

## **Church’s Mission to Generation Z: A Theological and Missiological Analysis**

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### **Abstract**

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The tremendous cultural, technological, and moral transformations that define Generation Z pose a significant missional challenge for the church today. The presentation of the gospel to this age group needs to be packaged in a manner that is understandable and acceptable to them, yet without compromising the eternal biblical truths. The responsibility of the church still lies in the unchanging gospel of Jesus Christ, but when it comes to Generation Z, theological clarity and missiological sensitivity must be renewed and contextualized to address the specific challenges and needs of this generation. This essay examines the church’s mission to Generation Z through the prisms of biblical theology and Christian missiology, arguing that a successful work in this area should not be devoid of reasoning and practical applications. The research commences with the socio-cultural context of Generation Z, encompassing the salient characteristics of digital natives, skepticism towards institutions, moral pluralism, and the quest for authenticity and belonging. It then examines the theological basis of mission, with a special focus on the Trinitarian character of God’s sending activity and the Christ-centered nature of the proclamation of the gospel. Based on Scripture, the paper introduces the church not only as a religious institution but also as a sent people called to be faithful representatives of the gospel across generations and to proclaim it. The paper also addresses missiological practices of contextualization, apologetics, and discipleship, and is very much concerned with the thorny relationship between cultural relevance and doctrinal faithfulness. It states that the mission to Generation Z should emphasize relational presence, high-level discipleship, and a witness led by the Spirit. The paper ends with a recommendation that Generation Z is not merely a field of mission but a co-worker in the current mission of God, and there is a need to rediscover the missionary character of the church in the fast-changing world.

**Keywords:** Mission, Generation Z, Gen Z, Church, Theological, and Missiological Analysis

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## Introduction

The Christian church was not intended to be just another religious institution but rather a community of believers called and sent by God to share the good news of His redemptive work and purpose with the world. Since the beginning, the church has identified itself as a missionary in function, witnessing the gospel in cultures, generations, and even historical events. Although the gospel remains the same, the context in which it is shared never stays the same, as it demands theological clarity and missiological wisdom.<sup>1</sup> The mission for Generation Z (people born between the mid-1990s and 2010s) is one of the most pressing challenges the church faces today.

Gen Z has been born into a fast-changing world that is digital and global, with cultures becoming plural, morality becoming fluid, and distrust of institutions, including the church, growing.<sup>2</sup> This generation is characterized by continuous exploration of the world amid unceasing interconnection, exposure to competing truths, and a growing awareness of social injustice, leading to profound questions about identity, meaning, and belonging. Though Generation Z shows curiosity about spiritual matters, they tend to revolt against institutional religion when it is seen as irrelevant, hypocritical, or out of touch with their daily lives.<sup>3</sup> This friction begs a crucial theological and missiological question: how can the church be true to her calling as a divine being and yet do so with a generation that is both open and suspicious of Christian faith?

The rationale presented in this paper is that the mission of the Church to Generation Z should be grounded in biblical theology, shaped by the *missio Dei*, and implemented through intentional missiological engagement.<sup>4</sup> Instead of culturalizing the gospel to fit cultural demands, the church is invited to share its message about Christ without altering it, but to contextualize it in ways that resonate with the lived experiences of Generation Z.<sup>5</sup> Drawing on the fusion of theological principles and missiological acumen, this paper aims to outline a faithful and constructive model of the church's mission for the new generation.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 372–389.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Root and Kara Powell, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 3–20.

<sup>3</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 1–15.

<sup>4</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 62–70.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Goheen, *A Light to the Nations: The Missional Church and the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 23–41.

<sup>6</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 17–34.



## Understanding Generation Z: A Missiological Beginning Point

Proper Christian mission takes serious consideration of context because the gospel is never taught outside of specific cultural, societal, and generational contexts. Gen Z is a unique missiological setting characterized by digital nativity, rapid cultural transformations, moral pluralism, and declining trust in established institutions, including the church.<sup>7</sup> In contrast to past generations, Gen Z has been brought up in a hyperconnected world, where identity, truth, and belonging are negotiated at all times in both online and physical environments. It is this atmosphere that has led to a high level of spiritual inquiry and a profound distrust of institutional religion, particularly when faith is understood as irrelevant to lived experience. Missiologically, it requires a faithful witness, demands careful listening, cultural discernment, and contextual engagement without theological compromise, which makes it necessary to understand Generation Z. Treating Generation Z as a credible mission field and no longer as a demographic category will help the church reach its target population more effectively, sharing the gospel in a language that is both comprehensible and true to its biblical roots.<sup>8</sup>

### A. Understanding Generation Z within its Cultural Context

Biblical context is the beginning of missiology, as God is the author of missions. Fundamentally, missiology entails an in-depth understanding of the cultural and social contexts and the interface where the gospel can be applied and practiced. Generation Z, born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, is the first generation to be raised entirely in the digital world, affecting how they communicate, learn, create identity, and negotiate.<sup>9</sup> According to research by Jean Twenge on this generation, Gen Zs have grown up in a world with Web 2.0, smartphones, and social networking, so digital nativity is a characteristic of their cultural context.<sup>10</sup> This immersion is not only technological but also socio-cultural, and it will affect habits of attention, socialization, and belief formation.<sup>11</sup> The church cannot just impose traditional ways of interaction in the online

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<sup>7</sup> Andrew Root and Kara Powell, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age: Responding to the Church's Obsession with Youthfulness* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 3–18.

<sup>8</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 420–426.

<sup>9</sup> Jean M. Twenge, *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood* (New York: Atria Books, 2017), 1–5.

<sup>10</sup> Twenge, *iGen*, (discussion of digital nativity and Web 2.0). 12–14

<sup>11</sup> Ali Alruthaya, Thanh-Thuy Nguyen, and Sachithra Lokuge, “The Application of Digital Technology and the Learning Characteristics of Generation Z in Higher Education,” *arXiv* (2021): 2–3 (digital technology as sociocultural context).



environment until it understands how Gen Z members perceive truth, community, and self-expression through digital media.

Gen Z's exposure to alternative truth claims also makes evangelistic interactions more difficult. Young people are exposed to a plurality of worldviews and epistemic authorities that coexist and often clash in digital spaces where algorithmic information curation and community-building occur.<sup>12</sup> Studies on the information sensitivity of Gen Z indicate that they do not tend to perceive information through conventional, authoritative sources; rather, they evaluate information socially, where reliability, social approval, and peer acceptance take precedence over factual correctness. This exposure is part of fragmented identity narratives in which gender, race, and purpose are negotiated not only in offline communities but also online, where subjective experience and personal authenticity are celebrated.<sup>13</sup> This situation calls for a reorientation in both missiological and theological perspectives: the field of mission is now as digital and epistemic as it is geographical. Gen Z's proclamation of truth claims necessitates a preliminary understanding of the forms and forums that articulate and compete against them.

In addition to their digital nativity and challenges to traditional truths, Gen Z shows a greater interest in mental health, justice, and authenticity, which aligns with their religious aspirations and discontent. Twenge reports an increasing rate of anxiety, depression, and social comparison among digitally native youth, and these trends can be explained by the fact that constant connectivity and social media pressures are substantial contributors.<sup>14</sup> In other studies, the empathetic involvement of Gen Z in global activism and the need to be authentic define their involvement in civic and religious groups.<sup>15</sup> These values and vulnerabilities are missiologically central rather than peripheral, as Gen Z is finding meaning, belonging, and transcendence through them. Thus, missiology starts with context by understanding the cultural grammars of digital interaction, the tensions around truth, and the commitments to values that constitute Generation Z, so that the gospel can be delivered in a way that connects with their lived experiences.

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<sup>12</sup> Amelia Hassoun et al., "Practicing Information Sensibility: How Gen Z Engages with Online Information," *arXiv* (2023): 4–6 (Gen Z information practices and social context).

<sup>13</sup> Ralph Cunnington, "Gen-Z and the Crisis of Identity," *Alliance for Mission & Renewal* (September 10, 2024): para. 3–4 (fragmented identity and competing narratives).

<sup>14</sup> Twenge, *iGen*, 87–89 (mental health concerns and social media).

<sup>15</sup> Dharma et al., "Digital Religion and Generation Z: An Empirical Study in the Context of China," *Frontiers in Psychology* (2025): 5–7 (Gen Z concern for justice, empathy, and global engagement).



## B. Generation Z Spiritual Disposition

Generation Z, or people born approximately 1997-2012, have a spiritual orientation that scholars describe as not only different than previous generations but also strongly influenced by the cultural circumstances of late modernity. The spiritual state of this generation has been characterized by deinstitutionalized religiosity, in which formal religious affiliation is diminishing while individual spirituality grows or even deepens.<sup>16</sup> Sociologist Ryan Burge reports that Gen Z has lower attachment to organized religion than Millennials and Boomers, indicative of the broader trend of secularization in Western societies.<sup>17</sup> However, this statistical drop is not going to fit a wholesale rejection of the transcendent; rather, Gen Z tends to be interested in spirituality in a personal, eclectic, and experiential way, quite often not dogmatic.<sup>18</sup>

The online world in which Generation Z has grown up is a central factor in shaping their spiritual sensibilities. Gen Zers often discover and explore various religious concepts online and develop composite spiritual identities that draw on resources from multiple traditions. According to sociologists Heidi A. Campbell and Stephen Garner, digital media serve as both a space for spiritual exploration and a medium through which religious beliefs can be negotiated and remixed, resulting in a form of spirituality that is adaptive, syncretistic, and networked, rather than institutional.<sup>19</sup> This networked spirituality tends to be biased toward authenticity, personal change, and social justice issues—values that are overrepresented in Gen Z circles.<sup>20</sup>

Besides, the spiritual mindset of Generation Z is connected to its moral and social commitments. In contrast to the religiosity of previous generations, which was often explicitly focused on following dogma, Generation Z tends to find spiritual meaning in practices that promote community, well-being, and ethical interactions regarding global issues such as inequality, climate change, and racial justice.<sup>21</sup> Marc Jackson and other researchers studying young people

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<sup>16</sup> Aprilfaye T. Manalang, “Generation Z, Minority Millennials and Disaffiliation from Religious Communities,” *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* 17 (2021): 18.

<sup>17</sup> Ryan Burge, *The Nones: Where They Came From, Who They Are, and Where They Are Going* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 45–47.

<sup>18</sup> Jean Twenge, *iGen: Why Today’s Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood* (New York: Atria Books, 2017), 182–84.

<sup>19</sup> Heidi A. Campbell and Stephen Garner, “Networked Religion and the Study of Youth Spirituality,” *Journal of Youth and Theology* 16, no. 2 (2020): 110–15.

<sup>20</sup> Byron R. Johnson and Daniel J. Matthews, “Spiritually Engaged Youth: Values, Meaning, and Social Connectedness,” *Youth & Society* 52, no. 4 (2020): 621–40.

<sup>21</sup> Christian Smith and Kari Christoffersen, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 98–102.



point out that this focus on morals sometimes leads to activist spirituality, in which a person's religious identity is linked to taking action in the world and supporting social causes, rather than to personal beliefs or rituals.<sup>22</sup> This attitude challenges standard ecclesial patterns and urges faith communities to consider how to engage with youth seeking spiritual depth and social significance.

### C. Missiological Implication

The emergence of Generation Z presents missiological implications that challenge the established concept of mission in the church, prompting mission practitioners to reconsider long-standing views on the communication, embodiment, and application of the gospel in a rapidly changing culture. There is general agreement among scholars and mission leaders that Gen Z is a post-Christian, digital, and justice-focused generation that needs contextualized, yet incarnational, mission strategies rather than traditional, programmatic ones. Gen Z is experiencing religious disaffiliation at levels never witnessed before, and, particularly in the West, as noticed by James Emery White, is a sign that mission can no longer merely recycle older patterns of outreach but must critically address the cultural signs of the times with biblical and cultural acuity.<sup>23</sup> This turn indicates a more missiological point: mission is not about the conveyance of a belief system; it is about engaging in the lived experience of this generation through holistic and relational witness.<sup>24</sup> One implication of missiology is the growing mission praxis that must be a comprehensive explanation of evangelism, justice, and community transformation. Their ethical values include social equity, environmental protection, and human dignity, which shape how Generation Z interprets the Christian message and their involvement in the mission. Research on how Gen Z gets involved in missions shows that younger believers often reject the idea that evangelism and social action are separate, and instead seek a mix of both that follows the biblical call to share the message and take action (Matt 28:18-20).<sup>25</sup> Since Gen Z needs to be prepared to participate in missions, according to Collins, the group requires them to be taught how to explain the theologically rooted, socially responsible gospel to them so that outreach can address the spiritual

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<sup>22</sup> Marc D. Jackson, *Youth and Religious Practice in a Secular Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 71–89.

<sup>23</sup> James Emery White, *Engaging the Post-Christian Generation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022), 26–28; see also *Engaging-Gen-Z-in-the-Gospel-and-Mission*, EMQ editorial (Pew Research and Barna citations).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 28–30; and see David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991).

<sup>25</sup> Jennifer Collins, “Building a Biblical Foundation for Evangelism among Justice-Oriented Gen Z,” *Journal of the Evangelical Missiological Society* 1, no. 1 (2021): 3–4.



and material aspects of human need.<sup>26</sup> Missiology, therefore, needs to consider how Gen Z navigates mission situations in which the concept of holistic witness can never be separated from authentic proclamation.

Lastly, the digitally fluent and globally connected nature of Generation Z has important missiological implications for how missions are practiced and mobilized in the twenty-first century. The digital nativity of Gen Z, shaped by the strong impact of social media, networking services, and online communities, changes conventional notions of missionary presence and outreach.<sup>27</sup> The trend of mission strategists such as McMahan is that successful mobilization is characterized by new forms of digital discipleship, online community building, and cross-cultural cooperation that are not bound by physical location.<sup>28</sup> Such an approach involves rethinking the mission in terms of being networked, flexible, and collaborative so that Gen Z believers can be involved in the mission of God both in local grassroots and in digital networks around the globe.

### **Theological Foundation of the Church’s Mission**

The theological principles of the church mission discuss the biblical command for the church to be involved in God’s redemptive work in the world. This mission is grounded in the nature of God as presented in Scripture and in the church’s focus on proclaiming the gospel, serving people, and showing the love of Christ in every aspect of life. Knowledge of these foundations helps believers identify the mission and style of work in various cultural settings, so that evangelism and social action are more grounded in theology than in pragmatic measures.<sup>29</sup> Most fundamentally, the church’s mission is a manifestation of the Trinitarian God and of biblical compulsion to go and make disciples of people of all nations. This theme has always been emphasized in historical and present missiological studies.<sup>30</sup>

#### **A. The Missio Dei**

Mission shows that God is active in the world. The Missio Dei, the mission of God, holds that the church does not invent the mission; rather, it is involved in the redemptive work initiated by the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 12–14.

<sup>27</sup> Abraham Lincoln Kwame Owusu, *Fostering Faith in Gen Z: Bridging In-Person Engagement with Digital Tools* (Accra: University of Ghana, 2025), 5–6.

<sup>28</sup> Billy McMahan, “Innovations in Engaging the Next Generation Towards Discipleship and Mission,” *Great Commission Research Journal* 16, no. 2 (2024): 19–20.

<sup>29</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 20th anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 28.

<sup>30</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 45.



Triune God. (John 6:38, 16:7, 20:21) The fact that the Father sends the Son and the Son sends the Spirit shows that mission originates in the very nature of God and is supported by the divine initiative, rather than the human.<sup>31</sup> This realization dispels any belief that the church is the origin of mission and instead points to the fact that her task is to respond to God's invitation to participate in his saving work.<sup>32</sup>

The biblical basis for the church's involvement in the mission of God is found in several key texts. Gen 12:1-3 explains God's purpose to bless all nations through Abraham, stating that it has always been both worldly and redemptive. The Great Commission in Matthew 28:18–20 is another instruction that stresses the church's duty to disciple all people of every nation, baptize them, and teach them in obedience to Christ's authority. All these texts confirm that the mission is Trinitarian, biblical, and participatory, constituting God's overall plan of redemption.<sup>33</sup>

The church must reconcile evangelism and social action with discipleship within a unified theological framework to be part of the *Missio Dei*. According to scholars, the concept of mission as the participation of the church in the work of God guards against the individualistic as well as programmatic views that may distort the gospel.<sup>34</sup> The mission of the church is a demonstration of the love of God and a practical engagement with the world, making the values of the kingdom of God manifest in service, advocacy, and reconciliation.<sup>35</sup> The active engagement of the church in the mission of God has historically. It continues to make it holistic, taking into account the spiritual, social, and cultural aspects of human life.<sup>36</sup>

## **B. Christological Center of Mission**

Any legitimate mission to Generation Z should remain decisively Christ-centered, since the content, method, and authority of the church's mission are based on the person and work of Jesus Christ. Christian mission is not only the spread of moral ideals or the experience of religion but the heraldry of Christ, incarnate God, into human history and culture. The incarnation confirms

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<sup>31</sup> Karl Hartenstein, *Mission Theology in the Modern Era* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 14.

<sup>32</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 20th anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 390.

<sup>33</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 56–58.

<sup>34</sup> Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 23.

<sup>35</sup> John Stott, *The Contemporary Christian: Applying God's Word to Today's World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 112.

<sup>36</sup> Gerald H. Anderson, *The Theology of the Christian Mission* (London: SCM Press, 2012), 77.



that redemptive interaction between God and his world is personal, contextual, and relational, which Generation Z yearns for in the name of authenticity and embodied truth.<sup>37</sup> Christ took on human form to show that mission is about presence, identification, and faithful witness in particular cultural realities, not abstraction and detachment.<sup>38</sup>

At the very core of the Christ-centered mission is the crucified Christ, and this message challenges cultural pride and intellectual self-sufficiency. In 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, the apostle Paul places the crucifixion of Christ at the centre of the gospel. The cross is an insult to the reality of God in a civilization that has been awed by the sophistication and is dying of truth.<sup>39</sup> The strategy chosen by Paul emphasizes that a persuasive method cannot make the mission effective, but the faithful proclamation of the gospel, empowered by the Spirit, can.<sup>40</sup> This cruciform center addresses Generation Z's skepticism toward institutional religion and offers a gospel of suffering love and redemptive sacrifice.

The resurrected Christ confirms that the mission is not all about challenging sin and brokenness but proclaiming new creation and new life. The hope of resurrection addresses the anxieties, disruptions, and frustrations of Generation Z by telling them that death, hopelessness, and meaninglessness are not the last words.<sup>41</sup> It is faith in the power of God, not human wisdom, that results in true transformation, as Paul says (1 Cor 2:5). The mission of the church should therefore always go back to Christ, as the message preached and as the model of a faithful witness to the world.<sup>42</sup>

### C. Pneumatological Leadership

Christian mission is not maintained, however, on a basis of human plan, organizational effectiveness, or oratory, but rather by the enabling action of the Holy Spirit. The missionary vocation of the church is specifically connected with the mission of the Spirit in Acts 1:8, where Jesus states that it is only after receiving the Holy Spirit that the disciples will be his witnesses. This passage establishes a pneumatological principle: without God's empowerment, mission is

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<sup>37</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 141–143.

<sup>38</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 20th anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 512–514.

<sup>39</sup> John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 71–73.

<sup>40</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 92–95.

<sup>41</sup> N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: Harper One, 2008), 219–221.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 89–91.



impossible.<sup>43</sup> The Spirit does not just aid mission; the Spirit is mission in the sense that he initiates, directs, and maintains the witness of the church in the world.<sup>44</sup>

The mission of the Holy Spirit is multidimensional, involving conviction, revelation, and transformation. John, in his teaching, holds that it is the Spirit that convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment in order to prepare the hearts to accept the gospel (John 16:8). This is a convicting piece of work that highlights the fact that the end result of conversion is based on divine intervention and not on human influence.<sup>45</sup> The Spirit also announces the truth of Christ and clarifies Scripture, allowing faithful preaching across cultural and language barriers, as was so dramatically shown at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-11).<sup>46</sup> Mission is thus not an extension of man's religious influence but a God-led movement of self-disclosure in history.

Moreover, pneumatological empowerment transforms not only the one who has been sent but also the receiver. The Spirit defines the character of the church, which means holiness, courage, receptiveness, and discernment are needed to bear faithful witness in hostile or pluralistic situations.<sup>47</sup> Missiological literature has noted that when the Spirit is peripheral, mission becomes technical and practical; when the Spirit is central, mission is Christ-centered, courageous, contextually sensitive, and spiritually true.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, the role of the church in the work of God should continue to be reliant on the current operations of the Holy Spirit, who empowers witness, spiritually transforms lives, and promotes the redemptive purposes of God in the world.

### **The Church as a Community on a Mission**

The church is a community that is mission-by and mission-for. The church is grounded in the life of the Triune God, who is God; therefore, the church is the redemptive purpose of God through worship, witness to God, and service to the world. This missional identity implies that all spheres of the church's life, such as its structures, practices, and relationships within the community, are geared toward involvement in the work of reconciliation that God continues to do. Instead of

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<sup>43</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 20th anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 112–113.

<sup>44</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 64–66.

<sup>45</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 33–34.

<sup>46</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 820–823.

<sup>47</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 56–58.

<sup>48</sup> Amos Yong, *The Spirit of Mission: Pentecostal Missiology in Trinitarian Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014), 41–43.



existing as a mission among other activities, the church is a sent people and witness, and, through its faithful witness to the gospel, exists within a set of cultural and social contexts.<sup>49</sup> This kind of knowledge opposes inward-thinking ecclesiology and brings the church to the role of a visible sign, an instrument, and a foretaste of the kingdom of God in the world.<sup>50</sup>

### A. Ecclesiology and Witness

In the New Testament, the church is not only a congregation but also a group of people sent by God into the world to bear witness to Him. According to 1 Peter 2:9, the church is referred to as a chosen race and a royal priesthood tasked with proclaiming the mighty works of God, and thus, Christian identity is based on the calling and witness. This biblical vision is a challenge to churches that are more focused on comfort, consumption, or internal upkeep than outer involvement. According to David J. Bosch, the nature of the church is missionary, and by treating mission as a program rather than an identity, the church is likely to lose its theological core.<sup>51</sup> On the same, Lesslie Newbigin asserts that the church is the sign and instrument of the kingdom of God, publicly bearing witness to the gospel in both word and life.<sup>52</sup>

Perceiving the church as a sent people explicitly presents various prevailing trends in the modern church. Performance-oriented ministry is a further distortion of ecclesiology, in that faithfulness is not gauged by numerical increase, charisma, or aesthetic superiority, but rather by spiritual growth and obedience.<sup>53</sup> Although event-centered faith is not necessarily a problem, it might make the Christian life a series of religious experiences disconnected from daily witnessing. Some scholars, such as Darrell L. Guder, believe that a missional church resists such tendencies by forming believers as active participants in the mission of God rather than passive consumers of religious events.<sup>54</sup>

These ecclesiological problems have been particularly relevant to Generation Z, which places a constant premium on authenticity rather than polish and performance. According to

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<sup>49</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 20th anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 372–373.

<sup>50</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 227–229.

<sup>51</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 20th anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 368–370.

<sup>52</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 222–229.

<sup>53</sup> Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 105–107.

<sup>54</sup> Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 82–84.



sociological and theological researchers, Gen Z is highly doubtful of institutions considered inauthentic, hypocritical, or out of touch with lived reality. James K. A. Smith says that embodied practices, not spectacle, shape a person. This means that the role of witness must be clear in the daily life of a Christian.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, David Kinnaman notes that young people are being attracted to communities that have integrity, justice, and authentic faith rather than religious performance that has been professionalized.<sup>56</sup> As a result, the church in a Gen Z setting is being called to bear witness that is less about polished programming and more about believable, lived discipleship, grounded in a strong, missional ecclesiology.

### **B. Intergenerational Mission**

The role of the church for young people, and in particular for Generation Z, is the nature and continuity of the covenantal people of God. In this context, mission is continuously intergenerational: faith is not re-created by each generation but is loyally handed down to the next. The book of Deuteronomy shows the way, telling Israel to teach its people about God’s words with diligence, to discuss them when you sit in your house, when you walk, when you lie down, and when you rise (Deut 6:6-7). Through this reading, we discover that faith transmission is an all-inclusive, day-to-day practice that connects with all aspects of life and resists the church’s tendency to disciple between episodic youth experiences and discipling that runs across the cycles of family, congregation, and community.<sup>57</sup>

Psalms 145 can strengthen this intergenerational relationship and states: One generation shall praise thy works to another and shall speak thy marvelous deeds (Ps. 145:4). The vision that the psalmist spreads celebrates a tradition of worship and witness that cuts across centuries and makes it clear that the announcement of divine faithfulness is a business that everybody shares throughout their lifespan. Modern theologians have also claimed that mission is mutual formation between the young and the old. Stanley Hauerwas claims that the church is defined by a common narrative and practice over time, not by age-based activities, since the gospel constitutes a recognizable story that unites generations.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, Miroslav Volf asserts that true discipleship

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<sup>55</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 25–28.

<sup>56</sup> David Kinnaman, *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2019), 41–44.

<sup>57</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, *Deuteronomy* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 168–170.

<sup>58</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 89–91.



also implies involvement in the story of God’s people, which inevitably presupposes intergenerational interaction instead of the individual efforts of youth cultures.<sup>59</sup>

In practice, an intergenerational perspective of mission challenges the church to combine spiritual growth, worship, and community life in ways that allow people across age brackets to learn from and witness to one another. Theologians such as Darrell Guder have argued that the church should not take the position that younger generations are a problem to be solved, but rather to recognize that all generations have a role in ensuring that the gospel is represented and passed on to younger generations.<sup>60</sup> Both Kent Hunter and Andrew Root affirm that discipleship develops when congregations foster relationships between older and younger believers; the future of the church lies in deliberately embedding faith across age groups, not in haphazard programs that further separate the generations.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, the intergenerational mission confirms that the church’s mission is to cultivate disciples across generations, ensuring the faithful transmission of the word of God and His works between older and younger generations, and integrating these teachings into broader society.<sup>62</sup>

### **C. Discipleship as Mission**

Discipleship is the core of the church’s mission, especially in reaching Generation Z, whose spiritual desires are not always satisfied by entertainment-style Christianity. Discipleship is a way of responding to this need by creating believers whose most important identity takes the form of Christ and, therefore, how they conceptualize themselves, their roles, and their locations in the world. Therefore, discipleship should not be a follow-up to conversion but rather the means by which the gospel establishes an indelible foundation in people’s lives.<sup>63</sup>

The key point in discipleship as mission is the moral clarity developed from love. Given the common moral ambiguity and relativism in our cultures, discipleship provides a non-legalistic, non-permissive ethical framework for formation. Learning a way of life, the following of Jesus is to be based on the love of God and other people, where truth and compassion are united. This

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<sup>59</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 53–55.

<sup>60</sup> Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 135–136.

<sup>61</sup> Kent E. Hunter, *Discipleship and Family Life: Why Christians Are Not Effectively Passing Faith to the Next Generation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 47–49.

<sup>62</sup> Andrew Root, *The Relational Pastor: Sharing in Christ by Sharing Life with People* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 102–104.

<sup>63</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus’s Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2006), 43–45.



mode of moral development prepares believers to engage in struggle with intricate social realities through wisdom, humility, and courage and to give plausible witness to the transforming power of the gospel.<sup>64</sup> This clarity is particularly essential for younger generations, who need moral coherence, not hypocrisy.

The Modern Gen Z is characterized by constant digital stimulation, discontinuous attention, and emotional burnout. In this context, prayer, Scripture meditation, communal worship, and silence are all formative disciplines that redirect believers towards God. These practices do not remove Christians from the world but enhance their ability to be faithful and long-term witnesses. Deep discipleship within the church will create resilient disciples whose lives bear the gospel, and discipleship itself is a strong missional witness.<sup>65</sup>

### **Missiological Outreach to Generation Z**

To engage Generation Z in mission, the church needs to move away from models based on attraction and entertainment toward ones based on relationships, incarnations, and formation. Digital saturation, fragmented culture, and profound inquiries into identity and meaning shape this generation, making authenticity and lived witness more appealing than refined programs. Presence, listening, and community are thus key to effective mission among Gen Z, which entices young people into practices that not only explain the gospel but also make it a way of life. The church can provide a credible witness to Christ by putting mission into ordinary life and confronting both the spiritual and social realities, appealing to Gen Z's desire to know the truth, belong, and have a sense of purpose.<sup>66</sup>

#### **A. Contextualization and Faithfulness**

The interaction of Paul with the Athenians in Acts 17 provides a classical biblical way of contextualization that is culturally aware and theologically true. Instead of ridiculing his audience's worldview, Paul starts by mindfully acknowledging their religious context, demonstrating knowledge of Athenian culture, philosophy, and spirituality. Paul flattered the culture in which he was writing by mentioning the local religion and even quoting Greek poets, creating a point of familiarity that would help his message reach the intended audience. This

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<sup>64</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R. H. Fuller (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 57–59.

<sup>65</sup> James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 17–19.

<sup>66</sup> Andrew Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age: Responding to the Church's Obsession with Youthfulness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 98–100.



method explains that missionary faith is serious and does not involve ignorance or avoiding culture.<sup>67</sup> Listening and learning are integral components of the contextualization process, so that the church speaks the gospel intelligibly within the various cultural constructs without losing its uniqueness.<sup>68</sup>

Paul's speech in Acts 17 helps realize that understanding culture does not entail acknowledging its implicit religious presuppositions. Paul declares the truth of the one sovereign Creator God and openly challenges Athenian idolatry and philosophical speculation. His message shifts their perspective on God, man, and history through the revelation of God in Christ. This proportionality between cultural involvement and theological transparency indicates that contextualization should never ignore the biblical witness. There is always a caution: once cultural relevance becomes the major objective, the gospel is likely to be refashioned to reflect human preferences rather than what God has orchestrated.<sup>69</sup> True contextualization, however, does not ignore the authority and content of the gospel but renders them in ways that have culturally significant meaning.<sup>70</sup>

Lastly, Paul's speech ends with a strong appeal to repentance, with the mission grounded not only in dialogue but also in choice. Acts 17:30-31 points out the universal nature of the call to repentance in the face of God's coming judgment, as the gospel challenges all cultures to change. This aspect of purpose emphasizes the church's role in conveying the gospel without altering it—preserving its redemptive and confrontational nature. True contextualization does not water down the gospel but welcomes individuals to react to the saving work of God in their contexts by introducing alien cultural forms.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, the missional work of the church must be constantly discerned, balancing sensitivity to culture with faithfulness to doctrine in obedience to the mission of God.

## **B. Apologetics for Gen Z**

Apologetics for Generation Z needs to start with basic questions of truth. Gen Z is prone to conceptualizing truth as relative and self-constructed rather than objective and bestowed upon a person, a result of a cultural climate influenced by relativism, digital skepticism, and fragmented

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<sup>67</sup> *The Mission of God*, Christopher J. H. Wright (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 71–73.

<sup>68</sup> *The Open Secret*, Lesslie Newbigin (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 152–154.

<sup>69</sup> *Transforming Mission*, David J. Bosch, 20th anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 455–457.

<sup>70</sup> *Constants in Context*, Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 37–39.

<sup>71</sup> *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, Lesslie Newbigin (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 141–143.



narratives. Christian apologetics should therefore exercise patience in giving a coherent statement of truth based on the fact of God’s self-revelation, rather than merely by the proclamation of doctrines. As scholars observe, Gen Z does not oppose truth itself, but it is suspicious of those in authority who make assertions with some sense of certainty yet lack authenticity.<sup>72</sup> A good apologetic should address such questions as what truth is, be intellectually plausible and existentially significant, and provide a Christian view of the world that is capable of making sense of reality, morality, and human desire.<sup>73</sup>

Questions such as “Why trust the Bible?” can be based on historical criticism, perceived contradictions, and the abuse of biblical texts used to support oppression or exclusion. In this regard, apologetics should be both historically reliable and theologically humble; that is, it should demonstrate how Scripture has been accurately preserved and interpreted in the Christian tradition.<sup>74</sup> Concurrently, modern apologetics should be truthful with doubt, and in terms of the co-existence of faith and doubt, it cannot be denied that mature faith coexists with doubt rather than the opposite. This pose is very appealing to Gen Z, who would appreciate candor and integrity over dogmatism and formal reason.<sup>75</sup>

Lastly, a common question among Gen Z is whether Christianity is ultimately damaging or emancipatory, particularly in matters of identity, freedom, justice, and psychological well-being. Apologetics should thus go beyond defensive stances and prove that the gospel, in the form of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The resurrection is the most significant apologetic statement of the Christian faith, confirming that Christ is true and offering liberation into new life.<sup>76</sup> Rapid apologetics, which is relational and not combative, which is Christ-centered and not ideology-driven, which is invitational and not resistant, and which is not a constraint to human flourishing but its ultimate fulfillment, makes all the difference.

### C. Digital Mission

Online spaces have become the new mission fields where the church encounters individuals, cultures, and stories driven by constant connectedness. Given the growing mediation of identity,

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<sup>72</sup> James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 41–43.

<sup>73</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Apologetics: A Case for Christ* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 23–25.

<sup>74</sup> N. T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God* (New York: HarperOne, 2013), 97–99.

<sup>75</sup> Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Dutton, 2008), xvii–xix.

<sup>76</sup> Os Guinness, *Fool’s Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 112–114.



community, and meaning through online environments, the mission should be rethought without losing its theological underpinnings. According to scholars, the digital mission is not a break with historic Christian witness but a continuation of the incarnated church's presence in networked places where people live and interact daily.<sup>77</sup> This view supports the idea that mission in the digital realm is part of the redemptive work of God as he manifests himself among people where they exist, mirroring the biblical model of God's self-disclosure in human societies and languages.

Digitally, the incarnational logic of the Christian mission is digital presence, in which the closeness of God in Christ provides a model of meaningful engagement rather than distant proclamation.<sup>78</sup> Simultaneously, integrity should characterize virtual interaction, as anonymity and algorithmic communication may encourage performative or manipulative behavior. Digital missions must therefore be ethically grounded in veracity, responsibility, and humility so that the online witness aligns with the character of Christ and the gospel values.<sup>79</sup>

The role of discipleship in the digital era should go beyond platforms and metrics, and we should not be tempted to equate influence with transformation. As much as digital tools might support teaching, mentoring, and community-building, it is true to say that authentic discipleship would always pursue spiritual formation that incorporates online activities with real-life as a Christian.<sup>80</sup> Scholars point out that digital mission ought to be more of a bridge than an alternative, cultivating practices that bring believers to more intimate engagement in Christian community, sacramental life, and ethical witness in the world.<sup>81</sup> In this way, digital mission will remain authentic: it will create disciples who embody Christ in their entirety while being mindful of digital cultures.

## Challenges and Tensions

Cultural relevance and fidelity to doctrine are among the long-standing dilemmas in the church's mission. On the one hand, the church needs to preach the gospel in a way that is understandable and relevant to the particular cultural settings; on the other hand, it needs to be true to the

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<sup>77</sup> Heidi A. Campbell, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds* (London: Routledge, 2013), 3–5.

<sup>78</sup> Stephen B. Garner, *First Thoughts on Theological Method in a Digital Age* (London: SCM Press, 2016), 71–73.

<sup>79</sup> Tim Hutchings, *Creating Church Online: Ritual, Community and New Media* (London: Routledge, 2017), 102–104.

<sup>80</sup> Michael Moynagh, *Church for Every Context: An Introduction to Theology and Practice* (London: SCM Press, 2012), 189–191.

<sup>81</sup> Pete Phillips and Braden Hancock, *The Bible in the Digital Age: Authorship, Authority and Authenticity* (London: SCM Press, 2019), 146–148.



underlying facts of the Christian faith. Accommodation would be excessive and might lead to watering down or adapting doctrine to the taste of the culture, whereas traditionalism would make the gospel inaccessible. One of the main claims made by missiological scholars has been that genuine mission must be critically contextualized—taking culture seriously while leaving Scripture as the ultimate authority.<sup>82</sup> Therefore, we should not resolve the tension, but rather nurture it through theological wisdom.<sup>83</sup>

Another conflict arises between biblical transformation and emotional affirmation. Modern culture tends to value confirmation of individual identity, emotions, and experiences, which has influenced the demands placed on the church.<sup>84</sup> Although pastoral sensitivity and compassion are an absolute necessity, the gospel does not simply seek to affirm people and communities but to repent them, renew them, and shape them into conformity to Christ. In this event, when emotional validation becomes the church's dominant objective, the demand for discipleship transformations is drowned out. In the absence of empathy, coupled with a focus on transformation, the church can be perceived as mean or aloof toward the human experience. These realities are united by a faithful mission that legitimizes human dignity and proclaims the costly grace that brings about real spiritual transformation.<sup>85</sup>

Micah 6:8 The Bible challenges the believers to seek justice, help the downtrodden, and engage social realities, but it also mandates preaching salvation in Jesus Christ. Scholars underline that Scripture presents a whole picture in which word and deed should go hand in hand with the redemptive mission of God.<sup>86</sup> The church should then be able to avoid falling into either extreme; there should be a faithful witness who shall give testimony to Christ and also represent how the gospel ethics implicate themselves in the world.

## Conclusion

Generation Z presents a challenge and a great missional opportunity for the church. A saturation of digital media, cultural pluralism, emotional expressiveness, and profound cynicism towards institutions, including the church characterizes this generation. As this paper argues, making

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<sup>82</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 20th anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 420–422.

<sup>83</sup> Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 88–90.

<sup>84</sup> John Stott, *The Radical Disciple* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 21–23.

<sup>85</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 43–45.

<sup>86</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 316–318.



superficial attempts or being a trendsetter is not enough to reach Generation Z in a deep, loyal way. The church should instead reclaim a strong theological sense of mission grounded in the *Missio Dei* and understand that mission is born of the Triune God; as such, the church is merely a participant in God’s redemptive effort, not its creator. The analysis has also shown that a successful mission to Generation Z should rely on the Holy Spirit and recognize the church’s role in mission. The empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit is essential for authentic witness, transformation, judgment, and safeguarding the church against a declining focus on technique or emotional appeal. Mission as the identity of the church invites all believers and the ecclesial practices involved in the mission of God. In this context, evangelism, discipleship, and social involvement are not conflicting interests but combined manifestations of the act of faith. Lastly, this paper has identified the key tensions the church must navigate without falling into extremes: cultural relevance and doctrinal fidelity; emotional affirmation and biblical transformation; and justice activism and gospel proclamation. The lack of authenticity and imbalance in these areas are especially sensitive to Generation Z. Once the church is true to these tensions, she is well placed to deliver hope, truth, and life to the generation seeking meaning, belonging, and purpose.

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