

Book Review
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The Last Christian Generation, by Josh McDowell and David H. Bellis, Holiday, Florida; Green Key Books, 2006, 200 pp. \$5.00. ISBN: 1932587799.

Josh McDowell is a well-known writer and speaker. He received a Bachelor's degree from Wheaton College in language and a Master's degree in Theology from Talbot Theological Seminary. He is a speaker for Campus Crusade for Christ and has spoken to over ten million people in eighty-four countries. He has written over 100 books including *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* and *New Evidence That Demands a Verdict, More Than a Carpenter* and *Beyond Belief to Convictions*.

David Bellis is a writer, producer, and ministry consultant who focuses on ministry planning and development. He has been the campaign director for Josh McDowell for the past twenty-nine years.

In *The Last Christian Generation*, McDowell and Bellis show that the younger generation has some different beliefs from previous generations. They entertain aberrant views of God, Christianity, the church, and truth. These views threaten the very future of Christianity in America. Both authors write from a mainline Evangelical Christian perspective. Consequently, their judgments are based on their particular point of view.

The book is divided into two main sections. The first section contains six chapters and the second section contains seven chapters for a total of thirteen chapters. The book has an appendix, notes, advertising, and brief information about the authors.

In Section One, McDowell gives statistical support and analysis of *A Generation's Distorted Views*. In chapter one, he covers the reality of where young people in America are with regard to the Christian faith. His statistical information is gleaned from various sources which is well documented in the notes. Some of the statistics are alarming. For instance, 63% don't believe Jesus is the Son of the one true God; 58% believe all faiths teach equally valid truths; 51% don't believe Jesus rose from the dead; 65% don't believe Satan is a real entity; 68% don't believe the Holy Spirit is a real entity (15); and 81% have adopted a view that "all truth is relative to the individual and his/her circumstances" (45). In the past, between fifty-five percent and sixty-six percent of churched young people said that the church would play a part in their lives as they get older. Today, only thirty-three percent say that (13).

These statistics reveal that the next generation does not have a Christian worldview that is based upon biblical truth. Instead, they have pursued an existential view of the world that borrows from many different religions. Religious pluralism and relativity of truth have had a profound effect upon the younger generation.

In chapters two through five, the authors proceed to address each area of concern. In chapter two, they address the distorted view of Christianity that young people have today. They view Christianity as only one of many religions that contain religious truth and not as the sole religion of God based upon the New Testament. Sixty-five percent of our youth either believe or suspect that there is "no way to tell which religion is true" (34). McDowell and Bellis also believe that young people today hold the view that salvation comes by works rather than by faith in Jesus Christ. They emphasize the need for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

In chapter three, the authors turn to the distorted view of truth that many young people have today. Truth, for them, is relative and subjective rather than absolute and objective.

Seventy percent of our church young people believe there is no absolute moral truth (45). An excellent illustration of this dilemma for our young people is related by McDowell who tells of an experiment conducted by his son Sean with a group of high school students. After distinguishing between a “matter of fact” and a “personal preference”, McDowell asked, “Is the resurrection of Jesus like the number of marbles (a matter of fact) or is it a matter of personal opinion?” The majority concluded that it was a matter of personal opinion (46-47).

In chapter four, the authors explore the distorted view of reality held by many young people. The faulty perception is, “what works is right” (52-53). Many young people determine the difference between right and wrong based upon how they “feel” and what “works.” God’s credo is, “what is right works” (53). There is a profound difference.

In chapter five, the subject of the church is discussed. The research done by McDowell and Bellis revealed five aspects of the present perception of young people regarding church. They are: (1) church is boring; (2) church is non-stop activity; (3) church isn’t the biggest influence in my life or my spiritual development; (4) church seems like just a series of events to me; and (5) church may help save my soul but it won’t help me grapple with the real issues of life (58-62). The authors correctly discerned a huge “disconnect” between young people and the church. Could it be that they see “church” as something you do, rather than something you are? Yet, there is hope. Seventy-four percent still haven’t figured out the purpose or meaning of their lives (63). They need guidance and God through His word can provide it with help from strong spiritual leadership.

In chapter six, the authors outline what they think will change the present distortions of the young people of America. They suggest: (1) the need for a true revelation; (2) a threefold foundation involving: (a) The God of Redemption; (b) The God of Relationships; and (c) the God of Restoration. Further, they recommend a shift from presentation of propositions to experiencing relational interaction with God (also called a *spiritual formation process*) (82-83). This new approach is delineated in section two.

Section two of the book contains a blueprint to rebuild the true foundation of the Christian faith. Chapter seven focuses on changing the educational model from a Hellenistic model where the student is presented with rational and logical propositions that he/she is required to learn to a Hebrew model of education where learning takes place in an experiential setting. The first is called propositional learning. The latter is referred to as process learning. McDowell and Bellis believe that the Hebrew model is superior for teaching spiritual truth and argue for a spiritual process transformation approach.

Chapter eight develops the God of redemption concept further. The authors attempt to develop storytelling as a means of incorporating the Hebrew model to increase understanding of how God redeems. They believe that one is saved by grace alone through faith alone. This affirmation is problematical because it leaves out the obedience of faith (Rom. 1:5, 16:26). While it is true that we cannot earn our salvation, it is also true that God requires something from us as we make a faith response to obey His will out of a heart of love.

The authors continue to develop their approach by listing what they believe should be the listener’s response to the God of redemption. They mention a life of faith, a life of worship, and a life of prayer.

In chapter nine, the God of relationships concept is further developed. The authors correctly assert that the ultimate purpose of our existence is to know God intimately and to become more and more like Him (124). How is this going to be accomplished? Two areas of concern are mentioned. The first is a proper attitude toward the scriptures. The second is the

proper understanding of the person and work of the Holy Spirit. The authors affirm a supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers (128-129). This is a dangerous approach because it leads to subjectivism in regards to the special leading of the Holy Spirit. It also puts one's personal promptings of the Spirit in conflict with the scriptures themselves.

Once again, the authors develop the response that believers should make to the God of relationships. They mention: (1) a life of loving others, and (2) a life of making godly choices.

Chapter ten develops further the concept of the God of restoration. The authors state that they believe that God will "restore his kingdom in a new heaven and a new earth" (142). They affirm that the earth will be re-created and become a dwelling place for the redeemed (144). Actually, the created heavens and earth will be destroyed (II Pet. 3) and the "new heavens and new earth" is a reference to heaven.

Two responses to the God of restoration are recommended by the authors. The first is a life of spiritual warfare and the second is a life of spiritual reproduction.

Chapter eleven describes a process-driven ministry. Four questions are presented for consideration: (1) who are you as an individual and what is your ministry? (2) why do you exist as a ministry? (3) where are we going as a ministry? and (4) how are we going to get there as a ministry?

In chapter twelve, the authors list five characteristics of a process-driven ministry. These ministries are: mission-focused, Christ-like, intergenerational, risk-taking, and build community coalitions. Several pages are devoted to developing the intergenerational concept of ministry. This is an area of much needed focus.

Finally, in chapter thirteen, the authors present ways in which they can serve churches. Primarily, they want churches to use them as a resource for materials and workshops to build the purpose-driven ministries that they have described in this book. The last pages of the book contain advertisements of materials available for this task.

There is a considerable amount of usable material in this book to help analyze the present state of spirituality among American youth. However, the recommendations made to solve these problems by the authors must be "sifted" in light of the Word of God. Take the good points and leave the chaff alone!