

THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION: A DEMOGRAPHIC, ETHNOGRAPHIC AND RELIGIOUS PROFILE

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A new generation is emerging into adulthood in the first years of the new century. Born from 1977 through 1994, most are the offspring of parents in the Baby Boom generation. Just as their parents childhood and adolescence largely paralleled the development of television, so the Millennial generation has grown up with the Internet. They share many of the values and interests of their Baby Boomer parents, although the world is starkly different. There is much greater diversity and global boundaries are transparent, while economic anxiety is increased. The young adults and teens in the Millennial generation tend to be positive about life and about themselves, involved in family, friendships and civic structures. They attend church about as often as their parents do and have adopted much the same set of values and religious beliefs, although sexual freedom is more pronounced and there has been a doubling of the relatively small percentage who are not connected with any organized religion.

The Valuegenesis studies give us a picture of Seventh-day Adventists among the Millennial generation. They have a more positive attitude toward the church than Gen X and greater denominational loyalty. They register the same levels of agreement on most of the doctrines of the church.

The “Millennial” generation consists of the people born from 1977 through 1994, using the most standard definition from the American Demographic Institute.¹ This year (2008) they are 14 through 31 years of age. Most are the offspring of parents in the Baby Boom generation and the generation is sometimes referred to as the “Echo Boom.” In 1977, “following a 12-year lull, the number of births climbed to 3.3 million. By 1980, annual births had risen to 3.6 million. By 1990, they topped 4 million.” (New Strategist, 2001, p. 2) A total of 68 million babies were born through 1994, when births again dropped below 4 million. With the additional contribution of immigration, the generation numbers about 75 million today. (See Figure 1.)

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This paper was written in 2009.

Just as their parents childhood and adolescence largely paralleled the development of television, this generation has grown up with the personal computer and the Internet. “Millennials do not face a generation gap. They share many of the values and interests of their Baby Boomer parents, [but] the world in which they are growing up is starkly different” from their parents’ childhood of the 1950s and 1960s. “Diversity is greater ... global boundaries are transparent ... terrorism is a real threat and economic anxiety is palpable.” (Mitchell, 2002a, p. 5)

This generation is much more diverse than any earlier generation of Americans. Less than two-thirds are non-Hispanic whites; 16 percent are Hispanics, 14 percent are blacks, four percent are Asians and one percent are Native Americans. (Mitchell, 2002b, p. 218) Those 20 years of age and older are more likely to be immigrants than are Americans over 30 years of age, while those under 20 are less likely to be immigrants (p. 221). Majority minority demographics has already arrived for Millennials in Texas and California, where the number of whites among teens and young adults has dropped below 50 percent. Other states are not far behind and the U.S. Census has projected that by the time Millennials are middle-aged this will be true for the nation as a whole.

The age at which people get married has been pushed higher by the Millennials than it was for earlier generations at the same stage of life. In 1998, 83 percent of men and 70 percent of women aged 20 through 24 were single as compared to 55 percent of men and 36 percent of women in 1970. (Mitchell, 2002b, p. 209) This is the third generational step up in the post-World War II era. Their Baby Boomer parents moved up the age of marriage when they were young adults. Gen X moved it up yet again, and now the Millennials are moved it even further up. Wuthnow points out that this has paralleled the significant increase in premarital sexual activity which has been supported by the widespread availability of oral contraceptives.

One third of households headed by young adults have a child under six years of age living in the home. (Mitchell, 2002b, p. 191) The majority of black and Hispanic households headed by a young adult have children in the home, while relatively few white households do. (p. 193) Overall, there has been a significant increase in the number of children born out of wedlock to teen and young adult mothers.

The majority of teens over 15 years of age have a job, and men and women are almost equally likely to be employed—53 percent of men and 51 percent of women. Among 16- and 17-year-olds, 86 percent work part time, while fewer than one in five of people 18 and older do so. Workers under 25 years of age account for 60 percent of sales people in shoe stores, 55 percent of sales personnel in clothing stores, 45 percent of parking lot attendants and 44 percent of kitchen workers in restaurants. (Mitchell, 2002b, p. 157) Many work without health benefits. The Kaiser Foundation reports that more than two-thirds of workers 18 to 29 years of age have no health insurance coverage. The adults in the Millennial generation are the least likely to have good access to health care among all Americans.

Attitudes and Culture

Millennials in America are generally “quite content” with most aspects of life. Nine out of ten are satisfied with their parents and their family life. Four out of five are happy with their housing, their standard of living, the kind of job they are in and the amount of free time they have. Although they agree with the vast majority of Americans of all ages who feel that the country is headed in the wrong direction, they are less negative than are older Americans. Among Millennials, 52 percent are dissatisfied with the direction of the country as compared to 62 percent of older Americans. (Kohut, 2007)

The Washington Post has reported a trend toward larger numbers joining clubs and other organizations on college and university campuses. Millennials are “goal-oriented” and “more communal than their predecessors ... in part because their lives have been highly structured.” This report quotes Judith Kidd, a dean at Harvard University, “This is the play-date generation. Things are always arranged.... It’s also a driven generation. They don’t know what to do with downtime. They come to campus with day planners.” One reason that campuses are again seeing a multiplication of student organizations is because many of these young people like to be leaders and “will start a club, just like the one next door, so they can be president. Some schools, for example, have a half-dozen environmental clubs.” (Oct. 25, 2005, p. A10)

There is a general belief among Millennials that young adults today are better off than were young adults in the previous generation. Four out of five (84 percent) say that they are better off in terms of getting a good education and three out of four (72 percent) say that they are better off in terms of getting a high paying job. Two thirds report the same attitude about sexual freedom (66 percent) and living in an exciting time (64 percent). The majority (56 percent) feel that their generation is in a better position bringing about social change. Only economic factors are view negatively. Just 47 percent say that young adults today have a better chance of enjoying financial security and less than a third (31 percent) said the same about buying a house when this survey was conducted in late 2006 and early 2007. (Kohut, p. 6) It is safe to guess that today these percentages would be even lower.

When asked to name the most important problems facing them (in 2006-2007), the largest number of Millennials listed problems related to money, debt and family finances (30 percent), while the second largest group listed problems associated with getting an education (18 percent). The third largest response were problems having to do with getting a job or starting a career (16 percent). Very few mentioned problems with family or relationships (7 percent), health (2 percent), or national and international conditions (2 percent). More recent events have underlined the priority given to concerns about economics and employment.

Millennials may be little prepared for the economic changes that are upon us at the moment. We may be living through the events that will prove to be the most important in the emerging years of this generation. A 2005 survey of high school and college students conducted for Ameriquest Corporation indicates that 94 percent expect to purchase a home within twenty years, most believe they should start saving for retirement by their late 20s and that their starting

salary will be somewhere between \$40,000 and \$50,000 a year. Nearly two thirds (62 percent) feel they must earn at least \$50,000 a year by the time they are 30 years of age in order to live comfortably. (*Youth Markets Alert*, Jan. 1, 2006) These expectation were already far from reality for most Millennials prior to the events of September and October 2008 and may be slipping even further away.

“Unlike the generations that have gone before them,” writes Stephanie Armour for *USA Today*, this generation “has been pampered, nurtured and programmed with a slew of activities since they were toddlers, meaning they are high-performance and high-maintenance. [They] believe in their own worth. ... They may wear flip-flops to the office or listen to iPods at their desk. They want to work, but they don’t want work to be their life.” She quotes Jordan Kaplan, professor of management at Long Island University, this generation “is much less likely to respond to the traditional command-and-control type of management still popular in most of today’s workforce. They’ve grown up questioning their parents, and now they’re questioning their employers.” (Nov. 7, 2005)

Two thirds of Millennials “see their generation as unique and distinct from other generations, [but] they are hard-pressed to come up with a word or phrase to describe their generation. In fact, they had an easier time describing their parents’ generation than they did their own.” They also find it difficult to think of heroes and role models beyond their own circle of relationships. The largest number named a teacher, mentor, family member, friend, etc. Just 14 percent named a famous cultural figure such as an athlete, actor, singer or TV personality. Only 8 percent mentioned a political leader—most often George Bush, Bill Clinton, Jimmy Carter, Hillary Clinton, Condoleezza Rice, Colin Powell and Al Gore—prior to the current heated campaign season and the emergence of Barack Obama as both a truly historic figure and a political “rock star” among young adults. Just 6 percent listed spiritual leaders—most commonly Mother Teresa and the Dalai Lama—and here again, a large number mentioned their own pastor. (Kohut, p. 9-10)

Millennials are “fairly harsh” in their evaluation of the behavior and lifestyle of their own generation. Three out of four say that young people in their generation are more likely to have casual sex than were young people twenty years ago. Seven in ten report that today’s young people are more likely to get violent when dealing with conflict or engage in binge drinking. Nearly two third (63 percent) think their cohort is more likely to use illegal drugs. And the largest number think that their generation is less likely to engage in positive behavior; less likely to vote and less likely to volunteer in community service. (Kohut, p. 10-11)

Constant technological change is one of the major markers of this generation. (See Figure 2.) Almost all Millennials use the Internet (86 percent) and cell phone text messages and instant messaging regularly (80 percent). The majority (54 percent) participate in social networking web sites such as Facebook and MySpace. Two thirds of these check their networking web site daily or at least once a week and one in five have dated a person that they met on line. At the same time, nearly three out of four Millennials are of the opinion that their fellow young people post too much personal information on the Internet. They are also more likely to be critical of new

technology than feel positive about it. Large numbers think that the Internet and other new technologies make people lazier (84 percent), more isolated (67 percent) and lead people to waste time (68 percent). A slightly smaller percentage believe that new technology helps people be more efficient (69 percent), make it easier for people to find new friends (69 percent) and enable them to stay closer to old friends and family members (64 percent). Perhaps their familiarity with technology gives them a more clear-eyed view of its pros and cons. (Kohut, p. 14-15)

This is a generation not afraid to express itself in its appearance. People in the Millennial generation are actually less likely than Gen X to have a tattoo—36 percent compared to 40 percent—but more likely to have a body piercing other than ear lobes—30 percent compared to 20 percent. They are also deeply involved with media other than the print media. A third are regular players of video games and nearly half go to a movie at least once a month. (Kohut, p. 21)

It is clear that the Millennial generation will change the politics of America. For one thing, they are much more likely to vote. The percentage of young adults who voted in 2004 is the highest since 1972 and the 2008 turn-out of young adults is estimated at 23.5 million, the largest number of young voters in the history of the nation. They also appear to be reversing the trend of the last quarter century toward increasing numbers of conservative voters. In a 2006 Pew survey 48 percent of Millennials identified themselves as Democrats and 35 percent as Republicans. This is the lowest proportion of Republicans recorded by Pew in 20 years of surveys. “This makes them the *least* Republican generation.” The same trend is evident when interviewers ask about political ideology. More than a quarter of Millennials (26 percent) identify their views as “liberal,” compared to 22 percent of Gen X, 19 percent of Baby Boomers and 14 percent of older generations; 29 percent of Millennials say they are “conservative,” compared to 33 percent of Gen X, 37 percent of Baby Boomers and 42 percent of older generations. (Kohut, p. 28-29) It was no accident that the Republican candidate for president in 2008 was the oldest in history and the Democratic candidate was the youngest since 1960. The election results clearly demonstrated a generational shift in politics that is believed by experts on both sides to be far-reaching and long-term.

This political change is related to a shift in values. In the mid-1980s 56 percent of Gen X told Pew interviewers that “It’s all right for blacks and whites to date each other.” In 2003, almost nine out of ten Millennials (89 percent) gave the same response. Two thirds say “I have old-fashioned values about family and marriage,” but this contrasts with 85 percent of older generations and 80 percent of Gen X when they were young adults in polls in the 1980s. A clear majority of Millennials support abortion rights; 59 percent would allow women to get “morning after” contraceptives over the counter and 58 percent are not in favor of outlawing abortions. Nearly half (47 percent) are willing to allow gay marriage as compared to just 30 percent of older generations. (Kohut, p. 39-41) Abstinence has been the emphasis in most sex education for at least a decade and “The New Virginity” has received considerable attention in the media, but there is little evidence that anyone is actually practicing it. “According to polls of those who stick with it, their abstinence is fortified with large measures of oral sex,” reports Mark Greif.

And 80 percent of Millennials have intercourse in their teens according to the Centers for Disease Control. (*Harpers*, November 2006)

The Millennial generation mirrors the attitudes and societal roles of the 1930s, according to Strauss and Howe (2006). The movies and music of this generation, like those of the 1930s, feature upbeat and happy themes. For example, the late 1930s were “hero obsessed” and in the spring of 2005 there were 18 new superhero movies in production. “Music is the first way a new generation announces themselves,” observe Strauss and Howe. Music then shapes the decisions about television, movies, Internet content and video games. The most important influences for Millennials are second-generation immigrants and young females.

Strauss and Howe also point out the television programs popular with younger Millennials, such as *The OC* and *Hannah Montana*, often include prominent roles for parents with their own story lines. This reflects the Millennial attitude toward parents. They want their parents in their lives, as opposed to the attitude in earlier teen shows which included little or no parental presence.

Some writers focus much on the events of September 11, 2001, as key to shaping the attitudes and values of the Millennial generation. For example, Wikipedia states that “a good way to define the boundaries of this generation in the United States are by the September 11 attacks; people who were not born in 2001 or were too young to remember and/or understand what happened” would be in the following generation and those “solidly of age, out of school, and into adult life” would be in the earlier generation, Generation X. Wild found that 21 percent of university students report that they changed their career plans or academic as a result of the event and there has been “a short-term turn towards civic engagement.” A study with a much larger sample shows only a modest and short-term impact by 9/11 on the spiritual lives and religious activity of young adults.²

In the heady days immediately after September 11, 2001, when massive crowds were gathering for candle light memorial services and urban churches were open around the clock for the many Americans who wanted to pray, some things were said, even by leading Adventists, that have proved to be quite foolish. One veteran evangelist and seminary professor is reported to have said that “postmodernism is dead” and that we could expect unprecedented attendance at Revelation Seminars and similar apocalyptic-themed public evangelism. In fact, Gallup Poll has shown that church attendance and interest in religion had returned to pre-9/11 levels within a year after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Uecker, working with a very large sample, found that events did not “drastically alter the religious and spiritual makeup of the young adult population. Only modest differences were noted in young adults’ levels of religiosity and spirituality after the attacks and the differences were generally short-lived.” Individuals with no religious affiliation and those from Catholic and mainline Protestant backgrounds were more likely to increase their religious behavior and level of interest in spirituality, while those an Evangelical background were more likely to register declines in religiosity and spirituality. Uecker asks whether the faith of conservative Protestant young people was actually shaken by 9/11.

Religion Among Millennials

About two in five Millennials identify themselves as Protestants, a quarter are Catholics and less than 10 percent are affiliated with other religions. About a third say they are “born again” or “Evangelical” Christians, including a significant number of Catholics. Twice as many Millennials say they have no religious preference or they are atheist or agnostic as is true for older Americans—20 percent as compared to 11 percent—and this gap has increased significantly in recent decades. “In the late 1980s, 11 percent of young people were non-religious, compared with 8 percent of those over age 25.” Millennials are the least likely of today’s generations to attend church regularly. (Kohut, p. 22-23)

There is limited information about the religious beliefs of the Millennial generation, but it is clear that they have more widely accepted evolution than previous generations. The 2006 Pew Religion Survey found that nearly two-thirds of the this generation (63 percent) indicated agreement with evolution over creation as compared to 57 percent of Gen X, 47 percent of Baby Boomers and only 42 percent of those from earlier generations. (Kohut, p. 23)

Webber reports that the Millennial generation is turning sharply away from the models of church and worship introduced by their Baby Boomer parents. He says that the Boomer church has been shaped by a market model, a marketing model and “they’ve created a consumerist church. The product is Jesus and the good life. ... I call them Wal-Mart churches. ... It’s a reflection of the culture. ... Christianity accommodated itself so much to the culture that has come to look like the culture.” The Evangelical mega church has become such a powerful force in America today that the first joint appearance of the 2008 presidential nominees was at one of these churches and presided over by the pastor who has become a best-selling author and a media figure. President George Bush’s re-election in 2004 was attributed to the key role of Evangelical voters and he has clearly identified himself with this segment of the nation.

“This is where the Younger Evangelicals are breaking with the past,” Webber continues. “They do not see the church as an accommodation to the culture. They don’t see it in terms of a civil religion. They see the church in a very counter-cultural way. (*Homiletics*, January-February 2004) He goes on to discuss worship style preferences of the Millennial generation of Evangelicals:

Their approach to worship is an embodied reality. My sense is that they’re still pretty much all over the map in terms of worship, but one of the things they’re really trying to do in worship is create a sense of transcendence. If you look at worship over the last 30 years, the movement has been primarily the nearness of God, the friendship of Jesus, the relationship and even a lot of romantic terminology in contemporary music about a relationship with God. The Younger Evangelicals are sick of that stuff. They just think it’s shallow, not really real ... and they’re beginning to see God more on the side of God’s holiness, God’s otherness, God’s transcendence. They’re trying to create an atmosphere that allows

for that. What are big with Younger Evangelicals are candles, icons ... there's a recovery of hymnology, there's a recovery of liturgy. ... They're so sick of wearing your relationship with Jesus on your sleeve.

Along the same lines Josh Anderson has written of “the new monasticism,” a movement in which young adults are committing themselves to spiritual disciplines and ministry as a lifestyle without the benefits of a clergy career. (*Prism*, March-April 2006)

This difference in religious style has led to certain myths about the Millennial generation—that they are more conservative than their Baby Boomer parents, that they are more postmodern in their faith than previous generations, and that there is widespread rebellion against organized religion. Smith and Denton have demonstrated that these views are unfounded in fact. In general, Millennials tend to share the religious commitments and beliefs of their parents and are not particularly dogmatic or enthusiastic about their faith. They go to church about as often as their parents. They tend to think of religion as important to a good life, part of being a moral person, but they do not have clear ideas about the specifics. One academic reviewer summarized the work of Smith and Denton as follows:

While religion may be significant and widespread in teens' lives, it is often not very deeply articulated in terms of belief, theology, and other cognitive orientations. There is what Smith and Denton call a pervasive “moralistic therapeutic deism” (MTD) among teens that is non-specific, non-exclusive, instrumental and individualistic. It accompanies a sort of casual tolerance—a bit of “whatever” attitude. There is not much serious syncretism and little adamant secularism. ... The authors show how easily this “whatever” religion resonates with contemporary cultural currents. There is an “elective affinity” between MTD and American mass-consumer culture, abetted by a digital communication revolution and grounded in an increasing age and generational segregation. ... The religion being offered to teens is something of a competitive response by religious organizations that are at a disadvantage for teens' and parents' attention compared to school, media, entertainment, and work. (*Review of Religious Research*, June 2006)

In 1982, James Hunter, a sociologist at the University of Virginia, conducted a survey of students at nine leading Evangelical colleges in the U.S. His research was published in *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (1987, University of Chicago Press). His findings showed that secularization was at work on conservative Protestant religion in America and would slowly change the face of Evangelicalism. In 1996, Penning and Smidt replicated the Hunter survey. These data provide an interesting and recent comparison of two generations and their views on faith and values. The 1982 survey was made up of college students largely from the final wave of the Baby Boom generation, the last cohort of which was born in 1964 and would have been 18 the year of Hunter's survey. The 1996 survey was made up of college students largely from the first wave of the Millennial generation, the first cohort of which was born in 1977 and were 19 the year of the Penning-Smidt survey.

The Millennials at these Christian colleges are quite serious about their faith. Four out of five engage in prayer each day and attend church each week. Two in five study the Bible each day and one in five report that they make some attempt to share their faith at least once each week. Clearly an active spirituality is alive and well among the next generation of Evangelicals.

The “inerrant” view of Scripture has made real progress among Evangelicals over recent decades. Where only a little more than a third of the students in the last wave of Baby Boomers believed in this view, nearly half of the students in the first wave of Millennials have adopted this view. (See Figure 3.) The percent of Millennials taking the orthodox and neorthodox views has declined compared to the Baby Boomers 15 years earlier, but the very small percent with liberal or agnostic views has actually doubled. This may be due to the increased interest in religion among the Millennial generation which has likely led a few more nonbelievers to enroll on these campuses.

Successive generations of Evangelicals have become increasingly more committed to most conservative Protestant doctrines. (See Figure 4.) The percentages of Millennials who believe that the Devil is a real being and that Adam and Eve were real people are markedly higher than previous generations, and even the percentage of Millennials who believe that Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation has increased. It is significant that on the question of moral absolutes, Penning and Smidt are silent about the data from the Millennial generation although they show data from previous generations demonstrating a growth in this belief. Perhaps this means that even among devout Evangelical young adults, postmodernism has begun to erode belief in absolutes as a theoretical possibility despite clear allegiance to specific moral standards.

On many specific behaviors, the Millennial generation students at these Evangelical colleges are even more likely to adopt a conservative moral stand than were the Baby Boomers fifteen years earlier. Higher percentages agree that premarital sex, heavy petting, watching X-rated movies, and smoking marijuana are always morally wrong. (See Figure 5.) Although nine out of ten still see homosexual relations as immoral, there has been a slight decrease in the number taking this view. There are significant declines in the views that smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol are always morally wrong, which may explain why at least one of these colleges recently changed its rules on the consumption of alcohol.

There is also a small shift in the views of Millennial generation Evangelicals about divorce and remarriage. (See Figure 6.) The percentage who believe that divorce is acceptable only in extreme circumstances has actually increased a little. More significant is the growing number who believe that remarriage after divorce is acceptable beyond the traditional Bible teaching that it can happen only when the divorced spouse has died or committed adultery.

Significant shifts have taken place between the views of the last Baby Boomers and the first Millennials regarding gender roles in marriage. (See Figure 7.) Nearly two decades ago, a majority of the last students from the Baby Boom generation reported that they believed the husband should have the “final say” in family decisions. This view is no longer shared by the majority of Evangelical young adults, pointing toward an increasingly egalitarian view of gender

roles in Christian homes. At the same time, there is a growing opinion that a married woman should not work outside the home unless she is forced to by economic necessity. The ideal of a mother at home with the children, focusing on homemaking has wide support among Evangelicals in the Millennial generation, despite their egalitarian view of gender roles in marriage. This may be due to the high percentage of their generations who have negative feelings about “latch-key children” or in single-parent homes. This can be seen as a growing value on the quality of family life with both strong partnership between spouses and strong parenting for the children.

The individualistic values that most scholars feel were born, in part, from the Reformation emphasis on personal salvation and individual freedom to interpret the Bible, are alive and well in the latest generation of Evangelicals. (See Figure 8.) Individualism is asserted in the increased percentages that say “self-improvement is important” and a person “can be a good Christian without attending church.” At the same time, there seems to be a greater awareness of the limits of individualism in the decline in the portion who agree that “the individual should arrive at his or her own beliefs independent of any church,” or that “realizing your full potential is just as important as putting others before you as a Christian.”

A similar split between strongly-affirmed individualistic values and skepticism about the ideology of individualism can be seen in the economic views of the two generations. (See Figure 9.) The Millennial generation is stronger in its belief that “competition encourages excellence” and “hard work builds character,” but they are somewhat less likely than the last Baby Boomers to believe that “hard work always pays off” and “when a person is poor, it is probably his or her own fault.” Perhaps this is due to the fact that a number of today’s young adults have been exposed to some of the spectacular failures in free market economics despite its widespread popularity, especially among conservative Protestants.

The Millennial generation students have a slightly less critical attitude toward the church than did the last Baby Boomers two decades earlier. (See Figure 10.) The majority of both generations believe that most churches are more concerned about internal, organizational issues than they are the spiritual and other needs of individuals both within the membership and in the world. But, significantly fewer Millennials feel that the church “has lost the really spiritual part of the religion.” Is this evidence that churches are doing a better job of meeting the spiritual needs of the Millennial generation than they are with the Baby Boomer and Gen X?

The growing negative view is about the failure of conservative Protestant churches to demonstrate sufficient concern for social justice. In order to meet the needs of the Millennial generation, Evangelical leaders, congregations and denominations must visibly increase their investment of time, energy and funds in ministries focused on social concerns. For today’s young adults this has become a concrete test of spiritual authenticity.

Adventist Millennials

The Valuegenesis studies provide an opportunity to compare the Millennial generation among Adventists with Generation X Adventists at the same stage of life. Valuegenesis2 was conducted in 2000, a decade after Valuegenesis1. In each case the students in grades six through twelve in almost all schools operated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America completed detailed questionnaires. (Gillespie *et al.*, 2004) For purposes of comparison here, I am using a sample of 762 respondents in the Columbia Union Conference³ from Valuegenesis2 which are labeled “Millennial generation,” and the comparable items in the Valuegenesis1 reports which are labeled “Gen X.”

Adventist Millennials are even more diverse than the generation at large. (See Figure 11.) A little more than a third of these young people (37 percent) are white. An astonishing 18 percent claim to be multiethnic which suggests that their parents entered into many more inter-ethnic marriages than the general population in America. It is significant that Adventists in the Baby Boom generation evidently felt much more comfortable and supported in this step than was true for most Americans outside the Adventist movement. Of course, some of these parents were inter-ethnic couples who joined the Adventist Church because, in part, they felt accepted in the Adventist Church, although the majority of Adventist Baby Boomers in North America were born into the denomination. (Sahlin, 1998)

At the time of the Valuegenesis2 survey in 2000, more than a third (36 percent) of the Adventist Millennials were not as yet baptized. (See Figure 12.) Considering that the sample began with 6th grade and children in that grade are typically 10 or 11 years of age and there is an informal Adventist tradition that the appropriate age for baptism is 12, this is not entirely surprising. Yet, a quarter of the sample indicated that they were baptized at age 10 or younger and a smaller percentage of the sample even in Grade 12 remained unbaptized. Baby Boomer Adventists—the parents of these young people—often talk of “going along with the group” when they remember their baptism as a child and these data provide some evidence that some of these parents may hold back in urging their Millennial offspring to be baptized and join the Church.

The good news is that out of the eleven items that form the Faith Maturity Index in Valuegenesis, the Millennial generation scores higher than Gen X on seven items, somewhat lower than Gen X on four items. (See Figures 13 and 14.) With one exception, the higher scores on the seven items are considerably greater than the lower scores. The one item in the Faith Maturity Index on which the Millennials score significantly more poorly than Gen X is “I care about reducing poverty in the world.” This may reflect the fact that, until very recently, the Millennials grew up in a more prosperous time than did Gen X. It may also be related to the data that show that throughout the late 1990s the Adventist membership in North America became significantly more upper middle class in orientation. (Sahlin, 1998) In any case, the besetting sin of materialism may be the Achilles heel of this new generation of Adventists which is, in general, more spiritually mature than the previous generation.

Millennial Adventists evidently have a much stronger relationship with the Church than did Gen X and, very likely, their parents' generation. They have a much more positive attitude about the congregational climate of their local church than did Gen X. (See Figure 15.) They evaluate the youth ministries of the church much more positively than did Gen X. (See Figure 16.) They rate higher on all four items that measure denominational loyalty. (See Figure 17.) They rate the same as Gen X on six of the nine items that measure theological orthodoxy. (See Figure 18.) Where concern can be registered is on the other three items.

There are three doctrines with which Millennial Adventists are markedly less likely to register agreement than were Gen X. (See Figure 19.) These are the three doctrines which generated much discussion and some dissent during the 1980s and into the 1990s. The majority of Millennial Adventists do not agree that "the Seventh-day Adventist Church is God's true last-day church" (the Remnant), that "Ellen White fulfilled the predictions that God would speak through prophecy in the last days," or that "the investigative judgment began in 1844." A large number of those who do not agree to these doctrinal statements say they have not made up their minds, while a smaller number disagree. So the door is open to persuade them of these doctrines and perhaps the Bible courses they take in college, their participation in church activities and their reading of church periodicals will do so. This situation probably reflects the turmoil on these three topics that they have overheard in their parents' generation.

Regardless of what is theologically important to God and His church, these data suggest a situation in which sociological realities may drive revisionism of one sort or another. It should not be assumed that this will necessarily mean a broader or more "liberal" explanation of these doctrines will become widely accepted. It may result in a reactionary movement that actually narrows the interpretation of historic teachings and results in a more "conservative" doctrinal consensus. Remember that Millennial Adventists are generally more positive and loyal toward the Church than the immediate previous generations.

Another area of concern has to do with at-risk behaviors among Millennial Adventists. They are significantly more likely to report Marijuana use, being in trouble at school and hitting someone than were Gen X. (See Figure 20.) They are somewhat more likely to have engaged in shoplifting and sexual intercourse, attempted suicide or used Cocaine. The percentage reporting use of alcohol is the same in both generations. Among the troubling behaviors, only depression is reported at a much lower level than Gen X. That is another indicator of the generally more positive attitude of the Millennials, but the larger issue is that we have not reduced the trend toward larger and larger percentages of each generation of young people experimenting with behavior that risks serious damage to the entire lives of the individuals involved.

At the same time, it should be kept in mind that Adventist young people are still much less likely than American teenagers in general to engage in the most risky of these behaviors. (See Figure 21.) They are less than half as likely to have had sexual intercourse. They are about half as likely to have used alcohol. They are significantly less likely to have hit someone or be depressed, and somewhat less likely to have attempted suicide. In general, Adventist young people are healthier and happier than others in their generation.

No data is available regarding the attendance patterns of this generation in the Adventist denomination. We do have the reports of a sample of congregations in the FACT 2000 Survey in which four out of five local churches (82 percent) indicate fewer than 50 “children and teens (17 and under)” typically attend and only 2 percent report more than 150 young people typically attending. In the same survey, the elders, pastors and church clerks who served as the key informants were asked, “Of the ... regularly participating adults [in your local church], what percent would you estimate are age 35 or younger?” One in seven churches (14 percent) responded “none” or “hardly any.” Six in ten reported “few” or “some.” One in six (16 percent) said “many” or “most” or “nearly all.”

A third item from the same data set may be more relevant in the context of this paper. “How many of the high school age children of your adult [active members] would you estimate are involved in the religious life and activities of your congregation?” Just 10 percent said “almost all,” 27 percent said “most,” 33 percent said “some,” 17 percent said “few,” and 12 percent said “hardly any.” The majority of churches (62 percent) fall into the category of “some” or fewer, clearly indicating that most local church teen ministries are falling short of effective ministry with the Millennial generation.

Recommendations

Rather than complicate a complex topic by adding yet more suggestions to the many that have been published, I will reproduce here the recommendations voted by the Consultation on the Millennial Generation and the Church held October 5, 2003, at the Columbia Union Conference office. The participants were half young people from the Millennial generation and half church administrators, most from the Baby Boom generation. The emphasis of the day was on church leaders listening to a new generation of church members and so these recommendations were generated largely by Millennials.

1. Establish of sense of ownership, belonging and community by asking local churches to give a six-month trial period to the concept of a monthly Youth Sabbath with teens and young adults in charge of all parts of the program and with the understanding that the young people are empowered to change the service according to their needs.
2. In order to facilitate the inclusion of teens who are attending public high schools, establish Adventist Youth associations in each church or in clusters of small churches where necessary to achieve a minimum viable number of youth; that these associations meet at least twice a month; and that these AY associations be attached to area federations building on the federations that already exist in the Regional Conferences.
3. To launch an intensive educational effort to help congregations to empower, validate and accept Millennial generation teens and young adults. Break down stereotypes by providing informational seminars, using current church publications, and show local church leaders how to develop an environment that is appealing to Millennials.

4. Replace the current Sabbath School Quarterly materials for teens and young adults (*Cornerstone* and *Collegiate Quarterly*) with a fresh design and approach, including a strong focus on Christian principles and values, and contemporary stories relevant to Millennials.

5. Provide training for pastors and church leaders to reach the Millennial generation and convey ideas from this meeting; don't pass out information and expect it to be acted upon.

6. Create a system whereby local pastors can be notified of students attending secular schools (colleges/high schools) in their area so these students do not "slip through the cracks" and a support system can be provided locally.

7. Have conference-wide and union-wide events for youth to gather for encouragement and support; totally youth-oriented special events, not just a "youth tent" at camp meeting.

8. Because about 25 percent of the population is in the Millennial generation, then require/expect representation of local church demographics on governing boards, nominating committees and constituency delegations.

9. Reorganize conference staffs and budgets so that resources are made available to support a Millennial generation outreach department.

10. Provide conference-wide training sessions for youth leaders, preferably once a quarter or twice yearly, but at least annually.

11. Develop quality resources for ministry with the Millennial generation, such as books with ministry ideas, Bible studies, etc.

12. Create a strategic plan for youth ministry with mission statement, vision statement and action plans; then implement and hold denominational leaders accountable for attaining the goals set.

It is my prayer that in amplifying the voice of the Millennials who participated on that day more church leaders will be brought to listen to this new generation and act on their ideas. The mission of God's people remains the same; to bring the good news of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, to each new generation in its own time and its own tongue.

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Endnotes

¹There are a variety of specific definitions for most generational cohorts in the current context, many of them idiosyncratic to a single author. Some authors have an obvious bias, wanting to increase the size of a particular generation or shape its cultural history around certain events. In other cases the reasons for a different set of years of definition are unclear.

²Wild's study is based on only 50 interviews on five college and university campuses, while Uecker's data set is drawn from the longitudinal Adolescent Health Sample including 20,745 young people from two waves, 1994-95 and 2001-02.

³In 25 years of surveys for the Adventist Church in North America, I have found very few of thousands of items in which the Columbia Union Conference sample differed significantly from the entire sample. It is in many ways a microcosm of the entire church in North America.

Figure 1. Births by year for the three contemporary generations of Americans; Baby Boomers, Gen X and Millennials.

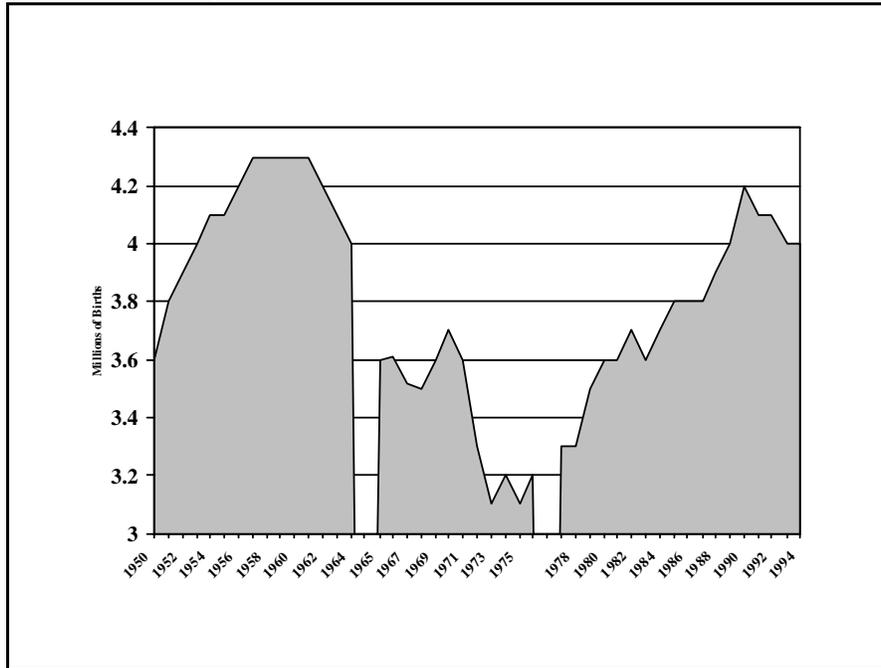


Figure 2. Narrative evidence of the pace of technological change.

How 20-year-olds See the World

<p>Bert and Ernie are old enough to be their parents.</p> <p>An automatic is a weapon, not a transmission.</p> <p>There has always been a screening test for AIDS.</p> <p>Banana Republic has always been a store, not a puppet government in Latin America.</p> <p>Computers have always fit in their backpacks.</p>	<p>They have never gotten excited over a telegram, a long-distance call or a fax.</p> <p>Test tube babies are now having their own babies.</p> <p>Stores have always had scanners at the check-out.</p> <p>They have always had a PIN number.</p> <p>They have never been able to find the "return" key.</p>	<p>Directory assistance has never been free.</p> <p>There has always been Lean Cuisine.</p> <p>There have never been dress codes in restaurants.</p> <p>Gas has always been unleaded.</p> <p>Rock and Roll has always been a force for social good.</p>
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Source: Beloit College Mindset List for 2007

Figure 3. Doctrinal beliefs of Evangelical students.

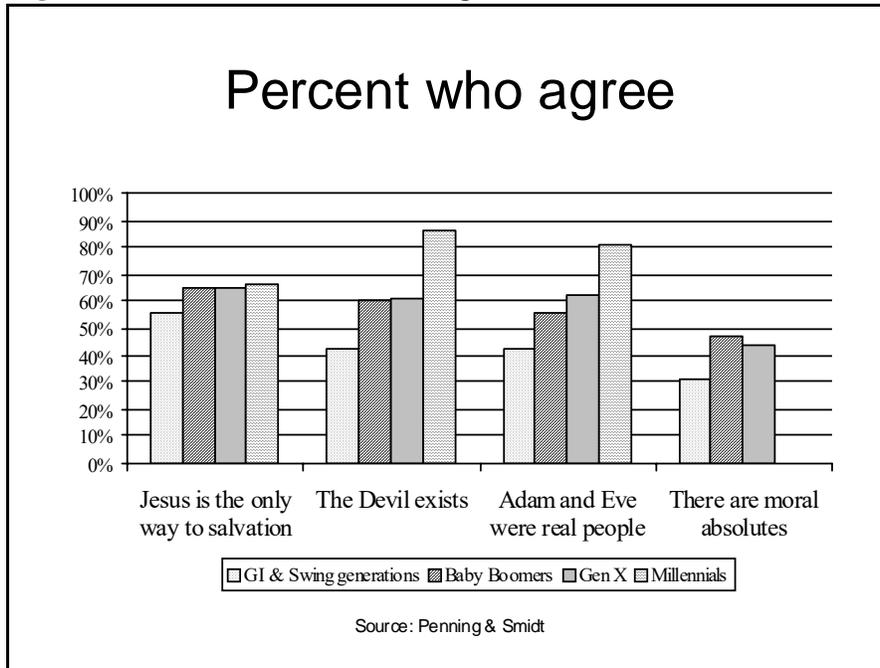


Figure 4. View on Scripture among Evangelical students..

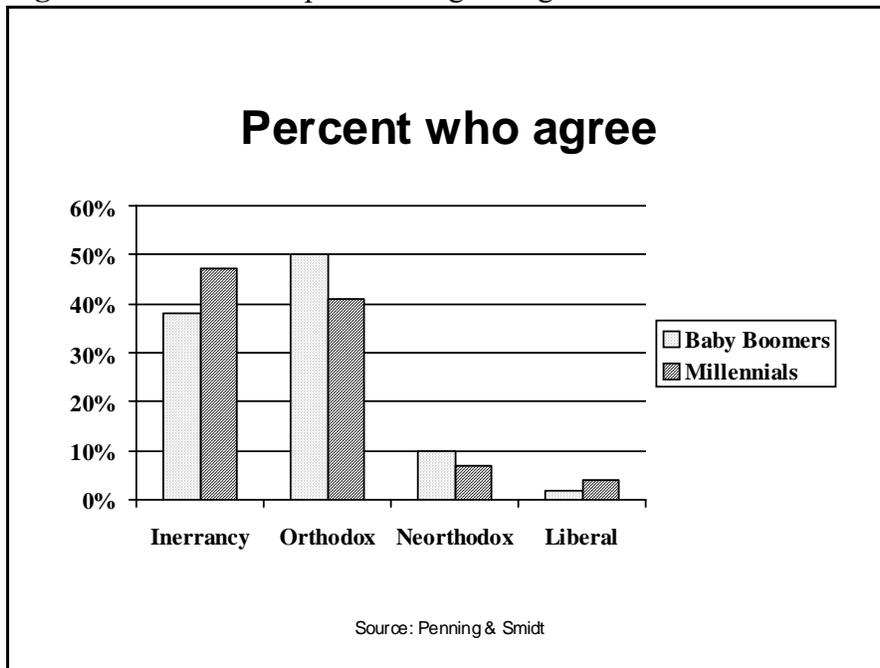


Figure 5. View on moral standards among Evangelical students.



Figure 6. Views on divorce and remarriage among Evangelical students.

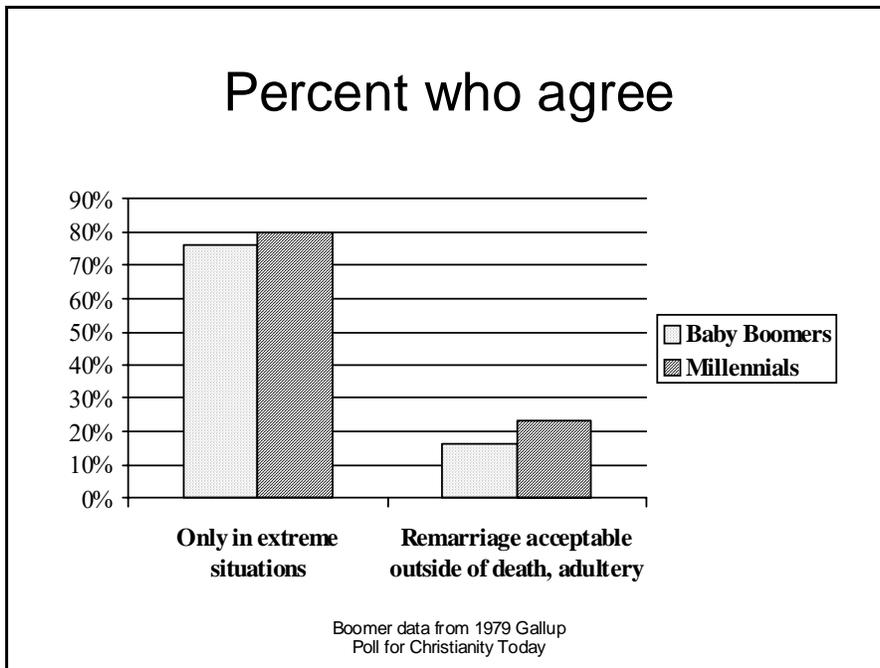


Figure 7. Individualistic values among Evangelical students.

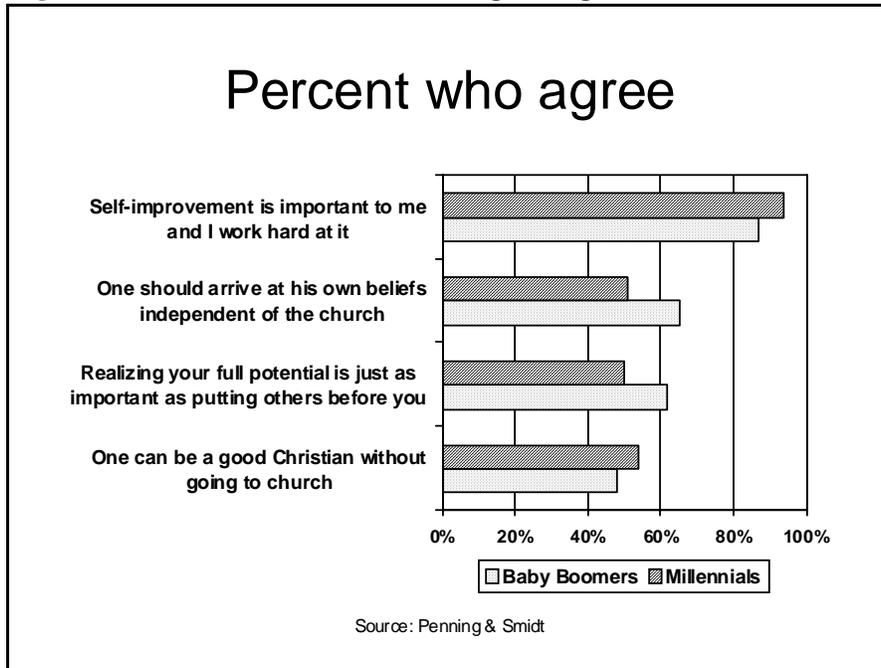


Figure 8. Economic values among Evangelical students.

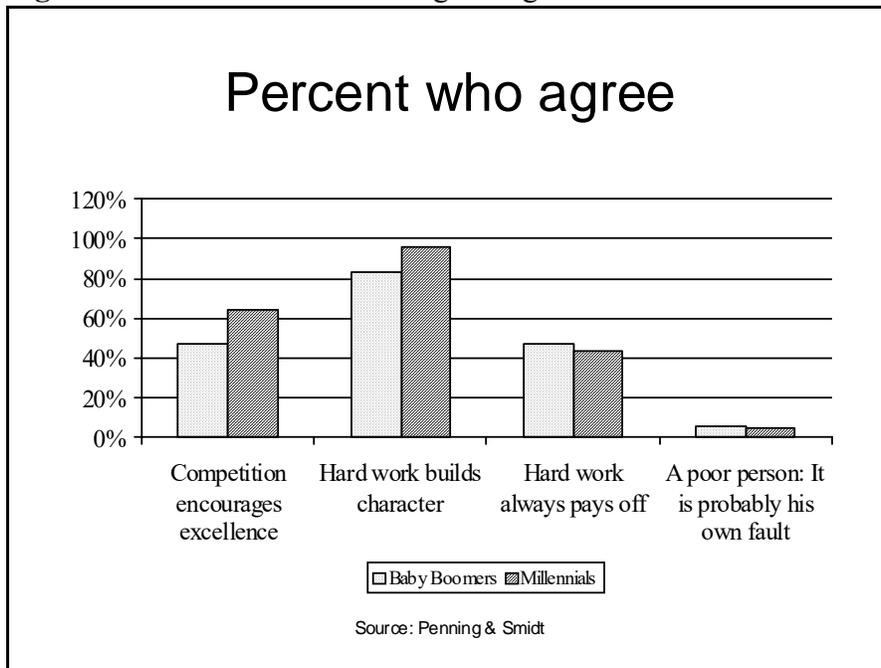


Figure 9. Views on gender roles in marriage among Evangelical students.

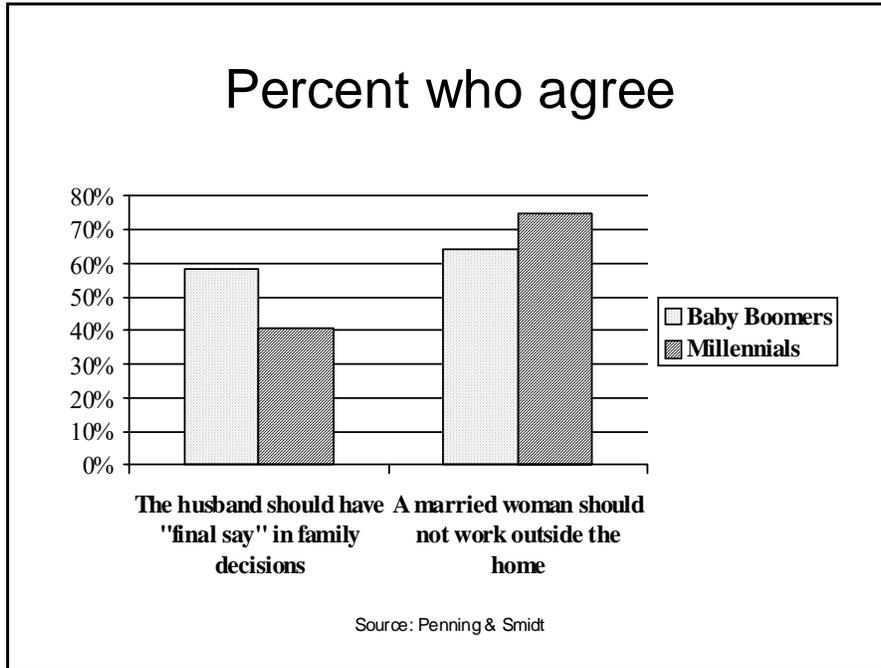


Figure 10. Opinion about churches among Evangelical students.

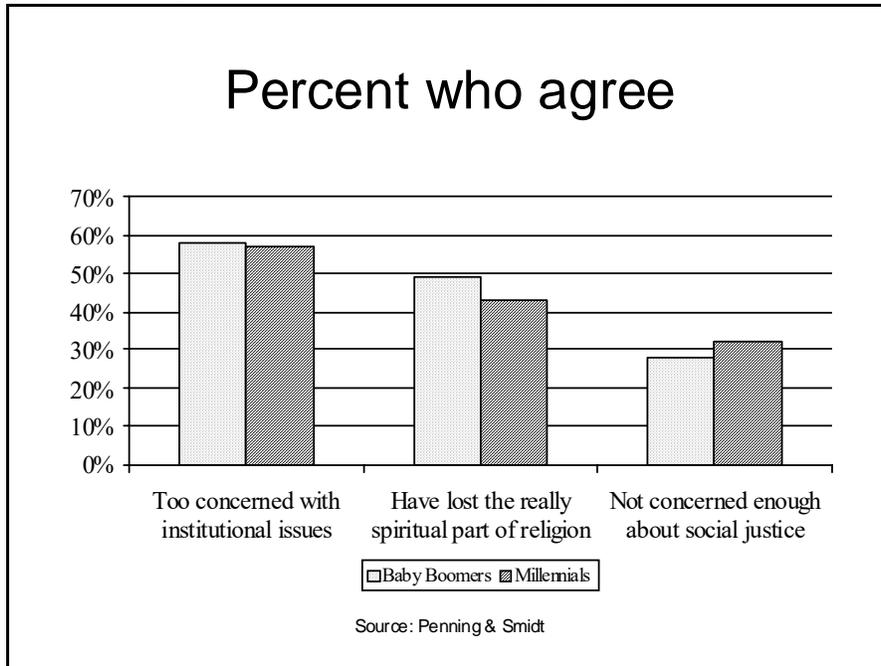


Figure 11. Baptism among Adventist young people from the Millennial generation in Grades Six through 12.

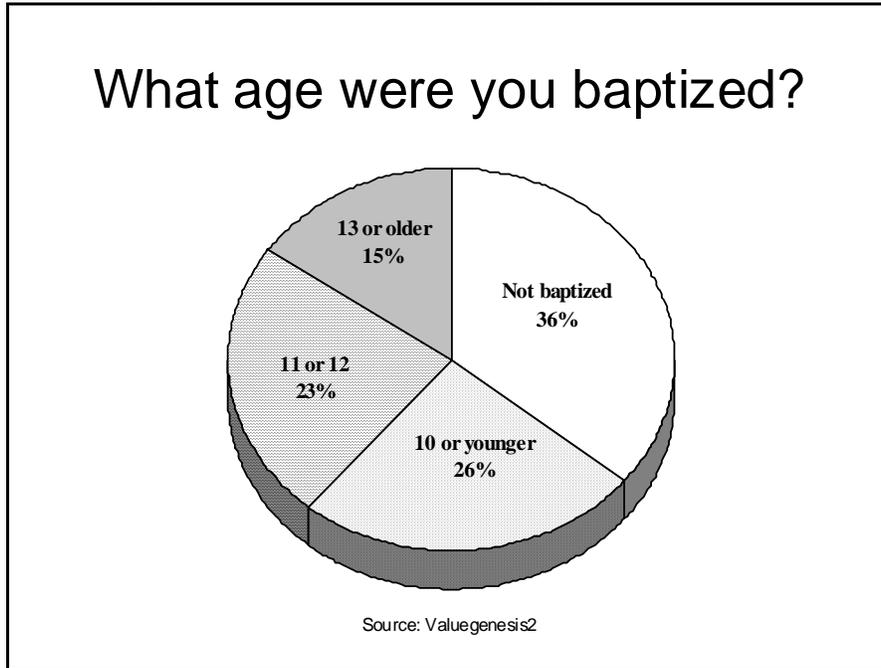


Figure 12. Ethnicity of Adventists in the Millennial generation.

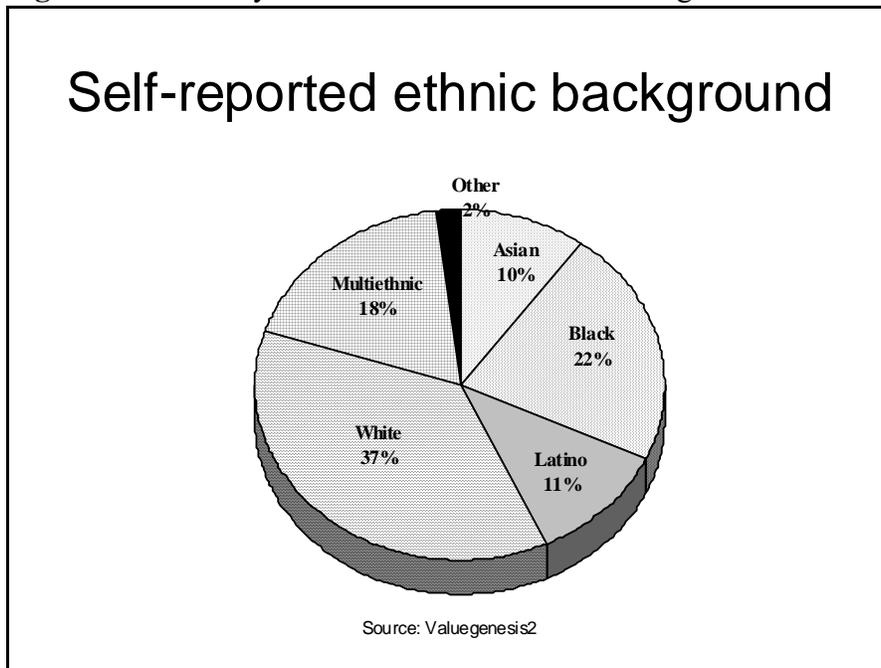


Figure 13. Items on the Faith Maturity Index in which Millennial generation Adventists respond more strongly than did Gen X.

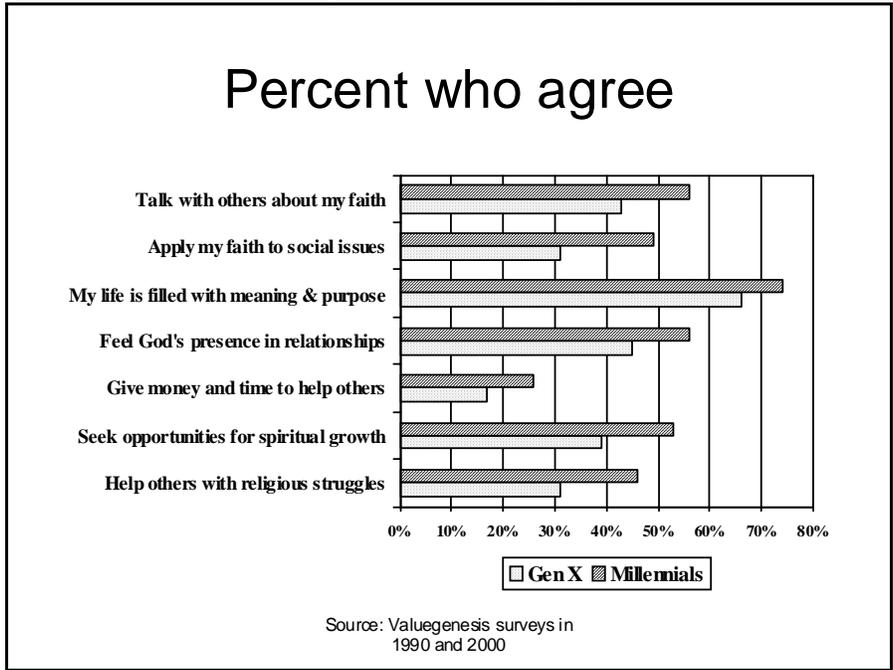


Figure 14. Items on the Faith Maturity Index in which Millennial generation Adventists respond less strongly than did Gen X.

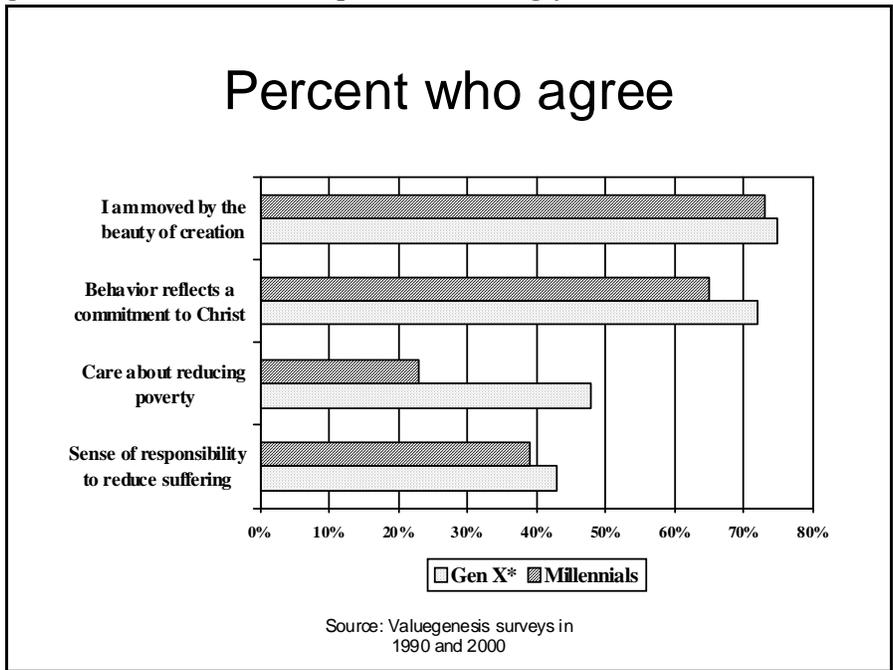


Figure 15. Evaluation of youth ministries by Adventist young people in Grades Six through 12.

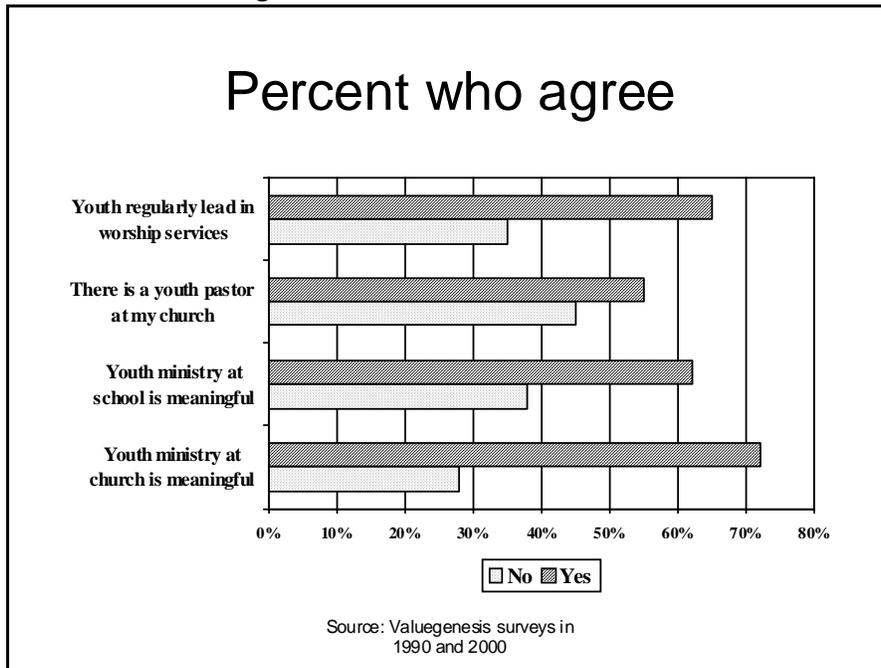


Figure 16. Evaluation of congregational climate by Adventist young people in Grades Six through 12.

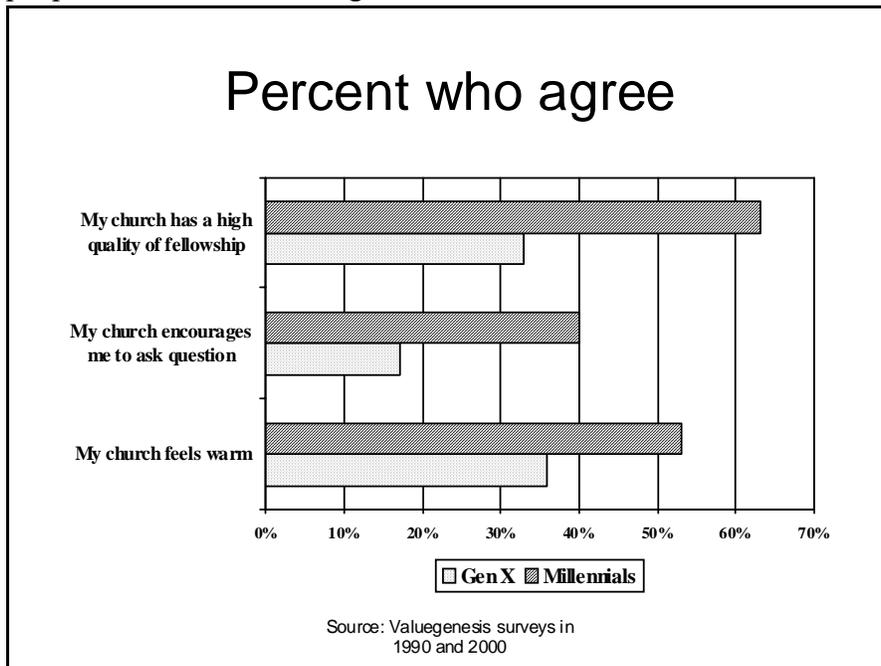


Figure 17. Indicators of denominational loyalty among Adventist young people in Grades Six through 12.

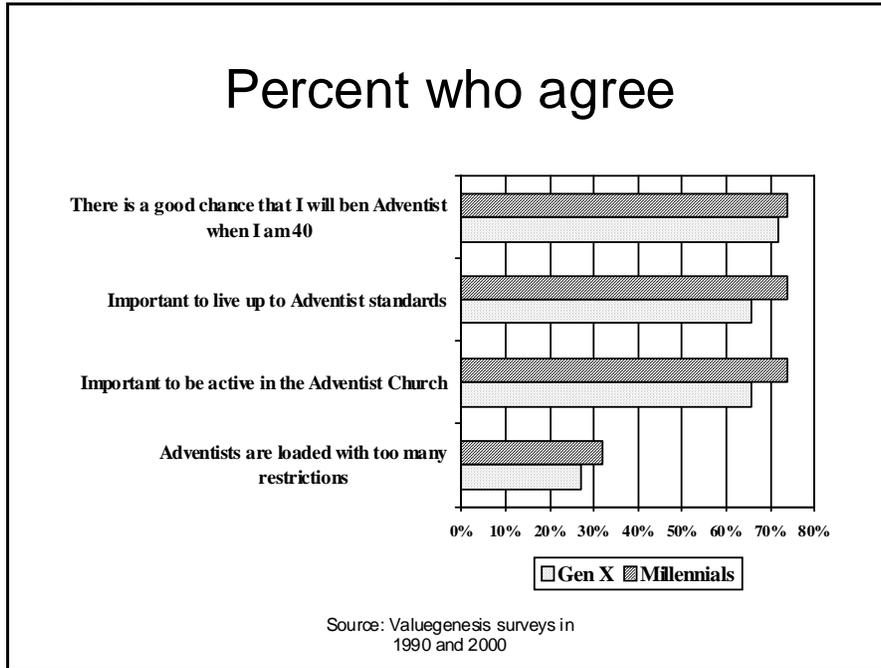


Figure 18. Agreement with key doctrines among Adventist young people in Grades Six through 12.

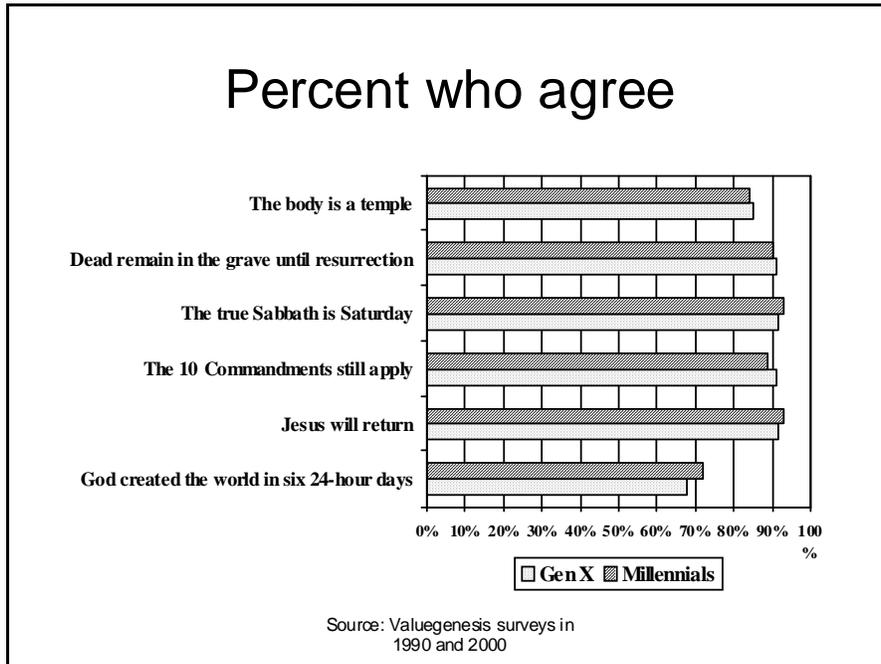


Figure 19. At-risk behavior as reported by two generations of Adventist young people.

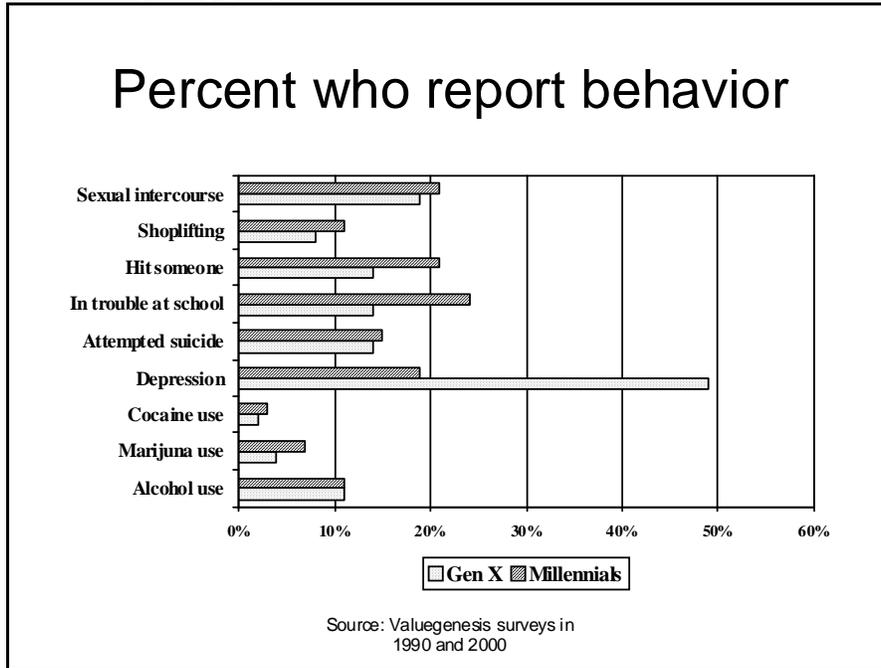


Figure 20. Doctrines where agreement has declined significantly from Gen X to the Millennial generation among Adventist youth.

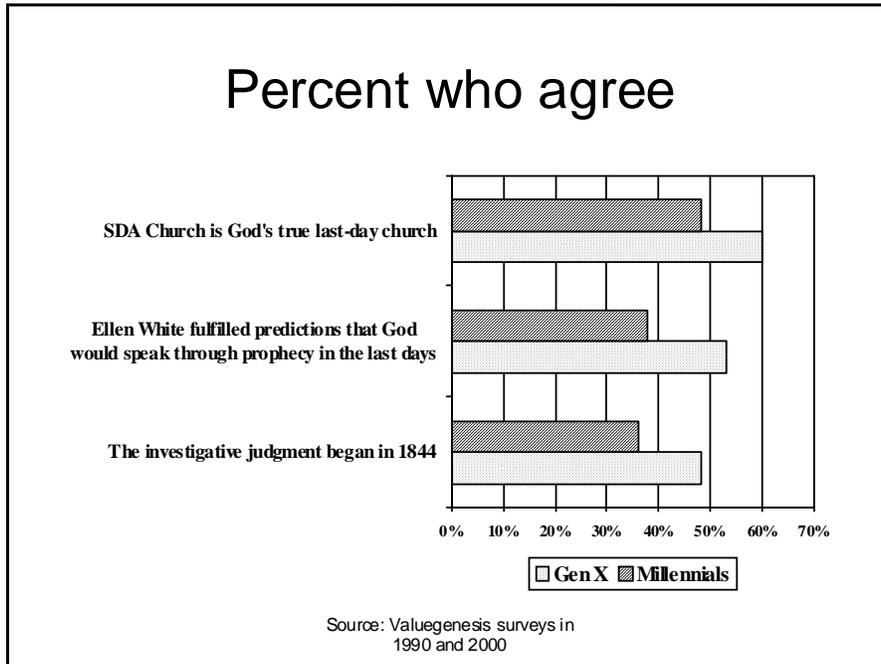


Figure 21. At-risk behavior of Millennial generation Adventist young people as compared to the general public in the U.S.

