compensating, albeit destructively, for what is lacking in the sense of identity and self.”

⁷⁷ Hargrave and Pfitzer, 155.

In essence, relationships force us to deal with the deepest part of ourselves that needs to form in terms of learning who we are and how we can become capable and powerful in a world that is not always safe. ... As individuals, we must be responsible for our own sense of self and our own power, or we cannot partner. Instead, we become dependent on a partner and force him or her into a position of trying to provide us with the parenting that we may never have received. Since partners cannot supply this type of parenting competently to one another and certainly cannot make up for what was not given in childhood, the relationship is bound to be filled with conflict, strife, and difficulty, and one or both of the partners is constantly trying to get the other to behave, feel, or act differently.⁷⁸

With a foundation of expectations on others to fill insufficiencies, it is easy to imagine a gap in relationship, not unlike the reactivity of generational cohorts. Hargrave developed a model that provides a tangible means of becoming a non-anxious presence, allowing the space for others to do the same:

The four steps are effective in helping address and correct the executive operating system of the brain with regard to primary emotional violations and fight-and-flight responses. But, we hope that it is obvious that this technique takes much therapeutic work through (1) clearly identified violations and feelings associated with lack of love and trustworthiness, (2) identification of key process patterns that accompany feelings of self-reactivity, (3) identifying key truths essential to the individual's life, and (4) map the agency actions that will result in more positive outcomes. The [person] must become skilled not only at knowing the four steps by heart but also at utilizing the steps at the critical times he or she is emotionally activated. ... The more the steps are practiced, the more a person finds themselves able to work from a position of peace and make action choices that are based on human agency.⁷⁹

The four steps are described in manageable language in *5 Days to a New Marriage*,⁸⁰ a book utilizing the restoration therapy process for group study as a way to begin to identify the four steps mentioned above as individuals in a marriage context in a

⁷⁸ Ibid., 177.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 170-171.

⁸⁰ Shawn Stoeber and Terry Hargrave, *5 Days to a New Marriage* (Amarillo, TX: The Hideaway Foundation, 2011).

single statement, “right now I feel _____, and I usually act on that feeling by _____, But the truth about me is _____, so I choose to _____.”⁸¹ The benefit of Hargrave’s work in marriage can be extended into other systems of relationships. Bowen states, “The main goal in these situations is to take stock of my own functioning and to make an effort to modify it. ... One always has to be aware of emotional issues in the life of an individual that are being transmitted to the group, though there is a fine line in accepting responsibility and blame.”⁸² Hargrave’s four steps put feet to Friedman’s non-anxious presence, allowing the space for individuals to become more differentiated within a system. In effect, both scriptural references of working out your salvation,⁸³ as well as transformation by the renewal of the mind,⁸⁴ line up with the physiological and neurological processes laid out by Saucy, Coe, and Hargrave. The process allows for reconciliation to take shape beginning with the individual, or subjective, as a means of preparing for relational reconciliation.

Conclusion

Biblical reconciliation is framed by creation, un-creation, and re-creation identified in the biblical narrative and culminating in the complete work of Christ on the cross. Reconciliation establishes a connected relationship between God and humanity while at the same time a clear individuation of personhood remains in both God and humanity. God’s reconciliation of humanity to himself through Christ sets the table for

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Bowen, 462.

⁸³ Phil. 2:14.

⁸⁴ Rom. 12:2.

the reconciliation of humanity with each other through (1) offering reconciliation in the face of enmity, (2) approaching other individuals with the same value as one approaches God, (3) a continual movement toward reconciliation with friend and foe, and (4) committing to reconciliation regardless of stratification. Beginning biblically, reconciliation starts with the individual moving toward being differentiated. This involves a continual self-defining process. For the Christ follower, self-identifying as a new creation in Christ and as such, a living sacrifice,⁸⁵ shapes an understanding of individual identity associated with the participation in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection⁸⁶ through the transformation of one's mind.⁸⁷ Reconciliation also suggests the individual develop an ability to remain non-anxious through self-regulation, or "knowing where one ends and another begins"⁸⁸ within anxiety-ridden situations with others. Practically, this involves "taking maximum responsibility for one's own emotional being and destiny rather than blaming others or the context."⁸⁹

Only insofar as an individual in Christ participates in the working out of their salvation,⁹⁰ can self-defining and self-regulating behaviors shape one in a Christ-like manner and move one toward being more differentiated. This is different from a works based faith. Working out one's salvation is not an issue of acceptance, but an issue of

⁸⁵ Rom. 12:1.

⁸⁶ Rom. 6:5.

⁸⁷ Rom. 12:2.

⁸⁸ Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York: Seabury Books, 2007), 183.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Phil. 2:12.

allowing transformation. Coe states, “Spiritual disciplines do not transform, they only become relational opportunities to open the heart to the Spirit, who transforms.”⁹¹ This becomes foundational for an individual to be able to extend and move toward reconciliation with others. Thus, the need to remain differentiated as an individual in the midst of the collective, begins the process whereby the church creates space for others to be fully who they are in the midst of a generational dialogue. The need for identifying such a space, as Chapter 4 will demonstrate, is vital if generational cohorts are to remain capable of being both differentiated, and non-anxious presences in the process of reconciliation.

⁹¹ Coe and Hall, 77.

CHAPTER 4: THEOLOGY OF TABLE FELLOWSHIP

Table Turning

Just when Josh thought he was making headway with the generational tension at Fellowship Church, the bottom fell out. The past year of establishing a connection between the college ministry and the elders of the church seemed to be a step in the right direction. However, Josh had just received a call from his boss that made him question all of it. Josh had been asked to meet with his boss the following day about the release of Ryan, a college staff member, due to Ryan's judgments regarding vision and direction of the church. Josh was completely caught off guard. If his department was not on the same page regarding the vision and direction of the church, what did that mean about him as the head of that department? Had he failed as a leader? Was he unacceptable? Was he next?

The next day Josh loaded his backpack with his notes from the night before. He put on his jacket and prepared to make the long trek across the parking lot. He was so angry! His enraged state from the day before had been fashioned into a controlled anger made up of a series of ironclad arguments. As he entered his boss' office, he sat down at the unending conference table. "Ironic," Josh thought, "there really is no getting away from the separation here." Not unlike the parking lot, this table was now the symbolic division of two wills, a generation apart. Sitting across the table from his boss, Josh reviewed the airtight case he developed fueled by his own fear and pain. He had assembled five points as to why Mike was not just wrong about letting one of Josh's staff members go, but why Mike's reasons were ridiculous, hurtful, and out of touch. "Little

wonder the previous college staff had issues,” Josh thought, “what I think does not carry any weight around here!”

With the past generational tension in mind, Josh approached the conversation with his superior expecting it to be a firestorm, and Josh was ready “to turn tables!” Josh rolled his sleeves, clenched his fists, and prepared for the fight. Once the meeting started, he unleashed all five of his arguments, one right after the other. In Josh’s mind, each point landed a blow like a devastating combination of punches—right, left, uppercut. Josh listed off of why he was right and why the logic of his boss was flawed. The fuel for the firestorm came from a deep need in the young pastor to validate his person, prove his worth, and explain why he was an adequate leader.

Josh could hear the final bell in his head as he finished with his concluding remarks—“ding, ding, ding.” The fight was over, and he was sure he had the upper hand. In the end, the decision was made to still release Ryan. Josh was devastated, confused, and unsure what to do now.

Table Fellowship in Antiquity

Humanity has historically found the table intrinsically associated with survival, culture, literature and ultimately the divine. “Perhaps more than any other human activity, food intensively creates the individual as well as the community through the daily practices of eating. People must eat to live and they do so every day. It is the ultimate habitus practice, as meals structure the lives not only of the preparers but also of the

consumers.”¹ Early civilizations structured their lives around food, and thus the table was a place of covenant, intimacy, celebration, but also a place of survival, a place of tension, a place of anxiety.

Archeological association of the table and culture has seen a significant influx of research and attention in the last twenty years. Brian Hayden, a professor of archaeology at Simon Fraser University points out,

[since] the 1980s and especially the 1990s, a number of key publications attempted to link pre-industrial feasting with theoretically important issues such as political complexity, social structure, inequality, domestication, the development of prestige technologies, and the creation of monumental architecture ... resulting in an explosion of research.²

The influx of research connects food, banquets, feasts, meals, and the table to generations. The generational associations include meals with ancestors, socioeconomic status,³ sociopolitical power and hospitality.⁴ Also included is ritualization over time rather than communal differentiation,⁵ social and individual identity,⁶ gender,⁷ status in

¹ Sonya Atalay and Christine A. Hastorf, “Food, Meals, and Daily Activities: Food Habitus at Neolithic Catalhoyuk,” *American Antiquity* 71, no. 22 (2006): 283-319, accessed November 24, 2015, <http://www.saa.org/AbouttheSociety/Publications/AmericanAntiquity/tabid/124/Default.aspx>.

² Brian Hayden, *The Power of Feasts: From Prehistory to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 3.

³ Atalay and Hastorf, 283-319.

⁴ George F. Lau, “Feasting and ancestor veneration at Chinchawas, North Highlands of Ancash, Peru.” *Latin American Antiquity* 13, no. 3 (2002): 279, accessed November 23, 2015, <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA92448194&v=2.1&u=newb64238&it=r&p=AONE&sw=w&asid=038b0704877a2eaeff1319f0eab90f9b>.

⁵ James M. Potter, “Pots, Parties, and Politics: Communal Feasting in the American Southwest,” *American Antiquity* 65, no. 3 (2000): 471, accessed November 25, 2015, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2694531?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents..

⁶ Atalay and Hastorf, 315.

⁷ Michael Dietler and Brian Hayden, eds., *Feasts: Archaeological and Ethnographic Perspectives On Food, Politics, and Power* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian, 2001).

all human societies,⁸ and class distinction through engendered ideological formation of the personal and political.⁹

Mealtime theoretical associations inform accounts of the table in literary devices that are often more ideal than actual: the way the recorder wished to be seen. Matthew Roller, whose research and teaching is concerned with the culture of the ancient Roman world,¹⁰ acknowledges an important historical facet that has formed humanity at the table:

The basic historical question of who assumed what posture when, cannot be answered by simply accepting at face value what the texts say or the images show. This is because most representations of dining posture in every medium are ideologically fraught: the posture that people are represented as assuming while dining has more to do with the values they seek to claim for themselves than with giving an authentic “snapshot” of actual social practice. To lack awareness of this ideological dimension, or to ignore its intricacies, vitiates any attempt to recover actual social practice. Yet at the same time, these ideological effects themselves presuppose that certain social practices do exist, or can plausibly be imagined to have existed at some time and place; thus ideological analysis requires a parallel analysis of practice, just as no analysis of practice can proceed in ignorance of ideology. The two dimensions refer to, presuppose, and symbolically require one another.¹¹

The ideal and the actual are intrinsically linked and in some ways necessarily dependent on each other for putting together a holistic picture of the table. The converging of the ideal and the actual is the place where humanity makes sense of the

⁸ Pauline Wilson Wiessner and Wulf Schiefenhövel, eds. *Food and the Status Quest: An Interdisciplinary Perspective* (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1996).

⁹ Tamara L. Bray, ed. *Archaeology and Politics of Food and Feasting in Early States and Empires* (Hingham, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), 132,

¹⁰ John Hopkins faculty site. <http://classics.jhu.edu/directory/matthew-roller/>.

¹¹ Matthew B. Roller, *Dining Posture in Ancient Rome: Bodies, Values, and Status* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 7.

world, and more importantly, the place of transcendence, the place where the divine and humanity meet. Homi K. Bhabha, Director of the Humanities Center at Harvard

University, calls this the Third Space:

[it is] the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. It makes it possible to begin envisaging national, anti-nationalist histories of the “people.” And by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves.¹²

Scripture is no exception here. Biblical genre helps frame what is an attempt at historicity and what is ideological. Genre provides a lens to read and understand truth; simply because something is not historical does not make it untrue. In the same way, a song may not be historical, but can still be considered true. It may even be argued that a song can be more “true” than a historical account, due to the nature of the psychological and emotional impact of a song.¹³ When humanity seeks to know what is actual and what is ideological, there is a movement toward the transcendent and, in the Christian faith, towards God. The table, historically, has been the meeting place for humanity at the center of culture, identity, and meaning. The table then is the place where survival, anxiety, culture, literature, transcendence, and the divine converge, as Craig Thomas McMahan describes in his dissertation: “The meal, one of humankind’s most basic common practices, was transformed by Jesus into an occasion of divine encounter.”¹⁴

¹² Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), 56.

¹³ These thought are influenced by Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

¹⁴ Craig Thomas McMahan, “Meals as Type-Scenes in the Gospel of Luke” (diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1987), 1.

The understanding of the table has distinctly and unapologetically emerged as a place of and for formative influence specifically for all those who choose to dine. Nathan MacDonald, at University of St. Andrews, says this about the pre-biblical table,

In Mesopotamian empires like Sargon's, the royal table was a central institution for the redistribution of economic resources, which were traded for loyalty and prestige. The king was the central figure in the redistributive economy. He claimed tribute, taxation and spoils, which were then redistributed through the king's table to nobles and servants. The royal table confirmed the king's power and prestige.¹⁵

The table was not then, and is not now, neutral. Rather, it is the place where tensions converge, be they social, political, or theological. It is at the table where ideological and practical tensions in life collide in convergent commensality.

Biblical Table Fellowship

The biblical table is a central theme and also a place of dividing tension. Creation begins in the garden where humanity is invited to take and eat, and from the heart of creation begins the provision of the meal and extension of the table from Creator to created.¹⁶ In the same way that the distinctly separate Mesopotamian ruler and subjects meet at the table, the divine and human relationship begins at the garden's table.

From creation to Abraham, God provides for humanity at the table in the midst of a famine (Gen. 12:11-20). God invites humanity to join him at the table where the tension

¹⁵ Nathan MacDonald, "The Eyes of All Look to You': the Generosity of the Divine King," in Nathan MacDonald, Kathy Ehrensperger, and Luzia Sutter Rehmann, eds., *Decisive Meals: Table Politics in Biblical Literature (The Library of New Testament Studies)*, NIPPOD ed. (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 8.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 12. "The provision of food for all is an undertaking of the creator... God does not only create men and animals, but assigns them food (Gen. 1:29-30). Similarly, in Genesis 2 the first words of YHWH God to the man concern the trees from which he is permitted to eat (vv.16-17)."

begins and the unraveling starts, as seen throughout the Old Testament narrative. Adam and Eve falter in the Garden (Gen. 1 and 2); Cain is said to have shed Abel's blood over a food sacrifice, a possible allusion to meal etiquette broken at the table. Abraham extends his banquet table to the three travelers imagined as God or angels (Gen. 18); Jacob wrestles away Esau's birth rite at the table (Gen. 25: 29-34); Joseph is sold from the pit during his brothers meal (Gen. 37: 12-36), and reveals himself to his brothers years later through food provisions (Gen. 44-45).

In the pentad of Genesis 1-11,¹⁷ the table is the place fraught with creation, un-creation, and re-creation, where the tension of the divine human encounter moves from the created order to the people of God. In both Egypt and Exodus the table is set for commensality first through Passover and throughout the institution of slavery when the Hebrews survive the famine and into the established people of God in the desert with miraculous manna and quail (Exod. 1, 16). The Psalms describe, "YHWH, the creator of all, does indeed provide food for all. Not only that, he is explicitly said to provide it for the poor and hungry (Pss. 145:14; 146.5-9)."¹⁸ Whether in captivity or the Promised Land, God sustains His people at the table. Furthermore, "Despite the concern with the wicked, there is a persistent emphasis on YHWH's goodness to all his creatures. YHWH's provision of food to his creatures is one of the paramount expressions of this goodness."¹⁹ The invitation to the table is a central posture by the creator to the created, faithful or wicked. The table and provision continues through their journey: the Israelites

¹⁷ Gen. 1-11 has already been dealt with as a literary unity in Chapter 3, Blenkinsopp.

¹⁸ MacDonald, "The Eyes of All Look to You," 14.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

complain about the manna and receive so much quail they vomit (Num. 11:31:-34); they are invited to eat of the fruit of the land (Josh. 1); and Ruth, the Moabite, is invited into the fold through the provision of food.

Peter Altman, who completed in his dissertation on festive meals, concludes about Ruth,

The designation of time as, literally, “the time of eating”, corresponds with anthropological theory with regard to ritual: there is a set time, hinting at a cultural practice. . . . As a time specified in the text—marked—it is somewhat ritualized. Second, Ruth is given a specific invitation to come to a specific place “here:” yet another marker of ritualized action. These mentions by the text of time and place emphasize the fact that an act of significant importance is about to take place . . . The very action of the meal exhibits and brings about Ruth’s inclusion in the community. She—as the individual taking her portion—enters the community.²⁰

The Biblical account of the table continues into the monarchical period. Eli prophesies to Hannah about a coming son; Samuel, in conjunction with the dinner table as Eli thought she was drunk (1 Sam. 1). David brings his brothers food at the battlefield where he meets Goliath (1 Sam. 17:17), refrains from eating at the transfer of the Kingdom and the death of Abner (2 Sam. 3), marries Abigail as she brings him an array of food as a gift, provides for Jonathan’s descendants (2 Sam. 9), and again fasts in intercession for the child born in adultery with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 12). The examples continue through the biblical canon as Susan Plietzsch, professor of Jewish Studies writes,

The Book of Esther is structured by banquets, and the reading of the text finds its continuation in the festive banquets of the Feast of Purim. . . . There are banquets where conflict erupts and escalates and others where, through clever politics of invitation, decisions are reached and new courses set.²¹

²⁰ Peter Altman, “Everyday Meals for Extraordinary People: Eating and Assimilation in the Book of Ruth,” in MacDonald, Ehrensperger, and Rehmann, 21.

²¹ Susanne Plietzsch, “Eating and Living: The Banquets in the Esther Narratives,” in MacDonald, Ehrensperger, and Rehmann, 40.

The Old Testament is full of accounts at the table. The importance of the table touches on culture, humanity, truth, and religious gatherings. These all converge at the table, the tension where human and divine meet.²²

In the same manner, the New Testament has numerous accounts of formative influence found at the table. The Synoptic Gospels account for meals throughout, from Jewish feasts that structure the life of Christ and form time itself, to the meals Jesus shares with his disciples, the Pharisees (Zacheus), friends (Mary, Martha, Lazarus), and tax collectors.

Beyond the Gospels²³, the New Testament has its own accounts of the table and meals that point to themes of division.²⁴ The sheer number of accounts of food and table fellowship demonstrates a tension associated with the table that will be explored further

²² For accounts of Old Testament table fellowship and food see the following: Gen. 6:21-9:4, 24:33, 25:30, 27:4-31, 28:20; Exod. 2:20, 10:5-12, 12:4-48, 13:3-7, 16:8-16; Lev. 3:13, 6:16-30, 7:6-27, 8:31, 10:12-19, 11:2-47, 14:47, 17:10-15, 19:6-26, 21:22, 22:4-30, 23:6-14, 24:9, 25:12-22, 26:5-38; Num. 6:3-4, 9:11, 11:4-21, 15:19, 18:10-31, 24:8, 28:17; Deut. 6:11, 8:9-12, 11:15, 12:7-27, 14:3-29, 15:20-23, 16:3-8, 18:2-8, 20:19, 23:24, 26:12-14, 27:7, 28:31-57, 29:6, 31:20; Josh. 24:13; Judg. 13:4-16, 4:9-14; Ruth 2:14, 3:3-7; 1 Sam. 1:7-9, 2:36, 9:13-24, 14:24-34, 20:24, 28:20-23, 30:12-16; 2 Sam. 3:35, 9:7-10, 11:11, 12:3-17, 13:5-11, 16:2, 17:29, 19:28-42; 1 Kings 1:25, 2:7, 13:8-28, 14:11, 16:4, 17:12, 18:19-42, 19:5-7, 21:4-24; 2 Kings 4:8-34, 6:22-29, 7:2, 7:19, 9:10, 9:36, 18:27-31, 19:29; 1 Chron. 12:39; 2 Chron. 31:10; Ezra 4:14, 6:21, 9:12, 10:6; Neh. 5:2, 8:10-12; Esther 4:16; Job 1:4-18, 5:5, 6:6, 13:28, 20:21, 31:8-39; Ps. 14:4, 22:26-29, 27:2, 50:13, 53:4, 78:24, 102:4-9, 106:20, 127:2, 128:2, 141:4; Prov. 23:1-20, 25:21-27, 30:20, 31:7; Eccles. 2:24-25, 3:13, 4:5, 5:11-18, 8:15, 9:7; Song of Sol. 5:1; Isa. 1:19-20, 4:1, 5:17, 7:15-22, 21:5, 22:13, 29:8, 37:30, 44:16-19, 55:1-10; Jer. 5:17, 16:8, 29:5-28, 2:33; Ezek. 2:8, 3:1-2, 4:9-16, 12:18-19, 40:39-43; Dan. 1:12-13; Hosea 9:3-4, 10:13; Joel 2:26; Zech. 7:6.

²³ More specifics about meals in the Gospels will be addressed later in the chapter. Meals in Luke include Luke 7:36-50, 10:38-42, 11:37-54, 14:1-24, 15:1-32, 19:1-10, 24:13-35, and in the other gospels Matt. 8:11-12, 11:16-19, 21:31-32; Mark 2:13-17, 6:30-44, 8:1-10; John 2:1-11, John 21: 1-14. Craig L. Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness: Jesus' Meals with Sinners* (Leicester, England: IVP Academic, 2005), 39. Other citations of the table in the Gospels includes Luke 13:29, parables in 16:21, 17:7, Eucharist in 22:14-27; Mark 14:17-19, 16:13-15; John 12:1-3, John 13:1-30.

²⁴ Acts 10:9-33, 20:7-16, 27:33-38; Rom. 14:3-26; 1 Cor. 5:11, 8:3-10, 10:1-22, 11-13, 1 Thess. 3:6-15; Rev. 2:12-17, 2:20-29, 3:20, 10:8-11.

below, as well as the importance of such a topic in the formation of the Jewish people and the Christian church in relationship toward each other, outsiders, and God.

Contextual Table

As the incarnation of God himself, Jesus enters into human history at a specific time and a specific place. Jewish history and culture in the time of Jesus is under Roman rule²⁵ and Roman expansion involved the assimilation of people groups into the Greco/Roman culture. Depending on the ruler, and as a means of staving off rebellions like the Maccabean revolts, in Jesus' day an outward tolerance was extended by the Romans toward Jewish practice, as described by Everett Ferguson:

Romans in general showed great respect for Jewish religious scruples: for example, Jews were exempted from appearing before a magistrate on a Sabbath or holy day; a sacrifice offered at the temple "for Caesar and the Roman nation" was taken as a sufficient expression of loyalty; and copper coins minted in the country carried no human portrait but only the emperor's name and inoffensive emblems, as did the Roman standard.²⁶

Despite the leniency, mostly aimed at keeping relative peace, tension between Jewish and pervasive Greco/Roman culture remained, and the table was not exempt.

The detailed exploration of the Greco/Roman symposium²⁷ as an ancient meal is beyond the scope of this work. For reference, Jason König, Senior Lecturer in Greek at

²⁵ Luke 2:1.

²⁶ Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 415-416. Read Ferguson for a more detail picture of the cultural scene in the 1st century.

²⁷ The history and literature of conviviality in symposium form is extensive and beyond the scope of this study. Refer to authors and studies that cover, Plato's *Symposium*, Xenophon's *Symposium*, Plutarch, writing in the early second century CE in the first preface to his *Sympotic Questions* (612d), lists his philosophical predecessors in the enterprise of recording sympotic conversation – Plato, Xenophon, Aristotle, Speusippos, Epicurus, Prytanis, Hieronymos and Dio of the Academy (König, 12), The *Deipnosophists* (or Dinner-Sophists) of Athenaeus, naming the medical *Symposium* of Heraklides of

the University of St. Andrews, wrote a 2012 monograph called *Saints and Symposiasts*²⁸ where he defines the term:

The Greek word, *symposium*, literally means “drinking together.” The roots of the institution lie in the archaic period, the eighth to sixth centuries BCE. In practice it must have taken many different forms in different contexts and locations, but there are recurring features. The symposium was a drinking party, held most often in private homes. It was a venue for elite, male sociability, sometimes even viewed as a politically subversive, anti-democratic space.²⁹

The symposium as a cultural phenomenon was a type of table fellowship embodied by Greco/Roman culture and certain scholarship suggests Jesus engaged in and utilized sympotic commensality. However, the research is divided on whether or not Jesus engaged in the Greco/Roman symposium. Craig Blomberg argues that symposium form and ideology is rather absent from the biblical account. Furthermore, any meals, especially in Luke, that resemble some form of symposium, such as Jesus’ mass feedings, are anti-symposium in nature.³⁰ Blomberg’s survey of Old Testament, Intertestamental, and Gospel literature argues for a variety of meal types and shapes. He purposes that they are not sympotic.

Rather than the sympotic/anti-sympotic debate, the importance of the table for this research involves the exploration of the tension at the table. Judith M. Lieu³¹ makes clear

Tarentum (1st century BCE), the *Symposium* of Aelius Herodian (2nd century CE), the *Conversations* of Heraklides Ponticus the younger (1st century CE), the *Sympotic Miscellany* of Aristoxenos of Tarentum (4th century BCE) and the *Sympotic Miscellany* of Didymos Chalkenteros (1st century BCE), Pamphile's lost miscellany (1st century CE) is also relevant: Photius, *Bibliotheca*; (König, 29).

²⁸ Jason König, *Saints and Symposiasts: The Literature of Food and the Symposium in Greco-Roman and Early Christian Culture* (Greek Culture in the Roman World) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), Kindle.

²⁹ König, Kindle, loc. 6-7.

³⁰ Blomberg, 161.

³¹ Faculty page at Cambridge. <http://www.divinity.cam.ac.uk/directory/judith-lieu>

that navigation of the Christian community within the Greco-Roman world was an attempt to establish identity:

Spatial origins and a place to inhabit are integral to perceptions of Roman identity. In Jewish thought, land, city, and temple play a focal role, while the experience of exile and diaspora demanded their reinterpretation. Besides redefining these concepts, early Christian writings had to negotiate, with a range of results, the tensions between the local and the universal, and between belonging to and choosing alienation from society.³²

The integration between Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian culture was full of tension. Joel C. Relihan suggests “Jesus’ ‘open commensality’ could have inspired the creation of gatherings of people from all walks of life whose equality before God and each other is stressed.”³³ Though the research is divided on the issues of whether or not Jesus engaged sympotic form, what is conclusively held throughout, is that identity is formed and found at the table.³⁴

Commensality as Risqué

With identity formed around the table, the participants or dining company becomes important. Jennifer A. Glancy suggests, “We may even speculate that, like the Pharisee named Simon in the Gospel of Luke, some theologians would have looked askance at Jesus’ willingness to allow an unknown woman to caress his feet with her

³² Judith Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 234.

³³ Joel C. Relihan, “Rethinking the History of the Literary Symposium,” *Illinois Classical Studies* 17, no. 2 (Fall 1992): 242, accessed October 21, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23064322>.

³⁴ König, Kindle, loc. 25, Hal Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal: Social Experimentation and Early Christian Identity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 67-68; Ursula Rapp, “You are How You Eat: How Eating and Drinking Behavior Identifies the Wise According to Jesus Ben Sirach,” in MacDonald, Ehrensperger, and Rehmann, 42.

hair.”³⁵ There is potential conflict between the dining Jesus and Christian writers’ reservations about the implicit dangers of the banquet setting. The temptations at the table, and particularly the shared company of the table, make it dangerous. Glancy continues,

Commensality is a good thing. It is good to eat together. It is also good, perhaps after a glass or two of diluted wine, to raise voices to praise the deity. Nonetheless, the dining room is not an innocent or safe space. The dining experience is potentially corrupting, not least because eating, digesting, and eliminating are part of the cycle of corporal corruption that characterizes mortal life. I believe that from our modern perspectives we may be readiest to acknowledge those early Christian concerns about corporeality that arise from issues of intimacy and sexuality.³⁶

Glancy is acknowledging a transition from how Jesus approaches the woman in Mark 14 who washes his feet with her hair and how “a Christian man of the late second or early third century would have responded to a woman who attempted to wash his feet with her tears and dry them with her hair.”³⁷ McGill University professor Ellen Bradshaw, describes the risks involved with Jesus acceptance of cultural norms:

For our purposes, we may say that in the context of the meal narrated in Mark 14, the woman becomes the performance. Her action comprises the performance portion of the symposium. What is more, inasmuch as her act partakes of funerary practices, we may recognize that how she is remembered here is indicative of women’s roles in rituals of lamentation and funerary meals.³⁸

Jesus is in the converging tension between allowing the woman in Mark 14 to rub oil on his feet, or to stop her. The tension, felt by everyone at the table, was how Jesus

³⁵ Jennifer A. Glancy “Temptations of the Table: Christians Respond to Reclining Culture” in Smith and Taussig, *Meals in the Early Christian World*, Kindle, loc. 229.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, loc. 236.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, loc. 229-230.

³⁸ Ellen Bradshaw Aitkin, “Remembering and Remembered Women in Greco-Roman Meals,” in Smith and Taussig, *Meals in the Early Christian World*, Kindle, loc. 109.

would respond to such a gesture. The “kind of woman” described in Luke 7:39 marks her as unacceptable, unclean, and therefore rejected culturally. Jesus embodies a reconciliatory posture in the midst of the tension between responding to the woman as would be culturally expected, or pushing back against culture by allowing her to continue. König acknowledges the gyroscopic balance regarding cultural engagement or lack thereof:

Admittedly, many of the most distinctive forms of Christian commensality had a great deal in common with non-Christian conviviality. Between them, classical, Christian and Jewish feasting customs formed a broadly homogeneous continuum of shared practices stretching across the Mediterranean world. At the same time, early Christian groups—like so many others in the ancient, and indeed modern, world—used their own feasting practices to build a sense of community and to separate themselves sharply from outsiders. These practices in turn were often represented as disturbingly alien by non-Christian observers. This was the case even very soon after the initial emergence of Christianity in the first century CE.³⁹

There is an absence of a wholesale association with the pervasive culture, yet there is a navigation of what to hold on to and what to be distinct from. The importance here lies in the balanced tension, holding a higher view of humanity than cultural acquiescence or cultural abnegation. The reconciliatory tension is like a pendulum that swings as a way of pulling polarized positions back towards the middle and is not unlike the generational pendulum swing that Schmidt discusses in Chapter 3; a delineation he suggests is rooted in seeking and belonging.⁴⁰ The correlation with Schmidt is that seeking typically leads to a cultural concession either by an organization or individual whereas belonging involves holding the party line and establishing distinction, much like

³⁹ König, *Kindle*, loc. 122-123.

⁴⁰ Schmidt, 19-21.

cultural rejection. In the same way, the table must be approached with care and caution, as in the case of Jesus: whom he dined with is part of what got him killed.

Dividing Tension Driving to Hostility

As Jesus navigates this tension at the table, how he interacts with one person or group appears to be different in some cases in comparison to others. This sets up Jesus to become an easy target for the scapegoating of the systemic anxiety. As Jesus becomes the target for societal projection, all forms of reactivity emerge aimed at him; blame, shame, control, and chaos/escape.⁴¹ For instance, Jesus is blamed for appearing too loose with his drink and his associations. In Luke 7, there is a strong distinction made by Jesus contrasting his participation in table fellowship and his cousin John the Baptist's complete withdrawal from commensality. König points out, "At 7:33–4, he [Jesus] draws that contrast himself: 'John the Baptist has come not eating bread or drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The son of man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, this man is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.'"⁴² Robert Karris suggests "the phrase, 'a glutton and drunkard,' is proverbial for an apostate and is based on Deuteronomy 12:18-21,"⁴³ a proverb specifically dealing with a generational constriction of meeting expectations of the in-group.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Hargrave and Pfitzer, 41.

⁴² König, Kindle, loc. 131.

⁴³ Robert J. Karris, *Luke: Artist and Theologian: Luke's Passion Account as Literature* (New York: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2009), 57-58.

⁴⁴ Deut. 21:18-21: "If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and, though they discipline him, will not listen to them, then his father

Jesus transgresses expectations and is labeled a glutton and drunkard. Jesus reshapes the expectation of the messianic banquet in himself as the agency of Torah; through him hungry creation is met with food and justice, bringing satisfaction to both.⁴⁵ “In all of this it seems likely—although again hard to demonstrate—that Luke may be offering models of hospitality and community aimed specifically at his own early Christian readers, who may have defined themselves in part as ‘banquet communities.’”⁴⁶

The Jewish religious elite reacted to Jesus and began taking matters into their own hands. According to Brumberg-Kraus,

Table fellowship was the principle practice used by the Pharisees to win adherents to their religious movement in the first century C.E. The Pharisees’ gathering together to eat properly tithed food in a state of ritual purity, and the procedures for acquiring food and maintaining households or other spaces fit for such gatherings, were strategies to influence non-Pharisees to conform to a Pharisaic way of life.⁴⁷

The history of the Jewish people’s struggling with idolatry, leading to captivity, creates part of the tension of assimilating to the culture of the day. As a means of avoiding captivity once again, the religious elite held the Jewish people to strict adherence to Torah. A reaction of this nature, rooted in fear, is a direct link to past hurt. In order to control the situation, even if the intention is one of saving the Jewish people

and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gate of the place where he lives, and they shall say to the elders of his city, ‘This our son is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.’ Then all the men of the city shall stone him to death with stones. So you shall purge the evil from your midst, and all Israel shall hear, and fear.”

⁴⁵ Karris, 52-60.

⁴⁶ König, Kindle, loc. 131-132.

⁴⁷ Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, “Were the Pharisees a Conversionist Sect? Table Fellowship as a Strategy of Conversion, ‘The Making of Proselytes,’” *Jewish Missionary Activity in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* (ed. A.-J. Levine and R. Pervo), 161-192, accessed October 26, 2015, <http://wheatoncollege.edu/faculty/profiles/jonathan-brumberg-kraus/>.

from exile, ends up enslaving the people to the law. The religious elite propitiate the anxiety in the system by not acting on the capacity to be one's own person while not completely disassociating⁴⁸ from the Jewish people. This becomes the "other" gospel (reconciliation) that Paul fights against (discussed in Chapter 3.)

As an example, dismissal and shame became the status quo. The marginalized, the tax collectors, the poor, and the deformed were considered damned by God and thus, disposable. The out-group is unclean, and no longer able to associate with the community of God. In modern culture the hostility described here is similar to that of any polarized group, much like liberal and conservative theological ideologies. Modern religious liberals are critiqued for an interpretation of Scripture and doctrine that folds to culture for the sake of remaining socially progressive, while conservative religious ideology receives criticism for legalistically holding to doctrine against culture, both sides valuing correctness over humanity. The hostility toward Jesus from both cultural rejection and assimilation points toward the self-reactivity in individuals and groups that attempt to deal with inner anxiety by triangulating Jesus through hostility. Jesus becomes the problem in the system. Humanity deals with systemic problems through mimetic rivalry⁴⁹ and the use of redemptive violence to alleviate the anxiety through enacted violence on the identified problem.

⁴⁸ Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 184.

⁴⁹ Discussed in Chapter 1 on page 17.

Embodied Tension at the Table

The problem with looking into table fellowship as a platform for generational reconciliation is the false pretense that table fellowship as a ritual developed *ex nihilo*, on its own, devoid of any cultural influence in the Greco-Roman, Jewish or Christian context.⁵⁰ As has been noted, there is evidence for symposium and anti-symposium as a means of table fellowship in Scripture. The embodied tension requires a shift in focus. In a discussion about dining, “John 6:51-58 has a notable Eucharistic theme even if some elements from the texts of reference are missing. Although the consumption of body and blood is valued highly in the bread of life discourse, the true way to partake in Jesus is through faith and spirit.”⁵¹ Emphasizing faith and spirit help frame the table of reconciliation for generations. The point is not the food, the table, or generations even. The point is a focus on Christ. Approaching the table must first be remembering Christ and God’s revelation in Christ.

D. A. Carson points out, “Insofar as John allows echoes of the Eucharist to flavor his language in the bread of life discourse, his point is that the ultimate saving act is the cross/exaltation of Jesus. Jesus himself is the bread of life.”⁵² Jesus is the bread. He is the meal. Being the meal substantiates an evaluation of how Jesus handles banquet ideology.

Furthermore, Jesus as either accepting or rejecting culture is not a new view. Richard Niebuhr’s book *Christ and Culture*, offers four alternatives for understanding Jesus in relationship to culture. The first perspective he offers is that Jesus is against

⁵⁰ König, Kindle, loc. 130.

⁵¹ John 6:27-29, 35, and 63 as discussed by Esther Kobel, “The Various Tastes of Johannine Bread and Blood: A Multi-Perspective Reading of John 6” in MacDonald, Ehrensperger, and Rehmann, 88.

⁵² D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester, England: Eerdmans, 1991), 458.

culture. Second, Christ stands above culture. Third, he is for culture by fully supporting it. Finally, Jesus ignores culture altogether.⁵³ Paul Conway in his dissertation contextualizing Jesus and his Jewish world quotes Leonard Sweet addressing Niebuhr's distinctions, "All of these categories offer honest and worthy perspectives. One could see truth in each of these considering the circumstances. Leonard Sweet does a great service by opining on Niebuhr incomplete. Jesus was not for or against culture nor above or ignoring it. Christ incarnated into culture."⁵⁴

Jesus' incarnation into culture is echoed by McMahan who deals with meals as type-scenes:

Of all the means by which Jesus could have chosen to be remembered, he chose to be remembered by a meal. What he considered memorable and characteristic of his ministry was his table-fellowship. The meal, one of humankind's most basic common practices, was transformed by Jesus into an occasion of divine encounter. It was the sharing of food and drink that he invited his companions to share in the grace of God. The quintessence of Jesus' redemptive mission was revealed in his eating with sinners, repentant and unrepentant alike.⁵⁵

The divine encounter is fundamental to the understanding of table fellowship. The table is where the divine invites humanity to know the God who is fully other, yet connected to humanity. The divine encounter also models the potential for humanity to have a clearer picture of what being more clearly a self, while also remaining connected to others, might look like. Relationships that invite the individual to know and love the

⁵³ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975).

⁵⁴ Paul D. Conway, "Jesus and his Jewish World: A Resource That Brings First-Century Biblical Context into the Twenty-First-Century World Through Technology," DMin. diss. (George Fox Evangelical Seminary, 2013), 2-1370. <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/70>.

⁵⁵ McMahan, 1.

self, while allowing for mutual self-revelation, build trust and move toward reconciliation in the midst of the tension of past pain and fear, all at the table.

Jesus as a Differentiated Non-Anxious Presence at the Table

Jesus, incarnate, embodies the tension of the divine-human encounter. At the table, by remaining fully himself without allowing the pressure of a situation to cause him to react, he invites others to know and be known which also helps others remain connected. Examining Jesus in the cultural context demonstrates how he remains a differentiated non-anxious presence between the triangulating tension of cultural pressure in Luke 14.

Differentiation as “Connected To”

Karris suggests that in the Gospel of Luke, “Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal, or coming from a meal. References to food abound on almost every single page.”⁵⁶ Luke 14 records Jesus accepting the invitation to dine with Pharisees. Ideologically, “those who dined together were to be treated equally. This was a standard feature of ancient dining protocol. It functioned as an elaboration of the concept of social bonding.”⁵⁷

Allowing himself to be associated with the Pharisees had the potential to affect other groups of people negatively. The Pharisees were vocal about who was and was not acceptable, and by eating with them, the potential of assumed alignment with their values and views by others must have been considered. Rather than allow the pressure of

⁵⁶ Karris, 14.

⁵⁷ Smith, loc. 178-179.

association with the religious elite to influence his decision, in differentiated form Jesus willingly associates with the Pharisees. This is his non-verbal declaration of remaining connected to rather than rejecting the religious elite. By remaining connected⁵⁸ Jesus assumes a non-anxious posture in the midst of a tenuous situation. Staying connected to the religious system allows Jesus to affect change in a system that would not be possible should he choose simply to disassociate from the Pharisees.

The contrast of the host is evident; Jesus is not the host, but a guest. In other gospel accounts, mainly in Mark, “the imagery is of two worlds, one where the banquets of Jesus are held, and the other where the banquets of his opponents are held. In the world of Jesus, unclean people and outcasts are welcome at the table, and dietary laws are abolished. The contrast is vivid and deliberate.”⁵⁹ When Jesus accepts the invitation to eat with the Pharisees it is a commentary on social boundaries and a defining moment. Jesus is not afraid of the possible stigmatization regarding who he eats with. Jesus approaches the table by establishing a self-definition⁶⁰ that is not contingent upon culture or expectation. By agreeing to share the table with the Pharisees in a culture where identity is founded on the collective,⁶¹ the potential ramifications for Jesus’ identity and values to be associated with the Pharisees could polarize him from the marginalized, but instead of allowing a potential fear to influence his decision to reject dining, he accepts.

⁵⁸ Friedman, 150.

⁵⁹ Smith, Kindle, loc. 3506-3508.

⁶⁰ Friedman, 102-104.

⁶¹ Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary On the Synoptic Gospels*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Books, 2003), 283-285.

Furthermore, Jesus addresses the overarching emphasis of serving people at the table in Luke 14:10-11. The point of serving has less to do with literally providing food and contains strong symbolic emphasis toward serving the community as a whole. Following the silence of his question regarding the law of Sabbath observance, Jesus responds by sharing a parable of a wedding that presents the scenario of choosing a lower position, rather than having to be asked to move from higher to lower when a more honorable person shows up. Jesus is articulating a type of communal service.⁶² The rank of such table seating and arrangement suggests participation in the social stratification of places at the table, and “here also the issue of ranking is resolved by reference to an ethical principle. To be sure the principle is not the philosophical virtue of friendship, but rather the ‘biblical’ virtue of humility.”⁶³ Jesus shifts the discussion from Sabbath observance to self-regulation⁶⁴ by discussing the modification of personal behavior by choosing a lower rank at the table. Jesus utilized the parable as a means to reflect back to the religious elite, the areas where they are not differentiated. The parable acts as a type of Rorschach test of the soul pointed out by Palmer, “evoking from us whatever the soul wants to attend to. Mediated by a good metaphor, the soul is more likely than usual to have something to say. But the fact will count for nothing if we fail to recognize that the soul is speaking or fail to pay attention to what it says.”⁶⁵ Jesus’ parable reflected back to

⁶² Smith, loc. 3857-3858.

⁶³ Ibid., loc. 3732-3733.

⁶⁴ Friedman, 257.

⁶⁵ Parker J. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 1.

the religious elite the need for emotional self-regulation as differentiation toward a true, social equality.

It is only because Jesus has chosen to accept the invitation to dine with the Pharisees that he has a place with them to begin to address some of the deeper issues within their hearts. By not allowing the fear of possible rejection by others to determine who he dines with, Jesus is able to allow the inner tensions of humanity to be brought squarely into sight at the table.

Differentiation as “Identified From”

In the same scene in Luke 14, Jesus, through actions rather than words, does not give the Pharisees an opportunity to rebut the original question about the lawfulness of healing on the Sabbath (v.3). Instead, through his healing miracle Jesus declares not only an answer, but an answer where he is the agency, and as such, equal with God. Jesus asks the question, and the Pharisees would have been prepared for a verbal sparring match. Jesus subverts the cultural norm utilized by the Pharisees as a means of controlling who can and cannot be at the table, who is acceptable and who is not, who is in and who is out. Jesus establishes a self-definition by re-interpretation of the law, and as such communicates boundaries and values inherent in the “correct” interpretation of Sabbath observance.

Rather than entering into an argument about correctly interpreted law, Jesus answers the well-established dialogue of what is and is not allowed on the Sabbath by enacting a healing miracle. Canadian professor Willi Braun⁶⁶ identifies Jesus’ approach to arguments regarding the interpretation of the law in Luke’s Gospel and how it is

⁶⁶ <http://www.westarinstitute.org/membership/westar-fellows/fellows-directory/willi-braun/>.

different from Matthew's Gospel of reinterpretation, through familiar Jesus statements like, "you've heard it said, but I say" re-interpretation.⁶⁷ After healing on the Sabbath, Jesus shifts the argument toward renunciation of status and honor for the sake of benevolent behavior towards, and in association with, those who have neither. The presence of the Pharisees as the ostensible opponents in the "debate" is also significant. "Elsewhere the lack of quality of generosity and inclusive sociability is the major character flaw of the Pharisees, whom Luke characterizes as self-justifying and self-exalting money lovers."⁶⁸ The cultural norms that could have been utilized by the Pharisees in the setting to justify the dismissal of benevolence toward the marginalized are brought into question.

Additionally, Jesus extends the invitation for those he shares the table with to identify with the "outsider." Jesus heals the man of dropsy and follows that by asking if anyone at the table would not do the same for their personal family and welfare, son and ox (v.5). The example is a push toward inclusion. By bringing impersonal law interpretation much closer to home, the other table guests are asked to interpret the law when their family and welfare are personally included in the marginalization.

Also, Braun establishes a profound link in the use of the dropsy as a literary double entendre. Historically and proverbially, the illness of dropsy is directly related to avarice.⁶⁹ In this manner Luke is attributing a direct correlation in the sickness of

⁶⁷ Willi Braun, *Feasting and Social Rhetoric in Luke 14* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 26.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 30-38.

unending thirst while one's body filled with water to the point of drowning, to the sickness of greed as drowning in insatiable wealth. The author, Luke, is commenting on the overgeneralization of the Pharisees to hold the marginalized, outwardly ill, and lame up to the Jewish cultural tradition of receiving God's wrath due to sin, all the while covering up and sustaining structures in culture that allow for ignoring inner illness like avarice. The association with dropsy becomes a metaphor for insatiable greed, a consequence of gluttonous behavior. Jesus, by healing the man of dropsy, is communicating his social commentary on moderation.

*Jesus' question turns out to be one concerning the proper response to a person suffering not only from a physical illness but from a 'disease' symbolized by the malady of dropsy ... of which Jesus, specializing in the cure of 'diseased' characters and their dropsical cravings is clear; the thing to do on a sabbath is to heal, an activity that is a sub-category of doing good. This cure or transformation of character from greed to generosity, defined as both the disposition of wealth and the renunciation of an ethos of exclusive social interaction, is of course the thematic centre of the episode.*⁷⁰

Finally, Jesus' miracle response to his own question demonstrates his authority.

Jesus "shows no interest whatsoever in citing authorities for his own claims ... his wisdom comes into being fully formed, not dependent on tradition"⁷¹ and his actions are not just directed at the Pharisees: to heal on the Sabbath would have been a social statement to all, especially if the man healed was a Pharisee.

By addressing the overarching social malady of exclusive social interaction, Jesus remains self-regulated by inviting the Pharisees to see the hypocritical nature of the standards they place on the external, while ignoring what is underneath and in their own hearts. Jesus does so in a culturally appropriate manner: parabolic dialogue at the table,

⁷⁰ Braun, 42. Emphasis mine.

⁷¹ König, Kindle, loc. 133.

rather than simply condemning them. This is a classic example of remaining non-anxious while staying connected to the dysfunctional system. He demonstrates how to remain present in it while also being distinct from it, a necessary means of affecting change in a system.

Conclusion

Theologically, the table has been a prominent place of tension and anxiety. In a contextual analysis of Jesus' participation at the table, competing ideologies have led scholars to be divided on the form of table fellowship in the gospel accounts. Rather than a bifurcated view of the tension, Jesus embodies the tension at the table by remaining a differentiated non-anxious presence.

As has already been stated above, culture is not the enemy, but without caution it can become the operative assumption and form rather than simply the setting. Culture gives humanity grounding in time and space, just as the table is the place humanity and the divine meet. The embodied tension is demonstrated in that Jesus is unwilling to allow expectations of who he should be or what he should do determine how he interacts at the table. Jesus does nothing about the stigmatization from being labeled a drunk and a glutton. At the same time, his engagement is highly strained⁷² as he also willingly joins the religious elite at the table associating him with strict law observance.

Jesus engages both forms of table fellowship while remaining self-identified, self-regulated, and connected. These set him apart as a differentiated individual, able to act openly and honestly as himself in the midst of the group, without reacting to any anxiety

⁷² König, Kindle, loc. 133.

in the system. Jesus communicates the value of humanity over and above issues or positions. Jesus is unwilling to triangle an issue or position as a way of dealing with anxiety within a system.⁷³ The value of God's created individual holds such prominence for Jesus, that this allows him to remain fully present in the midst of a circumstance which has the potential for primary emotional violations and fight-and-flight responses. Jesus incarnates culture, embodying postures of differentiation at the table as a means of inviting humanity to be reconciled to self and each other in the manner that Christ reconciles humanity to God. This is a call to come and die,⁷⁴ while loving God with the "hidden heart" and loving neighbor as self. By differentiating, oppositional views of the table are allowed to converge, informing postures of reconciliation through eating together in ways that incorporate varieties of people and values.

⁷³ Friedman, 35.

⁷⁴ Donna K. Wallace, class discussion in LSF Dissertation Writing Studio at George Fox Evangelical Seminary video chat, July 21, 2015.

CHAPTER 5: CONVERGENT COMMENSALITY AS GENERATIONAL RECONCILIATION

Shadow Boxing

Following the meeting, Josh walked back across the Sahara-like parking lot. His feet were heavy, and he felt as if he had just taken a strong right hook to the jaw. After finally reaching his office, he plopped in his chair exhausted. He felt as if the space between the generations at Fellowship Church was wider than ever. He sat for what seemed like hours letting the dust settle. Josh was in a daze. He was hurt. He remembered thinking at the end of it all that he had won the argument. He was not even sure what Mike, his boss, had said. In fact, the longer he reflected on the meeting he realized Mike had sat listening for most of it. “What just happened? Did Mike even argue back?” Josh wondered if he had just had a boxing match with himself. He had gone in swinging so hard and fast he did not even pay attention to what Mike did or said.

The Pendulum Swing

In the last twenty years, a plethora of adjectives have emerged to describe various streams of Christianity attempting to navigate the balanced tension between past and future, old and young, large and small. The discussion about how this transition would emerge and what shape it would take, splintered into the division of ideologies, language,

and praxis. Descriptors like Emergent, Emerging, and Emergence¹ have elicited as much polarization around ideologies as cohesion, in attempts to address the gospels' interaction with changing culture as well as the generational leadership transition between Boomers and Generation X. Throughout the dialogue, and often confusing distinctions, the term Missional has become a new buzzword to further describe the engagement of culture as the Millennial generation begins entering young adulthood, sandwiching Gen X with the Boomers.

In a brilliant set of articles detailing the Evangelical fragmentations, Brad Sargent, former Resource and Publication Specialist for Exodus International,² explains his take on the taxonomies of fragmented evangelicalism as six paradigm groups. Each group is missional in one way or another, and their differences make up the current division of the evangelical landscape. All six streams have relational ties to evangelicalism:

Progressives, Emergents, Emergings, Evangelicals, Missionals, and Neo-Reformed.

Sargent sorts them,

in a comprehensive paradigm system that looks at information processing styles, values, theologies, organizational strategies and infrastructures, acceptable lifestyles, cultural systems, and collaboration styles ... [the] six paradigm groupings regardless of their particular overall theology [are]: Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, Anabaptist, Charismatic, Pentecostal.³

¹ Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012).

² Exodus International was a former conversion therapy non-profit that asserted same sex attraction was reversible.

³ Brad Sargent, "The Fragmentation of Evangelicalism and the Precipitation of the Missional Movement - Part One," *States News Service (Washington D.C.)* February 19, 2013, accessed November 11, 2015, <https://futuristguy.wordpress.com/2013/02/11/missional-movement-part-one/>.

Sargent's taxonomy begins to explain the breaking apart within evangelicalism, and describes paradigms that are not new, but help provide distinctions. These distinctions are related generationally according to Robert Webber's "Ancient-Future Faith," something Webber has been discussing since the late 80's and identified as a pendulum swing back toward issues of the ancient church:

The Holy Spirit seems to be working new convictions in the church, particularly among members of the younger evangelical generation who differ significantly from the older generation of Christians. The older generation is attracted to the details of theological systems, tends to think in exclusive either/or terms, enjoys debates over theological points, tends to be passive about social issues, and wants to maintain the status quo. They have been shaped by the science, philosophy, and communication theory of the modern worldview. Therefore, they opt for security and stability over change. But the newer generation has been shaped by the new scientific, philosophical, and communications of the postmodern world. Consequently, the new generation is geared toward change and dynamic development. Although the above characterizations of the older and newer generations are not true of everyone, they do stand as generalizations. The kind of Christianity that attracts the new generations of Christians and will speak effectively to a post-modern world is one that emphasizes primary truths and authentic embodiment. The new generation is more interested in broad strokes than detail, more attracted to an inclusive view of the faith than an exclusive view, more concerned with unity than diversity, more open to a dynamic, growing faith than to a static fixed system, and more visual than verbal with a high level of tolerance and ambiguity. It is at these points that the link between the ancient tradition and the new generation can be made. The early tradition of faith dealt with basic issues, and was concerned with unity, open and dynamic, mystical, relations, visual, and tangible.⁴

Webber describes the polarity between an either/or spiritual temperament within a fixed system and that of a dynamic changing system focused on experiential and relational unity. Ian Mosby, Associate Missioner of the UK Fresh Expression Initiative, describes a combination of consumerism and information technology that has swung the pendulum backward. The combination creates "a new spiritual hunger that stems mostly from a

⁴ Robert Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999), 27.

devotion to material possessions that cannot answer the existential questions of life. Therefore a new kind of techno-consumptive-mysticism is arising which, surprisingly, has much in common with the spirituality of pre-modernity.”⁵ The pendulum swing establishes a rather common generational tension between Boomers and Generation X. The tension is focused on the reaction from one generation to the next, experienced in the pendulum swing of one ideal to the other. As Millennials begin taking the spotlight, the diagnostics of their effect on the pendulum swing is not entirely concrete, though few would argue they have no affect. The convergence of the generational tension is not approaching; it is here and has been here for some time. The great temptation that forms the “generational gap” is not the polarity of preferred values and convictions held by one generation over and against another. Instead, the gap is the triangulation of tension felt in the anxiety of the pendulum.

Convergent Commensality

Convergence is not the same as fusion. Sargent notes,

Paradox is NOT the fusion of all things into a single essence that collapses all differences—rather, it is a view that sees things that may be distinct but not separate, two polar opposites co-existing in one person or thing. It is neither Eastern nor Western, but far closer to a biblical Hebrew mindset. So, the sooner we understand the biblical basis for paradox and get this principle on our spiritual radar, the more we will recognize it in complementary truths from Scripture that we may have thought were contradictory. And then the more accurately we can

⁵ The authors are referencing Mobsby’s earlier work for the research, *Emerging and Fresh Expressions of Church* (London: Moot Community Publishing, 2008), 24-6, 38-9, 8-40, 41-3, 46-7 in Steven Croft, Ian Mobsby, and Stephanie Spellers, eds., *Ancient Faith, Future Mission: Fresh Expressions in the Sacramental Tradition* (New York: Seabury Books, 2010), Kindle, loc. 338-342.

study and ‘exegete’ our emerging paradoxical host cultures in order to ‘share our life and live our faith’ more fully and faithfully in them.⁶

The understanding of distinction while remaining connected fits well with Mosby’s and Webber’s description of perceived opposites or paradoxical tension, where opposite sides meet. The pendulum swing thus becomes a microcosm of overall convergence; renewal of the past converges with engagement of the future all in an attempt to reconcile generations towards successfully navigating systemic anxiety, which will also help in the transition of leadership from one generation to the next.

The pendulum swing establishes a polarizing tension, which is also found at the table. So, a return to the table for the reconciliation of generations is appropriate. Jesus embodies convergent commensality in each formative stage of development, because he lives in the paradox; the both/and rather than an either/or. Paradoxical table fellowship requires the individual to differentiate. To have “the capacity to be one’s own integrated person while still belonging to, or being able to relate to,”⁷ others. By exercising this capacity, Jesus demonstrates what a differentiated non-anxious presence practically looks like as a means of being “welcoming and mutually transforming.”⁸ Ultimately this is a means of being reconciled to God, each other, and self.

⁶ Brad Sargent, “The Fragmentation of Evangelicalism and the Precipitation of the Missional Movement - Part Three,” *States News Service (Washington D.C.)* March 4, 2013, accessed November 11, 2015, <https://futuristguy.wordpress.com/2013/03/04/missional-movement-part-three/>.

⁷ Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 184.

⁸ Sargent defines missional in this light as paradox in “The Fragmentation of Evangelicalism and the Precipitation of the Missional Movement - Part Nine,” *States News Service (Washington D.C.)* June 13, 2013, accessed November 11, 2015, <https://futuristguy.wordpress.com/2013/06/11/missional-movement-part-nine/>.

Miroslav Volf describes the need for a posture that allows the ill-formed center of the individual to become de-centered or un-created. In Galatians 2:19-20, Paul describes the de-centered individual as crucified with Christ, and now Christ lives in the individual, re-centered by, in and through Jesus life,⁹ death, and resurrection. Re-centered as re-creation is connected to reconciliation to God and others.

By the process of de-centering, the self did not lose a center of its own, but received a new center that both transformed and reinforced the old one. Re-centering entails no self-obliterating denial of the self that dissolves the self in Christ and therefore legitimizes other such dissolutions in the 'father,' the 'husband,' the 'nation,' the 'church,' and the like. To the contrary, re-centering establishes the most proper and unassailable center that allows the self to stand over against persons and institutions which may threaten to smother it.

Significantly enough, however, the new centered is a *de-centered center*. Through faith and baptism the self has been re-made in the image of 'the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me,' Paul writes. At the center of the self lies self-giving love. No 'hegemonic centrality' closes itself off, guarding its self-same identity and driving out and away whatever threatens its purity. To the contrary, the new center opens the self up, makes it capable and willing to give itself for others and to receive others in itself.¹⁰

Convergent commensality proposes postures for generational roles as they come from different points of view to the table. It facilitates a space which allows for the newly created individual to become a non-anxious new creation in Christ in the midst of opposition, to differentiate and be an "I" in the midst of "we," and to engage fully, without the triangulation of issues as a means to deal with anxiety.

⁹ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: a Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 69-71.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 71.

Jesus in Generational Roles

Although he only lived 30 years, Jesus, as our great high priest and sympathizer,¹¹ embodies convergent commensality in each of the generational roles established in Chapter 2.¹² These roles; dependence, activity, leadership, and stewardship, inform each cohort (Millennials, GenX, and Boomers) in the current system, providing a picture of what to prepare for next, especially if there is a Great Emergence, 4th Turning,¹³ or any other epochal shift in religious culture. Jesus' life in each role invites cohorts to postures that create space for differentiation, providing a picture of convergent commensality as generational reconciliation.

Jesus as Dependence

In the generational scheme set forth by Strauss and Howe, the first cohort grouping is “Youth (age 0-22), central role: *dependence* (growing, learning, accepting protection and nurture, avoiding hard, acquiring values).”¹⁴ The posture Jesus embodies in this role will be found in the infancy narratives, particularly the Gospel of Luke 2:41-52, when Jesus is left at the Temple.

¹¹ Heb. 4:15.

¹² Strauss and Howe, *Generations*, 60-61. Elderhood (ages 66-87), Central role: *stewardship* (supervising, mentoring, channeling endowments, passing on values). Midlife (age 44-65), Central role: *leadership* (parenting, teaching, directing institutions, using values), Rising Adulthood (age 22-43), Central role: *activity* (working, starting families and livelihoods, serving institutions, testing values), Youth (age 0-22) Central role: *dependence* (growing, learning, accepting protection and nurture, avoiding hard, acquiring values).

¹³ Strauss and Howe, *The Fourth Turning*, Kindle, loc., 58. The phrase is used to describe the author's identification of a new era in Anglo American history, one that happens every two decades or so.

¹⁴ Strauss and Howe, *Generations*, 60-61.

The account of twelve-year-old Jesus happens within the context of the table. As Pope Benedict XVI discusses in *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, “The Torah laid down that every Israelite was to make an appearance in the Temple for the three great feasts—Passover, Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) and Feast of Tabernacles. . . . Jesus’ parents went on pilgrimage every year to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover. Jesus’ family was devout: they observed the law.”¹⁵ As the account goes, after having traveled to Jerusalem in accordance with obedience to the law and customary feast, Joseph and Mary returned in their traveling group, and Jesus remained behind. Unable to find Jesus among the others, Mary and Joseph returned to Jerusalem to find Jesus at the Temple.

Surrounding the context of this story is the celebrated feast. Jesus has lingered at the table rather than returning home with his family. He is found, sitting, listening, and speaking with teachers of the law, presumably older men. Jesus embodies a posture for young generations, the willingness to be invited. Mark Coleridge, an Australian Bishop explains some specifics of this posture: “The intensification of focus on Jesus and his authority in vv.46-47 moves in three steps—from hearing to questioning to answering. He who begins by listening becomes more active in the act of questioning, and more active still as he answers questions put to him—and answers in a way that draws amazement.”¹⁶ Rather than having to prove himself, Jesus first places himself among older men, remaining present and listening. The posture suggests, as Coleridge states, that listening moves to questioning, an important alternative to immediately interjecting. Jesus

¹⁵ Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Image, 2012), 120.

¹⁶ Mark Coleridge, *The Birth of the Lukan Narrative: Narrative as Christology in Luke 1-2* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield, 1993), 195-196.

allows the teachers at the Temple to invite him to engage rather than having to force his position or fight for his worth, and is only able to do so as a differentiated non-anxious presence. Jesus embodies a willing posture to be invited, where the convergence of invitation and response, respect and individuation, submission and healthy boundaries come together to demonstrate “radical newness and equally radical faithfulness, rooted in Jesus’ sonship, ,[which] emerges clearly in the short narrative about the twelve-year-old.”¹⁷

The focus of the story shifts to a familial dialogue between Jesus and his parents, establishing another posture—stability. “Joseph is silent throughout, but he is given pride of place in Mary’s expression, ‘your father and I.’ The effect of the word order is to stress the phrase ‘your father’ in reference to Joseph in order to prepare for what Jesus will say in v.49 in reference to God. The emphasis on the word ‘father’ stresses the family bond in Mary’s words, which prepare the reader for what Jesus will say in v.49, where the question of belonging will be cast in a quite different light. Joseph’s paternity is emphasized in v.48 in order to prepare for its transcendence in v.49.”¹⁸ Jesus is asked about his actions, and

becomes the interpreter of himself and his action, the one who reveals the coherence between who he is and what he has done. In v.49, it becomes apparent that Jesus has separated himself from his parents and stayed in Jerusalem not simply because of a penchant for theological debate, but because he is the Son of God and therefore in filial obedience to God’s will. For all that it may seem, what Jesus has done is what God wants ... the interpretation Jesus offers in v.49 is so enigmatic that it prompts at least as many questions as it answers. The ambiguity

¹⁷ Benedict XVI, 121.

¹⁸ Coleridge, 198.

of v.49 leaves both characters and readers asking what the phrase “in the things of my father” might mean.¹⁹

Philip Francis Esler, professor of New Testament Studies notes, as Jesus speaks and interprets himself, “his words form the delicate balance whereby God’s purpose expresses itself through history but is not constrained by history.”²⁰ Jesus’ first words display convergence as “the story speaks of the divine wisdom that rests upon Jesus but also hints at the necessity for faith, of a reaction not as mere wonder and astonishment but acceptance by others.”²¹ The interplay of divine wisdom and need for faith grounds the interaction in oppositional tensions. Jesus is about the things of his heavenly father and there is no doubt that the pious nature of his formative life informs a rooted obedience to YHWH:

The story of Jesus on the threshold of adulthood may look backwards as well as forwards. Certainly it speaks of Jesus’ obedience as he enters adult life, looking ahead to his obedience as he enters upon his ministry through baptism about the age of thirty (Luke 3:23) and in going up from Nazareth to Jerusalem (Luke 2:41) which echoes the journey narrative of Luke 9:51-19:28. But it may also look backward to the years of his nurturing through childhood in which Mary and Joseph are regarded as having had a central role. In Luke 2:40, and 2:51-2 Jesus’ obedience to his parents is the means by which his growth physically and spiritually is achieved.²²

¹⁹ Ibid., 213.

²⁰ Philip Francis Esler, ed., *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts: the Social and Political Motivations of Lucan Theology* (Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series), Reprint ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 273.

²¹ Ibid., 274.

²² Ibid.

Jesus' obedience in faith to God is directly linked to the formative obedience witnessed, demonstrated, and acted upon by his parents.²³ His obedience is best described as a posture of stability.

Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, a leader in the new monasticism movement, writes, "Stability does not depend on our ability to shore up crumbling foundations in the midst of change and confusion. Rather, it rests on the character of One who promises to love us where we are. Faith is a response to that love, rooting us in the reality of a God who is faithful."²⁴ Stability is first rooted in God's faithfulness. Mary and Joseph ground Jesus in formation within a community. Hartgrove expands on the importance of stability in community: "We learn to dwell with God by learning the practices of hospitality, listening, forgiveness, and reconciliation—the daily tasks of life with other people. Stability in Christ is always stability in community. Perhaps no one knows this better than those who promise themselves to a specific community of real people for life."²⁵

²³ Esler, 114. The author points out "It is apparent in that the infancy narratives do contain a particular perspective on the law. Luke's message on this subject has three elements. First, the law is good but cannot provide salvation, as Jewish tradition itself attests in speaking of a Messiah who is to come; secondly the most devout Israelites, without abandoning the law, realize that Jesus is the Messiah and that the time of salvation is at hand; and, thirdly, many Jews will reject Jesus and, in so doing, demonstrate the illegitimacy of their *personal* beliefs and practices.... But the impression which Luke wishes to convey is one thing, the realities of the situation are quite another. Jews antipathetic to Christianity on account of its encouragement of Jewish-Gentile table fellowship would hardly have been impressed by Luke's argument that being a Christian involved no abrogation of the Mosaic law. For there was, of course, a fundamental incompatibility between a Christianity which included Jews and Gentiles in one closely knit community and Judaism." Within Luke's account, already the culmination of the law and the prophets being fulfilled in Jesus is evident through the devotion of Mary, Joseph, Simeon and Anna to the law. The result of their "true piety and obedience to the law result in an accurate appreciation of the identity and role of Jesus, a failure by some to arrive at this appreciation raises a question-mark over the integrity of their adherence to the law." The ideal presented by Luke is a true reverence for authority will lead to an appreciation for which Jesus is and the role he plays both in the gospel accounts and now in our lives. The spirit of the living Christ will become evident in the lives of those who are willing to submit to authority.

²⁴ Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *The Wisdom of Stability: Rooting Faith in a Mobile Culture* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2010), Kindle, loc. 17.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, loc. 18.

Such stability in a community committed for life can be found in the Benedictine tradition. Dom Columba Cary-Elwes, Order of Saint Benedict writes about the vow of stability based upon St. Benedict's rule:

Before St. Benedict's time monks had begun roaming from one monastery to another as the whim moved them, owing no allegiance or obedience to any particular abbey or abbot. This vow is intimately linked with obedience. In the earlier centuries, if you did not get on with your abbot, you walked out and sought one who fitted in with your ideas. ... Stability was a fundamental need in St. Benedict's day, he lived in a world already in collapse, in decay.²⁶

St. Benedict's day does not sound so unfamiliar to the current cultural landscape. The adventure culture so prevalent in social media is symptomatic of the internal condition of rootlessness.

The posture of stability, faithful commitment, and obedience to his parents, leads to the rootedness in Jesus' faithfulness to his Heavenly Father. In other words, Jesus can only be "in the things of his father" because he is committed to remaining with his father, remaining true to his father. Jesus only knows what a faithful commitment in relationship entails because he has watched it in his parents' relationships with each other and his parents' relationship with God, forming the same type of relationship between Jesus and his parents, as well as Jesus and God. Esler describes the point of converging tension: "Jesus obedience to his parents is not at variance with his obedience to God in its nurturing purpose, but obedience cannot be contained solely within kinship ties, and in that regard Jesus' own family must learn along with everyone else the meaning of discipleship."²⁷ The posture of stability within the family of origin develops the character

²⁶ Columba Cary-Elwes, *Work and Prayer: Rule of St Benedict for Lay People* (Turnbridge Wells, United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Academic, 1d. (January 1, 1994), 1605, 181-182.

²⁷ Esler, 275.

and faithfulness that will be transferred to a relationship with God. Jesus will eventually step out from under the authority of his parents as the providers of stability as he transitions into the next life phase. The transition calls for a movement of stability once found in the family, to stability placed in God first, then extended to the community of God. However, should a person's family of origin not demonstrate necessary formative character and values, hope is not all lost. Part of Jesus' transitions from his parent's authority to God's authority is the important process of allowing perfect authority to reconcile pain. The individual who comes from a destructive family of origin can rest knowing that all families of origin are less than perfect, and thus the transition necessarily provides a similar formative re-creation, regardless.

Overall, "The narrative in Luke is intended as a glimpse at a pivotal age and it is also making a statement. The narrative at this point looks as much backwards as forwards, describing the course of a childhood marked by obedience but with a hint of paradoxical nature of that obedience. Believing and belonging may reflect, but they also transcend, existing family ties."²⁸ So Jesus' postures of willingness and stability allow him to remain, even when things get tough. Jesus does not move into blaming others, particularly older generations, or escape by joining a contextual zealot community. Instead, Jesus detriangles²⁹ in a differentiated manner through postures of willingness to be invited, and stability that leads to rootedness. Both will help younger generations lean towards older generations.

²⁸ Ibid., 276.

²⁹ Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 37.

Jesus as Activity

The next cohort, Rising Adulthood (age 22-43), has a central role of *activity*³⁰ (working, starting families and livelihoods, serving institutions, testing values).³¹ The context of Jesus' life as a part of this cohort is found in the Gospel of John, Chapter 2, where Jesus, his disciples, and his mother are at a wedding feast in Cana.

The traditional wedding feast would have gone on for some time and had the potential for several hundred guests. A feast of this size would have at least caught the attention of local governance.³² When the wine runs out, Mary, Jesus' mother instructs him to help. Jesus provides the best wine at the end of the feast, when he changes the purification water into purification wine. "Jesus uses the hierarchy of wine to invert the social and religious order. ... No one can be worthy of heavenly wine, so all receive it freely."³³ He concludes by discussing new wineskins followed by confrontation about fasting while feasting. The converging dialogue with Mary is suggestive of the impending generational transition of authority away from his family of origin,³⁴ and through this recorded dialog Jesus offers the gift of trust to his mother, the present authority, while in the midst of the anticipatory transition.

³⁰ Emphasis mine.

³¹ Strauss and Howe, *Generations*, 60-61.

³² David H. Sick, "The *Architriklinos* at Cana." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 130, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 513-26, accessed December 10, 2015, <http://search.proquest.com.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/docview/912044877?accountid=11085>.

³³ *Ibid.*, 519-20.

³⁴ John 2:4-5. "And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.' His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.'"

In the transition from young adult life into established adulthood, the role of parental authority shifts. The parental role prior to this transition images God, through provision, sustenance, love, and care. By establishing himself now primarily under God as opposed to his mother, Jesus defines authority and where it is found as shifting from created, to uncreated for the sake of reconciliation. Witherington explains,

In this case, then, “hour” would mean Jesus’ time to go out into the world and begin his ministry and be independent of his mother’s authority. There is a focus in this Gospel on Jesus’ time—the time for decisive action that manifests Christ’s glory and fulfills God’s will. *This* is to be seen as a gentle rebuke, not an irretrievable rejection. Jesus shows respect by using the term *gynai*, but this also distances him from his mother and her authority.³⁵

The generational torch passing is happening in Jesus’ household. The assumption is that Joseph has passed due to his absence in the account, and Mary assumes the authoritative role in Jesus life. The author of John points to the appropriate and respectful differentiation of Jesus’ stepping into his own in the transition between Jesus’ authority once found in his mother and Jesus’ authority now found fully in God the Father. The wedding feast could even be symbolic of such a transition in Jesus’ family. When Jesus returns from the desert with a group of followers, he is beginning his ministry, and the authoritative role in his life shifts from parental to divine. Jesus attempts to detriangle himself. This does not result in a caustic break from Mary as his authority, but a respectful push back, a posture of gifted trust to authority that can only be held humbly and non-anxiously. Maintaining such a position is founded through the self-identity of personal reconciliation to God, or through the newly created, de-centered self. New Testament and Christian Origins scholar Ritva Williams explains,

³⁵ Ben Witherington III, *John’s Wisdom: A Commentary On the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 79.

Jesus' response to his mother is a double query: "What concern is that to me and to you, Woman? Has not my hour come?" (2:4). His words signal that he is well aware that he and his honor are being challenged indirectly by the family of the groom who is in need of help. Jesus' answer is a recognition that his mother is trying to draw him into the local game of honor and patronage. Although his words indicate that there is tension between him and his mother over the question of his patronage and its brokerage, they do not constitute a refusal, rebuff, or rebuke. In Mary's ears they are no more than a complaint, a grumbling objection that is not even worth a comeback. Sure of herself and of her son's favor, she instructs the servants to obey him (2:5).³⁶

First, a word on gifted trust to authority. According to philosopher and theologian James Childress,

The complexity of human relationships means that many acts will be mixtures of trust and control, but insofar as control is present, trust is to that extent excluded or rendered impossible. Trust requires the possibility of error and thus the possibility of rejection and betrayal. The trustee must have the freedom to respond in different ways than we expect him to respond.³⁷

Requiring the possibility of rejection, trust fits Hargrave's categorical scheme of potential violations of trust and love.³⁸ For example, a Rising Adult with a role of activity, has the potential to perceive authorities as controlling, resulting in self-reactivity due to past violations of trust. The temptation for the Rising Adult is to cope through blame, shame, control and chaos/escape. In his seminal work, Childress makes an interesting distinction: "Trust is focused primarily on the person and only secondarily on his actions or roles. One expects certain action because he discerns and trusts a certain

³⁶ Ritva H. Williams, "The Mother of Jesus at Cana: A Social-Science Interpretation of John 2:1-12," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (1997): 679-92.

³⁷ James F. Childress, "Nonviolent Resistance: Trust and Risk-taking," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* (1973), 89, accessed June 22, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40016699>.

³⁸ Hargrave and Pfitzer, 41.

disposition in the other person.”³⁹ The focus on the individual over and above the action or inaction of roles is gifted trust.

One can only give trust if first there is an abiding trust in God. Then, much like Jesus at the wedding, a person can remain a non-anxious presence in the face of control, perceived or real, and offer an alternative while remaining submitted to authority. Jesus exemplifies convergent commensality by demonstrating the posture of gifting trust to his mother. Mary has clearly come to her son to do something about the issue of empty wine jugs. Jesus’ response to his mother, as has been noted, was not assault or withdrawal. Rather, Williams suggests that “The incident at Cana reflects some tension between Jesus and his mother. In spite of this tension, Jesus does not dissociate himself from her in this or in any other Johannine narrative.”⁴⁰ Jesus demonstrates a differentiated gifted trust to authority, by living in the tension. “What appears, at first, to be a potential distraction from his divinely appointed mission turns out, in the end, to serve the purpose for which he was called.”⁴¹

[the] theological and social significance of Jesus [is that] he is the one who brings the new wine of the Gospel, which eclipses and makes obsolete previous sources of life and health such as Jewish purification water. It is also part of the evangelist’s agenda to present the faith that is centered on Jesus as a more powerful, life-giving, and universally accessible faith than Judaism, but also, in this story, as more powerful and life-giving than any pagan religion such as Dionysian rites.⁴²

Being more life giving and accessible, Jesus is above both cultural (Dionysian) and anti-cultural (Judaism) religions. The gospel writers’ account of Jesus’ gifting trust

³⁹ Childress, 91.

⁴⁰ Williams, 692.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Witherington, *John’s Wisdom*, 77.

demonstrates how Jesus avoids triangulation by not taking on his mother's anxiety, and sets the table of convergent commensality in the role of activity.

Jesus as Leadership

Midlife in the modern conception would be age 44-65, with the central role leadership (parenting, teaching, directing institutions, using values).⁴³ Though Jesus does not live beyond his thirties, his role as an itinerant rabbi demonstrates leadership as a central role with his disciples. The research will now explore how Jesus creates space in the midst of tension towards generational reconciliation by examining two primary moments where Jesus' convergent commensality informs postures of contemporary Midlife leadership.

Leadership Part I

The leadership role is found early in Jesus' ministry. All three synoptic gospels (Mark 2:13-17, Matthew 9:9-13 and Luke 5:27-32) account for Jesus at the table early on in his ministry as a leader. Specifically in Matthew 9 Jesus heals a paralytic and establishes his authority from God with the people. The next scene has Jesus calling Matthew as a disciple, followed by Jesus' conscious choice to dine with tax collectors and sinners at the table. The Pharisees question his disciples about Jesus' choice of dining companions. Overhearing the question, Jesus addresses why he would be at the table with such questionable people by taking the opportunity to un-create and recreate, or reconcile, the idea of contagion as expressed by Blomberg. Jesus' holiness is caught by

⁴³ Strauss and Howe, *Generations*, 60-61.

the sick, according to the idea of contagion expressed by Blomberg.⁴⁴ His healing is for those who are traditionally not invited to the table, and his holiness is intended as contagious rather than traditional Jewish thought of the contagion of unclean “sinners.”

Joel Marcus, in his commentary on Mark agrees:

[Jesus] response shifts the frame of reference from the Pharisees’ anxiety about the contagion of impurity and sin to the human need of the sinners and the new situation created by Jesus’ advent (“I have come”). In that new situation holiness rather than sin turns out to be contagious, Jesus is not defiled by his contact with impurity but instead vanquishes it through the eschatological power active in him. Our passage, then, ascribes to Jesus the same sort of divine authority for it implies that he is not one who is susceptible to sin’s infection but the doctor who heals it, and in so doing it transfers to him an image customarily used for God in the Old Testament.⁴⁵

Jesus’ authority to heal the sick includes re-framing the conditions of sickness and sin. Jesus reframes contagion, and includes the sick and the sinful rather than excluding them for fear of transmission. Now all conditions and people receive Jesus’ invitation to the table. There is no initial requirement of repentance for sinners and tax collectors prior to engaging in table fellowship with him.⁴⁶ In doing so, Jesus does not allow himself to be triangled and reconciles the in-out group, leaving the door open to the religious elite to also join the table.

⁴⁴ Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness*, 102.

⁴⁵ Joel Marcus, *The Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries: Mark 1-8* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 1.

⁴⁶ Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001), 123. “What is nonetheless striking is that Jesus appears to not require repentance in advance of having table fellowship with sinners and tax collectors. This comports with various Gospel traditions suggestions that a variety of people from the fringes of society were in the wider circle of Jesus’ followers--a tax collector, a Zealot, some fishermen, some women, some sinners. Notice also that Jesus’ vision of the messianic banquet seems to have included such people (see Matt. 8:11-12/Luke 13:29). Possibly Jesus saw such meals with the bad as a foreshadowing or foretaste of the banquet in the dominion of God. Perhaps he saw such meals as a dramatization of the coming dominion.”

Additionally, Jesus suggests that either fully embracing or rejecting culture is missing the point. The debate of right and wrong interpretation of law creates a dehumanizing tension in the form and practice of commensality. Instead, the recreated focus is on *relational mercy*. The emphasis of intrinsic human value above cultural stigma is a value instilled through the un-creation, de-centered self that has been made new in the image of Christ. At the core of the re-centered self is “self-giving” love. No “hegemonic centrality” closes itself off, guarding its self-same identity and driving out and away whatever threatens its purity. To the contrary, the new center opens the self up, makes it capable, and willing, to give itself for others and to receive others in itself.⁴⁷

The recreated, re-centered self in Christ exemplifies God’s extravagant mercy toward the individual. From the new, de-centered self in Christ the differentiated individual is enabled to extend mercy, even if imperfectly, to others in the midst of the converging cultural pressure to conform. As such, the posture of extending mercy is imperative for a reconciliatory generational dialogue. In the same way that Jesus does not require repentance before table fellowship, generational cohorts should not expect the views and values of a generation to be assimilated or ascribed to before mercy is shown. Assuming that any set of views and values is more important than an individual places paramount value on rightness rather than on the individual. Joseph Wimmer points out that Jesus’ manner of engagement at the table was,

not in order to eat, drink, and be merry, but in order to share a fellowship of love and conviviality with tax collectors and sinners, with the outcasts and rejected, those most starving for love and acceptance and yet most deprived of it. The contrast between the fasting Pharisees who fear to touch a tax collector lest they

⁴⁷ Volf, 71.

become unclean, and Jesus, who calls Levi to be an apostle and who pleasantly dines in the company of sinners, is striking.⁴⁸

Jesus demonstrates convergent commensality through a posture of mercy that does not require the individual to be right, or cleaned up, and is preemptive of repentance. His mercy communicates the inherent value of the people and individuals, which makes them welcome at His table.

Leadership Part II

The role of leadership is also present as Jesus' ministry culminates around the table at The Last Supper. All four gospels account for the last supper: Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-39; and John 13:1-17:26.⁴⁹ The difficulty in Mark's account is associated with reference to the Passover meal, and the referencing of the Lord's Supper with Passover is akin to describing the celebration of Christmas on Christmas Eve rather than on the actual day.⁵⁰ So as not to get lost in the discussion of whether this last meal was Passover or not, the focal point of this table interaction generationally focuses on Jesus' interaction with his disciples at the table before he actually breaks the bread.

The institutional meal is a converging commensality. The *IVP Dictionary of the Gospels* notes the Lord's Supper represents the tension of looking both forward and back while coming together at the table:

⁴⁸ Joseph F. Wimmer, *Fasting in the New Testament: A Study in Biblical Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 112.

⁴⁹ For a concise and overall look into the Last Supper, see Joel B Green, Scot McKnight, and I Howard Marshall, eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1992), 444-450.

⁵⁰ For an overview, see Green, McKnight, Marshall, eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 445.

The Lord's Supper contains a two-dimensional focus. It recounts the passion of the Son of man and his sacrificial death by which he seals a new covenant for humanity. One cannot celebrate the Lord's Supper without looking backward to the cross and the suffering of Christ, our Passover. As a result, a certain pathos and sadness is present at this celebration. But there is a forward-looking dimension, which does not permit the Lord's Supper to become simply a morbid recalling of the passion. Believers "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." Since the final dimension of the Supper looks forward to the messianic banquet, the Lord's Supper is not simply practiced; it is celebrated in faith. In this celebration the church believes, hopes and sings "*Maranatha—Come, Lord Jesus*" (1 Cor. 16:22; Rev. 22:20) and awaits the consummation when faith turns to sight at the table of the Lord.⁵¹

In Mark 14:17-21 Jesus opens the discussion addressing his knowledge of the coming betrayal. In their social science commentary, Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh note that the "reality and symbol of social cohesion and shared values cannot be overestimated in this text. Moreover, since the Passover more than any other meal was a family meal, eating it with his disciples is recognition of the group as a surrogate family in the deepest sense of the term."⁵² Jesus gave his life and ministry to his disciples, his surrogate family, men who are younger both in years and spiritual maturity. While at the table together as a family, Jesus addresses his betrayal. A young cohort of disciples all turn inward in self-reactivity, rejecting the idea of betraying the man who has invested in them, called them up and out, and walked beside them for the last three years empowering them to participate in his inauguration of the Kingdom. Jesus identifies the "one" who will betray him as (v.20) "one who is dipping bread into the dish," and extends into v.21: "The son of man goes his way as it has been written concerning him,

⁵¹ Green, McKnight, Marshall, eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 450.

⁵² Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary On the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Books, 2003), 211.

but woe to the man through whom the son of man is betrayed. It were well for that man if he had never been born.”

George Aichele makes note of the betrayal extending well beyond the singular individual, encompassing everyone in the “family” from Judas to Peter:

This verse (v.21) is traditionally read as though it refers to Judas. However, there is another betrayer in Mark 14, namely Peter. The story of Peter’s denial of Jesus forms the closing bracket of the inner frame of Mark’s passion narrative. When Jesus prophesies that the disciples will all fail him—as “it is written” (Mark 14:27, citing Zechariah 13:7)—Peter insists that he will not abandon him. Yet Peter (along with James and John) sleeps in Gethsemane, even though Jesus asks them to keep watch with him (14:34ff.). Peter apparently flees with the other disciples when the crowd comes to arrest Jesus (14:50), although he follows (as does the unnamed young man) “from a distance” (14:54). When the young man is seized, he flees naked. When Peter is identified as a companion of Jesus in the high priest’s courtyard, he denies (three times, before the cock crows twice) that he is not “one of them” (14:66ff). . . . Mark presents both Judas and Peter, then, as fulfilling the Scriptures. Both of these characters share, along with numerous others in Mark, the responsibility for the death of Jesus.⁵³

Aichele’s assertion of the complete and total betrayal of Jesus by his closest followers extends from the person who turns him over to the authorities with a kiss to the most outspoken and inner circle participant, including everyone in between. If Jesus’ statement (v.21) references Zech. 13:7, the implication of betrayal is to the whole table, identifying the collective betrayal of the group.

In effect Jesus eats with his surrogate family, knowing he will be betrayed. Furthermore, he invites those who will continue on with him into the garden to pray, repeatedly confronting his disciples’ inability to remain with him in the midst of the trial. Jesus demonstrates a posture which allows failure, while resisting the temptation to allow his inner anxiety of the pending betrayal move him to blame or scapegoat his surrogate

⁵³ George Aichele, *Jesus Framed* (London: Routledge, 1996), 19-20.

family. Moreover, the chaos and uncertainty of betrayal is not the first, nor would it be the last, failure. Jesus leans into converging commensality, allowing the space, formatively, for this younger group to fail. By remaining a non-anxious presence, Jesus is unwilling to be triangled by his disciples who vehemently react to the idea that any of them would betray him. He demonstrates allowing failure throughout their time together by reflecting back to them the interpersonal shame and guilt already in their hearts. Jesus could have blamed them, he could have shamed them, he could have called down a host of angels to save him and escape (Matt. 4:6, 26:53). Instead, Jesus differentiates by remaining at the table, even inaugurating the institutional supper with the people who will turn on him. The disciples' failure is not just relegated to a moment; it is persistent throughout the moments and days to come. By allowing the younger generation space to fail without judgement, older generations provide vital formative opportunity for learning emotional regulation by differentiating while remaining connected, a vital part of the reconciliation of generations.

Rev. Thomas Bracket of Fresh Expressions of Church, reports a conversation about failure in the Anglican Church:

How would you recommend that we Americans might respond to this hard-earned wisdom you've offered? Their [the seventy-six interviewed leaders in the church of England] answers were straightforward: "Start now-don't wait until you have this all figured out. Experiment joyfully and publicly with new forms of ministry that match the cultures in which you find your ministries. Fail early and fail often until you learn what works. Learn to trust the young prophets in your midst and don't be afraid when the visions they share are out beyond your comfort zones. Be daring and be bold!"⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Croft, Mobsby, and Spellers, Kindle, loc. 481-484.

Allowing failure provides the space for differentiation to be passed on generationally, and for transformation to develop in the lives of the young. When a younger generation fails and even betrays their leaders only to find an older generation willing to remain connected in love, it will move their hearts to humility, repentance, and reconciliation. Receiving the grace that is so lavishly offered in Christ and tangibly experienced through those fathers and mothers who continue to believe in and invest in young cohorts despite the arrogance and foolishness that comes with a youthful heart, is the tangible work of reconciling through un-creation and re-creation. The leader experiences un-creation and re-creation as they allow others to fail and they choose not to make the issue more important than the humanity of someone younger. When there is no grace, the temptation for rebellion and betrayal brew. When betrayal does occur, the pain is a type of death and must be mourned. Through the mourning, comes resurrection, the continual transformation of the newly created-self. For the subordinate, the experience of un-creation and re-creation will most likely go unnoticed until later formative experience allows self-reactivity to bring to the surface violations of love and trust that have informed false identities.⁵⁵ Experiencing the self in the midst of failure becomes vitally important. Generations are thus invited to remain re-centered in Christ, as the posture that allows failure in the midst of convergent commensality cultivates reconciled non-anxious individuals.

⁵⁵ Hargrave and Pfitzer, 41.

Jesus as Stewardship

Lastly, in a modern rendering of Elderhood the age range is represented between 66-87, and the central role: *stewardship* (supervising, mentoring, channeling endowments, passing on values).⁵⁶ As in the previous role, Jesus does not physically live through the modern chronological age of stewardship. However, he, being eternal in wisdom, exemplifies the role of passing on values, mentoring, and endowing his leadership to his followers, specifically post resurrection. In John 21 Jesus reveals himself to his disciples for a third time, and particularly engaging Peter at breakfast.

Concerning the context, Witherington comments,

In a sense we have here two stories in one. The former (*regarding the collective and fishing*) signifies the mission, the latter (*the interpersonal dialogue between Jesus and Peter*) the ongoing fellowship with Jesus. The latter makes the former possible. Here then we see a parable of the church in its twofold thrust—outward mission coupled with inward feeding and fellowship. Through it all Jesus is the one guiding the mission and providing the food, although it is expected that the disciples will bring some fish to him. They must do their part.⁵⁷

Jesus asks about the disciples' catch and suggests where to place their nets. As the disciples haul in a catch of 153, the "beloved disciple" recognizes Jesus for who he is and Peter abandons ship to meet the Lord on the shore. Larry R. Helyer writes about the breakfast of fish on the shore over a charcoal fire:

Once again, memories are jogged and the disciples remember the miraculous feeding of the multitudes with five loaves and two fish (John 6:1-14). If there were any lingering doubts about how they will manage in the future, this incident vividly reinforces Jesus' earlier assurance: "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear ... your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things. But strive first

⁵⁶ Strauss and Howe, *Generations*, 60-61.

⁵⁷ Witherington, *John's Wisdom*, 355. Emphasis mine.

for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”⁵⁸

Jesus, invites the disciples to the table, and does so in a location and manner that calls to mind the memory of the mass feedings, a time where Jesus’ disposition was compassion toward those he fed despite exhaustion and hunger (Mark 6:30-34). Furthermore, Jesus’ compassion was invoked at the recognition of the shepherdless. The correlation is poignant. Days before, the men who had been fishing all night, betrayed their leader. In reactivity to all that had taken place, these men return to the one thing they know, fishing, and the failure in their hearts resounds with the sunrise of an empty net. They have become sheep without a shepherd. Jesus invites them to the table and in the process of addressing “the outward mission and inward feeding and fellowship,”⁵⁹ articulates their hearts to them.

The heart is complex. Robert Saucy identifies the heart as “where we think, feel (experience emotion), and will the actions of our life. . . . These three personal functions are joined together in inseparable unity in the depth of the heart. Thus, there is an inevitable interchange between our thought, emotion, and will in our heart.”⁶⁰ The reader only has to imagine what the instruction of fishing technique by someone not even in a boat would evoke in a professional fisherman who has failed. Jesus helps to articulate all that is in the hearts of the disciples as he gives directions of where and how to fish. The men, who had once left their trade to follow Jesus, return to fishing after their failure.

⁵⁸ Matt. 6:25, 32-33. Larry R. Helyer, *The Life and Witness of Peter* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 65.

⁵⁹ Witherington, *John’s Wisdom*, 355.

⁶⁰ Saucy, *Kindle*, loc. 2657-2659.

Scripture does not account for the inner workings of each individual in this scene, what they experienced deep in their heart, but,

the reality of a hidden depth in our heart is also the answer to a common problem: our lack of understanding of why we behave or feel the way we do. We have certain conscious thoughts and attitudes, but our experience doesn't seem to correlate with them. The truth is that other thoughts and attitudes deep in our heart— of which we are not fully conscious— are actually driving our life.⁶¹

In the midst of a significant life event, the depths of their heart come out in action: the return to fishing. The situation is wrought with self-reactivity; shame, blame, control, and escape/chaos all fit the situation though the specifics of the individual are not communicated until the interaction with Peter.

Coe explains further what Jesus is modeling by allowing the hidden heart to come to the surface, in his work *Psychology in the Spirit: Contours of a Transformational Psychology*:

The hidden heart represents the repository of the collected beliefs, desires and feelings that are embedded in the habits of the heart as the repressed material we do not want to see or experience about our self, and has been habituated in certain patterns of unhealthy deep beliefs and desires that have a long history and etiology. . . . The degree to which the deep beliefs and desires have not been brought to conscious awareness and dealt with is the degree to which one is not in control of them. The sins of the hidden heart are so a part of the deep structures of our capacities that we are going to have intentionally expose these deep beliefs and desires into conscious experience with God and or another person to begin to re-experience oneself with them.⁶²

On the shore where memories of provision, sustenance, compassion, purpose and shepherding were once provided for the masses, Jesus' posture toward his followers helps articulate their heart. As Jesus provides instruction on the positioning of their net, he

⁶¹ Ibid., loc. 1704-1707.

⁶² Coe and Hall, 300-303.

reminds them of the mission, reminiscent of John 15:5, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” Inviting the men back to his table, he moves from the group to the specific, from the external and collective concern into the deeply personal articulation of Peter’s heart. Witherington states,

As has often been noted, the threefold questioning of Peter’s love parallels his earlier threefold denial. It could suggest Jesus’ dissatisfaction with Peter’s first two answers, but more likely, since the third answer is the same as the first two, the point is that Jesus is sifting Peter to the core to see whether he has the courage and perseverance to assume a shepherding role.⁶³

The sifting requires that Jesus go with Peter into his failure, into the denial, into the painful memory. Jesus is “gently but painfully reminding Peter of his threefold denial. This time, Peter does not swear or take an oath; his only recourse is to appeal to Jesus’ extraordinary understanding of the human heart.”⁶⁴ Jesus knows Peter’s heart, not only because of his divine status, but because Jesus has lived, walked, and experienced Peter’s heart. From a position of stewardship, Jesus can help remind Peter what is in his heart, while remaining distinct from it. John’s gospel provides a window into Peter’s heart in this instance, describing him as grieved (v.17). Antonia Damasio, a neuroscience professor at USC, describes the functions of feeling, neurologically as,

the sensors for the match or lack thereof between nature and circumstance. And by nature I mean both the nature that we inherited ... and the nature we have acquired in individual development, through interactions with our social environment, mindfully and willfully as well as not. Feelings, along with the emotions they come from, are not a luxury. They serve as internal guides, and they help us communicate to other signals that can also guide them. And feelings

⁶³ Witherington, *John’s Wisdom*, 356.

⁶⁴ Helyer, 65.

are neither intangible nor elusive. Contrary to traditional scientific opinion, feelings are just as cognitive as other precepts.⁶⁵

By pressing Peter, Jesus demonstrates the process of articulating Peter's heart. To be sure, this posture of heart articulation extends from the external, inward, and in the case of John 21's two-part story, from the collective to the deeply personal, the general to the specific. Jesus' conversation helps Peter come face to face with his own self-reactivity of shame and control. Jesus does not take responsibility for Peter's inner anxiety, but creates a safe place for Peter to explore his own heart in the presence of another person. Jesus enters with him into the pain, a type of death and re-centering. Peter moves toward reconciliation with himself, with his beloved leader, and with God. Over breakfast, Peter's hidden heart converges with Jesus' posture of heart articulation, helping him to put words to the dizzying experience of the last several days and bringing clarity to the present circumstance. Larry Crabb describes de-triangulating dialogue of this nature in *Soul Talk*: "We almost never speak words that are formed in the center of our soul and pour out from our very being with power and a sense of life. And we almost never hear words that stir life within us, that pour hope into those empty spaces deep inside filled only with fear and fury and frustration."⁶⁶ This wise posture is not limited to stewardship, but often comes most naturally with age. Jesus stewards Peter's reconciliation and entrusts the care of the people of God to his disciple. He does so gently, but firmly, over a shared meal.

⁶⁵ Antonia Damasio, *Descartes' Error* (New York: Putnam, 1994), xv.

⁶⁶ Larry Crabb, *Soul Talk: The Language God Longs for Us to Speak* (Nashville: Integrity Publishers, 2005), 13.

John Chrysostom echoes the re-creation and entrusting that will allow for Peter to put the denial behind him, “And the life you said you would lay down for me, now give for my sheep.”⁶⁷ To articulate the heart of a younger generation is to help them navigate the complexity therein without becoming enmeshed. The assumption follows that such a posture would be passed down from generation to generation. Helping to articulate the hearts of Christ followers will release a generation to honor and remember those who have gone before them, passing down vital values that allow for convergent commensality to reconcile generations.

Conclusion

Convergent Commensality is the place where generations come from different points of view, to the table. Jesus demonstrates various postures at the table that help frame a dialogue toward reconciliation. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus embodies table fellowship as a differentiated non-anxious presence. In a role of *dependence*, Jesus’ posture toward others communicates his willingness to be invited, and the stability that grounds him formationally. Jesus’ convergent posture of *activity* is gifting trust to authority found during the wedding at Cana with his mother. As a *leader* at the table, Jesus demonstrates postures of mercy and allowing failure, as some of the most tangible forms of love that can be offered. Finally, in *stewardship*, Jesus approaches the table articulating the hearts of his followers, and invites them to an un-creation and re-creation process. The postures of Jesus at the table inform generational cohorts how to approach

⁶⁷ Joel C. Elowsky, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*. New Testament IVb: John 11-21 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 386.

one another in a manner that creates the space for differentiation and invites generations to remain non-anxious in the midst of a converging dialogue towards reconciliation.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Time Will Tell

Months had passed since Josh had sat across the table from Mike. Since that time, Josh was counseled by a mentor to choose to trust his leadership and remain willing and connected at Fellowship Church. There was much he did not understand, but he followed the wisdom offered to him, and began taking steps to trust Mike.

What Josh did not yet see was the degree to which Mike had invited him to share his frank thoughts and opinions. He had allowed Josh the space to be his own person, to be angry even, and to express his thoughts. This was not the first time Mike had sat across the table from a young pastor who thought he knew better. Over the years, Mike had seen and been a part of every facet of Fellowship Church's dark age. He worked directly with the former Gen X pastor who tried to wrestle the church away from Boomer leadership. He had also started the former college ministry and disciplined the staff that ended up splitting off and planting. Mike had seen it all.

Results of the Study

Just like setting the table for a meal, the family systems model helps frame the tense dialogue that separates generations. The table is the place where humanity comes face to face with the deepest parts of life and the deepest parts of the self. Joshua Furnal writes,

Table fellowship is how we are being freely and fully ourselves. It should also be said that table fellowship is not an exclusive membership where only some are invited. Rather, it is a radically inclusive process that changes our behavior towards being for other people and opens up dialog between persons. Finally, as I

have said, this table fellowship is not only a representation of the kingdom of God but also an embodiment of it.¹

As Christ incarnates God in the world, the table incarnates the kingdom. Should an individual allow it, the encounter with the self in the presence of others is deeply transformative. The choice then is one of posture: to be willing and allow God and others to help form the “hidden heart” or to project inner anxiety onto others and allow self-reactivity to respond through blame, shame, control, chaos/escape.

Early on in their lives, Boomers self-reactivity to violations of love and trust fueled their attempt to transform culture. The anxiety of exploring a self-identity in reaction to their elders led to a similar skepticism towards the next generation. Now in the transition between Elderhood and Midlife, Boomers lead most organizations in society including the church. The transitional handoff is approaching.

Generation X was defined in opposition to all things Boomer, and the reactivity to similar violations resulted in a pendulum swing away from culture, institutions, and life. Straddling Midlife and Rising Adulthood, Gen X is preparing to receive the leadership mantle while trying to figure out how to lead and work with another large generation behind them.

Millennials, encompassing Youth and Rising Adulthood, find themselves in the middle of their formative experience, navigating self-identity. The influence of over-involved parents, combined with the social trend to “do what makes you happy,” has produced various results. For some in the cohort, these influences have been paralyzing

¹ Joshua Furnal, "A Theology of the Table (Report)." *New Blackfriars* 92, no. 1040 (July 2011): 409, accessed January, 16 2016, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2010.01377.x/abstract>

while others have capitalized on it. Like other cohorts in this stage, reactivity is directed toward the older cohorts, Boomers and Gen X.

A systemic pattern of generational anxiety and overall lack of differentiation is present in all three cohorts. For far too long, the gap has been discussed in a manner that only perpetuates systemic anxiety. Triangulation of cohort and generational ideologies has utilized all too obvious differences between people separated by a decade or two of life experience. The resulting polarization leads to overgeneralizations about people in different life stages and disassociation between the young and old.

According to Scripture, reconciliation is a pattern established in the created order by the Creator. The theological grounding for reconciliation is found in Marcello Ghirlando's work on 2 Corinthians and the ministry of reconciliation.

[The] Church is called to work in favour of reconciliation of men to God and of men between themselves. . . . The Church itself becomes a sacrament of reconciliation, i.e. sign and instrument of reconciliation, through its own existence as a reconciled community, through its being in the service of the Holy Scripture, through the sacraments, especially through the same sacrament of reconciliation, through the proclamation of the Gospel.²

From Genesis to Revelation, a pattern of creation, un-creation, and re-creation has shaped how individuals and groups are reconciled first to God, re-centering the individual on Christ as a means toward a differentiated self. Subjective and relational reconciliation take place in human relationships as differentiation allows self-regulation and self-definition in the individual to remain connected, rather than through passing on systemic anxiety.

² Marcello Ghirlando, *The Ministry of Reconciliation (2 Cor 5, 17-21): A Ministry of the New Covenant, of the Spirit and of Righteousness (2 Cor. 3, 4-11) in the Service of Evangelisation* (Malta: [s.n.], 2004). 97.

Establishing a place and form of bringing the generations together becomes an important function in addressing the generation gap. The power of subjective experiences at the table informs the power of commensality. As Adele Reinhartz, Professor in the Department of Classics and Religious Studies writes, “As high school students in a school cafeteria can attest, eating together in what is ostensibly a purely ‘social’ situation can realize just the same anxieties about who is in, who is out and community definition as does the most highly structured religious meal.”³

The theology of the table provides the place where Jesus, being fully present and at peace, embodies differentiated postures of reconciliation. Jesus remains non-anxious at the table regardless of the pressure to respond in particular ways to different types of people.

Practical Application

Luke describes the epitome of convergent commensality in his Gospel when he writes about the culmination of Jesus’ walk on the road to Emmaus: a meal at the table. After having unknowingly walked with the risen Christ as he interpreted the law and the prophets concerning himself, the disciples urge their traveling companion, who they had not yet recognized, to remain with them. We read in Luke 24,

When [Jesus] was at the table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, “Did not our hearts

³ Adele Reinhartz, “Reflections on Table Fellowship and Community Identity.” *Semeia* no. 86 (February 1999): 227. Academic Search Premier, accessed April 25, 2015, <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA78839738&v=2.1&u=newb64238&it=r&p=AONE&sw=w&asid=dfc3ec8f7a1ebbdclf2723d513be34fe>.

burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?”⁴

The disciples, while on the road, were consumed with anxiety and carried that posture with them to the table. Their hope for the redemption of Israel, found in their crucified leader, was all but lost, and furthermore, the third day, so far as they could see, brought only an empty tomb. Jesus, once again, embodied a non-anxious presence, inviting his followers to return to the foundation from which reconciliation is made possible, in Him. At the table, as the risen Savior broke the bread for the meal, the eyes of his followers saw him for who he really was. At the table – whatever form it takes – the vision is given to see others for who they are,⁵ and that vision is only possible by maintaining a differentiated non-anxious posture.

In the same way, the application of differentiated postures at the table is less about an overarching prescriptive means of reconciliation and more about a way of interaction. Differentiated postures allow the individual to self-regulate by seeing beyond their own pain to their true self. In addition, those at the table can self-identify by seeing others for who they really are. The division of the congregational system is nothing new, and generational division is one area among many that has resulted in societal projection that only further divides groups of people within a system. Christena Cleveland writes at length about division and suggests,

From the very beginning, divisions have threatened the mission of the church. But it is also evident that from the very beginning, followers of Christ have demonstrated that they can overcome divisions in order to preserve and strengthen the mission. Clearly, we have the potential to be so engaged in our common

⁴ Luke 24:30-32.

⁵ Dr. Trudy Hanson suggested this culmination of convergent commensality in our dialogue after her edit of the manuscript.

identity as members of the body of Christ that we begin to treat each other as fellow ingroup members.⁶

Part of the problem with the current discussion about generations involves the dividing prescriptive form of solution provided from triadic relationships. The inability of the third party of an emotional triangle to effect change is well documented in Friedman. Furthermore, the third party is more likely to wind up with the stress for the other two parties in the triangle.⁷ This tension is present almost anytime a person or group attempts to diagnose and change anxiety within another generation.

Strategies for Application

Rather than a prescription for change, two strategies for moving forward are suggested. One strategy for helping individuals move toward better differentiation and non-anxious presence within tense situations is the spiritual discipline of centering prayer. “Nothing is simpler than being what we are, and nothing is more difficult. We need a practice to take us from here to there. Centering prayer is one such practice.”⁸ Centering prayer has a varied history and can be practiced alone or in a group setting. It is a means of opening to God that also affects the degree to which individuals are open toward the self, God, and others.

While the heart of this practices comes through our going into our room and shutting the door and praying to our Father who is in secret (Matt. 6:6), one effect is the recovery of our original unity, which puts us in a place to join in communion with the original unity of all others, whatever their differences. It

⁶ Christena Cleveland, *Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces That Keep Us Apart* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2013), 150.

⁷ Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 37.

⁸ Thomas R. Ward Jr., "Centering Prayer: An Overview." *Sewanee Theological Review* 40, no. 1 (January 1, 1996): 272.

gives us a way of entering the dance with our Triune God and of joining others in that bonding experience of communion.⁹

The practice of centering prayer ultimately helps to establish the interrelated nature between an individual, God, and neighbor, as Orthodox Christian theologian Oliver Clément points out,

To enter into God is to let oneself be caught up in the immense movement of the love of the Trinity which reveals the other person to us as 'neighbor' or which enables each one of us to become the 'neighbor' of others. And to become a 'neighbor' is to side with Christ, since he identifies himself with every human being who is suffering and rejected, or imprisoned, or ignored.”¹⁰

Another strategy for moving forward includes the application of the postures that Jesus embodies at the table in each generational role. The postures inform individuals how to begin moving towards reconciliation by suggesting a way of being with another.

In youth, Jesus’ postures toward reconciliation are his willingness to be invited when he is among the leaders at the Temple in Jerusalem, and rooted stability as his formative life is shaped by faithfully remaining. Formationally, adolescents will not have the ability on their own to navigate the tension of their inner pain as it is projected onto others. Wisdom suggests that persons who have lived longer enjoy the benefit of already having walked through the developmental and rocky ground of adolescence. Leaders need to create space that invites younger generations to discuss, challenge, wrestle with, and confront in the midst of this formative time. Being able to enter this space with their elders, without fear, is vital for healthy growth and development. Establishing this type of safe space will help encourage youth to feel more comfortable, and even confident, in

⁹ Ibid., 272.

¹⁰ Olivier Clément, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism: Text and Commentary* (New York: New City Press, 1996), 270-271.

committing to being in community. Such rootedness helps resist the temptation to cut and run when times get tough or don't go the way they think they should, and also forms a discipline of being present.

As a Rising Adult, Jesus embodied a continual gifting of trust to his mother while still self-regulating and self-defining in the midst of the transition from familial authority to authority found primarily in God. Emerging adults need to be offered relationships with their elders, wherein they can choose to gift trust. When they are being challenged to think differently, or to trust what they do not yet understand, these kinds of relationships can make all the difference. Leaders must prayerfully initiate relational connections with rising adults which begin to build rapport. These can help establish a place for gifted trust to be exercised in the midst of confrontation.

In Adulthood, Jesus remains a differentiated non-anxious leader first in a posture of mercy that supersedes correctness and repentance. Jesus also embodies postures allowing for failure. Despite knowing and informing his disciples of their betrayal, Jesus remains at the table with them and even invites them further into the most vulnerable place of prayer and petition with God regarding his death. In the role of leader, He extended mercy and allowed for failure to transform the heart rather than simply attempting to modify behavior. The leader must take this role, while at the same time, understanding that they may never see the fruit of these postures. Allowing failure while remaining connected establishes a clear delineation for the one who failed. The transformative distinction is the difference between failing at a task and being a failure as a person. Furthermore, it may be years before a subordinate understands the degree of

undue mercy a leader has shown them, but being a recipient of such mercy eventually moves the heart to be more merciful itself.

Concerning Elderhood, Jesus' posture towards his followers is the articulation of the heart. Jesus remains present and distinct in his interaction with Peter at breakfast, going into Peter's heart alongside him as a way of helping Peter see what Jesus already knows: that Peter loves him and is a capable leader. The benefit of having lived through failure, heartache, pain, and joy is that it produces a collection of wisdom in the stewards among us. There are few things more normalizing and freeing than hearing another person articulate the confusing aspects of the heart. All generations that will come after this group need the shared wisdom found in the stories that help ground identity and bring a breath of fresh air which comes from being understood.

While maintaining these postures, Jesus does not require repentance before table fellowship. In the same manner, generational cohorts should not expect the views and values of a particular generation to be embraced or endorsed before relationship has been established. The assumption that any set of views and values is more important than the individual places paramount value on rightness rather than on the individual, and only further perpetuates systemic anxiety. The gospels provide a picture of how Jesus postures himself in each cohort role, providing practical means of differentiated interaction with individuals in older and younger generations. Like Jesus, an individual seeking reconciliation can remain a full self while staying connected to the system when they embrace these postures. The person with individual anxiety can take the anxiety and past violations of love and trust into prayer and interaction with God, through Christ, in the power of the Spirit, towards transformation.

The aim of this research has not been to fix the generation gap, but to adjust the lens on the gap. Systems theory provides the framework to identify anxiety within the system of generations, and informs individuals within the system how reconciliation can happen. Until Jesus' triumphal return, generational cohorts will continue to pass through each role. Over time, the issues that will arise between cohorts will vary at least as much as technology influences culture. The specifics of *what* to address seems to be less important than *how*. Family systems provides a framework of differentiation that changes the conversation beginning with the individual and moving outward to social reconciliation and forgiveness.

Further Research

The limitations of this research do not address other factors that play significant roles in generational identity development, as well as how those identities influence differences within cohorts. Furthermore, the generation as a social construct forms a loose generalization of a large body of people. The distinctions of gender, culture, socio-economic status, race, and geographic location are important factors and need to be examined in future research.

Also, the difficulty of remaining differentiated from formational distinctions and anecdotal influences of a contextual nature can be problematic. Trying to deal with each generational cohort objectively, without bias, proves problematic when prescribing postures for reconciliation. The researcher, being a Rising Adult, has limited practical experience with postures for reconciliation in older roles of Midlife and Elderhood. Having no experience in the older roles makes speaking to those positions in life somewhat tenuous.

Generational fragmentation of the church in areas of ecclesiology and pedagogy needs to be addressed in further research. Former Chancellor of Covenant Theological Seminary Bryan Chapell acknowledges that there are various ways to

... unchain the church from cultural norms that keep the worshiper from experiencing the reality of Christ. The norms that some want to escape are what they consider anachronistic traditions that have deadened the church culture. The norms that others want to escape are the secular consumer values that they think have invaded church culture.¹¹

The desire to escape from consumerism is complex and includes “generational fragmentations ... promoted by global capitalism that attempt to segment markets when promoting the values of consumerism.”¹² Consumerism and capitalism create a problematic context of “religious disestablishment [that] leads to pluralism, increased competition, individual choice. These, in turn, are associated with specialization and niche marketing – that is marketing specifically to a certain segment of the population. ... In the process, congregations come to be made up of highly similar people,”¹³ according to scholar Michael O. Emerson in *Divided by Faith*. The projected formation of homogeneous congregations presents problematic in-out group dynamics that can be polarizing due to self-defining tendencies. “People make snap judgments based on ... values, preferences, and priorities.”¹⁴ Lisa Johnson’s note regarding snap judgments

¹¹ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 69.

¹² Robert W. Pazmiño, and S. S. Kang. “Generational Fragmentations and Christian Education.” *Christian Education Journal* 8, no. 2 (Fall, 2011): 379-94, accessed December 10, 2015, <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA269028183&v=2.1&u=newb64238&it=r&p=AONE&sw=w&asid=056ab4b0ad7215f2ee3c4a45954dfddd>.

¹³ Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Oxford University Press, 2001), 147.

¹⁴ Lisa Johnson, *Mind Your X's and Y's: Satisfying the 10 Cravings of a New Generation of Consumers* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 88.

influences market-driven ecclesiology and calls for attention to pedagogical decisions about liturgy that can address consumer-driven trends. The current trends, according to Johnson, are “experience, transparency, reinvention, connection, and expression.”¹⁵ The major critique encompasses a fundamental loss of gospel-centered worship:

Biblical worship has a consistent gospel pattern through the ages because the gospel’s truths transcend cultural trends or generational preferences. Removing the gospel pattern of worship is as destructive to the church’s ministry as imposing personal style preferences on worship. Concerns for relevance, connection, and understanding should affect the means we use to express the pattern of Christian worship, but should not encourage elimination of the gospel pattern of our worship.¹⁶

Johnson’s critiques are merited. Future research should explore a systems theory view of the consumerist influence on ecclesiology and pedagogy as a potentially triangulating discussion. A large body of research contains both sides of the conversation, and future research would do well to address how contemporary issues can be held in a converging tension much like generational cohorts.

A further note of research needs to explore the implications of third-space theory¹⁷ as it relates to the table. The link developed in Chapter 4 regarding the holistic picture of the table as the place or space where the ideal and actual come together as a means of aiding humanities understanding of the world has possible connections with third space theory as the “in-between space that carries the burden of culture.”¹⁸

¹⁵ Johnson, 7.

¹⁶ Chapell, 122.

¹⁷ Bhabha, 56.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Finally, significant research is needed that covers an important distinction noted in Chapter 5. In *Jesus as Leadership Part II* the idea of a posture that allows for failure is described. An important note to explore regarding betrayal is the legitimacy of intentional subversion and not a transference of perceived violation. The subjective experience of an past violation can often feel like a betrayal, and can easily be a coping mechanism. The difficulty in identifying the difference is paramount. The long-lasting emotional and relational damage that can result following the declaration of betrayal (whether a perceived violation or real violation) has the potential to be substantial.

An Unexpected Turning of the Table

Over the course of the next six months, Josh found himself regularly sitting across the table from students ten or so years younger than himself. Each interaction seemed to be a case where the younger person was angry and hurt, blaming Josh for being out of touch and inconsiderate.

In one particular instance, Josh found himself at the table with a group of frustrated and hurt college student leaders. A conflict about leadership roles broke out and student leaders called for a meeting. The student leaders wanted to communicate their frustrations about the leadership changes and their arguments about why it was not the best move. In one meeting, Cherie, a key student leader, blamed Josh for letting the guys remain too legalistic as leaders. She felt as if they were holding her to unrealistic standards, causing her to feel unworthy. Lori, another leader, lost it in the midst of a confrontation, exclaimed her frustration toward Josh, “Who gives you the right to confront me about what I can and cannot do? You have just as much baggage as any of

us!” For Cherie and Lori, the problems in the college ministry started with Josh being controlling and legalistic.

Adam and Brody, two male student leaders, also called for a meeting with the college pastor. They both wanted an explanation for the leadership shift. In the meeting, Adam and Brody presented a Lutheran-like theses with 16 points of major contention regarding the structural shift and reasons why the decision was wrong, unbiblical, and hurtful.

The young adults did not understand or feel understood. The tension between an older and younger generation had culminated once again at the table where the potential for reacting out of past personal pain was likely. Josh’s initial internal response was hurt, betrayal, and anger. He wanted to argue his points, while also validating and proving why he was right by demonstrating why the complaints and questions were disrespectful and invalid. He felt his inner posture begin to prepare for a fight, much like the one he had much earlier had with his boss.

Then it hit him. He was now sitting in his boss’s seat. He was now sitting at the table as the older generation across from the younger. The present conflict with the college students had evoked some sharp emotional responses in Josh. He began to wonder what his own reactivity had evoked in Mike. How had the executive pastor felt when, Josh, fifteen years younger, told Mike, a seasoned leader, how wrong and hurtful he had been. All of a sudden Josh realized his boss had handled him with such mercy, care, restraint, and integrity. How could Josh offer anything less to the college student leaders but the same posture that he had been given undeservedly.

Josh took a deep breath as he sat at his desk across from the students. The sunlight hit his eyes through the open window shade. He glanced across the parking lot. Maybe the distance was not as far as Josh thought. Maybe the distance between generations had much more to do with his inner navigation of past hurt and fear. He thought to himself, “how can I remain open and loving?” Reflecting on encouragement from his mentor, Josh reminded himself that his success or failure as a leader did not define him as a man. He concluded that at the end of the day, what the college students were bringing to the table probably had very little to do with him, and much more to do with their own inner angst. So Josh sat back, and rather than validate himself by being right, listened to their hearts. The table had turned, just not as the young pastor had imagined it.

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