

## MERCHANTS OF COOL OR COMMUNITIES OF THE KING?

Having past the half-century mark I am constantly reminded that I am hopelessly out of touch with "what's happening." Being cool has never been my forte and I admit freely my idea of a good time includes climbing on my John Deere tractor for the 5-6 hours it takes to mow the Klaus homestead. Call me unconvinced, but I am growing weary of the hype coming from both popular culture and the church seminar industry. It is regularly suggested that we are facing a "new generation" so unrelated to the past that unless we enter this "New World" with an open mind and new rules we will be overwhelmed by the emerging realities.

I'm not disregarding the obvious fact that post-modernism is certainly exerting huge influence in our world. (though the obituary some would want to write for modernism is considerably premature) Generational descriptions are helpful ways to get a grip on understanding the observable differences that exist between myself, my own children and even my teenage nieces and nephews. But whether you are builder, boomer, buster, Gen X, Gen Y, millennial or any other "tribe" your personal taxonomy uses to describe people, what positive results emerge in our society (let alone our churches) when we allow our "tribes" to live increasingly separate and unrelated to one another? The currently popular victimization theories of how adults have bequeathed such a horrible world to younger generations need serious critiquing. The fact remains that all generations/tribes/age-groups have the innate capability to destroy themselves without external help. Just read the classic novel "Lord of the Flies" which certainly demonstrates that children/young people can descend in savagery without any help at all from "evil" adults. What about Isaiah 53:6 or Romans 3:23? Is there an alternative reading of these texts that exempts people from accountability to God because they have been victimized by what is arguably just a contemporary version of Adam and Eve's "blame game?"

Enough soap box rhetoric....what's my point? I am thoroughly convinced that ministry in this century cannot merely be an updated version of past strategies. Learning new skills necessary to communicate in our current milieu requires a deep commitment to listening and responding with a "language" that builds bridges. But what kind of Christian communities are we building in our well-intended attempts to reach our world with the transforming power of Jesus Christ? Do those communities that represent the King, fairly reflect His character? For example, it is increasingly possible that children born into a church here in North America can attend specialized age group programs throughout their entire childhood and adolescence without any significant worship experience with anyone other than their own age-group. How does that differ from MTV, WB and FOX whose programming inevitably excludes adults, except to portray them as buffoons and hypocrites? Our spiritual lives will reap the results of such a tragedy, just as we are reaping the destructive results in our popular culture. But before we vent our spleen at the evils of violence spilling from the Hollywood media machines let's be humble enough to acknowledge that we have

uncritically followed their priority of separating "tribes" and have done so under the smokescreen of relevant ministry.

Maybe I've opened a can of worms that is considerably more of a challenge than I intended; yet the uncritical manner in which churches all too often shape ministry requires some serious evaluation. The words of a recent article in Christianity Today may be a starting point for you to reflect on the questions I have just raised. Andy Crouch writes, "In the Old Testament, the word generation usually refers to the continuity between parents and children, along with the joy of passing on faith from one generation to the next. In the New Testament, the word generally refers to everyone alive at a given moment in time, whatever their age, and the potential for God's judgment on them all. Both senses are vital to the church at this moment in history, whereas breathless hype about the "new generation" is most useful to those whose jobs (and products) depend on convincing young people they have nothing in common with their parents."

A retrenchment into the safety of the virtual reality we have created called the "good old days" does not begin to serve the church well. We have no place to go but forward into uncharted waters, yet as we enter this terrain let's not take our cues entirely from the current definition of "cool", which may be nothing more than the virtual reality created by a marketing firm to sell products. While we may treasure those distinctive traits that we have come to believe mark our "tribe" the words of St. Peter describe an eternal standard descriptive of a church community that most fully reflects the King in any era. (Whether you are a builder, part of the greatest generation, boomer, buster, Gen X'er, Gen Y'er, millennial, or any other label I probably missed remember that : "You are a chosen people/generation, royal priesthood, holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Peter 2:9) We can and must live out this Kingdom identity together.

Byron D. Klaus  
agtspres@agseminary.edu

Check it out. . .

Some articles that further develop this Prez Report:

Andy Crouch, Generation Misinformation, in Christianity Today, May 21, 2001

Chuck Colson Merchants of Cool, in Christianity Today, June 11, 2001

Merchants of Cool, a report on the creators and marketers of popular culture for teenagers.

[www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/cool/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/cool/)