

Why Fewer Students are Interested in Missions as a Career?

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### **Abstract**

In recent years, there has been a substantial decrease in the number of missionaries operating overseas and joining missions agencies. This decline has been attributed to changing cultural contexts in the United States and the advent of postmodernism and pluralism. Youth growing up in these contexts have differing views about missions and Christianity in general. The purpose of this research is to understand how younger generations view and understand missions, first, by a literature review, and second, by a survey sent out to undergraduate students at Houghton College. The literature review focuses on four major themes: the ambiguity in defining missions, the impact of historical missions, the effects of postmodernism, and the characteristics of members of Gen Z and Millennials. The survey received 124 responses and revealed that many students exhibit a greater affinity for holistic missions and a broader definition of missions than its traditional structure.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Missions has been an important task for the church since the work of the early churches described in the New Testament. However, over time, its definition, how it is put into practice, and who participates in it have shifted and changed. Missions today is not the same as missions in the time of the apostles or William Carey. Though missions has been a primarily Western and North American enterprise for hundreds of years, today, it is often described as from everywhere to everywhere, representing the global nature of the church. Engen (2016) notes that the center for global Christianity has been moving southward since the sixteenth century, resulting in “not only growth in the geographical south and the east, but also decline in the north and the west” (p. 85). With the constantly evolving cultural conditions of the West, like secularization and pluralism, has come a shift in how people think about the church. As Wan & Tira (2009) describe,

The Church in the West is going through traumatic change. It could be argued that the West is in the process of growing out of Christianity...Church movements that were once growing and flourishing are adding fewer people than they once did. (p. 124)

These changes in thinking have affected not only general attendance in churches, but also the numbers of those involved in missions.

A variety of statistics are available describing the number of missionaries operating in the world, but almost all have found that the number of missionaries operating overseas with missions agencies and other similar programs have decreased dramatically. According to the article, “Missions Statistics: Have We Failed the Great Commission,” of 5.5 million full-time Christian workers from the United States, only 7.6% were serving in another country in 2001, equaling 418,000 people serving overseas. The article further reports that, in 2017, only “an

estimated 430,000 full-time missionaries” were serving in another country. Further evidence of the lack of missionaries overseas is given by Global Frontier Missions, which states that people who live in countries like Iran, Bhutan, Somalia, Turkey, Afghanistan, and Algeria, where “people have no access to a Christian, a missionary, a church, or a Bible,” and comprise approximately 28% of the world’s population, only receive “3% of the missionaries and 1% of the missions finances” (“State of the World: Task Remaining,” para. 5). There is a severe lack in missionaries willing or able to go to the most unreached people groups. And for those who do go overseas, the attrition rates are high. Joannes (2018) provides some of these numbers, saying,

it is estimated that one career missionary in twenty (5.1 percent of the mission force) leaves the mission field to return home every year...If we estimate the current long-term, international, cross-cultural missionary force at 150,000 strong (a very conservative number), an annual loss of 5.1 percent would be 7,650 missionaries leaving the field each year. Over a four-year term, this figure jumps to 30,600. (p. 131)

These numbers don’t even take into account the number of missionaries that retire every year. The influx of missionaries is simply not meeting the necessary replacement rates to make up for retiring missionaries or missionary attrition. However, as Escobar (2003) describes, the problem is not a lack of resources, instead it is that “many of the older, more traditional missionary organizations do not find as in the past a regular flow of volunteers willing to be trained and sent as missionaries” (p. 18). However, the question of why there are fewer volunteers is not easily solved.

When trying to find the answer for the decreasing number of people interested in missions overseas it is best to look to the next generation of missionaries. Some attribute the lack of willing participants to the fact that churches are “unable to understand postmodern youth,”

and thus, “unable to keep the new generations in their fold” (Escobar, 2003, p. 71). This sentiment is echoed by many older members of the church. One such member in an interview with authors Engel & Dyrness (2000) said

'The only people interested at all in missions are those my age or older. Most of the others have closed their eyes to a world beyond their own home and neighborhood, and nothing we do seems to make any difference'...The only thing that provides him any encouragement is the fact that growing numbers in their twenties express real concerns about victims of unrighteousness around the world. Bud has had to face the discouraging fact that the 'romance of missions' that captivated previous generations is almost a thing of the past. (p. 12-3)

So, is the problem really that young people are no longer interested in the global church and missions or is it that their views of missions are no longer compatible with the current model of missions? This is the question this research seeks to investigate.

Just as the church theology has changed as generations came and went, so too do views of missions. Values and culture shift over time as people adapt to the dynamic world around them. As one author said,

Motivations for missions and ministry are shaped not only by Spirit-guided responses to God's revelation but also by cultural and historical perspectives...God's glory is simply marginalized by busy schedules, challenged by secular perspectives, and disfigured by cultural misunderstandings of God and his mission. (Pocock et al, 2005, p. 163)

One such secular perspective that has impacted the younger generation's views of missions is postmodernism. Additionally, the social justice focused nature of society today has impacted how young people view the necessity of missions, its values, and its practices. The literature

review portion of this research has aimed to understand the complexities of how the North American society and culture has shaped the younger generations and how this has then impacted their desire and willingness to participate in missions.

However, while theorizing is valuable for determining possible explanations, the best way to determine the younger generation's perspective is to ask them directly. The method for conducting the research was through a survey sent out to Houghton college undergraduate students, which received 124 responses. Initially, the survey was sent out to only Intercultural Studies majors, but was then expanded to an all-campus email. Other colleges were contacted to be included in the research, but were unable to participate for various logistical reasons. The survey contained three parts: demographic questions, an agree-disagree section, and an open-ended quote response section. Results of the survey were then statistically analyzed using reliability tests, such as Cronbach's alpha, and independent samples t-tests. The responses to the survey were varied; however, there were indications that many students' beliefs about missions push against the traditional picture of missions, particularly in terms of specific definitions and how missions should be conducted in a culturally diverse world.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### *Everything as Missions*

#### ***Why is defining missions important?***

For such a widely used word, missions can be defined very differently depending on the speaker. It is a term subject to much interpretation and discussion, which in turn affects how it is understood and acted upon. In addition, Hesselgrave notes that the lack of clarity in defining missions has led to the “dissolution of mission” (Spitters & Ellison, 2017, p. 30). This lack of clarity has also produced a variety of questions surrounding the idea of missions, such as

Is mission primarily a matter of preaching the gospel to those who have never heard? Or does mission include feeding the hungry? Perhaps mission should focus more on social justice and fighting “structural sin”? Or is mission simply a matter of quietly living out a life of integrity and love wherever one is—being a “silent witness”?...Is there still even a need or justification for sending missionaries? Who is a “missionary”? What right do Christians have to suggest that Christianity is in any way superior to other religions?

What about those who have never heard the gospel? Do we need better strategies or more spiritual power? (Ott & Strauss, 2010, Location 118)

People often answer each of these questions differently, especially between generations. The trends that characterized missions in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, may no longer represent missions today. As such, the call to missions may result in different actions. As stated by Ferdinando (2008), “it is problematic to call people to engage in mission when the meaning of that engagement remains elusive” (p. 47). It is vital to understand the different definitions of missions to understand how younger generations interpret their call to missions and how they will carry it out.



### *Everything as Missions*

When defining missions, one of the primary issues is which actions of the church qualify as missions. One view is that everything is missions and every Christian is a missionary. One propagator of this perspective is Alan Hirsch who stated, “Christians who earn a living as teachers, accountants, store clerks, mechanics, plumbers, doctors, whatever—you are a missionary!” (Wilton, 2013). In other words, “every dedicated Christian, regardless of his vocation, is in full-time Christian service. If every Christian is in full-time service, then it is only a step to saying, as many do today, that every Christian is a missionary” (Wilton, 2013). This is an all-inclusive definition of missions that sees every ministry of the church as missions.

This perspective arose from a desire to encourage the involvement of everyday people in the work of God and to lessen the impact of a “spiritual” hierarchy in the church. Advocates of this definition state that those who are called to international missions are seen as ““heroes of the faith” worthy of all our respect and honor--the cream of the ministry crop, so to speak. In the minds of many, they are in another ministry world altogether” (Stetzer, 2010, “Involving all...Part 1”). As a result, everyday people and pastors see themselves as supporters of missions, while not being engaged in missions directly. Since they are separated from missions by this “spiritual hierarchy” they “miss great opportunities to serve God in greater ways than they might otherwise imagine” (Stetzer, 2010, “Involving all...Part 1”). This definition of missions seeks to combat this idea by making missions something everyone can, and should, be involved in wherever they are, rather than a task of a set aside for a special group of people. Stetzer (2010) explains the place for missions in the church in his article, “Involving all of God’s People in All of God’s Mission, Part 4,” where he says,

Moving toward mission means that all ministry efforts have as their primary goal the same goal God has, which is His glory being displayed among...the peoples of the world. So, whether it is the nursery, elementary classes, middle-school or intergenerational small groups...Avoid allowing mission to be a silo of ministry--just one thing among the many things we do. We should lead our mission leaders to cross-pollinate each ministry with the mission of God. "How does what we do demonstrate a partnership in God's mission in the world?" should be the defining question from the children's worship planning team to the ushers to the personnel team to the homeless ministry.

In many ways, this view has helped people understand "the importance of daily living in God's mission" (Wilton, 2013). It allows for an integrated view of the church, focusing it and making sure every ministry and person is being intentional with how they present the Gospel to those around them. However, there is some criticism of how this affects international missions.

***Everything as Missions Means Nothing is Missions***

In response to the 'everything is missions' paradigm, comes the famous phrase by Stephen Neill, "When everything is mission, nothing is mission" (Spitters & Ellison, 2017, p. 19). His view is built upon the idea that generalizing the term missions to refer to all ministry of the church results in the neglect of overseas/international missions, particularly missions to unreached people groups. Corwin (2017) points out a historical precedent for this view, saying, "The sad history of the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches over the last century bears elegant testimony to this truth. The dramatic decline of their related churches in cross-cultural missionary engagement among least-reached populations has few parallels." Spitters & Ellison (2017) expand on this stating,

In addition to contributing to confusion as to the nature of mission, the Edinburgh Error contributed to the virtual demise of the great conciliar denominations of North America. At the beginning of the 20th century those denominations supplied 80 percent of the North American missionary force. At the end, they supplied no more than six percent! (p. 30)

Propagators of this view insist that missions should be a set aside ministry of the church dedicated to reaching unreached people groups and engaging in cross-cultural communities. Corwin (2017) argues that

The things that affect us most intimately—the welfare of our family and friends and the welfare of our community and country—are always going to receive first dibs on our attention. It takes a major adjustment to our mental and spiritual orientation for us to add a focus on geographically or culturally-distant people living and dying without the gospel...And if a missions emphasis focusing on those outside our purview is not a significant part of the burden and teaching of local churches and their members, it will almost always be ignored. Without a special emphasis, the needs across the street...will tend to crowd out the needs across the world.

The argument is not that local ministry and outreach are not important, but rather that by extending the terminology of missions to that work, the work of overseas and cross-cultural ministry will be ignored and forgotten. Without making cross-cultural missions a priority, it will be neglected.

Part of this argument stems from the Greek words used in the Bible to describe missions and the Great Commission. In their book, Spitters & Ellison (2017) describe how the use of certain Latin and Greek verbs corresponds with the idea of being sent, saying,

The Latin verb *mittere* corresponds to the Greek verb *apostellein*, which occurs 136 times in the New Testament (97 times in the Gospels, used both for Jesus having been 'sent' by God and for the Twelve being 'sent' by Jesus)." So maybe our words about missions are in the Bible, and the core meaning has to do with being "sent." (p. 35-6)

This combined with the wording of the Great Commission leads them to argue that missions refers "to the work of the Church in reaching across cultural, religious, ethnic and geographic barriers to advance the work of making disciples of all nations" (Spitters & Ellison, 2017, p. 37). Rather than being all ministry of the church, missions is solely work that crosses borders of some kind. The idea of being sent means that missionaries are those who do not stay in their own communities, but rather make efforts to go outside of their "normal" to reach other people in their homes and communities.

### ***Prioritism Versus Holism***

In addition to attempting to find a place for missions among the various ministries of the church, there is the difficulty of defining how social work and social justice issues fit into the framework of missions. This is presented by the dichotomy of prioritism and holism. Spitters & Ellison (2017) describe the differences between the two, saying, "Those who view mission holistically see evangelism, disciple-making, and church planting as no more important than ministries of social justice and humanitarianism, while those who hold the prioritist position say that they are" (p. 46). In other words, prioritism argues that evangelism and church-planting should take priority over humanitarian work in missions, whereas holism argues that evangelism and humanitarian work have equal importance in missions.

Over the years, it has been clear that holistic missions is taking precedence over prioritism. This trend is described by Spitters & Ellison (2017), who state,

Evangelicalism was built on evangelical church-planting pioneers. Always, or at least nearly always, such missionaries were fully engaged in church-planting as well as compassion and provisions so far as they were able. But they were there to preach and teach the gospel and win people to Christ. That's evangelicalism. A friend of mine, a missionary, told me that in the last 15 years in his corner of the missionary world he has seen not one new missionary concerned with church planting and evangelism; they are all NGO types. Giving to NGOs is on the rise; giving to church-planting is on the decline. (p. 30-1).

Those who argue for prioritism see this as a negative trend, believing that no amount of humanitarian aid and social justice work will provide the depth of change necessary to truly improve the human condition. Thus, they argue,

if men and women are alienated from God and face eternal judgement, then communication of the message of reconciliation must have precedence over social action... We may feed the hungry, heal the sick, release the oppressed, but if they remain alienated from God then their gain is relatively small, for the eternal reality has a significance that infinitely surpasses the circumstances of the present. (Ferdinando, 2008, p. 56)

Their argument is based on the belief that the ministry of Jesus and the Apostles in the New Testament was focused on eternal consequences and bringing people back into right relationship with God. Ferdinando (2008) attributes the switch to holistic missions to

a loss of belief in the eternal consequences of human lostness... Under those conditions the emphasis necessarily moves away from the spiritual and eternal and towards the physical and temporal... the loss of those doctrinal certainties about sin and hell and

Christ that fostered missionary endeavour in previous generations, has been a major factor...in changing definitions of mission. (p. 56)

Thus, the argument becomes a theological issue. Missions in the past had been defined by church-planting and clearly defined evangelism, with missionaries establishing churches and trying to create converts. However, holism does not see missions the same way and there are few in more recent generations who want missions to be defined as solely evangelistic, without some form of development or meeting of physical need.

Holistic missions is an approach to missions that addresses all aspects of life, the physical, spiritual and emotional. Woolnough & Ma (2010) describe it as “not exclusively addressed to the spirit, aimed at conversion and personal discipleship, nor...exclusively concerned with the social gospel, tending to care merely for people’s physical welfare” (p. 4). Its aim is to blend the two together to further the kingdom of God. Its argument is that pursuing humanitarian aid is a gateway for portraying the love of Christ through action, rather than just words. There is a recognition that sin is the ultimate cause of human suffering, however, there is a sense that Christians should seek to improve the human condition by addressing both physical and spiritual needs. This is best understood through the framework of *shalom*, which seeks to bring

peace, completeness and welfare...Thus not only does it propose a way of restoring our relationship with God, but also to mend individual psyches, to bring justice and peace to the political systems between peoples, and to heal our relationship with God’s created environment. (Woolnough & Ma, 2010, p. 4)

Holistic missions seeks to put this restoration into action in the present day, rather than waiting for the coming of Christ to bring justice and peace. And while this argument is theologically

based in beliefs about God's justice and *shalom* there is also a practical reason for holistic missions. Escobar (2003) expands on this, explaining further motivators for holistic missions, saying,

There has been a significant multiplication of models of holistic mission that include a social component...Providing services for the material needs of people is in some places the only way missionaries can obtain a visa to enter a country. Mission projects of this kind are not just the result of a new awareness among Christians about a biblically based social responsibility; they're the inevitable response to worsening social conditions that have created many victims, who become a new challenge to Christian compassion. (p. 65-6).

Missionaries such as this would not exist if they did not perceive a need in the world.

Throughout the world, people are "surrounded by religions, corrupt political systems, poverty, exploitation and many signs that oppose the kingdom of God" (Engen, 2016, p. 96). And while they do acknowledge that "only the redemptive power of the gospel transforms people in such a way that it enables them to overcome the dire consequences of poverty," there is no reason for missionaries to not be examples of the life and love of God that they invite people into. Many advocates for holistic missions see this as a response to hypocrisy in the church, wishing to be the hands and feet of Christ where they have seen Christians stopped by prejudice, racism, and ethnocentrism. For holistic missions, the primary motivator is to show the love of Christ in every way possible, whether it be justice issues, developmental issues, political issues, or spiritual issues.

*History of Missions****The Burden of History***

Much criticism against Christian missions arises from its historical association with colonialism and imperialism and how those practices have carried over into present day missions work. The ethnocentrism, racism, or superiority-complexes associated with these practices have offended many and left many scars across the developing world, particularly in Africa; and the consequences of such attitudes continue to affect missions today. For many potential missionaries, this history is a barrier to the pursuit of missions as it raises the question, “If the pattern of church missions is one of war, genocide, abuse, and- at best- ethnocentrism, what is to say that this pattern has changed, or will ever change? Should we let a practice that has had such clearly horrific results continue?” (Bush & Wason., 2017, p. 2). This line of questioning is further exacerbated by changes in the global church. The majority world is becoming a sender of missionaries as much as a recipient of them, leaving the Western church to question what role it should play in missions in the future. As stated by Burrows (2010),

'missions' and activities directed from North to South seem embedded in the DNA of missiology, no matter how we try to shed them. These images are outmoded, yet they dominate our imagination because of the way they so nobly captured an aspect of the church's missionary identity. The issue? Formerly missionary-exporting lands are today in greater need of evangelization than formerly missionary-receiving lands. (p. 131)

Thus, the Western church is left with task of reformatting its role in evangelizing the world. New generations of missionaries and potential missionaries, particularly in the West, are attempting to answer these questions and find ways to deal with the burden of historical missions.



### *Critique of Historical Missions*

Christianity is no stranger to criticism, especially as it is a major global religion that seeks to convert people from other religions. However, when attempting to understand how people view Christianity and its evangelistic practices, it is important to understand where the criticism is justified. The association of missions with colonialism and imperialism is one of those areas that must be viewed critically in order to better inform future practices.

In his article, Hiebert (1997), describes six of the criticisms levelled against missions. The first is “disrupting and destabilizing society by changing traditional customs and practices” (p. 264). In other words, when brought into another culture, the practices, views, and culture of missionaries and Christianity create a variety of effects that often result in the loss of customs and practices in traditional cultures. The second criticism is that missionaries have used “monetary means to attract converts,” thus damaging economic frameworks and leading to poverty and other widespread consequences, in addition to creating superficial relationships with God (p. 264). Thirdly, missionaries have forced converts to “adopt Western ways,” thus resulting in the loss of traditional culture and other values. The fourth criticism is that missionaries and agencies have supported “colonial government and commercial interests in their oppression and pillaging of non-Western lands” (p. 264). In addition, the fifth criticism is that missions have seen “nothing good in non-Western cultures,” maintaining an attitude of ethnocentrism and not learning from non-Western culture, let alone tolerating them (p. 264). The last criticism is that missionary efforts have made “converts victims of cultural violence” (p. 264). All of these criticisms have arisen from specific occasions and even the most revered missionaries are subject to critique.

One of the key critiques is that Christian missions was used to either reinforce, aid, or be a partner to colonialism and slavery. Burrows (2010) notes that “the Protestant missionary movement would splice the genes of nationalism and colonialism into what was emerging, tragically repeating patterns that had so wounded early modern Spanish, Portuguese, and French Catholic missions” (p. 132). Specific examples of such practices include the introduction of Christianity to Africa under the rule of King Leopold II of Belgium, where “missionaries were sent there as part of a “civilizing” mission which served as an excuse for the colonial project” (“Jesus Was Not White,” 2019). This was a fairly common practice, where missionaries were sent in to make natives more receptive to the changes and innovations that colonialism brought by first “civilizing” them with Christianity, often with the financial support of the government. David Livingstone has come under similar criticism, as described by Walsh (2020), who states,

The relationship between Livingstone and the Magololo was clearly not one of fundamental equality but a case of ‘racialised unequal exchange,’ as the Magololo were exploited as a form of capital and labour...Secondly, Livingstone had unveiled his plan to “civilise” the Kololo kingdom by introducing Christianity, as well as capitalist relations with Britain and European traders, which was dependent on opening a trade route across Africa. (p. 8)

In other words, the financial/material interest of the colonial government was often a factor in the work of missionaries. These criticisms also arise in the relationship that Christians had with slavery. In an article, “Jesus Was Not White,” the author describes the use of a

‘Slave Bible’ that was used by British missionaries to convert and “educate” slaves. They also removed any portion of text that might inspire a rebellion or liberation. It was intended for use among enslaved Africans in the British West Indies. (2019)

However, the relationship between missionaries and colonialist governments is not the only issue social justice advocates have.

One of the key arguments against Christian missions is its role in destroying or polluting traditional cultures. Anyone involved in cross-cultural communication and work carries the presumptions and values of their own culture into each interaction, and missionaries are no exception. Hiebert (1997) describes this, saying,

Western missionaries carry heavy cultural baggage including "the idols of their own tribe." Two of the most important idols that mesmerize the Western church are individualism and the love of organization. There is no doubt that in many cases Western missionaries have tried to set up their own cultural idols after tearing down those of other religions and cultures. (p. 265)

In some ways, Christianity itself brings cultural change, but the issue many have with Christianity is that Western culture is confused with biblical truth, resulting in the propagation of Christianity that is infused with Western values, damaging existing cultural frameworks. One example of this is quoted by Hiebert (1997),

European missionaries...presumptuously thought that everything about African religion and culture was evil...setting out "to uproot the African, body and soul, from his old customs and beliefs...The African was expected...to follow the white man's religion without questioning whether it was suited for his condition of life or not." Cultural violation by missionaries wreaked havoc on the Africans sense of community and the political and moral authority derived from it. (p. 264)

In the past, ethnocentrism has tainted the efforts of many missionaries. Western culture's focus on individuality and organization did not always blend well more collectivist cultures and often resulted in difficulties with identity, traditions, and community dynamics.

The reality is that events such as those described did occur. However, the question is how much modern missions fits the stereotypical picture of missionaries as “wearing a pith helmet, rain or shine, riding the coattails of colonialist governments...dispensing Christianity with one hand while destroying native culture and religion with the other” (Hiebert, 1997, p. 259). And if it does fall into that stereotype, how should future generations respond to it?

### ***Critique of Modern Missions***

The critique of modern missions is similar in many ways to the critique against historical missions. Ethnocentrism and the propagation of Western cultural values are the chief complaints of current missions. Martinez (2019) argues,

People on mission trips have the motive of evangelizing people who didn't ask to be evangelized. This is essentially religious colonialism. Before you go on that mission trip across the globe, take into consideration your reasoning. At least make sure your exploitation of the less fortunate isn't with the intent to gain social media engagement or to add to a future job resume.

Rather than necessarily being potential financial gain or aiding a colonialist government, the issue with missions here is that the act of spreading Christianity itself is a form of colonialism. In addition, the argument is made that missionaries benefit from missions in other ways, seeking to gain some sort of social worth or status from helping broken communities. In response to this, some say, “When considering the amount of damage that has been instilled by American missionaries in several countries, one must question how long it will take for these churches to

stop their global pursuits and instead work harder to help those who are struggling in their own communities first” (Lopes, 2021). In this sense, the ethnocentrism, attitudes of superiority, selfishness, and insincerity that occur in missions work have somehow invalidated it, so missionaries should redirect their efforts to their own communities, where differences in culture may have fewer negative impacts. One major topic within this idea is avoiding the white savior complex, which is seen as the remains of colonialist intentions in history.

### ***White Savior Complex***

The existence of the white savior complex in missions is another major source of critique in missions today. As Walsh (2020) defines it, a white savior is

a person who has been raised in privilege and taught implicitly or explicitly (or both) that they possess the answers and skills needed to rescue others, no matter the situation . . .

The savior mentality means that you want to help others but are not open to guidance from those you want to help. Savors fundamentally believe they are better than the people they are rescuing. Savors want to support the struggle of communities that are not their own, but they believe they must remain in charge. The savior always wants to lead, never to follow. When the people they have chosen to rescue tell them they are not helping, they think those people are mistaken. It is almost taken as evidence that they need more help. (p. 2)

The problem with white saviorism is the superiority complex that accompanies it. With it comes the assumption that the people that are the target of aid are somehow not capable of providing for themselves or not intelligent enough to accomplish things themselves. There is a sense that the savior is the only one who can provide the means to save them. Cooney-Petro (2019) notes that part of the issue occurs when attempts to provide aid make things worse by remaining at surface

level, not diving into structural issues and social issues that lead to such circumstances (p. 10). This is particularly applicable in areas that have had a complicated relationship with the West, suffer from long-term consequences of colonialism, and are politically/structurally unstable, like the Global South. The assumption of being able to save those in need can lead to a sense of inferiority for those being helped, a loss of dignity, and dependency on the ‘saviors,’ which is not sustainable. These attitudes and assumptions often go hand in hand with racism and ethnocentrism.

In many ways, white saviorism is seen as carrying over the attitudes prominent in the Colonial era. Walsh (2020) describes this, saying, white saviorism originates from “the Crusades and the colonisation of the Americas,” where, “the violence and genocide of these imperialist endeavours...driven by self-interest,” accompanied by the “narrative...of saving the barbaric and uncivilised natives” (p. 2). The language of progression and development implies that the former world was in some way archaic, lacking, and damaged. This is the heart of the issue with the white savior complex, which is seen as modern imperialism. As stated by Walsh (2020), “Modern-day US imperialism...takes the form of charitable activities, humanitarian interventions and international aid programs that perpetuate unjust hierarchies or create financial dependencies and exploitative economic relationships” (p. 2). The problem with missions is that it often contains some form of white saviorism, whether intentional or not. Cooney-Petro (2019) points out that the “there are ideological continuities emerging from colonial times, that perpetuate this ongoing need felt by white, middle-class Americans and Europeans to individually alleviate global suffering,” which is manifested in humanitarian aid and missions trips.

In light of the argument that missions is modern day colonialism and imperialism, many question whether or not it is a redeemable practice. If white saviorism is something to be avoided, and it is inherent in modern missions, then many assume the focus should shift away from global/cross-cultural missions. Especially as the Global South begins to send missionaries as much as receive them.

### ***Generational Response***

With the constant bombardment of perspectives describing the history of missions and critiquing the foundations of its goal and practices it should be no surprise that younger generations wrestle with doubt about missions and their role in it. Today's culture is dominated by social justice issues and 'cancel culture,' all with the goal of righting past wrongs, disposing of unethical practices, and 'cancelling' anything that is insensitive to issues of race, culture, and ethnicity. It is no wonder that younger generations would struggle more with the role missions has played in history.

In a recent study, the Barna Group (2020) investigated ten questions about global ministry that the church must wrestle with when trying to understand how new generations feel and think about missions. One such question is "How does missions' history shape its present and future?." Through their surveys researchers found that

Overall, engaged churchgoing Christians 18 to 35 appear to be more concerned than older adults with problematic aspects of the past...One-third of young adult Christians (34%) agrees that 'in the past, missions work has been unethical,' compared to one in four adults 35 and older (23%). Two in five (42%) agree that 'Christian mission has been tainted by its association with colonialism' (vs. 29% adults 35+, 31% teens. (p. 23)

Essentially, younger generations are more sensitive to the history of missions. Thus, it is likely that such a history may be a barrier to them when they consider their role in missions. Younger generations experience a great deal of anxiety about this topic. As Wason (2017) phrases it, “I hope I can speak for the Christians of my generation when I say that we do not doubt the Holy Spirit. We worry that sinful humans cannot produce real good, and we doubt the virtue of the systems we have created when they are so full of dysfunction” (Bush & Wason, 2017, p. 11). This is keenly felt in who Barna describes as the supportive skeptics group, which they define as “engaged Christians who don’t consider missionary work 'very valuable' but nonetheless are engaged in giving to or going on mission” (p. 24). This group is often “more concerned than others about the shameful parts of mission history,” which “is true for supportive skeptics in all three age cohorts, but most of all among young adults” (p. 24). However, even in the midst of such skepticism, there are many who still want missions to continue.

### ***Redeeming Colonial History***

The negative aspects of missions history are undeniable, but in light of such evidence, there are some who still argue that missions is necessary and should be continued. Phan (2008) speaks to this, saying,

Furthermore, greater explorations have been made into the manifold contributions of Christianity to the local cultures in diverse areas such as linguistics, anthropology, history, philosophy and religious thought, literature, music and songs, dance, the plastic arts, architecture, and even economics and politics. What emerges is a more balanced and richer picture of Christian missions, not in order to refute the charges of colonialism and imperialism of which Western Christianity has at times been guilty, but to place Christian missions in the wider context of cultural preservation and transmission. (p. 3)



In other words, the history of missions has not been wholly negative. Although the ends do not justify the means, something can be said for positive outcomes being born out of the efforts of missionaries, even within colonialist contexts. When addressing the existence of different forms of colonialist attitudes in modern missions, Phan (2008) goes on to say,

While recognizing the colonial impulse inherent in modern missions...local churches, far from being passive receivers of the Christian message or victims of ecclesiastical colonialism, were self-conscious and active transformers of the Christianity exported to them from the West and have shaped it, and at times even subverted it, to meet their own cultural and spiritual needs. (p. 3)

There are many occasions throughout history where missions has worked in conjunction with traditional cultures through contextualization. Yet, the church must have a sense of responsibility for its history and seek to improve its efforts in the future. In its research, Barna (2020) found that many of the supportive skeptics “say Christianity should rehabilitate its reputation before continuing international missions work” (p. 24). So instead of being rid of the entire concept or practice, younger generations may be more inclined to reform the process. Younger generations have not completely discarded the importance of missions, but instead, express a desire to prevent history from repeating itself and avoid attitudes of ethnocentrism and white saviorism, becoming more culturally aware, inclusive, and sensitive to the contexts of their ministry.

*The Impact of Postmodernism*

***Postmodernism and Religion***

Inevitably, every generation is influenced by the dominant views and values of their time. This is no less true of Millennials and Gen Z young adults and teenagers, who are impacted by the postmodern values that surround them today. As put by Sahayadoss (2010), postmodernism is a response to modernism and can be expressed by the contrast: “If the modern maxim was: ‘I think, therefore I exist,’ then the postmodern slogan is: ‘I feel, therefore I exist’” (p. 2). Furthermore, postmodernism combats the modernist focus on human reasoning and tends to lean more towards a relativist understanding of truth. When describing postmodernity, Budiselic (2014) states that

postmodernity is characterized by a crisis of authority, and a profound suspicion of all a priori claims to truth and knowledge. Hence, in postmodernity everybody has a voice; there is not necessarily any ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ voice; it all depends on the point of view. Thus everybody contributes, and everybody is free to pick what is preferred from the patchwork of many voices. (p. 403)

These values and tendencies tend to affect how those of the postmodern generation view religion. Budiselic (2014) notes that alongside the Enlightenment “God was slowly but surely taken out of the picture, while man was put in the center,” resulting in differing views of Christian witness where “a great deal of attention is given to the recipients, their circumstances, surroundings, and how they will hear and understand God’s message,” rather than focusing on the work of God (p. 402). Postmodern views of truth, culture, and power expanded on this, “undermining positive assessments of Christian mission’s concern with conversion” (Presler, 2010, p. 195). Postmodern values have a tendency to make younger generations doubt and

challenge the Christian prerogative to do missions and attempt to convert as many as possible, posing a potential barrier to their involvement in missions.

### ***Issue of Truth***

One of the most important and impactful characteristics of postmodernism is how it relativizes truth. The fundamental absence of a belief in absolute truth is the characteristic of postmodernism that most conflicts with religious views, particularly in regards to Christianity. In postmodernism, truth becomes about experience and perspective. Robert (2014) describes this dynamic, saying,

A hermeneutical shift has taken place in the West in the past half century...making it clear that all 'knowing' is multiperspectival. All knowing is shaped in part by our foreknowing which we acquired through having been socialized into particular human communities...we are enmeshed in the hermeneutical circle, and our focus has shifted onto the importance of the perspectival: the local, the particular, the narrative, and the story. (p. 13)

In other words, truth becomes less about an absolute and more about how each individual experiences life, which contributes to their own form of truth. In fact, many postmodernists reject the idea of absolute truth. As stated by Sahayadoss (2010),

The essential character of postmodernity is the emphasis on relativism. Postmodernity affirms the inability to provide an absolute and final explanation of human reality.

Eventually, the conclusion that is arrived at points to the fact that there can be neither universal ethics nor universal truth. (p. 5)

Part of the argument of postmodernism is that absolute truth is impossible because of the communities and cultures that people grow up in. Rather than being universal and applicable in

all areas of life they believe “that truth consists in the ground rules that facilitate personal well-being in community and well-being of the community as a whole” (Sahayadoss, 2010, p. 4).

What may be beneficial in one community, may not be in another, so when truth is based on the well-being of a community, just as what is beneficial changes, so too does truth itself. As stated by Moore (1996),

The postmodern age may be characterized as the age of pluralism. There are no longer agreed-upon absolutes that apply to all peoples; rather, each social category (e.g., ethnicities and nationalities, feminists, gays and lesbians, etc.) claims to speak for itself and only for itself. This focus on community-level truth means that postmodernism does not accept metanarratives. (p. 202)

This is where postmodernism begins to conflict with monotheistic religion in particular. The rejection of meganarratives refers to the postmodern belief that “There is no grand narrative (or metanarrative) that explains everything,” meaning that there is no single explanation for the complexity of the universe (Sahayadoss, 2010, p. 4). Since postmodernism allows for no “truth claims or moral claims based on an absolute transcendent reality,” it makes it so that “no single faith or ideology can assert...it has monopoly over truth” (Sahayadoss, 2010, p. 5). However, in Christianity, there is an absolute truth. Christianity asserts the primacy of God and the Gospel, which in postmodern thought, is an attempt to assert a monopoly on truth, so it should be rejected. Sahayadoss (2010) describes this disagreement, saying,

The history of God’s concern for humanity that is narrated in the Bible and the redemption that is available in and through Jesus Christ are rejected by postmodernism as metanarratives. The fact is that Christians cannot afford to deconstruct this metanarrative, because it can ultimately nullify the Christian message as well as Christian concern for

missions. Even though the rejection of the metanarrative is a central feature of postmodernism, Christians cannot afford to let go of their foundation. (p. 11)

Due to these views on truth, postmodernists often reject religion, Christianity specifically. The claim to truth that Christianity exhibits is viewed by postmodernists as an attempt to gain power and can be described as intolerant or bigoted. In turn, many Christians regard this postmodern view of truth as “a danger to be avoided and rejected” (Sahayadoss, 2010, p. 11). Many view Christianity and postmodernism as incompatible. This further influences views of missions, which are seen as an extension of Christianity’s disregard for local contexts. Postmodernists argue that all religions are “true” in some way and that attempts to convert others is in some way infringing on their human rights.

However, there have been places where postmodernism has influenced Christian theology and its practices. One affect of postmodernism has been to challenge historical church practices and act as a reminder “that the gospel of salvation is meant to bring healing and wholeness, and should not be directed toward establishing power” (Sahayadoss, 2010, p. 11). Placing greater emphasis on power dynamics in church planting and in cross-cultural ministry has lead greatly to acts of contextualization and greater inclusion of nationals in missions work. As Robert (2014) describes,

Attention to the theme of contextualization during the latter half of the twentieth century led to increased emphasis on the importance of context, fostering the development of theology in context and the rise of local theologies. An abundance of adjectival theologies—black theology, feminist theology, water buffalo theology, minjung theology, and others—was the result. (p. 13)

Greater contextualization has opened up new theologies and allowed other cultures to develop their views of Christianity and Scripture. In addition, postmodern thoughts have the potential to create a “spirituality of openness where those who question, doubt or are ambiguous in their thinking may not feel rejected by the church” (Sahayadoss, 2010, p. 12). For those in younger generations, this is the type of Christianity they want to see. One where power dynamics are understood and worked through and where people are more free to question Christianity and its practices.

### *Interplay of Community and Culture*

One of the most positive aspects of postmodernism is the importance it places on community and culture. In many ways postmodernism “celebrates the local, the contextual and the particular,” though it can be argued that this goes too far in relation to truth (Sahayadoss, 2010, p. 4). This tendency in postmodern thought is particularly evident in its responses to globalization. Sahayadoss (2010) presents postmodern views of globalization, saying,

Postmodernity is critical of the tendency to globalise western culture. Globalisation, according to postmodernity, eventually suppresses other cultures. On the contrary, postmodernity intends to promote “multi-culturalism.” This may result in respect for other cultures. Postmodernity believes in affirming human life in all its diversity, variety, and multiplicity. (p. 6)

Culture is seen as vital to human flourishing and the interaction between cultures as beneficial to society as a whole. However, there is a recognition that globalization is a primarily Western project, resulting in the destruction of traditional culture and the propagation of Western values, disregarding unique cultural tendencies. Sahayadoss (2010) expands on this, saying, “in response to the fact of globalisation, postmodernity affirms the significance of sustaining the ecosystem

and developing a respect for different cultures instead of promoting the culture of the West for the sake of profit” (p. 6). Postmodernism rejects any form of power imbalance, which it perceives in globalization.

Since postmodernism places such importance on the local, it in turn places great importance on culture and the diversity it brings. These values have been manifested in “in our own cultural shift from individual liberty to group empowerment, ‘political correctness’ media and campus speech codes alike presume the ethnic ‘right to offense’ and a corresponding social duty to respect diversity” (Moore, 1996, p. 205). Various indigenous movements and human rights movements display the postmodern emphasis on culture and diversity, rejecting ethnocentrism, prejudice, and unbalanced power dynamics. This can also be observed in the postmodern criticism of individualism. There is more emphasis placed on the well-being of the community and group responsibility, thus issues of justice, tolerance, and love become more prominent.

Some scholars suggest that the postmodern emphasis on culture and community can bring new perspective to the church. Sahayadoss (2010) describes the argument of Grenz on this topic, stating,

We need not affirm or unconditionally accept self-reflective, self-determining, autonomous individuals who have no regard for tradition or community. Christian believers need to make a paradigm shift, wherein the role of the community is given more attention than the role of individuals. Grenz develops an ecclesiology on the basis of the postmodern Christian perception of church as a community. He argues that human beings are fundamentally social creatures. The emptiness that is found within the individual can

never be filled by the blessings of globalisation. Rather the individual experiences wholeness only in relationship with others. (p. 8)

In an era of division and conflict, the postmodern concept of unity is seen as a potential avenue to bring unity to the truth, with each individual culture existing in the multicultural community of the church. In order for this to happen, more recognition must be given to the damaging effects of globalization and the supremacy given to Western theology and practices. Hiebert (as quoted by Sahayadoss) also expands on this idea, saying,

Christian missions should address the issue of how people of different communities can live together and build a world where there is love, justice and harmony. Jesus prayed for unity (John 17). Christians need to prove that they are followers of Jesus by striving for unity amid diversity. Let us pursue Christian missions in such a way that the gospel of Jesus Christ becomes good news not only for a few but for all. (Sahayadoss, 2010, p. 11)

Recognizing the individual value of each culture and each one's ability to contribute to the global church is a key way in which postmodernism can improve the function of the church, although there must always be caution to avoid relativism.

### ***Deconstruction***

The theory of deconstruction in postmodernism is an extension of its arguments about truth and human rationality. This is best explained by Sahayadoss (2010), who states,

The basic presupposition and argument here is that meaning is not inherent in the text itself. The meaning depends on the interpreter who is in dialogue with the text. Therefore, there is the possibility of multiple meanings emerging from the text..."Just as a text will be read differently by each reader, ... so reality will be 'read' differently by each knowing self that encounters...it means that there is no one meaning of the world, no



transcendent center to reality as a whole.” At the same time, those who argue for postmodernism stress the inability of the human to view reality apart from human constructions. The human beings perceive the world from their own perspective. Consequently, there is no objective external basis on which we can evaluate common accepted theories and propositions. (p. 3)

This argument is then applied to postmodern understandings of institutions. Due to the different perspectives of the world, the idea of an institution that imposes a certain view or ideology is rejected. Each perspective is valuable and should not be stifled. Therefore, any institution that is seen as stifling to diverse viewpoints is denounced, challenged, and often rejected. Sahayadoss (2010) explains this, saying,

postmodernism is a revolt against oppressive forces that suppress minority groups and marginalizes them in society, thereby denying them the right to express themselves and assert their identity. There is, in postmodernism, the tendency to revolt against forces that allow systems and structures being formed. Such systems and structures will lead toward oppression that will result in dehumanization. Any one way of perceiving truth by those who are in power will lead to perpetuating one’s own ideology. Postmodernism does not allow any space for such parochial perceptions that provoke conflict and suppress the weak. (p. 3)

In postmodernism, minority suppression and power imbalances are unacceptable.

These views about deconstruction are often reflected onto the church. Historical connections between the Church and colonialism/imperialistic endeavors, as well as cultural insensitivity and a perceived lack of tolerance are all reasons why postmodernism would reject the institution of the church. This is also a potential reason why missions agencies are seeing

fewer numbers joining them and less support from churches. Pierson (1998) describes this trend with the statement: “it is the anti-institutionalism in contemporary American culture that undoubtedly plays into the dynamics of our 'post' era and helps to account for the current disaffection of some of our more influential evangelical churches with traditional mission agencies” (p. 147). He goes on to say that

while Americans have more houses of worship per capita than any other nation, religious sentiment in the nation is less and less tied to institutions and is more self-defined. The loss of a sense of connectedness and a lack of trust in institutions probably affects all of Western society, including the attitudes of church members toward mission agencies. (p. 147)

Overall, there is a trend that fewer in the younger generation are joining churches, which is in turn reflected in the state of missions agencies. Much of this can be traced back to the postmodern idea of deconstruction. Institutions are seen as suspect and as a result missions agencies are distrusted and seen as lacking accountability to the rest of the Church. If missions is seen as requiring the missionary to be a member of such an agency, it seems that those who are interested in missions may not participate since they do not want to be a part of a larger institution.

### ***Christian Approach to Postmodernism***

Though the views of society inevitably affect the attitudes and practices of the church, there is much discussion about how much of postmodernism should be accepted. Budiselic (2014) presents this well, saying,

Although modern societies demand from Christians conversation which is nonoffensive, neutral, and relativistic, Christianity cannot always provide such a type of conversation.

Christianity is exclusive, radical and provocative, and in this respect radical, but at the same time, it does not mean that it is judgmental, closed minded or disrespectful.

Christianity claims that it possesses the truth, yet this truth cannot be forcefully imposed on others. After all, Jesus was crucified as an enemy of the Roman Empire. Can we expect that this world will celebrate us as their friends? In the second century, Christians were labeled as haters of the human race. Can we expect anything less today? The point is that because of the exclusive nature of Christianity, conflicts are sometimes unavoidable. However, these conflicts should not come as a result of bad manners – whether in words or deeds. (p. 411)

This is where conflict between generations can arise. Some may say to reject the postmodern ideas of today, others strive to find ways to blend them with practices of the church. This is no less true in missions, where the meeting of cultures is most poignant. Pierson (1998) describes this conflict saying,

postmodern theological relativism and universalism...leads to a degree of schizophrenia for many Christians who live with one foot in the church and one in a world that is relativistic regarding truth and strongly antimissionary. A pastor friend from a Presbyterian church with a strong missions tradition took a group to India to visit an effective work that has seen 100,000 dalits converted, gathered into churches, and elevated socially and economically. But one member questioned why Hindus should be converted to Christianity. (p. 147)

Postmodernism and the foundational ideas behind missions in many ways conflict, thus younger generations who grew up surrounded by postmodernism have more difficulty coming to terms with their involvement in missions.

## *Generational Differences*

### ***Generational Gap***

As time passes and the state of the world changes, so too do the values and characteristics of each generation. The differences between Baby Boomers, Millennials, and Gen Z are just one example of this. For those who fall into the generations following the Boomers, they grew up in an age of technological advancement, modernity, and the Internet. The effects of this are described by Jenkinson (1991):

Because of modernity, the individual has discovered himself or herself with a new degree of self-consciousness. At the same time this new person is being bombarded with an unprecedented flow of information and options. This is a very volatile combination- high self-awareness and an almost unlimited supply of information. (p. 123)

In many ways, the advent of a globalized world has challenged traditional ways of looking at the world. High self-awareness and large amounts of available information have in turn combined to produce other characteristics in younger generations.

One characteristic that sets younger generations apart from their predecessors is their views on tolerance and diversity. Engel & Dyrness (2000) describe how “Most under the age of forty have much wider latitudes for tolerance for diversity. The legalism and rigidity of previous generations is questioned and abandoned” (p. 18-9). Being constantly confronted with information and interactions with the cultural “other” has resulted in differing views on race, ethnicity, and diversity. In a study, Mather (2011) looked at generational differences on issues of race and found that

younger evangelicals are much more likely to feel that shared values and lifestyles are not important as long as people follow the same rules...Whereas older evangelicals are more

likely to hold to a kind of mechanical solidarity based on shared substantive values, symbols, and identities, younger evangelicals tend to accept a more individualistic, organic solidarity based more on shared and uniformly applied rules and procedures. This shift in viewpoints is noteworthy because it is an important predictor for having a sense of solidarity with racial minorities, for valuing diversity in one's community, and even for respondent's judgments about the role that individual effort plays in racial inequality. (p. 19)

The pluralism and amount of information available today have resulted in young adults that place great value on diversity and culture. In the study, Mather (2011) also looked at the differences in responses between non-evangelical and evangelical young adults and found that

Younger white evangelicals mirror the attitudes toward diversity that are held by others in their age cohort. However, there is a significant difference between younger and older evangelicals in the value that they place on diversity in their communities and a wide gap between the values that these two groups assign to diverse friendships. (p. 8)

Thus, when older generations try to understand the motivations behind the actions and beliefs of younger generations, they must first understand the differences. Younger generations value diverse friendships and seek to end inequality wherever they see it.

However, these differences are not only visible in views on diversity, but also in beliefs about the church. For the post-Baby Boom generation (defined as Americans born after 1957), studies suggest that "this group tends to be more loosely connected to religious institutions and more critical of traditional religious authorities than its predecessors were," as well as being, "much more comfortable with various forms of religious and social diversity and that they are less easy to categorize on political issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage" (Mather,

2011, p. 8). Generations, such as Gen Z and Millennials, can be described as having a “more progressive view of authority,” and a more “tolerant attitude” overall (Mather, 2011, p. 3). These characteristics in turn affect how Gen Z and Millennials interact with the world around them and specifically how they understand and relate to missions.

### *The Basics of Millennials*

Millennials are often defined as those born between 1980 and 2000, though this definition varies and occasionally overlaps with the definition for Gen Z (Jacob, 2017, p. 9). Millennials have grown up in an era of instant information. Millennials and Gen Z share the same concern for issues of diversity and tolerance, as is common in younger generations. Some of the most notable characteristics of Millennials are their desire to change the world, the value they place on collaboration, and how they deal with commitment.

Millennials are deeply affected by their increased contact with people around the world. In many ways, it sparked a desire to change the world in Millennials. Jacob (2017) describes this trend, saying,

Millennials have lived their lives with instant access to news and information from all over the world. With the flick of their phones, Millennials can read reports about hurricanes devastating coastland villages, the effects of the war in Syria, and other calamities around the globe. As a result, they have become a global generation who cares about the world and its needs. Generally speaking, Millennials want to make a positive impact in society. One study found that nearly nine out of ten respondents felt it was their responsibility to make a difference in the world. Furthermore, the same study revealed that six out of ten Millennials “believe they will make some great contribution in their lifetime.” (p. 10)

This desire for global change greatly impacts how Millennials choose their vocation. They are reluctant to take a job if it does not somehow play into their vision for the future. In addition, they may be “quick to leave a job if it is not meaningful or does little to contribute to society” (Jacob, 2017, p. 10). Social justice and righting wrongs in the world are a primary motivator for Millennials.

Millennials, like many in the postmodern age, greatly value tolerance and diversity. In many ways, this results in a desire to work closely with diverse peoples, since they see diversity as good for community and individual growth. Jacob (2017) notes that

Millennials are more tolerant and open to the opinions of others, resulting in an environment that fosters collaboration. This, in part, explains why the Millennial generation values teamwork. They enjoy collaborating and learning from their peers.

“They possess an intuitive sense of shared experience and destiny with individuals who are very different from them, and they care deeply about the common good.” (p. 16)

Having a common goal or shared area of concern is vitally important in the relationships that Millennials build. Being public with their views and connecting with others who share the same values is another way that Millennials seek out community and collaboration.

One main criticism of Millennials is their lack of commitment. This in part arises from their prerogative to leave a job if it does not match their concern for social justice issues, but also relates to their relationships with their families. Jacob (2017) describes how Millennials are closer to their parents than other generations. This has multiple effects including, “a lack of confidence to engage in ministry,” and a tendency to prefer “to work close to home and,” a lack of interest in “long-term international assignments” (p. 15). When parent-child relationships are

particularly close it makes it difficult for Millennials to leave home, providing a barrier to missions work.

### ***Millennials and Missions***

Though Millennials are often described as wanting to change the world, they still have a complex relationship with the idea of missions. Wason (2017) notes that

one of the most urgent challenges facing Western missions is the widening gulf between the conviction that missions is the beating heart of Christianity and the skepticism of millennials- at times even Christian millennials- who are not only wary of Christianity but repelled by Christian missions. (Bush & Wason, 2017, p. xiii)

The main issues for millennials can fall into three categories: tolerance, the historical reputation of missions, and insecurity. Wason (2017) puts this into perspective, saying,

Millennials, who have just now come of age, are much more reserved in their approach and limited in their expectations. Most of all, they do not want to make the mistake of coercing others to faith in any way. They bear a load of real or imagined responsibility for the failures of the church and its evangelistic strategies, and hope somehow to be witnesses for Christ by showing themselves to be different than the perceptions and stereotypes commonly held of Christians. (Bush & Wason, 2017, p. ix-x)

Most of all Millennials hope to right the wrongs they have seen in the church, but that does not stop their trepidation when faced with being missionaries.

Pluralism and relativism are major issues when discussing how Millennials approach missions. It has been made clear that Millennials are more tolerant than previous generations because of the postmodern values they have grown up in. Wason (2017) expresses some of the frustration within the Millennial generation regarding tolerance, saying,



We are called to love God and love our neighbor, we are called to make disciples for Christ, we are called to spread the Good News- the greatest news we've ever known, in fact. But our peer group is one that, on the whole, does not see Christianity as fitting in with the trend toward tolerance and equality. Past grievances are sometimes hard to overcome. And even setting history (current events, for that matter) aside, Christianity as a worldview is all well and good so long as everyone else is equally entitled to their views. Another oxymoron: all worldviews are equal, unless your worldview suggests something other than all worldviews being equal. Christianity presents a problem because it demands to be shared. It takes a firm moral standpoint in the face of culturally assumed ambiguity. And so while the rest of our generation cries out that "love is love" (is love is love is love), there doesn't always seem to be a place for millennial Christians to offer the love of Christ. We are asked to step back, to keep quiet, to take up less space. A fair request, but our religion demands otherwise. (Bush & Wason, 2017, p. 59-60)

Millennials feel pressure from both their peers and their church. Opposing views of truth conflict and Millennials are left trying to find the balance of tolerance and spreading God's truth. The idea of "taking up less space" comes from both sides. Peers urge believing Millennials to keep their Christianity to themselves and not try to impose it on anyone else. Older generations in the church come from another direction, criticizing Millennials for not being set apart and firm in their beliefs. Wason (2017) describes the difficulty of finding a balance, saying,

I would like to comment on the darker dimension of needing to keep quiet and take up less space in millennial culture. If pressure to do so issues from oppressive and unequal power relations, sexism, ageism (that dismisses the opinion of youth), or anti-religious bigotry, then this pressure should be directly challenged. No need to tiptoe around it. To

quiet. Sit down. Your opinions are offensive. Shut up. You are flawed. Stop taking up space and leaving too large a carbon footprint. Such pressure is erroneous. One should not feel compelled to humbly yield to a demeaning type of "reverse privilege." You need to discern where valid critique gives in to oppressive strictures. It is a terrible thing to be bludgeoned into silence. To have one's voice stifled robs a person of the dignity of adding to the human discourse. It also robs humanity of one's gifts. (Bush & Wason, 2017, p. 61)

The Millennial generation feels that it is rejected on both sides, being told to "keep quiet" on both ends of the spectrum. Thus, not only are they frustrated, but they are also insecure about their decisions in the future and how they should proceed. As a generation that highly values collaboration, teamwork and diverse opinions, such decisions, which will inevitably alienate a group, are not easy to make. Involvement in missions directly attacks this insecurity as Millennials try to find ways of allowing people to make their own decisions and respecting worldviews and culture, while simultaneously holding true to their faith in the Gospel and the Great Commission.

To Millennials, the history of missions, and its involvement in colonialism and the destruction of traditional culture are simply more reason to be wary of the process. At the very least, missions involves a change in worldview and this is difficult for Millennials to deal with. After seeing how missions has gone wrong, there is a desire to do better. As Wason (2017) states,

We want to make sure that the ripples from our actions are not waves of destruction. Millennials are not sure that Western missions is a path toward changing the world for the better...I'm as fearful of ethnocentrism, Westernization, and neocolonialism as the rest of my generation. (Bush & Wason, 2017, p. 4)

Millennials are also fearful of the white savior complex, racism, and ethnocentrism, even if it is unintentional. They see missions in the past as resting on a foundation of privilege and power. Millennials “are in constant fear of using our privilege to our advantage, especially at the expense of someone else’s culture or tradition...often to the point that we allow our own beliefs to be reduced to opinions” (Bush & Wason, 2017, p. 3). When approaching missions fear and anxiety are the most common emotions felt by Millennials. As a group that desires to make things right, their deepest fear is whether or not they will “leave the world a better place,” as Wason (2017) states, “Such a fear is reflected in everything we do, in every theater of our lives. It means that our outlook on Western Christian missions, whether we speak as Christians or not, is inherently tied to the issue of what will do the most good, and the least harm” (Bush & Wason, 2017, p. 4). Thus, missions is no easy task for any believing Millennial to jump into.

However, there is a hopeful side to this. The attitude of tolerance, respect, and caution have the potential to be beneficial in a global church that is learning how to operate in a globalized world and deal with missionaries being sent from everywhere to everywhere. And not all Millennials let their fear and anxiety be a roadblock to their involvement. As Wason (2017) describes,

In our own ways, millennials are making those movements toward restoration of justice. And it is in that movement where I think a millennial expression of Christian missions is and will continue to take shape. That thread of relationality running through God’s narrative is a strong line to hold on to in the face of wild wind and waves. Christian or not, many millennials have already grabbed hold of that line. Millennials, more so than preceding generations, tend to view the world through a lens of relationality. We see

ourselves as deeply connected to the natural world... We understand the weight of our individual lives on the earth, and on each other. (Bush & Wason, 2017, p. 72)

Millennials are aware of the hope and restoration that Christ can provide, and as a result many still find reason to participate in missions. The perspective and values they bring have the potential to provide new life to Western missions, and the same can be said of Gen Z members.

### ***The Basics of Gen Z***

Gen Z is the generation of young adults and children born between 1995 and 2015 (this definition depends on the source) (Landrum, 2019). Many in this group are just starting to attend college or join the workforce. This generation has been described as the “most ethnically diverse generation in American history,” and as a result have many unique characteristics (Landrum, 2019). Much like Millennials, Gen Z were raised in “a fundamentally different digital and media-saturated society than older generations” (Collins, 2021, p. 30). Landrum (2019) notes that members of Gen Z make up approximately 25.9% of the US population and describes them as individualistic, lonely, and social justice oriented. They were raised on technology and their lives are often built around the online world. They are activists and volunteers who want to make an impact on the world. They were raised during the Great Recession and value financial stability. They are sexually fluid.

In many ways, these characteristics are mirrored in Millennials, however, Collins (2021) notes that Gen Zers tend to be more private and are less team oriented than Millennials, preferring to learn alone (p. 30).

Despite living in a postmodern culture one study found that 78% of Gen Zers still believe in God (Collins, 2021, p. 30). However, similarly to Millennials, Gen Z adults tend to differ greatly from older generations in what they value. Collins (2021) describes this well, saying,

Gen Zers are open-minded, inclusive, and compassionate. Many are concerned about social justice, poverty, and racism. They look very much like Millennials on key social and policy issues: they are progressive and pro-government and most see the U.S.'s increasing ethnic diversity as positive. "Gen Zers and Millennials are about equally likely [roughly two-thirds] to say that blacks are treated less fairly than whites in [the U.S.]...compared with about half of Gen Xers and Boomers." (p. 30)

With such high value placed on diversity and tolerance, Gen Zers are also acutely aware of occasions when the world falls short of their ideals. As a result, many in this generation struggle with anxiety and depression (Collins, 2021, p. 38). This is coupled with the whirlwind of information they are confronted with each day. They "are natural researchers with vast amounts of information available at their fingertips," often leading to "bewilderment, difficulty focusing and forming convictions, and little time for reflection" (p. 31). Gen Zers may find it difficult to come to concrete conclusions about what they believe and what is true. As a result they are greatly influenced by what is presented to them online. Collins (2021) states that

Gen Zers need persistent messages of hope; there are voices in every direction saying they are not enough and that their life is not as exciting as the well-crafted social media "brand" of their peers. They feel pressure to appear happy at every turn online, which does not pair well with authentic connection on spiritual matters. This leads, in part, to increased depression, anxiety, and a volatile self-image. (p. 31-2)

So while the desire for justice and authenticity are positive characteristics, in Gen Zers it is often destructive when combined with the globalized world they live in.

### *Gen Z and the Church*

Within the last fifty years, US culture has shifted to a more postmodernist value system, which has in turn affected members of Gen Z. As Landrum (2019) describes,

this secularizing of society has manifested itself in Gen Z as “disconnecting completely from religion, spirituality, and the larger questions of life.” In fact, the Barna Group characterizes Gen Z as the “first truly ‘post Christian’ generation,” with only 4% adhering to a Biblical worldview.” (Landrum, 2019)

In fact, Gen Z has been described as spiritually illiterate. In many ways this has originated in the pluralistic shift of society leaving members of Gen Z who “do not know what the Bible says... do not know the basics of Christian belief or theology...do not know what the cross is all about,” and “do not know what it means to worship,” leading to “increasing numbers of students abandoning their faith and losing interest in the church” (Landrum, 2019). In a series of studies researchers found that 82% of churchgoing Gen Zers “consider church to be “a place to find answers to live a meaningful life” that is “relevant to my life.” However, half of students believe that the Bible has exhibited incompatibilities with science (49%) and that churchgoers are hypocritical in their practice (36%)” (Landrum, 2019). For Gen Z members there is a desire for authenticity, which they don’t always find fulfilled in the church.

These views of the church help to expand on some of the challenges that face Gen Zers when they consider a future in missions. Collins (2021) notes where spiritual illiteracy may be a barrier, saying,

While biblical literacy among Gen Z is low, the Great Commission passages may feel cliché; Gen Zers often favor passages about social action. Barna “found that young Christians with a well-rounded, theologically rich understanding of the gospel are more

likely to have a resilient, lasting faith, but also that such an understanding is uncommon among young believers.” (p. 33)

For Gen Zers, who value justice, diversity, and culture and see the church as hypocritical, passages in the Bible that relate to social justice are seen as more important and relevant to them. For those who still take the Great Commission to heart, there are other barriers. Issues of tolerance and pluralism play a role, as outlined by Collins (2021) who states,

Because Gen Z has been exposed to cultural stereotypes of invasive evangelism and mission association with colonialism, our word choice matters. While many are evangelistically inclined, they are concerned about mission ethics; they may think of evangelism as propagandistic proselytism. Barna discovered that young adults find the word “convert” objectionable. They also dislike “winning souls,” “making disciples,” and “evangelism.” To a lesser degree they dislike “mission work” and “missions.” Very few object to “sharing faith.” They prefer “making a difference,” “following one’s calling,” and “helping to save lives.” (p. 33)

In many ways, because “they want to respect the beliefs of others, Gen Z Christians may not feel the same compulsion to share their faith as previous generations,” in fact they greatly fear the response of their peers and being “labeled as extreme or shamed for perceived intolerance” (Collins, 2021, p. 32). Showing respect and being considerate are extremely important values for members of Gen Z that stem off of their value of diversity and justice. Often, this makes them afraid of outrightly sharing their faith or trying to guide conversations towards spiritual matters, for fear of being manipulative or using a place of power to their advantage. Due to this many Gen Zers are hesitant to participate in missions and reluctant to participate in outright evangelism.

### Chapter 3: Survey Results

#### *Demographics*

The survey sent out to Houghton College students received a total of 124 responses. Of those 124 responses, there are a few notable demographic characteristics that should be taken into consideration. Approximately 95% of students claimed that they are currently Christians, with four of those being the only Christians in their family. In addition, only eight students stated that they have been in the church for less than five years, compared to the almost 93% who claimed they grew up in the church. The students who responded were fairly evenly distributed across years of college attendance, with approximately 33% being freshman, 20% sophomores, 21% juniors, and 25% seniors. The ages of the students were also fairly distributed, with all of them being under 25 years old.

In relation to their interest in missions, there were a variety of questions asked in order to discern the student's exposure to missions, the church, and other religions. To the question "Have you ever felt called to Christian missions?", approximately 63% stated yes (78 of the responses) and 36% stated no (45 of the responses). Almost one third of the students stated that they know a missionary personally and have been active participants in their church's youth group and other youth programs. A little more than one third (35%) of students claimed to have been on a short-term missions trip and 55% claimed to know someone active in another religion. Approximately 50% of responses indicated that their church puts an emphasis on missions, whereas 11% of them stated their church does not put an emphasis on missions.

These results indicate that most of the students that responded to the survey do have some exposure to the idea of missions. Most claimed to be Christians, often stating they grew up in the church, indicating that they may have had larger amounts of exposure to the idea of missions,



more opportunities to participate in missions, and perhaps a higher inclination towards evangelical practices.

*How do the students define missions?*

In order to discover the most common ways that students define and think about missions, there were a series of seven Likert scale agree-disagree questions and a missions related quote with a response section. In the open-ended responses, many students indicated that the term missions is unclear with statements such as, “I agree that missionary is a confusing term with confusing connotations,” or, “our understanding of a missionary is different now because the world is more interconnected and Christians are spread across the world.” The questions presented to the students aimed to help clarify what they think missions is and what they think it should be.

Two of the questions were aimed at understanding whether students see missions as primarily overseas/cross-cultural work. For the most part, students tended to fall into the “everything as missions” paradigm. To the statement, “Missions does not just mean going overseas, it also refers to ministry in your own communities,” 5% chose disagree or neutral, none strongly disagreed, 24% agreed, and 65% strongly agreed (weighted average=4.49). In addition, to the statement, “Missions means doing work overseas,” 30% of students strongly disagreed, 38% disagreed, 24% were neutral, 7% agreed, and only 1% strongly agreed (weighted average=2.11). However, despite seemingly clear results, in the open-ended responses many students tried to clarify their position, stating that while the idea of missions should be expanded to include more activities of the church there should still be a set-aside group of people dedicated to going overseas and reaching unreached people groups. One student commented, “I think the emphasis on daily work and finding a profession wherever someone is should become more

important. I do think, though, that some are called to leave their homes and move somewhere, whether that's another country or across a sea, and that should be supported.” Another in similar language said,

I think that every believer should see him/herself as someone meant to carry God's word to others and that "non-traditional" settings like the professional world are an important place to do that, but I think there is still probably a special call beyond that to people who are meant to dedicate their lives specifically to sharing the gospel.

For those who disagreed outrightly with the idea of “everything as missions,” unreached people groups were the main reason for their contention.

Other agree-disagree questions looked at whether or not students think missions operates holistically or more in a prioritist vein. In addition, these questions hoped to compare what students think about missions compared to how actual missions functions. These questions received more mixed results, with many students commenting that they did not know enough about missions to answer well or that their answers depended on what ministries they were looking at. To the sentence, “Missions focuses primarily on conversion and does not focus on broader spiritual and physical needs of the communities they are in,” most students disagreed, with 33% strongly disagreeing and 38% just disagreeing (weighted average= 2.12). Comments in response to this statement indicated that while students hoped this isn't true, they could think of examples where it is. Students responded strongly to the statement “Missions involves meeting physical needs in communities as well as spiritual needs,” with 43% agreeing and 49% strongly agreeing (weighted average= 4.40). Other questions sought to assess whether students thought missionaries solely did evangelism/church planting or were involved in other occupations and whether missions involves development work. Responses to these statements produced weighted

averages around 3, with most students expressing that they know missionaries who must have non-missionary occupations to enter restricted countries and that they think development work helps build relationships for missions. Most students also expressed that they desire a form of missions that is dedicated to relationship building and discipleship, with less emphasis placed on numbers and conversion.

***Do students think missions is still valuable?***

To help understand whether or not students perceive missions as a valuable part of the Church there were a variety of agree-disagree questions directed at their view of historical missions and general views of missions.

For the general view of missions students were presented five agree-disagree questions on a Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree) that fell into the category of Value Judgement. A list of questions included in the Value Judgement Composite score can be found in Appendix B. Collectively, these questions had a Cronbach's alpha equal to 0.669, which is an indicator of the reliability of the questions and determines how closely related the questions are to each other. The benchmark for reliability is 0.7, so this set of questions is slightly below that mark. The score distribution (see Table 1) and the average score (mean=2.58) seem to indicate that there is a wide range of beliefs on the value of missions. The open-ended responses associated with these questions also displayed a wide range of responses. Anywhere from saying the Great Commission makes it obvious that Christians are meant to be involved in missions to saying,

We can often get caught up in reaching all these people around the world and in great volumes, but neglecting our own families. God can still work in the world even if we are

not playing an active role. Prayer is also an active role without being there in person and I think that also has great benefits.

In addition to calculating the statistics found in Table 2, a t-test was also run to determine whether or not having missions experience affected the students' views on the value of missions. In order to fall into the category of "missions experience," students had to answer in the affirmative to the following questions: My church places an emphasis on missions, I know a missionary personally, and I have been on at least one short-term missions trip. Overall, students with missions experience ( $M=2.42$ ,  $SD=0.421$ ) compared to those who do not have missions experience ( $M=2.62$ ,  $SD=0.621$ ) failed to display significantly different opinions on the value of missions ( $t(90)=1.35$ ,  $p=0.181$ ,  $d=0.346$ ). These values indicate that missions experience does not have any significant impacts on the value that students place on missions.

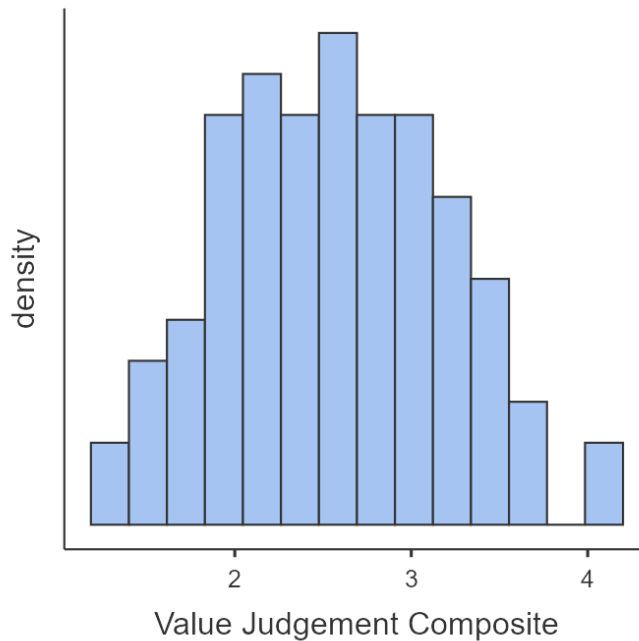


Table 1: Score Distribution for Value Judgement Agree-Disagree Questions

<i>Descriptives</i>	
<b>Value Judgement Composite</b>	
<i>N</i>	93
<i>Missing</i>	31
<i>Mean</i>	2.58
<i>Median</i>	2.60
<i>Standard deviation</i>	0.590
<i>Minimum</i>	1.20
<i>Maximum</i>	4.00

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Value Judgement Agree-Disagree Questions

Another factor that impacts how much students value missions is how they view the historical role of missions compared to its role today. This was assessed using two agree disagree questions and an open-ended quote response. The first statement that students responded to was, “I do not want to be associated with the negative aspects of historical missions, such as its role in colonialism and paternalism.” To this, 1% of students strongly disagreed, 8% disagreed, 23% were neutral, 28% agreed, and 40% strongly agreed (weighted average=3.98), as seen in Table 3. This indicates that students tend to have issues with how missions has been connected to colonialism and the destruction of traditional culture in the past. However, to the statement, “I think missions work involves the propagation of Western ideas and culture,” the response did not favor a single perspective, with 12% strongly disagreeing, 22% disagreeing, 34% neutral, 20% agreeing, and 12% strongly agreeing (weighted average=2.98, almost perfectly neutral). For this question, the comments suggested that students believed that modern missions is not as bad as it once was, in terms of cultural knowledge and respect. Very few students denied missions involvement in damaging practices in the past. Additionally, few students stated that they thought missions as a practice should be discontinued due to its history.

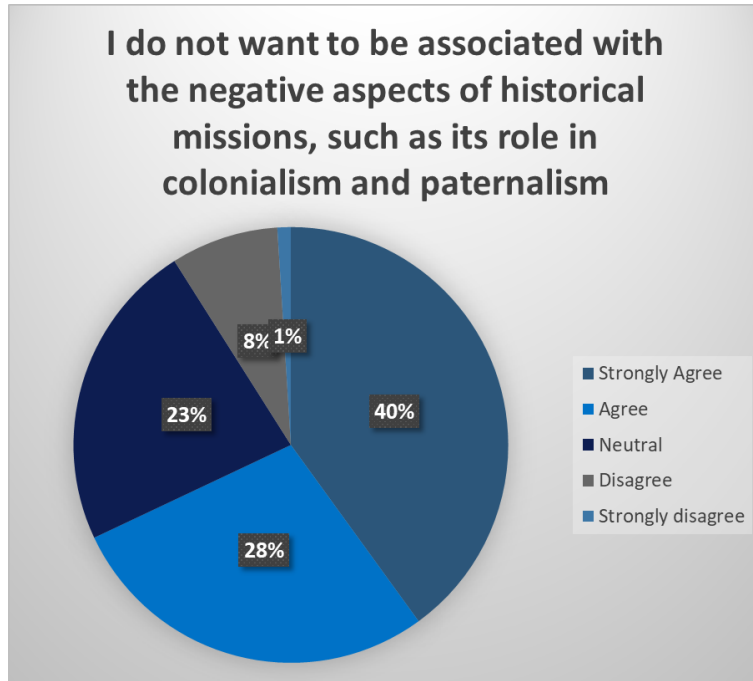


Table 3: Colonialism Agree-Disagree Question Responses

The responses to the quote, which can be found in Appendix C, also indicated that few students thought the practice of missions should not continue. However, trends suggested that students want the church and missionaries to take responsibility for wrongdoing in the past and work to overcome and prevent such actions from continuing. One such response stated, “No, we should not let a practice like that continue. That is not to say missions should end. Instead, missions should be strengthened in God’s love, recognizing and not forgetting the bad it has done, and focus on helping God’s children.” Another along the same lines commented, “I would say almost the opposite. I would encourage missionaries to continue steadfastly in an effort to break the pattern of history.” However, despite such opinions on redeeming missions, some expressed doubts, stating, “Yeah I agree with this, how can we be certain that missions, while founded with good intentions typically are really doing any good?” Overall, students tended to favor the opinion that missions has the potential to do good in the world, however, that it also must proceed with caution and constantly evaluate the consequences of its actions.

*How do post-modern values affect students' opinions on missions?*

As with the previous questions, the effect of postmodern values, such as pluralism and deconstruction, on students' views on missions were evaluated using a set of agree-disagree questions and open-ended quote responses. Similar to the value judgement evaluation, there was a set of six agree-disagree statements whose results were combined to give a single composite score. The Cronbach's alpha result was 0.727, meeting the benchmark for reliability, thus indicating that each question helps to evaluate the same variable/topic. For a list of questions included in this composite score, refer to Appendix B. Like the value judgement results, the results for the pluralism questions are mixed with an average score of 2.79, as shown in Table 4. Students varied greatly on how they view pluralism operating in missions and how much pluralism has influenced how they think missions should operate. As with the value judgement variable an independent samples t-test was run on the pluralism scores (for general statistics refer to Table 5). The independent samples t-test failed to find evidence of a significant difference between students with missions experience ( $M=2.54$ ,  $SD=0.408$ ) and those who do not have missions experience ( $M=2.85$ ,  $SD=0.710$ ) ( $t(90)=1.79$ ,  $p=0.076$ ,  $d=0.462$ ). However, unlike the value judgement results, the t-test based on missions experience suggests there may be some effect of missions experience on how pluralistic students are, although the results are just shy of being statistically significant, so there is a chance the result has been produced by chance.

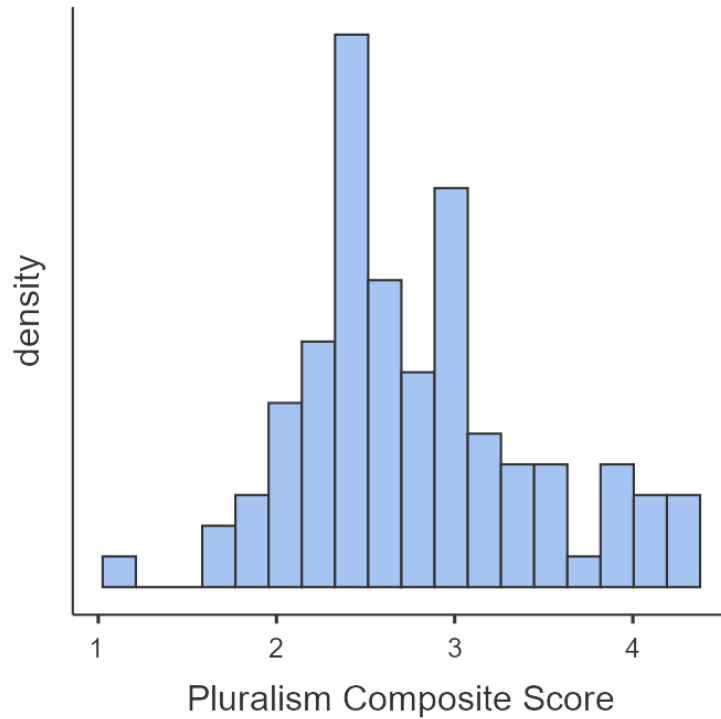


Table 4: Score Distribution for Pluralism Agree-Disagree Questions

<i>Descriptives</i>	
	<b>Pluralism Composite Score</b>
<i>N</i>	92
<i>Missing</i>	32
<i>Mean</i>	2.79
<i>Median</i>	2.67
<i>Standard deviation</i>	0.669
<i>Minimum</i>	1.17
<i>Maximum</i>	4.33

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics for Pluralism Agree-Disagree Questions

Another assessment of pluralistic views was the quote response question. The quote was geared towards understanding how much students identify with the millennial opinion on missions described in the quote, which can be found in Appendix C as question 35. The majority of students empathized with the emotions and opinions expressed in the quote. One student commented,



I absolutely understand this and feel it personally. I do feel shame for many actions of the church throughout history, and even many of its actions and treatment of certain groups of people today. Christian has become a word with strong negative connotations for many people. As a Christian I want so badly for everyone to see God the way I do, and feel and understand his unending love for us, but I also dislike making people upset or becoming at all close to the aggressive stereotype some have.

Other students expressed some reluctance to share the Gospel for similar reasons, saying, “I agree with this quote and identify with it a lot. I think that these are the reasons I feel uncomfortable sharing my faith.” However, despite some hesitancy many students also explained that they hope the caution expressed in the quote may be beneficial to missions in the future. One example is a student who said, “I agree, but this by no means cancels out the work that this generation has to offer. Maybe their beliefs will create a huge narrative for missions moving forward. One of peace and love.” Overall, students did identify with the author of the quote, however, they still see missions as worth pursuing, so long as it is with much thought and innovation.

## Chapter 4: Discussion of Research

The trends observed in the data, for the most part, were consistent with what was expected and what was described in the literature. However, there were biases that may have influenced the outcomes. The issue of defining missions was not initially an expected barrier for students, however, through the course of the literature review it became apparent that this was a key element to student involvement in missions. Millennials and Gen Z have a much greater concern for social justice issues and development work, which combined with their desire to change the world and disdain for hypocrisy, indicates that they would approach missions from a holistic standpoint. These younger generations want to live out an authentic faith, one that shows God's love for people on the ground, meets people where they are, and respects their unique history and culture. A more holistic approach seems to coincide better with these goals, so it is not surprising that students would desire a form of missions that blends physical outreach with spiritual outreach. The results of the survey portray this theme, indicating that Houghton undergraduates also desire a holistic form of missions. The issues of classifying different ministries of the church as missions or not became more prominent of an issue as research continued and produced potential confounding factors in analyzing the results. Students seemed to favor the position of 'everything as missions,' believing that the daily work of every individual can qualify as missions. For those who stated they felt called to missions or are currently involved in missions, they may be defining missions differently than the questions intended. Should missions be interpreted as every ministry of the church and the daily life of individuals, the questions do not help to answer why there are fewer missionaries going overseas or working cross-culturally or truly assess student interest in missions. Individual interpretations

of the word 'missions' could have played a large part in how students responded and how the data was understood.

According to the literature, the negative aspects of historical missions and a desire for tolerance are primary sources of hesitancy in younger generations. The responses in the survey to those issues was more mild than expected. There were few students who strongly questioned whether missions should continue and many seemed to believe that it is a vital part of Christianity for believers to share their faith. Reactions to the history of missions seemed to be more positive. Overall students tended to believe that missions has done good in the past and that whatever injustice was committed can be redeemed and inform actions in the future. This may also be a reflection of how they define missions. The literature suggested that these trends would be more significant, especially as justice, tolerance, and diversity are so important to Gen Z and Millennials.

These more mild responses to these issues may be influenced by potential biases in the research process. Since the majority of Houghton students are Christians (95%) and have grown up in the church (93%), it seems probable that they may have a more positive view of missions in the church. Specifically, the issue of pluralism may be affected. Students who grow up in the church are likely to be more open to the idea of absolute truth and understand the limits of pluralism and relativism. However, students who have not grown up in the church may be more skeptical in those areas; more likely to favor a more tolerant approach to missions and be hesitant in sharing their faith. Also, since the students are likely to have grown up with a Christian worldview, they are more likely to see missions as a necessary task for the church and believers, and thus find it to be valuable.

Another potential bias originates in the fact that Houghton students are primarily white/Caucasian, with few minority groups. This has the potential to affect survey results in regards to colonialist history and pluralism. Students from minority groups are more likely to be sensitive to the negative impacts of missions in the past and be more cautious of how they share their faith. For these groups, tolerance and diversity may be more important and they are likely more aware of such issues. Thus, the fact that the students at Houghton are primarily white/Caucasian means that in a larger and more diverse sample size, the perception of missions may be more negative and critical.

Having a larger and more diverse sample size would be beneficial to future studies, as well as a clarification of definitions throughout the course of the project. In particular, it would be helpful to define terms, such as missions and calling, to help clarify questions. In addition, certain questions could be edited and refocused to better target a specific subject, such as pluralism, etc., and to obtain a more significant Cronbach's alpha. A larger sample size would also be helpful in determining the effect that missions experience has on student's opinions on missions. Though trends have been suggested and observed throughout the course of this study, further research is needed to clarify and ascertain how younger generations understand missions and how they wish to act on it in the future.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

The future of missions has been questioned by many as the numbers of young people becoming involved in missions have dwindled and the replacement rate of long-term missionaries has decreased. There are many possible explanations for this trend, including theological barriers, like defining missions, and cultural barriers, such as post-modern values, views of historical missions, and generational trends. However, this research has indicated that although these issues do weigh on students' minds, they do still find missions to be valuable, just maybe not in the ways it has been previously defined. The issue of defining missions may be the most critical finding in this research. Further research is still needed to understand the logistical barriers that students and young adults face, and to understand the role that missions agencies play in recruitment and encouraging young adults. In some open-ended responses, some students expressed a lack of opportunity for involvement. Thus, further investigation into those issues may yield more insight into how younger generations interact with missions and how they may participate in the future.

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**Appendices**

**Appendix A: Statistics**

**Independent Samples T-Test**

		Statistic		df	p	Mean difference	SE difference		Effect Size
Value Judgement Composite Score	Student's t	1.35		91.0	0.181	0.203	0.151	Cohen's d	0.346
Pluralism Composite Score	Student's t	1.79	<sup>a</sup>	90.0	0.076	0.305	0.170	Cohen's d	0.462

<sup>a</sup> Levene's test is significant ( $p < .05$ ), suggesting a violation of the assumption of equal variances

Table 3: Independent Samples T-test Based on Missions Experience

**Appendix B: Questions for Composite Scores**

Questions included in the Value Judgement Score

- I do not want to be associated with the stereotype that Christians are judgemental, prejudice, etc.
- Missions infringes on the freedom of other people to choose their beliefs, religion, and values.
- It is important to share the gospel even though it means someone must change their beliefs to become a Christian. (Reversed)
- I do not like the idea of making someone conform to my worldview, since every individual's worldview is valid and has worth.
- Everyone has their own form of personal truth, so who am I to tell them they are wrong.
- Missions today values culture and seeks to preserve traditional cultures and contextualize biblical values without losing their scriptural integrity. (Reversed)

Questions Included in the Pluralism Composite Score

- Due to the loving nature of God, people do not have to play an active role in missions, since he will make himself known to them in other ways.
- I would rather address issues, such as immigration, homelessness, drug addiction, etc, in the United States
- Missions today is focused on quantity instead of quality, seeking only to increase the sheer numbers of churches and converts, without being concerned about the deeper individual relationship each person has with God.
- There are many needs that should be met in the United States before going overseas
- There is a church in every country, so global missions is not necessary.

*Appendix C: Sample Survey*

All questions will be transferred to Survey Monkey

Demographic Questions-

How old are you?

Which college do you currently attend?

What year of college are you currently in (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior)?

Are you currently involved in Christian missions? Yes/No

If yes, please describe how. If no, why not?

Have you ever felt called to Christian missions? Yes/No

Are you currently a Christian? Yes/No

If yes, how long have you been a Christian?

Of the following choices, please pick all that apply to you:

- I grew up in the church.
- I have been in the church less than 5 years
- My church puts an emphasis on missions.
- I personally know a missionary.
- My family is involved in ministry.
- My church does not put an emphasis on missions.
- I personally know someone who is active in a religion other than Christianity
- I have been on at least one short term missions trip outside of the US (or my home country)
- I actively participated in youth group and other youth events in my church or denomination.
- I am the only Christian in my family

Agree-Disagree Questions (in the form of a Likert scale: strongly disagree-disagree-neutral-agree-strongly agree)

- 1) In today's world missions work can be involved in religious dialogue/conversations while still holding to a belief that salvation is only in Jesus Christ.
- 2) Missions focuses primarily on conversion and does not focus on broader spiritual and physical needs of the communities they are in.
- 3) Missions does not just mean going overseas, it also refers to ministry in your own communities.
- 4) I do not want to be associated with the stereotype that Christians are judgmental, prejudice, etc.
- 5) Missions infringes on the freedom of other people to choose their beliefs, religion, and values.
- 6) Due to the loving nature of God, people do not have to play an active role in missions, since he will make himself known to them in other ways.
- 7) Missions involves meeting physical needs in communities as well as spiritual needs.
- 8) It is important to share the gospel even though it means someone must change their beliefs to become a Christian.
- 9) I would rather address issues, such as immigration, homelessness, drug addiction, etc, in the United States.
- 10) Missions today is focused on quantity instead of quality, seeking only to increase the sheer numbers of churches and converts, without being concerned about the deeper individual relationship each person has with God.

- 11) I do not like the idea of fundraising or having to be a member of a missionary agency/organization.
- 12) I do not like the idea of making someone conform to my worldview, since every individual's worldview is valid and has worth.
- 13) Missions work has the capacity to be a force for justice.
- 14) I think missions work involves the propagation of Western ideas and culture
- 15) When in the field, missionaries often have occupations outside of evangelistic practices and their role as a missionary.
- 16) Missions today is focused on relationship building and discipleship.
- 17) There are many needs that should be met in one's home country before going overseas.
- 18) Each individual must have a personal relationship with Christ to enter heaven.
- 19) There is a church in every country, so global missions is not necessary.
- 20) Missions today incorporates development work, such as medicine, agriculture, and addressing various social justice issues.
- 21) I do not want to be associated with the negative aspects of historical missions, such as its role in colonialism and paternalism.
- 22) Everyone has their own form of personal truth, so who am I to tell them that they are wrong.
- 23) Missions work can bring peace, even among non-Christian peoples.
- 24) Missions today values culture and seeks to preserve traditional cultures and contextualize biblical values without losing their scriptural integrity.
- 25) Missions means doing work overseas.

Quote Response Questions-

For each of the following quotes, how would you respond to someone if they said this in a conversation? Do you agree/disagree or have any questions/comments on the given statement?

- 1) "Missions, so it goes, is the old handmaiden of colonialism. So a critique of missions starts with history, or at least the bad parts. We're dubious that bad examples of good missionary work are good enough to outweigh the bad. If the pattern of church missions is one of war, genocide, abuse, and- at best- ethnocentrism, what is to say that this pattern has changed, or will ever change? Should we let a practice that has had such clearly horrific results continue?" (*Millennials and the mission of god: A prophetic dialogue, 2017*).
- 2) "Millennials, who have just now come of age, are much more reserved in their approach and limited in their expectations. Most of all, they do not want to make the mistake of coercing others to faith in any way. They bear a load of real or imagined responsibility for the failures of the church and its evangelistic strategies, and hope somehow to be witnesses for Christ by showing themselves to be different than the perceptions and stereotypes commonly held of Christians" (*Millennials and the mission of God: A prophetic dialogue, 2017*).
- 3) "If every believer is called by God, empowered by the Holy Spirit and sent to the world for God's mission, what should mission be like? We have come to agree that missionary is one of the most problematic words in today's mission thinking. In addition to the historic perception of power, especially in the context of the colonial era, it conveys an

elitist notion that mission is a call applied only to a few specialists. In order to shape 'mission for the rest of us,' it will require, first of all, adding the everyday world to the mission field, which has been understood, until now, as the faraway ends of the earth. Second, daily work needs to be understood as itself a mission engagement such that the workplace becomes a mission field. Professions then become valuable mission tools. Third, this can provide a firmer basis for every believer to be seen as a missionary" (*The state of missiology today : Global innovations in christian witness, 2016*)

- 4) "Our contention is that this call has been interpreted for many decades, especially in North America and parts of Western Europe, as communicating a set of biblical propositions to a maximum number of people and declaring them as 'reached' once this takes place. In other words, go, evangelize, plant churches, and measure success by numerical response! This agenda has dutifully propagated during this century by well-meaning missionaries to the point that it has come to dominate outreach strategies of the church around the globe...if we are to believe current statistics. Ninety-three percent of the world presumably has been evangelized, and our missions task allegedly is virtually completed. There is no question that the Christian presence is being expanded globally. But is evangelism the outcome Christ intended...Making disciples involves much more than encouraging people to accept certain truths about God and to begin attending church. It involves a total transformation of the heart and life that involves a righteousness that impacts not only individuals but families, communities and nations" (*Changing the mind of missions where have we gone wrong?, 2000*).



*In the beginning of the survey, it will be indicated that students may skip questions or stop the survey at any point in time.*

***Appendix D: Consent Form***

Included in the beginning of the survey:

By checking the box below, I understand that I am allowing my responses to be used anonymously in future papers, research, and publications. I am recognizing that I am participating voluntarily. I acknowledge that I may be contacted about participating in a personal interview should I consent to give personal contact information and that this contact information will not be shared or used for any purpose other than this research project.

I have read and accepted the terms and conditions above.

I would like to give permission to the researcher to contact me about my responses.

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_