



The Post-church Christian: A Review

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Not long ago, I heard Millennials (AKA “Generation Y”) were ditching church in record numbers. Through an interview on [The Unitive](#), I found myself at [PostChurchChristian.com](#). They offer a free copy of *The Post-Church Christian: Dealing with the Generational Baggage of Our Faith* to bloggers willing to review the book. Suddenly, my path was clear (cue harp): get the free book, learn about Millennials, write a review.

The book started as a conversation between Paul Nyquist (a Baby-Boomer) and his son, Carson Nyquist (a Millennial). Carson opened up about the hurt and frustration he was experiencing in church. Many of his friends felt the same. They were trying to follow Jesus in the way that made sense to them and were meeting with judgment, resistance, “WRONG WAY” signs. Many hit the trails to prospect alternatives to church, where their own vision of Christianity could take root and flourish.

“Transparency” and “authenticity” are prime values to Millennials; you will hear these words a lot in the book. So I’ll be transparent. When I picked up this book, I was ready for a “Generation Whine” monologue followed by a lot of Baby-Boomer hand-wringing and hand-holding. Why anyone would give allegiance to a suffering Savior but feel entitled to a life without hurt feelings, I had no idea. But I would suck it up, read the book, and find out.

And I would be wrong. (“Never judge a book by its cover,” right?) Millennials (as told by Carson) are struggling with much more than emotional stubbed-toes. Their grievances are biblically grounded and theologically nuanced. Carson depicts a church where moral standards have replaced grace, where “image management” is king, and perfection is valued over faith (PCC, 18-22). Hebrews tells us to come boldly to the throne of grace so we can find help in our time of need (Heb. 4:16). But the church teaches us (with side-long glances) it’s better to hide that need because we won’t find grace or help.

Carson also campaigns to disentangle faith from political affiliation: “Jesus wasn’t a republican” (PCC, 35). Millennials don’t want to conflate political agendas and Christianity.

The church also needs to differentiate between sin and generational convictions. Boomer believers have traditionally avoided things like alcohol and tattoos though there is no command against them. Millennials view these things as “areas of freedom for the believer to discern personally” (PCC, 47). Walking in freedom as opposed to man-made rules is good theology and provides ways to connect with unbelievers.

Carson says his generation cringes at the insensitive way in which Christianity is often communicated. Harshly decrying homosexuality as sin misrepresents Christ, who let a prostitute wash His feet (PCC, 39). Doctrinal differences are also aired in strident tones that damage relationships (PCC, 65). While Millennials value doctrine, they value people and relationships more: “We want to engage others personally before bridging into areas of theology or religion” (PCC, 66).

Carson’s dad, Paul, takes the next part of the book. And he definitely uses his “dad voice”: full of straight talk, tempering, and things to think about. A healthy sprinkling of empathy but no handholding. For starters, Paul tells Millennials, “[Y]ou can’t sidestep your

need to be part of the church” (PCC, 84). The church is a divinely created community. You don’t have to join the evangelical church but a church can’t be any old group; it must meet biblical criteria (PCC, 80-83).

By the way, Paul says, the church never has been perfect and never will be—“Even when you are in charge in the future” (PCC, 89). An honest reading of the Bible shows that even the New Testament church—which many idealize as a model—was fraught with division, sin, and heresy (PCC, 90). Rather than adopt the easy role of critic, Paul challenges Gen Y to “take the bolder course” and lead (PCC, 85). Instead of only thinking about themselves, Millennials can give their lives and their talents to help others grow spiritually. Of course, if Millennials lead, they will also have to own their legacy when future generations question it (PCC, 96).

Millennials can further prove their relational focus by engaging Boomers instead of dropping them. Paul’s prescription is: 1) forgive; 2) thank Boomers for their many contributions; 3) gain from Boomers’ experience through mentoring relationships (PCC, 99-104).

Finally, Paul gives his two cents on Christian freedom. Sure, use your freedom (i.e. with alcohol and tats) to connect with people. But understand that love sometimes chooses to limit its freedom (PCC, 109-113). Motive determines the validity of our actions, so question what you’re doing: Is it helpful to me and others? Will it glorify God? Will it stumble or offend anyone? Good questions, whatever your generation.

In the last section of the book, Paul and Carson share their dreams for the future. Paul envisions a church on the front-lines, compassionately engaged in the culture and passionate about the uniqueness of Jesus. Carson hopes Millennials will 1) forgive; 2) overcome their tendency to critique; 3) lead the church into new expressions of faith without changing its substance.

For a Gen-X’er like myself, this was an interesting read. My angst-filled, grunge-rock years are less than 20 years past. (Sheesh, I only *just* had my 20 year high school reunion). I share many of Carson’s concerns about legalism, blurring religion with politics, and putting doctrine ahead of relationships. All the same, I’m going on 10 years of fatherhood. I could tell Carson didn’t have kids even before he said so (PCC, 61). How? Nothing knocks the chip off your shoulder quite like parenting; it has enabled me to see my parents and elders as people with the same problems I have—problems I criticized and vowed not to emulate. I hope that in some ways I have reached farther than those before me. But accepting that I am (in other ways) no better has shown me that forgiveness is a more powerful experience than criticism. So, Paul’s perspective resonated with me as well.

Going forward, it will be important for every generation to identify with Jesus and not with their generation. When we identify with Jesus, we express Him. Sometimes that means we fit in. Sometimes it means we stick out like a sore thumb. When we identify with our generation, we merely express the next iteration of the flesh and the world. Going forward, we will need to leave our generational baggage at the cross and walk in the newness of Christ’s life—together.

