

Abstract

THE FOURTH CENTURY CATECHUMENATE AS A MODEL FOR
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY CHURCH GROWTH AND EVANGELIZATION

SCOTT D. PARNELL

Project under the direction of Professor J. Neil Alexander.

The relationship between the church and the United States is evolving. The period between 1950 and 2025 has witnessed a rapid de-Christianization of American culture. Movements like the First and Second Great Awakenings represent seasons of intentional evangelism and Christianization; by contrast, since 1954, the percentage of Americans who qualify as “Practicing Christian” has fallen from 49% to 28%, with 31% of the population now identifying as “no religion.”¹ These seventy-five years have witnessed America’s move into a post-Christian reality, where Christianity (particularly categorized as white, conservative Protestantism) is no longer a primary influence on public life. This shift is captured by changing attitudes on numerous social issues, as well as individual participation in congregational life. This post-Christian existence parallels a cultural rise in pluralism and tolerance, where, for the first time in Western History, Christianity is losing its place of social prominence, while having to co-exist and respect other religious traditions.

Today’s culture of religious pluralism most closely resembles the relationship between the Church and Empire between 313AD (the Edict of Milan) and 381AD (the Edict of Thessalonica). In this inter-Edict time, Christianity was folded into the public life of the Roman Empire but was not yet the official religion of the empire. With this shifting relationship, the church adapted by developing their preparation and initiation rites (the catechumenate) to accommodate the church’s changing relationship with the empire. In this project, I hope to propose “*The Bridges Model of the Parish*” based upon the gained wisdom of the fourth century catechumenate in conversation with our twenty-first century setting, given the contemporary shifting relationship between church and state. The Bridges Model of the Parish takes common aspects of congregational life (community, worship, outreach, and learning) and provides a frame for their utilization for growth and evangelism within the parish. This model is rooted in the belief that the mission of the church is to restore all people to unity with God and one another through Christ – and that congregations can use what they’re already doing to facilitate that work.

Approved



Date

April 20, 2026

¹ Self-identifies as Christian, attends worship at least once a month, and claims that faith is very important in their life – cf. Barna Group *How Post-Christian Is U.S. Society?* Ventura, CA: Barna Research Group, 2013.

The Fourth Century Catechumenate as a Model for
Twenty-first Century Church Growth and Evangelization

by


Scott Daniel Parnell

Submitted to the Faculty of the
School of Theology of the University of the South
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

May, 2026

Sewanee, Tennessee

Approved  Date 17 April 2026
First Advisor


Approved  Date 17 April 2026
Second Advisor

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: The United States: A Post-Christian Nation	1
Shifts in American Religious Identity	5
Quantifying American Religiosity	15
The Church's Reliance on the State	21
Turning to The Episcopal Church	24
Chapter Two: Historical Survey of Baptismal Preparation	26
The Biblical Witness	27
Pre-Edict of Milan (East and West)	32
Post-Edict of Milan	42
The Medieval Church	49
Conclusion	57
Chapter 3: Post-Christian United States, Pre-Christian Rome	64
Social Trends in the United States (1950-2025)	64
Christianity and the Roman Empire	84
Rome and the United States: Tolerance and Pluralism	89
Chapter 4: Congregational Development in a Post-Christian Context	94
Faith Development in Community	96
The Bridges Model of Congregational Development	100
Chapter 5: The Effect of Generational Change	110
The Life Cycle of the Congregation	110
Tracking Generational Change	113
American Generations	120
Chapter 6: The Bridges Model of Congregational Development	131
Service: The Bridge and Foundations	132
Learning: The Bridge and Foundations	139
The Center of it All: Community and Worship	142
Chapter 7: Case Studies	146
Case Study 1 – Urban Parish	146
Case Study 2 – Rural Parish	148
Conclusion and Further Opportunities	151
Bibliography	153

Chapter 1: The United States: A Post-Christian Nation

In 2025, the church finds itself in uncharted territory regarding its relationship with the United States government. Since the 1950s, the influence of Christianity on American civic life has diminished and become one of many options available to the public. White Protestantism once dominated American life and served as the justification and impetus for numerous civic laws and social norms and behaviors. However, in 2025, this is no longer the case. Blue laws have disappeared, the “sabbath” is no longer sacred, and behaviors and relationships that once were shunned by a 1950s faith are now publicly affirmed and protected. Over the last seventy-five years, Christian religious influence and participation have declined, and the social imagination of tolerance, pluralism, and self-defined spirituality held by American citizens has replaced Protestant Christianity. The decline of the influence of Christianity on American life has pushed the United States to become a post-Christian nation: a country which holds a memory of a particular strain of Christian practice and moral teaching but no longer promotes its exclusive Christian world view.

The church has operated over the last seventy-five years as though it was in a privileged relationship with the state – because for a time, it certainly was. Appeals to the “Moral Majority” and “Judeo-Christian values” once bore great influence on federal policy and law, but this is no longer true. Christianity exists as one of many options within our contemporary, pluralistic society. Appeals to Christianity as the sole authority fall flat as public awareness of other worldviews has grown. Arguments over the First Amendment – “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...” – have grown as those of other faiths (and no faith) have increased in number and proponents of Christianity have attempted to reassert

its dominance.² Within the last two years, Oklahoma has required public schools to teach Bible (but not any other sacred text) and Texas and Louisiana have made it compulsory for classrooms to post the Ten Commandments – and each of these has begun to have their constitutionality challenged. Reactions to generational shifts have propelled this change and provide insight into the cultural waters of the United States that will continue to materialize in years to come as generational turnover occurs.

“The church” is not monolithic. American Christianity is multifaceted, with vast differences between the various sects and denominations. I would identify four broad categories of Christian churches (that is, organizations that view their mission as incarnating the Christian tradition): Roman Catholic, Mainline (generally liberal) Protestant, Conservative/Evangelical, and Black Churches. Within these four categories is a broad spectrum of identity. For example, the Roman Catholic Church ranges from “Trad” Catholic (i.e., rejects Novus Ordo and held *sede vacante* during the pontificate of Francis) to liberal Catholicism (e.g., James Martin, S.J.). The Mainline denominations traditionally include The Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Methodist Church, and some Baptist traditions. These are characteristically more progressive denominations that are affirming and inclusive of LGBTQIA+ persons and policies. By contrast, their conservative counterparts (The Anglican Church in North America, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Presbyterian Church of America, and Global Methodist Church), which reject affirming positions, are rarely included in the “Mainline.” Instead, they shift into a conservative/evangelical segment, which I would expand to include the Southern

² U.S. Const. amend. I.

Baptist Convention and non-denominational evangelical churches. I do separate Black churches out from the conservative evangelical tradition, despite their conservative tradition, because of the embedded racist history of evangelicalism in the United States.

Each of these four categories would offer critique of the other. For example, I would classify the collaboration between evangelical churches and the Trump Administration as an unholy alliance and corruption of Christianity. Bumper stickers, billboards, t-shirts, yard signs, and various paraphernalia proclaim “God, Guns, and Trump” and “Faith, Family, Firearms, Freedom,” among other slogans and images that (in my opinion) contradict what it means to be a follower of Jesus.



Figure 1: Merchandise merging Christian faith with American politics. The hat in the foreground says, “Jesus is my savior, Trump is my president” and the hat in focus says “God, Guns, and Trump” with an American Flag bill, with AR-15s and cross embroidered onto it.³

I would challenge the “Christianity” of a hypothetical caricatured born-again evangelical Christian who embraced these products as valid and affirming of Christian

³ <https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.wabe.org%2Fjesus-is-their-savior-trump-is-their-candidate-ex-presidents-backers-say-he-shares-faith-values%2F&psig=AOvVaw1JBCMKco8sA-g2CwZFr216&ust=1753364539296000&source=images&cd=yfe&opi=89978449>

teaching and practice, based on my own tradition. I would reject their interpretation based of scripture, reason, and tradition (hallmarks of the Episcopal/Anglican tradition). Reciprocally, this same hypothetical individual could challenge my own faith and tradition because of The Episcopal Church's commitment and inclusion of LGBTQIA+ individuals, based on a fundamentalist approach to *sola scriptura* (consistent with their own tradition). These examples demonstrate the complexity of the churches' and Christianity's relationship with the American government – because theological issues (nonviolence, sexual ethics, etc.) that become enacted in public policy are ultimately a political action. I will return to this later, with a discussion on the emergence of Christian Nationalism. There is no authoritative source which determines what is and is not authentic Christianity. Therefore, I will not be assessing an individual's claim of what it means to be "Christian" or the validity of whether an organization that talks about Jesus can be truthfully identified as part of "the church." I will simply use their own self-identification in determining the identity. Throughout this project "the church," refers to the invisible body of Christians committed to following Jesus, without particular reference to denomination. By comparison, I will use "congregation" to refer to the local church.

The purpose of the below examination is not to argue whether the United States government should or should not enact Christian principles in its policy and law; instead, it is to build a case that the United States has moved to a post-Christian society, and then examine how the church's relationship with the federal government has affected the church's own practices of evangelism and formation.

Shifts in American Religious Identity

Christianity's minimized role in public influence has changed the relationship between the church and the country: no longer do Christian norms and values dominate and dictate social behavior. Today, only 62% of Americans self-identify as Christian, 29% are religiously unaffiliated (atheist, agnostic, or "none"), and 7% belong to another religious tradition. However, only 33% of Americans attend a Christian worship service at least once a month (compared to 49% attending at least once a week in 1954).⁴ The Pew findings are consistent with a 2017 Barna survey, which found that while 74% of Americans would self-identify as Christian, only 32% of Americans would qualify as "Practicing Christians."⁵

To be post-Christian, a country must have once conceived of itself as a Christian nation – that is, a nation influenced by Christian ideals and principles – but no longer holds that collective imagination. In the case of the United States, referring to the country as "secular" is an incomplete description of the context, because of the historical comingling of Christianity and politics that still exists in the collective consciousness.

There are two conceptual ideas of what makes a nation Christian. On a macro-level, there is formal declaration and assent of the society to a particular religious tradition. In the modern era, this is exemplified by the United Kingdom, where Rushi Sunak (the Hindu Prime Minister) read from Colossians at the coronation of Charles III,

⁴ Gregory A. Smith et al., "2023–24 Religious Landscape Study: Executive Summary," Pew Research Center, February 26, 2025

⁵ Barna Group, *The State of the Church 2018*, April 17, 2018, <https://www.barna.com/research/state-church-2018/>. - According to Barna's definitions, a "Practicing Christian" is one who identifies with a Christian denomination, attends a worship service at least once a month, and say their faith is very important in their life.

who was proclaimed the Defender of the Faith and anointed as King. On the micro-level, there is the individual practice and participation of people in a religious tradition that both evolves and influences the society, which, with time, can collectively wax or wane. When a society forms a government “of the people, for the people, by the people,” where the majority of people identify as Christian, the government then reflects a Christian-influenced view, even without a formal, macro-level declaration. This individual perception then intersects with the collective imagination (the “social imaginary” of Charles Taylor) that transcends the specifics of individual belief and praxis.⁶

The macro experience of being in a Christian nation requires a formal assent (or perhaps, a subjugation of the nation) to the divine authority. This is an etiological understanding of a nation’s religious identity. In the early years of the church, Christianity and the Roman Empire were at odds: the Empire asserted its dominance by actively persecuting Christians. Constantine’s Edict of Milan in 313, validated the Christian religion with the Empire (thereby relieving the threat of persecution) but did not eliminate the cult of Caesar. Three generations later, Theodosius issued the Edict of Thessalonica in 381 to establish Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire. The church found security in its privileged role, because it now held the power to do the persecuting, rather than be persecuted. The fall of Rome would challenge the emerging theology of Christendom; and nearly four hundred years later, the coronation of Charlemagne as Holy Roman Emperor in 800 would consummate the union of church

⁶ Taylor, Charles. 2018. *A Secular Age*. London, England: Belknap Press.

and Empire. As the relationship moved forward, the church found itself in a complex relationship with the Empire: failure to baptize within one year of birth brought the consequence of paying a fine *to the Empire*, not the church.

The Protestant Reformation and Enlightenment exacerbated the tension in the relationship by doubting the seat of authority within the church-government relationship. The Pope, as the Vicar of Christ, crowned the Christian Princes of Europe and affirmed the Divine Right of Kings. The Petrine See stood independent from the monarchies, even though it would, throughout the centuries, become entangled in the politics between them. When Papal authority was rejected in the years following the Reformation, geographic territories began redefining themselves as nation-states based upon cultural and ethnic identities (of which, religion was a marker). The Enlightenment pushed this tension forward, exemplified by Napoleon's self-coronation in Notre Dame of Paris with Pope Pius VII sitting as a spectator. This symbolic move communicated that Napoleon's authority came from the people, and not from the church. However, it would not be until 1905 when France would formalize the principle of *laïcité* (secularism) in its constitution. Despite the hundred years between Napoleon's coronation and the declaration of a separation of church and state in its constitution, France was no longer etiologically a Christian nation. The social imaginary had begun to evolve from a divinely sanctioned government (Divine Right of Kings) to governmental authority (at least in the United States) being granted "by the consent of the governed".⁷

In the 1950s, many Americans viewed the United States as a "Christian nation." On June 14, 1954, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed House Joint Resolution 243

⁷ United States, *Declaration of Independence*, July 4, 1776.

into Law, adding the phrase “under God” to the United States’ Pledge of Allegiance.⁸ This clearly affirmed the contemporary perspective that the United States was a “Christian nation.” However, it was the micro-level belief and practice of individual people that generated the social imagination of the United States being a Christian nation, not any charter or document (unlike the United Kingdom). It is estimated that at the time of the Revolutionary War, only 17% of colonists participated in any form of religious practice.⁹ Thirteen years after declaring independence, the Constitutional Convention guaranteed the right to an individual’s religious practice and pledged that the Congress would not establish a religion. A motion, introduced by Benjamin Franklin, to pray before signing the Constitution was avoided by adjournment, rather than direct vote on the proposal.¹⁰ In 1797, the United States Senate unanimously declared in the Treaty of Tripoli that “the Government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion.”¹¹ Despite this clear historical precedent, the United States claimed a Christian religious heritage and identity through H. J. Res 243, nearly 175 years after the United States’ founding. The passage of the bill reflected the contextual sentiment of the United States, rooted in a pervasive false-memory myth that it was a “Christian nation.”

⁸ United States, *68 Stat. 249 – Joint Resolution to Amend the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America*, Public Law 83-396, June 14, 1954, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-68/pdf/STATUTE-68-Pg249.pdf#page=1>.

⁹ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 65

¹⁰ Madison, James. *Notes of Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787*. In *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787*, edited by Max Farrand. Vol. 1. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1911.

¹¹ *Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the United States of America and the Bey and Subjects of Tripoli of Barbary*, Article 11, signed June 4, 1796, ratified June 7, 1797.

The United States' 1950s Christian identity was rooted in the hypothetical faith of its citizens in the colonial period and early years of the Republic. This "Christian nation" myth linked the United States' founding to that of ancient Israel and assumed a special covenant status between Americans and God that mirrored the Deuteronomic Covenant of the First and Second Temple Periods. As the myth goes, religious practice was a motivator for the New England pilgrims who were hoping to found their theocratic utopias. John Winthrop preached about how his religious community would become a "city on a hill," alluding to New Zion imagery of Isaiah and Revelation. The faith and practice of Americans in the 1940s "delivered" a victory to the United States in World War II and was evidence of the nation's special status and role in salvation history. So long as Americans behaved in "the right way" – often characterized as "Judeo-Christian values" – God would continue to bless the United States with prosperity. In the 1950s, social pressure to conform propagated this myth (rooted in a puritanical fundamentalism, which would be revived during the various Great Awakenings), and made the United States "Christian". Understandably, the Red Scare dominated the contemporary imagination with the confluence of McCarthyism and Soviet involvement in the Korean conflict. It was pragmatic to affirm the United States' Christianness (to contrast the USSR's atheism) for national identity. The United States was overwhelmingly European (89.6% white, 10% black, >1% other), and understood itself a "European county, displaced westward."¹² The introduction of H. J. Res. 243 seemed to affirm what the majority already felt they knew: the United States was "the most God believing and

¹² United States Census Bureau, *1950 Census of Population and Housing* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952); Christopher Caldwell, *The Age of Entitlement: America Since the Sixties* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020), 87

religion adhering, fundamentalist, and religiously traditional country in Christendom.”¹³ In the 1950s, 73% of Americans claimed a Christian identity, and 49% of Americans would attend a house of worship at least once a week.¹⁴ The perspective of this majority would go on to influence social policy and teaching, based upon their interpretive context – at the time, a fundamentalist Protestant conservatism. Anti-abortion, anti-sodomy, and anti-divorce positions all attributed their source to Christian teaching and served as the law of the land because of the influence of the American Christian imaginary. Today, access to abortion is federally permitted (although, as of the 2022 Dobbs decision is no longer is federally protected), gay marriage is legal (Obergefell, 2015), no-fault divorce is common in all fifty states, and pre-marital sex is the norm. Moreover, marijuana has been decriminalized, school prayer violates the Constitution, and religious conscience protections are challenged. At one time, these were all indicators of the nation’s commitment to Judeo-Christian values. Yet, as the role of faith shifted in the lives of individuals, so the role that Christianity played in the public square shifted, as well as the relationship between the church (as an organization) and society.

The tension between macro and micro realities continues to exist in the United States, most recently in the “Christian Nationalist” movement. The United States has moved through phases of religious revival – the Great Awakenings of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries certainly increased individual religiosity and grew their respective religious communities (through converts). The 1950s were a decade of

¹³ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 2

¹⁴ Frank Newport, “Five Key Findings on Religion in the U.S.,” Gallup, December 23, 2016, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/200186/five-key-findings-religion.aspx>.

high religiosity in the United States, commingled with prosperity and abundance. Over the next seventy years this influence would decline, despite the efforts of Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell, and others. Within the last ten years, the Christian Nationalist movement has gained traction as an attempt to reassert conservative Christian “values” in the public square. These values are generally linked to restricting personal behavior and sexual ethics (e.g., abortion, same sex marriage, and gender expression) and rejecting social equity and inclusion (e.g., opposing antiracism, feminism, immigration, and social safety nets like Medicaid and SNAP) in the name of a fundamentalist hermeneutic. Sound bites like “God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve” and “All Lives Matter” attempt to justify and normalize this fundamentalist social teaching that is at odds with an alleged American principle of self-determinism and libertarianism. Christian Nationalism at its core propagates the myth that the United States was founded as a Christian nation and has a divinely sanctioned role to play in salvation history. If an individual believes that the United States is, was, or should be a “Christian Nation,” Christian Nationalism is the umbrella term under which that individual would identify.

Project 2025 and the *Mandate for Leadership*, as a “secular document,” implicitly concede that the United States no longer preferences the Christian tradition. The manual declares:

“God ordained the Sabbath as a day of rest, and until very recently the Judeo-Christian tradition sought to honor that mandate by moral and legal regulation of work on that day. Moreover, a shared day off makes it possible for families and communities to enjoy time off together, rather than as atomized individuals, and provides a healthier cadence of life for everyone.

Unfortunately, that communal day of rest has eroded under the pressures of consumerism and secularism, especially for low-income workers.”¹⁵

A common day of rest – of the rejection of consumerism and time to build and strengthen social bonds – would probably benefit any country or social group. And yet, at this time, there is no secular justification for why we should do that, particularly when the welfare of the country is based upon perpetually increasing consumerism through the idol of the economy. The *Mandate for Leadership* appeals to the “Judeo-Christian tradition” because they believe that a secular society lacks universal moral authority. The Heritage Foundation acknowledges that the United States finds itself in a place of relativism and moral ambiguity – and they hope to correct this reality by reasserting “Judeo-Christian values” as the source of authority. While their position does not attest to the nations’ a-religious governing heritage (as shown by the Treaty of Tripoli), it does concede that even if the United States functioned as “a Christian Nation,” it no longer is.

Popular culture caricaturizes the Christian Nationalist position by mocking the desire to “make America great again” by forcing “Christian values” onto Americans. In the satirical, social commentary show, “South Park,” PC Principal (“Politically Correct” Principal, a character introduced in 2015 to instill “woke” policies to the fictional South Park Elementary), calls an assembly to introduce a new initiative:

PC Principal: Everybody quiet. There’s some bull crap going on in this country and I’m not going to let it corrupt the environment of this school.

Eric Cartman: Ah, here we go.

¹⁵ Heritage Foundation, *Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise*, Project 2025 (Washington, DC: Heritage Foundation, 2023), https://static.heritage.org/project2025/2025_MandateForLeadership_FULLL.pdf, 589

PC Principal: Now I don't know about you, but I'm sick and tired of the way people are treated and mocked for being compassionate. It's out of control. There's only one thing that can bring some normalcy back to these corrupt times... and that's our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Eric Cartman: What?

PC Principal: This school has traded truth for comfort and worships idols of self and sin. We were a nation under God, but now we've spit in His face and wonder why everything is falling apart. There's only one way back: repent, bow to Christ, or be swept away with the rest of the Godless lies.

Eric Cartman: What the hell, dude?

PC Principal: In order to turn things around, I'm going to be a "Power Christian Principal." You can call me PC Principal. So now, I'd like you to put your hands together in welcoming Christ our Lord.¹⁶

PC Principal's office is later shown in the episode to be adorned with a poster of an American Flag, a Cross, and bald eagle, a framed picture that says "He is Risen" with three crosses, an *ichthys* JESUS fish paperweight on his desk, and a Sacred Heart of Jesus sticker on his laptop: an amalgamation of Christian traditions. This is a dramatic character reversal for PC Principal who was initially hired to make "South Park Elementary a more progressive place that fits in with today's times."¹⁷ In his debut episode, PC Principal introduced himself by saying: "I don't know about you, but frankly I'm sick and tired of how minority groups are marginalized in today's society.

¹⁶ Trey Parker, creator, "Sermon on the 'Mount," *South Park*, season 27, episode 1, Comedy Central, July 23, 2025, 02:30

¹⁷ Parker, Trey, creator. "Stunning and Brave." *South Park*, season 19, episode 1. Comedy Central. Aired September 16, 2015. 01:12

I'm here because this place [South Park Elementary, and by extension, fictional South Park, Colorado] is lost in a time warp."¹⁸ Throughout his debut season, PC Principal goes on to critique various conservative positions that would be common in the 1950s but were taboo in 2015, among them were the use of the word "retarded" and racial and gender stereotypes. Now, ten years after his introduction, PC Principal's dialogue in school assembly mimics the Christian Nationalist position by suggesting society's problems will be fixed by accepting Jesus, a traditional evangelical formulation. Implicit in this is that the United States no longer accepts Jesus – pointing to a post-Christian society. Ironically, in the evangelical tradition, accepting Jesus is an individual decision; yet, in the Christian Nationalist understanding, so long as the corporate body (i.e., the United States) assents to a Christian worldview, individual non-Christians in the United States are also destined to share in blessing because they are American. Further, PC Principals' dialogue mocks the Christian Nationalist tendency to criticize those who are "woke." He suggests that people who are aware of and compassionate to the needs of the marginalized (what he said South Park needed to do in his debut in 2015) are being mocked, and saying that if the country would follow Jesus, they would no longer be mocked. The irony is that it is the Christian Nationalist perspective mocks "woke" persons who are engaged in social justice work – who PC Principal used to be. PC Principal's observation that "we were a nation under God, but now we've spit in his face," embodies the Christian Nationalist myth that the United States was always a Christian nation and that the problems facing the country stem from "woke" policies that are inherently anti-Christian.

¹⁸ Parker, "Stunning and Brave." 01:36

Quantifying American Religiosity

Surveys attempt to quantify the combined religiosity of the country based on the micro-level. Some studies use frequency of attendance as the metric of Christianness, as well as an individual's commitment to fundamentalist tenants (e.g. the Bible is the infallible Word of God). The Barna Group first published its research on post-Christian attitudes in 2013 by using fifteen measures of belief and behaviors. This survey attempted to avoid a respondent's self-identification as "Christian," and speak directly to Barna's assumed markers of Christian faith and practice. Agreeing with 60% (9 out of 15 measures) indicated the survey participant was "post-Christian"; agreeing with 80% (12 out of 15) deemed the participant as "highly-post Christian."¹⁹ The fifteen measures were:²⁰

1. Do not believe in God
2. Identify as atheist or agnostic
3. Disagree that faith is important in their lives
4. Have not prayed to God (in the last year)
5. Have never made a commitment to Jesus
6. Disagree the Bible is accurate
7. Have not donated money to a church (in the last year)

¹⁹ Barna Group. *How Post-Christian Is U.S. Society?* Ventura, CA: Barna Research Group, 2013.

²⁰ While this list makes cultural sense for today, there is a curious thought experiment to be had in how many of these markers the average peasant under Charlemagne's Holy Roman Empire would have affirmed. Markers 11 through 15 would be immediately out, because none of that existed in 800. It is reasonable to believe that peer-to-peer evangelism (Marker 10) would be non-existent, as well as Marker #5 of making a commitment to Jesus (in the evangelical-Protestant-personal-confession sense that the Barna Group assumes). This leaves just two markers before the Barna Group would determine the ninth century peasant to be "post-Christian."

8. Have not attended a Christian church (in the last year)
9. Agree that Jesus committed sins
10. Do not feel responsibility to share their faith
11. Have not read the bible (in the last week)
12. Have not volunteered at church (in the last week)
13. Have not attended Sunday school (in the last week)
14. Have not attended a religious small group (in the last week)
15. Have not participated in a house church (in the last year)

It was the response to this survey in 2017 that suggested while 74% of Americans would self-identify as Christian, only 32% of Americans would qualify as “Practicing Christians.”²¹ This identifies nearly two-thirds of Americans as either no religion (atheist, agnostic, or “none” – roughly 19% of the population), a non-Christian religion (~6%), or self-identified as Christian, but not practicing (~39%). Overall, 42% of Americans qualify as “post-Christian,” regardless of their self-identification (i.e., a devout Hindu would be labeled as “post-Christian” based upon the survey, even though they never were Christian).

Using the metric of individual religious preferences and practices, the United States in the 1950s had a majority Christian population that significantly influenced society. In 1955, 74% of Catholics and 42% of Protestants attended worship weekly.²²

²¹ Barna Group, “The State of the Church 2018,” *Barna.com*, April 17, 2018, <https://www.barna.com/research/state-church-2018/>.- According to Barna’s definitions, a “Practicing Christian” is one who identifies with a Christian denomination, attends a worship service at least once a month, and say their faith is very important in their life.

²² Gallup, “Catholics Trail Protestants in Church Attendance,” *Gallup.com*, December 16, 2003, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/10138/Catholics-Trail-Protestants-Church-Attendance.aspx>.

Today, that individual religious practice has decreased, and only 23% of Catholics and 30% of Protestants attend a worship service weekly.²³ The Barna group’s metric of a “Practicing Christian” is now listed as someone who only attends worship once a month. Within seventy years of the Pledge of Allegiance Act becoming Law, the United States has shed its *prima facie* Christian identity, becoming a post-Christian society, because of how the role of Christianity has decreased in the lives of individuals that would in turn influence society. The 2021 Pew Research Center Survey “The Future of Religion in America” found that approximately 30% of Americans identified as “no religion” – a “none” – compared to 5% in 1940 and 8% in 1990.²⁴ The creation of the “none” label is due, in part, to the decreased role of Christianity in American life and its influence as experienced through generational change. No longer do Americans feel the social pressure to conform and claim a religious identity, as in the past.

A Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) survey published in 2016 looked to quantify the perception of the relationship between Christianity and the United States as part of the lead up to the 2016 election. The survey asked respondents to identify their belief regarding the relationship between Christianity and the United States: either (1) America has always been and is currently a Christian Nation, (2) America was a Christian Nation in the past but not now, or (3) America has never been a Christian Nation.

²³ Gallup. “Church Attendance Has Declined in Most U.S. Religious Groups.” *Gallup.com*, March 25, 2024. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/642548/church-attendance-declined-religious-groups.aspx>.

²⁴ James Emery White, *The Rise of the Nones: Understanding and Reaching the Religiously Unaffiliated* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014), 17 and 210

Response: America is a Christian Nation?

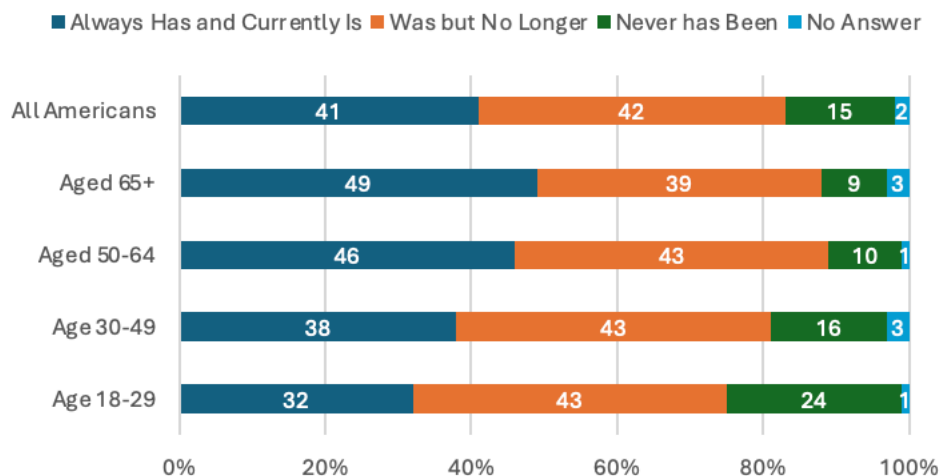


Table 1: PRRI Survey Results “Response: America is a Christian Nation?”

There is a clear belief that at some undesignated point in the past, “America was Christian.” The survey does not attempt to parse out what that means or why respondents believe that to be true, yet the consensus is clear. Worth noting is the segment that believes that the United States has never been Christian – here we see a shift away from popular opinion determining the nation’s identity to etiological founding principles determining identity.

Another PRRI survey published in 2023 measured national affinity for Christian nationalist presuppositions. The survey used five sentences to gauge the respondents’ understanding of the relationship between Christianity, American society, and the United State Government. Respondents could completely agree, mostly agree, mostly disagree, or completely disagree with each of the following statements:²⁵

- Statement 1: The U.S. government should declare America a Christian nation.

²⁵ Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI), *Christian Nationalism in America: State-by-State Analysis* (January 2023), <https://www.prri.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/PRRI-Jan-2023-Christian-Nationalism-Final.pdf>.

- Statement 2: U.S. laws should be based on Christian values.
- Statement 3: If the U.S. moves away from our Christian foundations, we will not have a country anymore.
- Statement 4: Being Christian is an important part of being truly American.
- Statement 5: God has called Christians to exercise dominion over all areas of American society.

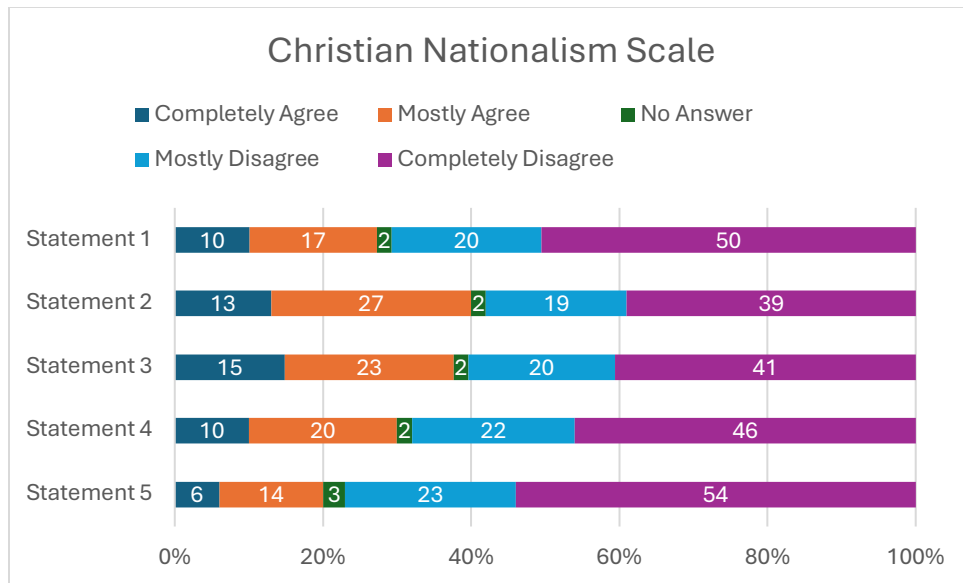


Table 2: PRRI Survey Results "Christian Nationalism Scale"

PRRI found that only 27% of the population either completely agreed or mostly agreed with the first statement that the United States government should declare the country a Christian nation, compared to 70% that disagreed to some degree (2% did not answer). This reflects a profound shift from 1954 when Congress approved the words “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance. A roll call vote was not taken for H. J. 243, but a majority must have passed it in both the House and Senate, supposedly reflecting the will of the people – and certainly more than the 27% that hold the position today. Statement Two reflects the implicit practice of rooting American laws in Christian

principles: 40% responded affirmatively, while 58% responded negatively. Statement Three connects the rule of law and the providence of the nation, touching on the Christian Nationalist myth of the United States as a new Israel, bound by a new, quasi-Deuteronomic covenant. This is reflected in PC Principal’s diatribe about how “we were a Christian nation, but because we have spit in [God’s] face” everything is falling apart. 38% responded positively and 61% responded negatively – this was the most affirmed statement of the five – suggesting a significant embedded belief that moral behavior is connected to prosperity. Statement Four speaks to American identity, with 30% affirming that being Christian is an important part of being American. Statement Five gauges cultural acceptance of the “Seven Mountains Mandate” (a dominionist, charismatic Christian belief that Christians are called to exercise dominion over the seven mountains of cultural influence – family, religion, education, media, entertainment, business, and government) and finds that only 20% agree while 77% disagree. Collectively, support for these statements represents a minority position within the United States and shows a relative decrease in public conventional wisdom on the links between Christianity, society, and the federal government. While there is no data addressing these (or similar) questions from the 1950s, age demographics of respondents provide insight into their embedded assumptions based upon birth year.

The PRRI data classified respondents as either an Adherent, a Sympathizer, a Skeptic, or a Rejector of Christian Nationalism based upon a composite scoring of their responses to the five statements. PRRI found the strongest allegiance to Christian Nationalism (Adherents and Sympathizers) to be in the 65+ age group (those born prior to 1958) at 36%.

Christian Nationalism Scale

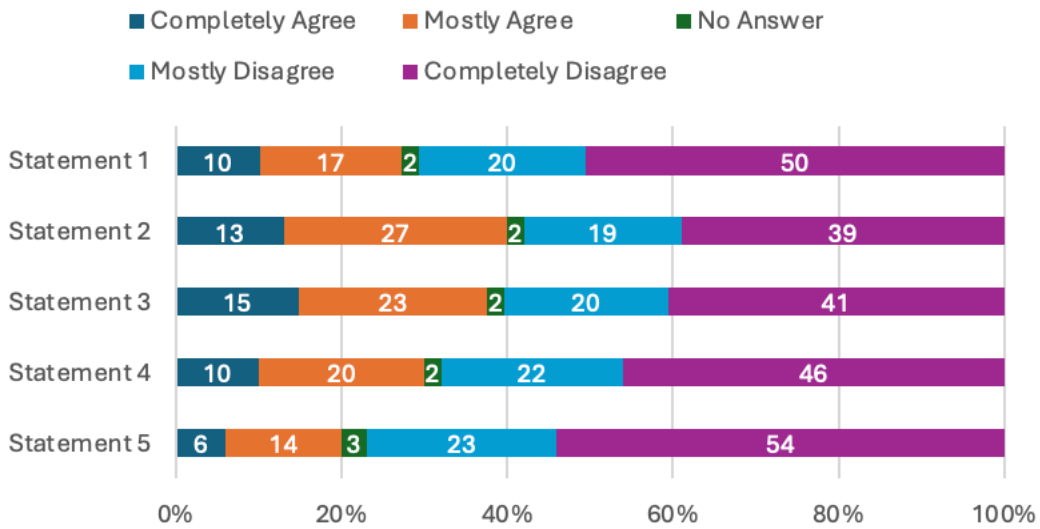


Table 3: PRRI Survey Results "Christian Nationalism Scale"

Support of Christian Nationalism decreases in each subsequent age bracket. Those 50-64 (born 1959-1973, representing the tail end of Baby Boomers and beginning of Generation X) were 33% positive, those in the 30-49 bracket (born 1974-1993, Generation X and Millennials) supported 25%, and those 18-29 (born 1994-2005) only supported 20%. These age brackets also increase their resistance to Christian Nationalist ideals from 61% to 63% to 72% to 79%, respectively. These trends reflect the larger, cultural decrease of the role of Christianity in individual life over these years, as reflected in the Barna Study.

The Church's Reliance on the State

Being in relationship with the state creates a complex scenario for the church. Holding a privileged space in the public square, endorsed and sanctioned by the state, provides the church with a level of safety and security. In this scenario, the two entities

are symbiotic in their relationship: they exist to reinforce one another. Criticism against Kennedy in the 1950s as a Catholic candidate reflects this embedded assumption of mutual support. W. A. Criswell, the then leader of the Southern Baptist Convention remarked that by the election of John Kennedy, “the Roman Catholic hierarchy is able to seize political power.”²⁶ There was a clear understanding at the time that the Protestant Churches and the American Government were clearly aligned. Further, when holding a privileged status, the churches do not have to fear state persecution, because there is an implicit allegiance from one to the other.

As the church loses its privileged status, its sense of security is threatened. Mimicking interpersonal dynamics, when an individual’s friend begins to spend time with other people, the individual perceives a threat to their relationship. Particularly if the individual and their friend spend a disproportionate amount of time together, when that time is equally distributed among others, the individual projects doubt and insecurity onto the relationship because they perceive that they no longer hold a preferred status. They assume they have been “demoted” or are “no longer exclusive,” when the friend may simply be spending equitable time with others. The same is true for the perception of those who believe the United States is a Christian nation. As more pluralistic and tolerant cultural waters emerge, some Christians assume persecution, because they perceive that their preference is decreasing. This assumption is embedded in the most recent religious liberty Supreme Court cases: *Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil*

²⁶ John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, “Religious Freedom, the Church, the State, and Senator Kennedy,” JFK Campaign Files, 1960, JFKCAMP1960-1019-007, accessed August 2, 2025, https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/jfkcamp1960-1019-007#?image_identifier=JFKCAMP1960-1019-007-p0003.

Rights Commission (2018) and 303 Creative LLC v. Elenis (2023). While both cases upheld religious liberty over the state's directive to perform the private services, perception remains that Christians are persecuted by the United States government. A 2025 Pew Survey found that in 2024, 67% of Republicans believed that evangelical Christians were persecuted. A country that self-identified as Christian would not be persecuting those who also identify as Christian: therefore, the United States of America is no longer a "Christian nation."

Over the last seventy-five years, congregations in the United States have experienced a declining privilege in both their faith tradition and parent institution's relationship with the government. While the United States was never etiologically Christian, the religious faith and practice of the people seeped into public policy, practice, and the collective consciousness. By the 1950s, the majority of the citizenry identified as Christian and promoted what they perceived as Christian values and principles, so therefore the United States was Christian and privileged Christian norms over other ethical and moral systems. Whether the promoted system would be classified as authentically Christian is irrelevant – the focus is on the people's perception of its authenticity and their self-identification. The church relied on collective social pressure for membership: to be a good American meant to be Christian. The Mainline denominations practiced infant baptism and looked to continue a child's formation through socialization within the congregational community. Being a good Christian in this context meant being a good, morally upright citizen within the community. Children were taught to do this through Sunday school, youth groups (particularly towards the end

of the 1950s as society became more segmented), and summer camps. There was little experiential, hands-on education to make the faith personally connected.

This predominantly white, conservative Mainline Protestantism of the 1950s focused on social cohesion and individual moral behavior, using Scripture as the authority. As time moved forward, doubt began to enter the system in connection to the emphasis on education, science, and higher order thinking. Critical thinking regarding biblical events pushed individuals to either blind fundamentalism (i.e., because the Bible says so) or to question the system and institution as a collective unit. Since the 1950s, the American citizenry has decreased its affinity for Christianity and the ethical system that Christianity of the 1950s propagated. Pluralism and tolerance have increased in social virtue, which contradicts the fundamentalism of the evangelical tradition. Drawing a comparison to a marriage, the church (as the physical entity manifesting Christianity) was married to the State (the physical entity manifesting the will of the people) – but that relationship has dissolved. Without putting a year on the finalization of “the divorce,” the embedded understanding held by the American public is that even if the United States once was Christian, it no longer is.

Turning to The Episcopal Church

In 2025, the mission of The Episcopal Church remains the same: “to reconcile all people to God and one another through Christ.”²⁷ 2025 also presents The Episcopal Church with a new opportunity to examine and understand itself, particularly its missional practices and congregational structures, in response to its new relationship

²⁷ *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 1979), 855

status with the American government (see Chapter 4). This new status of relationship can be good for the church, because it can force self-reflection on how well The Episcopal Church has been structured to meet its mission. Leadership across denominations and in local congregations must maintain clarity and focus on its mission (see Chapter 5). Reassessing past practices with the intent of reinvention helps avoid the pit of grief that can overcome an individual experiencing the breakdown of a relationship. Denial, anger, bargaining, and depression are all symptoms of grief, and are behaviors church members have displayed in response to the shifting relationship between the church and state. Denial rejects the generational data and national trends that reflect Christianity's reduced cultural influence. Accusations of persecution and prideful rejections of pluralistic principles are examples of anger. Evangelical leaders have attempted to bargain through their endorsement of the MAGA movement and alliance with Christian Nationalism. Congregations in decline emit a sentiment of depression and hopelessness in their future, as they watch membership decline and congregations shut their doors. And, in the words of Jesus, "be not afraid." The church has survived bloody persecutions and literal assaults on Christendom. We now turn to a survey of how the church has brought members into its fold over the centuries, through the process of the catechumenate.

Chapter Two: Historical Survey of Baptismal Preparation

The catechumenate is the period of exploration, within the context of a Christian community, of one's call to join the Body of Christ. While revived in recent years, the catechumenate has taken on many forms that has met the needs of the church, in the church's given historical context. These periods ranged from periods of intense persecution (pre-Edict of Milan) to times of security and stability (post-Edict of Thessalonica). The biblical witness identifies a rudimentary two-stage process of formational preparation and water-bath initiation, which is linked to the reception of the Holy Spirit. The order of the initiation rite and epicletic moment change based on circumstance (cf. Acts 8, 10, and 19), and preparation will consistently precede both actions. The early church emphasized the formational work in concert with the tumultuous relationship between the church and the empire, shrouding the rite with secrecy and skepticism of the candidate. Following the Edict of Milan and the assimilation of the Christian worldview into the empire, the process of preparation evolved to meet a new circumstance and need. Finally, as the empire and church became one, as experienced under Charlemagne and the Holy Roman Empire, the methodology was reversed and the preparation for baptism was done retroactively, perhaps years after the baptism itself. As our study continues, the ordo and rigor of baptismal preparation will be understood as inversely related to the entanglement of the church and the empire: the closer the relationship between church and government, the less rigorous the preparation for baptism and initiation into the church.

The Biblical Witness

The Christian practice of baptism is rooted in the Gospels' prototypical accounts of Jesus' own baptism. Matthew 3.13-17, Mark 1.9-11, and Luke 3.21-22 each provide a theological interpretation of Jesus' baptism that later communities built upon in their own practice. The scene of the baptism began at the Jordan River, a site "hardly fitting" for a purification rite, as the river was considered unclean.²⁸ The Jordan River also invoked salvation history by returning to the site of the Israelites' entry into the Promised Land. Through the invitation of John, those seeking repentance for the forgiveness of sins²⁹ would descend into the water as preparation to receive the Holy Spirit. Liturgist Maxwell Johnson notes that this ritual was neither an "Essene ritual washing [nor] Jewish proselyte baptism," but, citing Werner Kümmel, a "ritually enacted prophetic sign that anticipated the very coming of God in human history and the ultimate cleansing with water which would inaugurate the new creation of God itself."³⁰ The baptismal participant's anticipation and desire for the Holy Spirit's advent was ritually manifested in the washing.

Each of the synoptic Gospels recounts Jesus' participation in John's prefiguring baptism. Common to all three accounts is the manifestation of the Spirit in the form of a dove and a voice from heaven proclaiming Jesus as "my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."³¹ This sentence spoken from the opened heavens echoed images of

²⁸ Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation* (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2007), 11

²⁹ The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) (New York: National Council of Churches, 1989), Matthew 3.6, Mark 1.4, Luke 3.3

³⁰ Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation*, 11

³¹ NRSV, Matthew 3.17, Mark 1.11, Luke 3.22

Isaiah's suffering servant and the promise of the Psalmist's messiah.³² Matthew and Luke each added to the story, presumably interpreting the event in their respective communities. Matthew included a dialogue between Jesus and John the Baptizer, which addressed a concern of Jesus' subordination to John; Luke dealt with the same uneasiness by making it ambiguous as to whether John was present at the moment of Jesus' baptism: if Jesus were submitting to John, why then are Christians following Jesus, and not John? Matthew provided the explanation that it was to "fulfill all righteousness," whereas Luke, in the verse prior to the account of Jesus' baptism, noted that John the Baptizer had been thrown in jail by Herod.³³ The synoptics' account is held in contrast to the Johannine tradition where there was no specific account of Jesus being baptized at all. The Fourth Gospel emphasized the suffering servant motif by identifying Jesus as "the lamb of God" and circumvented the challenge of Jesus' subordination to John by John's own testimony.³⁴ The Fourth Gospel also testified to the occurrence of Jesus' own practice of baptizing others, in addition to his disciples' performance of the ritual.³⁵

The Acts of the Apostles contains the first in-depth accounts, including preparatory dialogue, of the baptisms performed in the early church. The inauguration of the church's formation was at the Day of Pentecost. Following Peter's address, three thousand converts requested to be baptized. Adela Yarbro Collins identifies the

³² NRSV, Isaiah 42.1, Psalm 2.7

³³ NRSV, Matthew 3.15, Luke 3.20

³⁴ NRSV, John 1.29-34

³⁵ NRSV, John 3.22, 3.26, and 4.1-3

connection of the practice between John's baptism and those of Acts, specifically the parallels between John's preparatory statements and Peter's Spirit-filled sermon.³⁶ The connection between the two suggested that the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost fulfills the promise of John at the Jordan.

This two-stage process was then reiterated in the Acts 8 baptismal accounts of Simon the Sorcerer and the Ethiopian Eunuch. Simon the Sorcerer "believed" the testimony that Philip (one of the seven deacons of Acts 6) gave concerning the imminence of God's Kingdom, and Simon was baptized.³⁷ The passage suggests an immediate conversion, subsequent baptism, and surprisingly immature obsession with the material, albeit mystical works accomplished by Philip. The author of Luke-Acts then drew attention to the perceived need of Peter and John to come and lay hands on them, for "the Spirit had not yet come upon any of them."³⁸ Simon, coveting the Holy Spirit and offering to pay for its reception, prompted a rebuke and the condemnation of Peter and John. The account itself differentiates between the preparatory act of baptism officiated by Philip (a deacon) and the laying on of hands and the transmittance of the Holy Spirit by the Apostles, which raised issues of apostolic authority and pneumatology. Following Simon's rebuke, Philip was led by the Spirit to engage an entourage returning to Ethiopia. There, he found a eunuch reading a suffering servant passage from Isaiah 53. The eunuch inquired as to its meaning. Following Philip's explanation and proclamation of the good news, the eunuch asked "What is to prevent me from getting

³⁶ Collins, A. Y. (1989). The Origin of Christian Baptism. *Studia Liturgica*, 19(1), 28-46.

³⁷ NRSV, Acts 8.13

³⁸ NRSV, Acts 8.16

baptized?”³⁹ They pulled the chariot over, Philip baptized him, and when they came out of the water, “the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away.”⁴⁰ It is important to note that the Spirit’s expressed action was whisking Philip away to Caesarea, not sealing the baptismal action on the eunuch. Despite the continued necessity of apostolic authority to confer the Spirit, it is worth noting the differences between Simon and the eunuch’s preparation for receiving baptism. Both individuals were baptized hastily following their conversions; however, the eunuch’s inquiry of Isaiah demonstrates a longer period of preparation before hearing Philip’s testimony, compared to Simon’s hasty conviction grounded in teaching buttressed by Philip’s performance of signs and wonders.

The baptism of Cornelius in Acts 10 inverts the progression of preparation-initiation-confirmation (of the Holy Spirit). Cornelius was described as a “devout man who feared God,” practiced charitable giving, and demonstrated a commitment to prayer.⁴¹ The biblical witness suggests by this accolade that Cornelius had already undergone some formational process that produced these behaviors and habits. Upon receiving a vision, Cornelius sought out Peter to explain the relationship of Jesus with the Jewish tradition (it was at the time when Peter independently received his vision about the designation of clean and profane). During the explanation to Cornelius, Peter began to interpret his dream as divine consent that Gentiles were to be included in the forgiveness of sins assured by faith in Jesus. At that moment, the Holy Spirit fell upon those present. Peter concluded that this was a verification of God’s assent to Gentile

³⁹ NRSV, Acts 8.36

⁴⁰ NRSV, Acts 8.39

⁴¹ NRSV, Acts 10.2

participation and thus “ordered them to be baptized.”⁴² In this case, it appears as though the rite of initiation followed the confirmation of the Holy Spirit, rather than preceding it – both of which took place after multiple formational/teaching events (the formation before Cornelius’ vision and the teaching by Peter at his arrival in Caesarea).

The apostolic authority to convey the Spirit through the laying on of hands, in conjunction with baptism, is exemplified in Acts 19.1-10. In the account, Paul arrived in Ephesus where he found disciple-believers. He inquired of them whether or not they had received the Holy Spirit, and a dialogue followed regarding their participation in John’s baptism. Paul identified Jesus as the perfecter of John’s baptism, and then proceeded to baptize (again!) and lay hands upon those present.⁴³ As a public witness to the efficaciousness of Paul’s imposition, the newly baptized began to speak in tongues and prophesy.⁴⁴ Setting aside the author of Luke-Acts’ impetus for linking Paul with the apostolic authority shared by Peter and John, we again witness an intermediate stage between first coming to faith in believing (the baptism of John) and participating in the water bath–imposition of hands ritual that was developing. Early Christian communities modeled their practice (not only of baptism proper, but of preparation) based on these accounts and the parallel traditions that developed alongside them.

⁴² NRSV, Acts 10.48

⁴³ NRSV, Acts 19.5

⁴⁴ NRSV, Acts 19.6

Pre-Edict of Milan (East and West)

The first generations of Christians lived with the expectation of Jesus' imminent return. Initially, a succession plan was not envisioned. However, the followers of the Way were beginning to "fall asleep." Even Paul's own understanding of Christ's return evolved, along with its implications for established communities and their future growth and expansion. The first century after the Ascension witnessed an exponential period of growth for the church and a renewed understanding of what Jesus might have meant when he exhorted them to be witnesses "to the ends of the earth."⁴⁵ As the church expanded across the Roman Empire, it drew attention to itself. The pre-Edict of Milan era of Christian history (that is, prior to 313) is the story of a thriving church in conflict with an oppressive empire. To be Christian was to reject the world before you: the government, the religion, and the culture. Further, to be Christian came with the personal risk of execution under the zeal of a local magistrate or at the whim of the emperor. The period was marred with persecutions and punctuated with fear. Not only was there risk in being Christian, but there was also risk in accepting new followers – you never knew who was walking into your midst. Christian communities within different geographic regions began taking on qualities rooted in the theology of its founder or current leader, along with the expression of those theological particularities. The pre-Milan communities scattered across the Mediterranean region reflected the diversity of their theological convictions in their approaches to baptismal practice and preparation, such as the differences between Alexandria and Byzantium.

⁴⁵ NRSV, Acts 1.8

The Didache (late first century) is the earliest extra-canonical text that we currently hold with references to instructional baptismal preparation. In its entirety, this East-Syrian document serves as a standardizing guide for church leadership in that locale. Of the sixteen chapters we have, the first seven deal with preparation (1-6) and baptism (7). Chapter 1 frames that there are two ways of living: “the way of Life, and the way of Death.”⁴⁶ It continues with a meditation on what it means to love God and neighbor (using passages from Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount). Chapter 2 moves into a more specific list of transgressions based upon the Ten Commandments. Chapter 3 places those moral instructions back into the context of the Sermon on the Mount. The text exhorts the hearer not just to abstain from adultery, but to “not be lustful” (c.f. Matthew 5.28).⁴⁷ Chapter 4 invites the hearer to be committed to a life of prayer (suggesting the existence of a theology around saints) and teaches the hearer to prize unity and maintain a posture of generosity. The culmination of the chapter is a directive to abhor hypocrisy and participate in the general confession of the congregation.⁴⁸ Chapters 5 and 6 then depict the “way of Death”: warnings against a list of sinful behaviors (reading very much like Galatians 5:19-21) and the reception of food sacrificed to idols (in contrast to Paul in 1 Corinthians). The Didache does not include an

⁴⁶ *Didache* 1.1, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, ed. and trans. Bart D. Ehrman, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

⁴⁷ *Didache* 3.3, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, ed. and trans. Bart D. Ehrman, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

⁴⁸ It is worth noting that *Didache* 4.9-11 appears to endorse corporal punishment and does condone slavery (albeit, with the admonition that the master be gentle to the slave “for God made them both.” Its etiology of slavery is that the master has been prepared by the Spirit for such a role (and implies that the enslaved person has not). Both the practice of corporal discipline and enslavement are to the ends of teaching “fear” and “reverence” as the primarily points of connection to God.

instruction on how the first six chapters are to be used, other than offering the commentary, “having first rehearsed all these things, baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁹ At some point in the preparation process, this moral instruction would have, at a minimum, appeared as a one-time pre-baptismal exhortation. It is entirely possible that it served as a larger formational curriculum moving between Exodus 20 and Matthew 5 and their connection to Deuteronomy 6, Leviticus 19, and Jesus’ summary of the Law in the Gospels. The text underscores a pattern that will emerge in pre-Nicene churches of emphasizing moral conduct in contrast to theological formation.

Later Syrian developments attest to a short catechumenal period. The *Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions* (mid-third century) specifically names three months of preparation prior to baptism.⁵⁰ There are other Syrian texts that mention a pre-baptismal period of preparation, but no specific timeframe is provided. For instance, in the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (c. 230-250), there is an instruction for baptism that alludes to a formational period taught by the bishop. In describing the episcopal function in the rite, the document identifies the bishop as the one “through whom you have learned the word and known God.” Beyond the consistent agreement that such a dedicated time exists, there is no description of its length.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Didache, 7.1

⁵⁰ Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation*, 61

The church in Egypt articulated an established pre-baptismal process. The *Stromata* (c. 200), attributed to Clement of Alexandria, alludes to a three-year process “of instruction... to him that is being catechized.” Clement writes:

For it orders newly planted trees to be nourished three years in succession, and the superfluous growths to be cut off, to prevent them being loaded and pressed on; and to prevent their strength being exhausted from want, by the nutriment being frittered away, enjoins tilling and digging around them, so that [the tree] may not, by sending out suckers, hinder its growth. And it does not allow imperfect fruit to be plucked from immature trees, but after three years, in the fourth year; dedicating the first fruits to God after the tree has attained maturity. This type of husbandry may serve as a mode of instruction, teaching that we must cut the growth of sins, and the useless weeds of the mind that spring up round the vital fruit, till the shoot of faith is perfected and becomes strong. For in the fourth year, since there is need of time to him that is being catechized, the four virtues are consecrated to God...⁵²

Despite the articulated connection, scholars are not universally convinced of its application to catechesis for catechumens.⁵³ Andre Méhat, a nineteenth century French scholar, argued that Clement meant what he wrote, and that the intentional use of “instruction” and “catechized” reflect an intentional period of three years for catechesis. He goes further to characterize it as “inconceivable” that Clement would use the precise language of the catechumenate, but not mean it to apply to pre-baptismal candidates when, within a generation, it certainly does in other parts of the Christian world (Tertullian and Origen).⁵⁴ However, the claim is stressed by the reality that the only other corroborating document that supports three years of instruction this early in Egypt is an

⁵² Clement, *Stromata* II.18.10, c.f. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation*, 64

⁵³ Clement, *Stromata* II.18.10, c.f. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation*,

⁵⁴ Michel Dujarier, *A History of the Catechumenate: The First Six Centuries*, trans. Edward J. Haasl (New York: Sadlier, 1979), 43

edition of Hippolytus' *Apostolic Tradition*. Initial scholarship dated *Apostolic Tradition* to the early third century; however, the question of pre-baptismal practice has contributed to the reconsideration of the *Apostolic Tradition's* dating. Maxwell Johnson points to an early fourth-century text, *Canons of Hippolytus* (c. 334), which alludes to only forty days of preparation.⁵⁵ Johnson argues that given the near universality that was assumed with *Apostolic Tradition* and would have been supported in Egypt with *Stromata*, it would be entirely unexpected that within twenty years of the Edict of Milan, the Alexandrian church would have truncated its preparation for baptism from three years to six weeks. Further, he explains the expressed period of three years in *Stromata* to perhaps refers to the work of penitents or a lectionary cycle.

Origen of Alexandria wrote in the generation following Clement. In his "Sermons on the Numbers" (c. 240-245), Origen uses the story of the Exodus as an allegory to understand preparation for baptism:

When you abandon the darkness of idolatry and when you desire to arrive at the knowledge of the divine law, then you begin your departure from Egypt. When you have been accepted into the crowd of the catechumens and when you have begun to obey the commandments of the church, you have crossed the Red Sea. In the halts in the desert, each day, you apply yourself to listening to the law of God and to contemplate the visage of Moses which discloses the glory of the Lord. But when you arrive at the spiritual spring of baptism...having crossed the Jordan...

Origen believes that the first step comes following conversion, once an individual has been inspired to engage a community of faith and inquires about being enrolled as a catechumen (the process of walking out of Egypt up to the shores of the Red Sea). The enrollment itself is the crossing on dry land, and the catechumenate phase is the journey

⁵⁵ Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation*, 64-65

through the desert. In *Contra Celsum* (c. 248), Origen articulates this two-stage process to be “evangelization” and then “formation.” Dujarier explains the first stage was the “concern of the entire church... they did this spontaneously in their daily lives, not as a tactic, but naturally, based on the relationships they had with their relatives, friends, and co-workers, each according to [their] charism.”⁵⁶ Once an individual became interested, following evangelization, they would participate in a probationary stage of formation where the postulant would need to accept basic tenants (*kerygma*) and demonstrate behavior changes in their daily life. Origen clearly builds a fence around an individual’s admission as a catechuminate, explaining that “as far as they can, Christians previously examine the souls of those who want to hear them, and test them individually beforehand; when before entering the community the hearers seem to have devoted themselves sufficiently to the desire to live a good life, then they introduce them.”⁵⁷ He described a catechuminate class with two groups enrolled “consisting of recent beginners who are receiving elementary instruction and have not yet received the sign that they have been purified, and another class of those who, as far as they are able, make it their set purpose to desire nothing other than those things of which Christians approve.”⁵⁸ Of this last group, they “make progress and show that they have been purified by the Logos, and do all in their power to live better lives, then we call them into our mysteries.”⁵⁹ Based upon Origen’s description, the pre-baptismal work focused on

⁵⁶ Dujarier, *History of the Catechuminate*, 58

⁵⁷ *Contra Celsum* III.51, tr. William Sadlier, cf. Dujarier, *History of the Catechuminate*, 60

⁵⁸ *Contra Celsum* III.53, tr. William Sadlier, cf. Dujarier, *History of the Catechuminate*, 62-63

⁵⁹ *Contra Celsum* III.59, tr. William Sadlier, cf. Dujarier, *History of the Catechuminate*, 63

drawing distinctions in acceptable conduct between the church and the World and a shift of an individual's alignment from the ways of the World, to the way of the church. His standard for baptism hints at a works-based salvation, yet underscores his own understanding for the public standard of conduct for Christians. The establishment of a quasi-postulancy for those moving between conversion and catechumenate is an important development by its formal articulation. It is important to note that theological formation and assent (orthodoxy) do not appear to be the gate-keeping hermeneutic for baptism as in postulancy, although it continues to be part of the catechetical process itself.⁶⁰

Placing Origen and Clement in conversation with one another, one may conclude that by Origen's time (c. 250), an extended catechumenate did exist in Egypt (i.e., longer than forty days), despite the record of the *Canons of Hippolytus*. *Stromata* identifies a three-year process where the "growth of sin" are pruned and "weeds of the mind" are tended, paralleling Origen's examination of conduct and process of teaching in the catechumenate program. The acknowledgment in *Contra Celsum* that the catechumenate contained both recent beginners and those further along in the process points to an extended period of formation: it would be extremely difficult to differentiate between these two subsets of the catechumenate class within a forty-day period. Formation (and indoctrination) takes time. Clement likens the completion of this formation in the fourth year as bearing "vital fruit," analogous to Origen's condition that catechumens "make

⁶⁰ Without being present for either of these phases of formation, one might assume, for instance, that the postulancy teaching would be today's standard statement of faith (Jesus died on the Cross and rose three days later), compared to more nuanced theories of atonement that would be explored in the catechumenal teaching.

progress and show they have been purified by the Logos.” Thus, it is more likely that the period of catechumenal preparation extended for a significant period, or at least longer than forty days.

In Carthage, Tertullian prescribed an unspecified period of pre-baptismal catechesis in *De baptismo* (c. 200). In this pre-baptismal teaching, Tertullian exemplifies the Western emphasis on baptism as a preparatory rite for reception of the Holy Spirit. Accordingly, the catechetical process prior to the pre-baptismal rites existed as a period of preparation that culminated in the water bath as the final preparation to receive the Spirit. *De baptismo* includes instructions for the pre-baptismal rites, stating that “those who are at the point of entering upon baptism ought to pray, with frequent prayers, fastings, bendings of the knee, and all-night vigils, along with the confession of all their former sins, so as to make a copy of the baptism of John.”⁶¹ In the concluding paragraphs, Tertullian argues that baptism should not “be rashly granted,” but instead “deferred.”⁶² Given his understanding of baptism as preparation to receive the Spirit, Tertullian is justified in advocating for an intentional period of formation to ensure that the work of preparation is not blotted out by later sin. This especially gets applied to the practice of infant baptism.

The pre-Edict of Milan practice of Rome is less known. The documents associated with Rome during this era, the writings of Justin Martyr and *Apostolic Tradition*, both stand with an ambiguity that warrants skepticism concerning their authority on second and third-century geographic Roman practice. For our purposes of

⁶¹ Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, trans. and ed. Ernest Evans (London: SPCK, 1964), 41.

⁶² Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, 18, tr. Ernest Evans, 37

analyzing the underlying ordo of the preparatory practice for baptism, we will examine them without needing to assign a geographic locus. Justin Martyr wrote from his *schola* in Rome, but he also happened to be from Syria. Thus, there is debate as to whether Justin's writings on this subject reflect the current practice in Rome or promote what was done in Syria. Johnson argues that Justin's description of the pre-baptismal formation should be considered as Syrian, given that Justin's baptismal theology more closely resembles Syrian than Roman thought. In his *First Apology* (c. 155), Justin writes:

“Those who are convinced and believe what we say and teach is the truth, and pledge themselves to be able to live accordingly, are taught in prayer and fasting to ask God to forgive their past sins, while we pray and fast with them. Then we lead them to a place where there is water, and they are regenerated in the same manner in which we ourselves were regenerated.”⁶³

We note that the objective of this pre-baptismal formation culminates in the water bath for regeneration, as opposed to Tertullian's understanding that the water bath was the culmination of the preparation, and the work of the Holy Spirit came later. Their formation did include an explicit expectation of spiritual practices (in contrast to moral instruction in the east), and it was for an undetermined length of time.

The *Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus* carries a similar ambiguity of its authority, largely based on the textual criticism of the document. As mentioned earlier, while believed to be an early third-century document (c. 215), we only have manuscripts of *Apostolic Tradition* from the fifth century, of which the portion related to baptism is missing (and thereby supplemented by other, later, eastern editions). The text, as we have it assembled, proscribes a process where catechumens are “presented to the

⁶³ Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 61, tr. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation*, 50

‘teachers’ by their ‘sponsors,’ who must testify about the manner of their life and their motives in seeking to become Christians... [they] shall continue to hear the word for three years.”⁶⁴ This is contrasted with the aforementioned *Canons of Hippolytus* (c. 334 – post-Nicene), which is based upon *Apostolic Tradition*, where “the reference is not to ‘three years’ but, rather, ‘forty days’ of catechesis.”⁶⁵ Further, the only additional text beside Clement of Alexandria’s *Stromata* that identifies a three-year period of preparation is the *Apostolic Constitutions* (c. 381), another post-Nicene document.

The pre-Edict of Milan churches differed in their theology of baptism, and thereby in the content of their approaches. Of what we can reconstruct, there appears to be a preliminary phase of teaching that included the basic tenants of the Christian faith and an assessment of moral conduct. They are also consistent in that catechumenal formation appear is not open for anyone to join spontaneously: the participant must have been examined in some way before admission (thus pointing to some sort of preliminary work). A formalized catechumenate program is attested to by the early church, albeit ranging in length and priority of content. The absence of description should not be assumed to affirm a non-existent or disorderly process: the church was being persecuted. Scraps of paper detailing the lesson plan were not going to be widely circulated, let alone left lying around. There may not have been a standard, universal practice, but something was going on to prepare non-Christians to be initiated into the faith in the face of persecution. Following the Edict of Milan, and more importantly, the Edict of

⁶⁴ Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation*, 97

⁶⁵ Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation*, 102

Thessalonica, the relationship between the church and the empire changed – as did the practice of baptismal preparation.

Post-Edict of Milan

The Edict of Milan released the church from the fear of persecution. Any threat to the church would now have to come from pagan tribes on the fringes of the empire, rather than from the empire itself. Even the Visigoth's sack of Rome (410) could not shake the "privileged liberty" the church enjoyed, compared to its pre-Edict of Milan existence.⁶⁶ This did not mean that the period did not come with its own institutional challenges. The bishops were now faced with the pastoral task of administering the sacraments with "authenticity," as there was an increased concern among bishops that conversion was perhaps motivated out of self-interest, rather than the work of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁷ This new era of ecclesiastical history would ultimately be the nascent emergence of Christendom, where the teachings of Jesus and faith of the church would need to be reconciled with a secular world: the Christianization of the Roman Empire.

Immediately following the Edict of Milan, Christianity received notoriety that changed its relationship with the general populace (see Chapter 3). Constantine's attribution of victory to the God of the Christians (and the subsequent devotion to this deity) prompted his general patronage of the church. He built basilicas, gifted land endowments, made public charitable offerings, and provided the episcopal leadership

⁶⁶ Dujarier, *History of the Catechumenate*, 78

⁶⁷ Dujarier, *History of the Catechumenate*, 78

with certain privileges.⁶⁸ This drew attention to the Christian church and inspired a large wave of converts; however, it was not just Constantine's emphasis on the church that raised public awareness, but the soon public debate over doctrine. Gregory of Nyssa quipped, "If you ask someone for change, he will discuss with you whether the Son is begotten or unbegotten."⁶⁹ As the church began to move into the public square, its thinkers were now able to move more publicly and preach with a "heady blend of biblical spirituality, doctrinal precision, and rhetorical flare."⁷⁰ People were drawn to the church for its social benefits, entertainment values, and no longer solely for its promise of salvation. This forced the church to endure "an uneasy shift away from the church of the few and pure and toward a church of the many."⁷¹ As Johnson observes, "an organized prebaptismal catechumenate... becomes absolutely necessary."⁷²

The fourth century witnessed a formalized, lengthy catechumenate period. Beginning in 305, the Council of Elvira dictated that those who "come to the beginning of faith, if they are of good behavior, may be admitted to the grace of baptism after two years."⁷³ *Apostolic Tradition*, assuming the later date of the mid-fourth century, required a three year catechumenate, as well as *Apostolic Constitutions*, a late fourth century

⁶⁸ William Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, rev. ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014), 57

⁶⁹ De deitate Filii et Spiritus sancti, PG 46:577), cf. Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 59

⁷⁰ Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 60

⁷¹ Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 60

⁷² Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation*, 119

⁷³ Council of Elvira, Canon 42, cf. E. C. Whitaker, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, rev. and expanded by Maxwell E. Johnson (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 154

Syrian document.⁷⁴ This may have, in part, been the result of the introduction of Lent. The season before Easter was recognized as a time of “intensive formation,” complete with the emergence of the renunciations (*apotaxis*) and adherences (*syntaxis*).⁷⁵ Exorcism rites became a large component of these final preparations, as well as anointings. Recorded sermons from across the church demonstrate the breadth of catechetical approaches. Further, catechumens approaching their baptism at the completion of their formation were distinguished from those still engaged in the process by being identified as *photizomenoi* (Greek, “those being illuminated”), *competentes* (North Africa, “petitioners”), or *electi* (Rome, “chosen ones”).⁷⁶

This final phase of preparation prior to baptism was often delayed. This was due partly to a common belief that the forgiveness of sin conveyed at baptism could only happen once (with a one-time post-baptismal canonical penance), and because admittance to the catechumenate assured one’s status as a Christian. This was a continuation of an early church practice where martyred catechumens (i.e., those who had not yet been baptized) were classified as Christian. It was not uncommon for individuals to wait years to be baptized. As Frederik van der Meer perceived, “the catechumenate was the customary status of the nominal Christian, the one who lacked the courage for baptism but was ashamed to be called a heathen.”⁷⁷ Dujarier goes further to say that if all the candidate sought was “simply the title of ‘Christian’; they had no

⁷⁴ Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 62

⁷⁵ Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 70

⁷⁶ Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 72

⁷⁷ Frederik van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop: The Life and Work of a Father of the church*, cf. Harmless, 66

true desire for baptism.”⁷⁸ A further complication was added, when children, who had been presented by their parents as catechumens, never had additional instruction: they remained catechumens unless prompted by inspired conversion. There is a similar phenomenon today when families will return to the “ancestral church” to baptize the newest member of the family as a rite of passage but never plan on attending in the future.

The exceedingly common practice of delaying baptism ushered a response from bishops across the church: the necessity of faith. It was the goal of the catechumenate to increase the faith of the catechumens. It was also expected (as it was in the pre-Edict of Milan churches) that action and conduct would follow this increase of faith. Bishops across the church wrote in support of the true faith required for baptism. Gregory of Nyssa went so far as to claim that “baptism conferred on a poorly prepared candidate is not only inefficacious, it is also an insult to God himself.”⁷⁹ One piece of the tradition that the church had preserved was the notion of *disciplina arcana* – the shroud of secrecy – that surrounded both baptism and Eucharist (it was still the practice that catechumens would be dismissed before the Canon).⁸⁰ What once was a defensive measure to provide a sense of security during periods of persecution, became a conveyor of *mysterium*. As the church became more infused with society – a Christianized Roman Empire – the practice of secrecy became increasingly difficult to maintain.

⁷⁸ Dujarier, *History of the Catechumenate*, 81

⁷⁹ Dujarier, *History of the Catechumenate*, 88

⁸⁰ Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*

The experience of Augustine of Hippo, recorded in *Confessions*, provides evidence of how the systemic complications of the church's new place in society was experienced by the individual. As an infant, Augustine was "regularly signed with the cross and given salt even from the womb."⁸¹ He was enrolled as a catechumen in childhood at the request of his mother, Monica. It is important to note that a catechumen no longer required assent to the *kerygma* of the church prior to becoming a catechumen: the period of postulancy from the pre-Edict of Milan church had disappeared. There was little accountability for Augustine as a child-catechumen, as there had been just a few decades earlier. While the church once would have provided mentors, sponsors, and teachers to guide the catechumens prior to the Edict of Milan, Augustine had no one to guide him other than his mother. As he strayed from the church, he found a plethora of other, more exotic traditions to explore. Augustine pursued his personal passions and appetites and wandered far from the moral conduct expected in a faithful life. He dabbled in Manicheism, engaging with the sect's own process of "hearing," and relished its high intellectual tradition. Augustine embraced the metropolitan nature of the vast Roman Empire. He dabbled with the social elite in Rome, paraded his rhetorical skill, and gained notoriety. He had become everything he could have aspired for himself: he was his own master.

As a rhetorician, Augustine settled in Milan and began attending sermons given by Ambrose. Whereas others went to church to be seen, Augustine went to church to watch. In fact, it was only his own arrogance and sense of social politics that prompted him to go hear Ambrose once in Milan.

⁸¹ *Confessions* I.11.17

“I used enthusiastically to listen to him preaching to the people, not with the intention which I ought to have had, but as if testing out his oratorical skill to see whether it merited the reputation it enjoyed or whether his fluency was better or inferior than it was reported to be. I hung on his diction in rapt attention, but remained bored and contemptuous of the subject-matter. My pleasure was in the charm of his language.”⁸²

It was the demonstration of Ambrose’s own rhetorical skill – the education and knowledge, his engagement with the different theological perspectives, a wider knowledge of the issues of the day, and his spiritual acumen – that kept Augustine coming back. He learned from Ambrose’s sermons not only the literal, moral, and spiritual meanings of the Scriptures, but his own hermeneutical process. This sort of teaching, in the pre-Edict of Milan church, would have taken place behind sealed doors; yet, in fourth century it was now a public event that even those who had ulterior motives for hearing could attend. No longer was the evangelization that Origen had described as “the concern of the entire church” required, because anyone could now walk into the basilica to hear the teaching. Passively, the rhetorical flare that enamored Augustine infused his mind with the content of Ambrose’s words. Augustine rejected his Manicheism, and he began to give Christianity a chance: he assumed the posture of a catechumen. It was here that Augustine migrated from “a politic catechumen to a catechumen-in-earnest.”⁸³ He began to interrogate his lifestyle choices and engaged the Scriptures (using the hermeneutic that Ambrose modeled in his sermons). Eventually, Augustine would have his moment of conversion – “*Tolle, lege!*” – and he would petition Ambrose for candidacy.

⁸² Confessions. 5.13.23; trans. Henry Chadwick, *Saint Augustine: Confessions*

⁸³ Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 105

Augustine sought baptism following his conversion. This demonstrates a shift away from the pre-Edict of Milan practice where sponsors and teachers progressed a catechumen. After Augustine's petition was received, he sat for instruction during Lent (of which, he records very little) and then was baptized. As a *competentes*, Augustine attended the Lenten preparations "personally handled" by Ambrose.⁸⁴ After a series of exorcisms and renunciations, Augustine was baptized on Easter Eve, 387. In the post-Edict of Milan church, it is as if the catechumenate swallowed up the pre-Edict of Milan postulancy phase and it was replaced by the final rites of the Lenten candidacy process. From Ambrose's writings, we see documentation of the content of these daily teachings. He prioritized moral instruction, in contrast to the eastern bishop's doctrinal emphasis: "the patriarchs provided the models while Proverbs provided the principles."⁸⁵ Also during this time, *competentes* went through scrutinies, or exorcisms. Finally, the Sunday before Easter, Ambrose would move with the *competentes* to the baptistry (following their dismissal from the service) to begin explaining what would happen on the day of their baptism. It was in this moment that Ambrose "presented" the creed to them: their "password" into the church.⁸⁶

The post-Edict of Milan church underwent a rapid development in its initiation process. Prior to the Edict of Milan, there was an ambiguous postulancy phase (warranted by the pressures of the empire), followed by a catechumenate: a period of formation that was secret, mentored, and assessed. In the East and West, it focused on

⁸⁴ Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 111

⁸⁵ Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 112

⁸⁶ Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 115

moral instruction and holy living. Following the Edict of Milan, there is evidence of a prescribed, formalized catechumenal process of varying lengths (two to three years). However, as this wave of converts moved into the church, a challenge arose as the empire became Christian, maintaining the integrity of the institutions in its members. This led to the evolution exemplified by Augustine's account, where the postulancy phase faded into a (potentially lifelong) catechumenate of undetermined length. Only by the individual petitioning to enter a more rigorous phase of formation, during the Lenten season, could one then be baptized. This trend and evolution continued as the empire and the church became one.

The Medieval Church

The Medieval church emerged in the centuries following the fall of the Roman Empire (476) with the rise of the Carolingian Dynasty (750): the next threshold moment of the Western church. In the eighth century, the residual factions of the Roman Empire continued to be at war. The Frankish and Germanic tribes fought perpetually, and the Moors moved across North Africa into southern Spain. Charles Martel united the Frankish tribes, drove out the Saxon invasion of Burgundy, and repelled the Moors at the Battle of Tours. Moreover, he established the Carolingian line that would rule western Europe for centuries. His son, Pepin, crowned king of the Franks in 751, courted a relationship with the Papacy to begin establishing his work as a holy mission. Pepin's son, Charlemagne, continued the work of Martel and led a campaign against the Germanic tribes, resulting in the reunification of the territorial lands of the Roman Empire – except now, it was the Holy Roman Empire. Charlemagne was crowned Emperor on Christmas Day, 800, restoring the use of the title since the late fifth century.

Charlemagne inherited a church with varying liturgical expressions and rites. He began an endeavor to standardize the religious practice across the realm.

At the beginning of the ninth century, infant baptism had become the prescribed practice. Two primary documents give insight into the Western practice of preparation in the mid-eighth century: the *Gelasian Sacramentary* (c. 7th century) and the *Ordo Romanus XI* (c. 10th-11th centuries). The *Gelasian Sacramentary* published the prayers for the third Sunday of Lent through Easter Eve, which focused on the *competentes*. It included the general collects and prayers during the Mass, as well as specialized exorcisms, blessings, and general prayers for various usage. The *Sacramentary* rubrically assumes that the *competentes* is an infant:

[The salt is exorcised]

And after this prayer, you place salt in the mouth of the infant and say:

N., receive the salt of wisdom, for a token of propitiation unto eternal life.

O God of our fathers, O God who established all truth, we humbly ask you to look favorably upon this your servant, and grant that he who has taken this first morsel of salt may hunger only until he is satisfied with heavenly food: until then, Lord, may he ever be fervent in spirit, rejoicing in hope, and always serving your Name. Lead him to the laver of the second birth that with your faithful people he may be worthy to receive the eternal rewards of your promises. Through the Lord...⁸⁷

This represents one of three scrutinies that the *Sacramentary* proscribed; the rite did not require an explanation of the practice or any form of catechesis to take place prior to or during the ritual. This is consistent with the shift the church was undergoing as the primary recipients of baptism were now infants, rather than adults. The *Ordo Romanus*

⁸⁷ Whitaker, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, 216

XI increased the number of scrutinies to seven, “corresponding to the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.”⁸⁸

The emphasis in the medieval church on infant baptism gave rise to a new development: the godparent. The creation of the role of godparent provided a new opportunity for ‘retro-active’ catechesis, where the expectation was that the godparents participated in the scrutinies along with the infant and vocalized the words of faith for the infant.⁸⁹ It was a requirement to be a godparent that you knew the text of the Apostles’ Creed and Lord’s Prayer; and it was expected that you would teach the child the texts in due time, as well. This was a further departure from the pre- and post-Edict of Milan catechumenates where only the *competentes* were taught the “formerly secret texts.”⁹⁰ The role of a godparent served as a binder for familial alliances. Sermons were dedicated to the text of the Lord’s Prayer on the Rogation Days leading up to Pentecost – the other sanctioned day for baptisms at the time, in addition to Easter Eve. In Charlemagne’s understanding, recitation of the Apostles’ Creed and Lord’s Prayer served a dual function for life within the Holy Roman Empire: “Christians did not state propositions but swore loyalty.”⁹¹

Charles Martel (Charlemagne’s grandfather) had defeated the Saracens at the Battle of Tours in 732. Tours remained central to Charlemagne, as to all Franks, and he

⁸⁸ Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation*, 223

⁸⁹ Nathan J. Ristuccia, *Christianization and Commonwealth in Early Medieval Europe: A Ritual Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁹⁰ Ristuccia, *Christianization and Commonwealth*, 180

⁹¹ Ristuccia, *Christianization and Commonwealth*, 183

installed one of his senior advisors, Alcuin, to be abbot of the local monastery. There, Alcuin wrote a history of St. Martin of Tours that framed Charlemagne's vision for the empire he was leading:

But the holy man (Martin) chose to serve the heavenly God rather than to fight under an earthly emperor; he who was specifically chosen to carry the flag of the holy cross in the western parts of the world, and who exchanged the signs [*sacramenta*] of the military for evangelical edicts: not to contend with the secular arms for the Roman Empire, but to enlarge the Christian empire [*imperium christianum*] with particular teachings; and not to throw wild people under the hard yoke of the Romans, but to put the light yoke of Christ on the necks of many nations.⁹²

It is in this account of Martin's life that Alcuin provided the "essential concepts guiding the Carolingian Renewal, most especially the importance of *sacramentum*... Alcuin juxtaposed contexts within which the *sacramentum* was operative, contrasting the Roman centurion's military oath with a Christian's baptismal commitment."⁹³ The text of the "oath" was no longer a pledge of loyalty to the roman emperor, but the sacred words of Apostle's Creed and Lord's Prayer.

For Charlemagne and Alcuin, the parents and godparents' recitation of the Creed and Prayer, culminating in baptism of the infant, was the ultimate pledge of fidelity to a vision of the Kingdom of God manifested by the Holy Roman Empire. The Holy Roman Empire lived as a visual testimony to the sovereign authority of God and existed as an icon of the New Jerusalem. Baptism was the "vital conceptual tool in establishing an

⁹² Owen M. Phelan, *The Formation of Christian Europe: The Carolingians, Baptism, and the Imperium Christianum* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 8

⁹³ Phelan, *Formation of Christian Europe*, 9-10

imperium christianum in Europe.”⁹⁴ The late eighth-century document, *Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae*, reveals the lengths to which Charlemagne demanded submission:

If, henceforth, anyone from the people of the Saxons, lurking unbaptized among them, wishes to conceal himself, and scorns to come to baptism, and wishes to remain a pagan, he is to be put to death... Likewise, it is pleasing to insert in these decrees that all infants shall be baptized within a year; and we established this, so that if anyone will have despised to present an infant for baptism within the course of a year with out the advice or permission of a priest, if he is from the nobility he shall pay 120 solidi to the fisc, if he is a freeman 60, if a *litus* 30.⁹⁵

It is important to observe that the failure to baptize a child was not an ecclesiastical crime, but a state offense: the fine was paid to the imperial treasury, and not the church. This piece of legislation, and its other requirements for baptism, dictated policy across the Holy Roman Empire for centuries to come.

The Carolingian reforms give insight into a profound intermingling of church and state and the role that the Christian religion was to play in everyday life. In this period, adults were engaged in the catechumenate process approximately as adult converts or as parents/godparents of infants. The process began roughly around the third Sunday of Lent and culminated on Easter Eve. In 802, Charlemagne issued the *Capitula de examinadis ecclesiasticis*, which contained instructions for what priests were to teach catechumens and to assure the priests’ ability to “change special masses for the dead or also for the living according to either sex in singular number or in plural.”⁹⁶ In 812, Charlemagne issued a circular letter inquiring of all the bishops about the baptismal

⁹⁴ Phelan, *Formation of Christian Europe*, 64

⁹⁵ *Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae* 8, 19, cf. Phelan, *Formation of Christian Europe*, 66

⁹⁶ Phelan, *Formation of Christian Europe*, 76

practices of their priests: the responses affirmed the validity of the question. Alamarius, the Archbishop of Trier, clearly linked “the religious nature of the emperor’s interest to his temporal rule.”⁹⁷

Under Charlemagne, the Holy Roman Empire shifted the work from instilling a vision of the *imperium christianum* to maintaining the *imperium christianum* he had forged. Following the *Capitulatio de partibus Saxoniae*, it was a safe assumption that baptisms were primarily of infants being born into Christian homes. Baptism was the “basic element in a broader program of social, political, and religious organization.”⁹⁸ No longer did catechesis need to precede baptism but follow it. This inverted the ordo of preparation. An infant was exorcised, baptized, and then catechized (once the parent of an infant, themselves).

The Scholastic Period built upon Charlemagne’s practice and included Confession as a *de facto* catechetical tool. Lateran IV codified the requirement that all adults make their confession once per year to a priest, complete the assigned penance, and receive the Eucharist during Eastertide. By requiring Confession, the church “[elevated] custom to duty” and insured an annual interactional between priest and layperson.⁹⁹ This setting provided the opportunity for the priest to instruct the penitent in matters of personal conduct and piety (using devotional penance). In addition to the memorization of the Apostle’s Creed and Lord’s Prayer as required under Charlemagne,

⁹⁷ Phelan, *Formation of Christian Europe*, 184

⁹⁸ Phelan, *Formation of Christian Europe*, 81

⁹⁹ Gottfried Krodel, “Luther’s Work on the Catechism in the Context of Late Medieval Catechetical Literature,” in *Piety, Politics, and Ethics: Reformation Studies in Honor of George Wolfgang Forell*, ed. Carter Lindberg (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1984), 365

the Decalogue was added to the list of memory work. The Ten Commandments provided a “system of coordinates... the horizontal line marked by the commandments of the Second Table, the vertical line marked the commandments of the First Table. The positive side was marked “obedience,” the negative side “disobedience.” Confession placed parishioners in coordinates which described their status of salvation.”¹⁰⁰ This catechetical tool, post-baptism, informed the basis of what it meant to be Christian in the late Middle Ages: a dutiful, loyal member of the *Civitate Dei*, manifested in the Christian kingdoms of Europe. Instruction in the faith was no longer preparatory, but a corrective exercise geared towards loyalty and unity, similar to the experience of the United States in the 1950s (see Chapter 3). The focus on personal conduct was emphasized; exploration of credal faith declined.

The intermingling of church and empire would continue through the Reformation. During the age of exploration and conquest, the formal catechumenate as baptismal preparation “was briefly revived” as those outside Christendom were evangelized.¹⁰¹ This included Jews and Muslims in Southern Italy and the Iberian Peninsula, and the indigenous tribes of Central and South America. There were several manuals published by the Roman church for their evangelical religious orders: *Liber Sacerdotalis*, *Manual de Adultos*, and *Manuale Sacramentorum- Mexicaniensis*. Each of these borrowed from the practices of Ambrose with a formal catechumenate phase, which included interrogations and scrutinies/exorcisms, progression into the assembly,

¹⁰⁰ Krodel, “Luther’s Work on the Catechism,” 366

¹⁰¹ Jaime Lara, “‘Precious Green Jade Water’: A Sixteenth-Century Adult Catechumenate in the New World,” *Worship* 71, no. 5 (1997): 415

and water bath with anointing of Chrism. By contrast, the reformers within the geographic boundaries of Christendom began stressing re-evangelization and identified two types of faith: faith *about* God and faith *in* God. In Luther's *Short Form of the Ten Commandments, a Short Form of the Creed, and a Short Form of the Lord's Prayer (SF)*, he articulated that his exposition should be regarded "not as abstract knowledge to be memorized, but rather as existential knowledge to live by and to practice in daily living."¹⁰² In function, Luther was appealing to the same conversion of the heart that Ambrose sought when progressing a catechumen to an *electi*, except Luther perceived it as the ongoing task of the Christian.

The reforms instituted by Charlemagne birthed a new church. Just as the Edict of Milan prompted a fundamental shift in the church's theology and practice in the fourth century, so did the Carolingian Reforms in the ninth century. The church, in concert with the Holy Roman Empire, was profoundly different after Charlemagne was crowned emperor. Baptisms were compulsory oaths of fidelity, rather than sacred acts of faith – and they were intended to propagate loyalty to the Christian empire. Memorization of the Creed and Lord's Prayer became mandatory. This retroactive instruction was exacerbated in the late Middle Ages by the elevation of Confession to an annual obligation, where practice became linked to the adherence to canon law. Krodell observes:

"If we oversimplify, we may propose that primary education consists of the triad of information [the Decalogue, Creed, Lord's Prayer] combined with explanation, retention, and use. In the medieval system the emphasis was on use, and use was understood as obedience first to the Decalogue, Creed, and Lord's Prayer, but then also to all the ecclesiastical rules. Information

¹⁰² Krodell, "Luther's Work on the Catechism," 379

combined with explanation and retention were important, of course, but it was obedience which was decisive. All this was subject to being tested in the confessional interrogation.”¹⁰³

As the church and empire consummated their relationship and Christendom was born, formation needed to take place post-baptism, because it was functionally the physical location of one’s birth within the walls of the Christian empire that made one Christian, and not the baptismal water-bath and indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The legal obligation to participate in an initiation ritual diminished the action to a rite of passage. The initiation was into a reality that was experienced by everyone: the aspects of secrecy and mystery propagated by the *disciplina arcani* had been entirely removed. No longer was there the allure of exclusivity or the confidence of being of the elect. Christianity became passive, rather than active; formation was by osmosis and participation, rather than preparatory teaching and instruction.

Conclusion

This dissolution of the catechumenate as a pre-baptismal practice coincides with the profound interpolation of church and empire. As the church embraced the empire and its role as the manifestation of the *Civitate Dei*, faith in the unseen eternal was no longer necessary. The Edict of Thessalonica consummated the relationship between the two; Charlemagne brought it to maturity. Just as the Israelites had seen and entered the Promised Land, so too had the Christians completed their construction of the City of God. One did not need instruction to see something that they currently inhabited; they only needed instruction to learn how to live within it. For forty years the Israelites had to

¹⁰³ Krodel, “Luther’s Work on the Catechism,” 378

be reassured of the promise of the land of milk and honey; however, once they crossed the Jordan, they needed no reminder. The pre-Edict of Milan church lived in hope of Christ's return and establishment of a New Jerusalem. This hope was realized as Constantine became Emperor, and the church and empire became one under Theodosius. As the Visigoths sacked Rome in the fifth century, questions were raised about the vitality of the manifested Christian-empire, but they would be forgotten by the time Charlemagne was crowned Emperor. The medieval church continued to ascribe Christendom's existence to divine fiat through the reformation up to the Enlightenment and the secularization of Europe.

As the relationship between church and empire was strengthened, catechesis and pre-baptismal preparation changed to reflect the lived experiences of those engaging in the rite. When the church was considered a pariah to the empire, preparation was rigorous, secretive, and tailored to the needs of the candidate and community. Between the conversion of Constantine and the Edict of Thessalonica, the catechetical process became more widely formalized with proscribed preparatory rituals and teachings based on locale. Following the Edict there emerged a greater consensus in method, and a public, multi-staged process advancing from inquirer to catechumen to candidate to baptized Christian. As the integration of church and empire culminated in the founding of the Holy Roman Empire, the process shifted from adult baptism to infant baptism, and matriculation began to take weeks and not years. As the empire collectively became more Christian, the need for individual pre-baptismal preparation declined.

The early church understood the connection between formation and initiation. This manifested through the implicit practice of the pre-Edict of Milan church's

reluctance to include outsiders and in the articulated process of inquiry, catechumenate, and candidacy of the post-Nicene church. Dujarier argues that by the time Christianity was accepted as normative within the empire, the catechumenate as a pre-baptismal process had become entirely irrelevant.

The very notion of a journey towards baptism was progressively weakened and the spread of the custom of infant baptism caused it to disappear completely... the notion of stages is fundamental to Christian initiation. Of vital necessity are not only a serious catechesis but also an efficacious probation period. And there must also be a preliminary to catechesis, a stage that permits the seeds of faith to be offered to those capable of welcoming it in their hearts and lives. The stages of the sacrament must coincide with those of the faith.¹⁰⁴

And it is these stages of faith Dujarier references that the medieval and reformed church attempted to retroactively address. Charlemagne's decree that all must be baptized (and then subsequently learn the Lord's Prayer and Creed) and Lateran IV's requirement of annual confession (and the elevation of the Ten Commandments as a catechetical tool) were attempts to progress the stages of faith after reception of a sacrament, whereas the sacrament's original intent was meant to signify the fullness of a realized faith.

However, the practical experience of Christianity in the medieval church became more about adherence to imperial and canonical rules than spiritual living. Rome worked to catechize Christendom through the sacraments, but it was experienced as legalism.

A few generations of mandated quasi-legal-religious practice yielded a disordered tradition. Luther and the other reformers pushed to challenge the status quo of ritual without understanding. They attempted to re-evangelize those within the walls of Christendom by advocating for a living faith, an appeal for the conversion of the heart

¹⁰⁴ Dujarier, *History of the Catechumenate*, 110

that once existed as a prerequisite for Baptism before Charlemagne's decree. Ironically, the Roman church recognized that those outside the Christian world needed something more than the passive catechesis they were providing in Europe. The various manuals published in the sixteenth century for use in Central and South America demonstrated a renewal of the catechumenate as was practiced under and following Ambrose. In the Americas, there was no illusion of living within the City of God – it was the New World, and thus formal instruction was necessary before initiation. There was a profound dissonance that an infant could be baptized in Europe with neither knowledge nor understanding, but an adult in the Americas needed a sanctioned period of preparation. This divergence points to a correlation between the rigor of pre-baptismal preparation and the interpolation of church and empire.

Today, the church has inherited the evangelization/re-evangelization dilemma that was experienced in the reformation era, within our contemporary context. Even in the post-Enlightenment world, the church and nation-state continued their relationship, albeit a fraught one.¹⁰⁵ Myths of the United States as the New Jerusalem and tales of Christian Princes of Europe were pervasive in their local contexts and continued through the twentieth century, despite moments of revolution and rebellion. At some point in the modern era, the State divorced itself from the church in a reversal of their relationship in the West since the Edict of Thessalonica. The forces of secularism, skepticism, and modernism crumbled the walls of Christendom from the inside-out (in contrast to the Visigoth's attack from the outside-in). Given this new status-quo, the church needs to

¹⁰⁵ I am migrating from "empire" to "state," as a reflection of the multiplicity of governments in Western Europe, in contrast to the singularity of the Holy Roman Empire under Charlemagne.

reassess its context and its relationship to the empire/state and consequentially reevaluate its strategy of evangelism and catechesis considering this reality. Passive catechesis was ineffectual in the Middle Ages, and it certainly will not work today. Additionally, we have the added complexity of needing to evangelize non-Christians in the same geographic location as those needing re-evangelization, and often it must be done at the same time. Our contemporary moment in history bears a remarkable similarity to the period between the Edict of Milan and the Edict of Thessalonica: we are a valid religious tradition within “the empire,” but not the only legal religion, and not a consort of the State. The church would do well to recapture the historic practices of this time: a formalized catechumenal period with intentional, structured formation that culminates in a ritualized initiation sequence.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ The Book of Occasional Services identifies this, and it would be worth elevating the expressed catechumenate to formalized, normative practice, rather than optional, occasional usage.

Pre-Edict of Milan -- Eastern Practices

Syria		Egypt	
Didache (c late first century)	Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions (c. mid third century)	Clement (c 210)	Origen (c 250)
			Preparation and ascent to kerygma and initial shift in behavior “between Egypt and the Red Sea”
Moral instruction in “the way of Life and the Way of Death”	Three-month process	Three-year process where “the growth of sin is pruned” and “weeds of the mind are picked”	Instruction in the faith with emphasis on behavior “between the Red Sea and the Jordan”
	possibly, an intensive three-week pre-baptismal ritual	In the fourth year when “vital fruit” is produced	

Pre-Edict of Milan -- Western Practices

	Carthage/N. Africa	Rome?	
	Tertullian (c late first century)	Justin Martyr (c 210)	Apostolic Tradition (c 215 – but with later additions)
Preparation/” Postulancy”			Sponsors attest to teachers
Instruction/”Catechumen”	Formation including an expectation of spiritual practices for purifications		Three-year process
Final Preparations/”Candidacy”			

Ordo Comparison

	Pre-Edict of Milan	Post-Edict of Milan	Carolingian/Medieval
Preliminary Inquiry	Postulancy, prior to admittance to the catechumenate, with hesitation	General admission as a “catechumenate,” with exorcisms	
Rigorous Instruction	Rigorous, secret instruction of undetermined length. Mentors and teachers assessed candidacy for baptism.	A designation as a <i>competentes/electi</i>	(Targeted at parents/godparents)
Final Preparations	Ritual exorcisms/anointings	Final preparations during Lent (40 days)	Scrutinies
Initiation	Baptism	Baptism	Baptism
Post-baptismal Formation		<i>Mystagogy</i> and explanation of the Sacraments	Instruction in preparation for one’s child’s baptism (and later, in the participation in Confession)

Chapter 3: Post-Christian United States, Pre-Christian Rome

The practice of baptismal preparation evolved over the centuries in response to the Church's contextual relationship with the non-ecclesial authority. Chapter 1 noted practices and trends of the church forming Christians at the height of American Christianity in the 1950s. In short, there was minimal preparation due to the common practice of infant baptism and relative inculturation of Christianity within the United States. A baptized infant's continued formation was entrusted to the social pressure to conform as the child grew into adulthood, mimicking medieval Christianity. Chapter 2 presented a historical study of the church's practice of preparation, from the apostolic era through the Reformation to offer insight into other historical models of preparation, which also had adapted to its cultural context. A challenge for the American church, today, is that the social pressure which once prompted congregational membership has slowly ebbed throughout the second half of the twentieth century. This compares to the experience of Christians shortly after the Edict of Milan, but before the social pressure to conform from the Edict of Thessalonica. The changes in American society and culture over the last seventy-five years have impacted the model of transmission and reception of the Christian faith. The United States' emphasis on individualism and authenticity laid the groundwork for a pluralistic tolerance to enter the collective conscience.

Social Trends in the United States (1950-2025)

The 1950s were a decade of paradigm-shifting change in the United States. Two phenomena materialized in this post-War decade that began shifting American life: urbanization and technological innovation. Rural living "peaked" in the United States in

1940, with 57% of all Americans living in small towns.¹⁰⁷ In 1950, the percentage of Americans living in rural/small town settings had declined to 44%.¹⁰⁸ Over the next few decades, the urbanization of the United States took place, reducing the share of non-metropolitan Americans to 14% in 2020. This shift, which began occurring in the post-War years, was enabled by several factors, including automobile accessibility, manufacturing jobs (i.e., non-agrarian jobs), and increased social-service accessibility. A family could live in the suburbs and commute to work, while receiving the benefits of living in a city center. Throughout the 1950s, 20% of Americans moved residences each year, with 35% of those moves being either across state or county lines (representing 7% of the total U. S. population).¹⁰⁹ This migration was populated primarily by young, rural migrants looking for economic opportunity in the post-war years. Generationally, those moving into metropolitan areas in the 1950s would have been older members of the Silent Generation (1925-1945) or younger members of the Greatest Generation (1901-1924) as they began settling and starting families. As these rural migrants relocated into urban or suburban locales, the “wartime zeitgeist of national unity and patriotism... reinforced civic mindedness.”¹¹⁰ This is compared to the last third of the twentieth century, which witnessed a decrease in civic engagement, led by those entering “middle age” at the time, or those born during the 1950s: the Baby Boomers (1946-1964).

¹⁰⁷ Kenneth M. Johnson and Daniel T. Lichter, “Is Rural America Failing or Succeeding? Maybe Both,” *Carsey School of Public Policy*, September 8, 2020

¹⁰⁸ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 206

¹⁰⁹ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 205

¹¹⁰ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 267

Parallel to the urban migration was a shift in procreative trends where Americans began having fewer babies. With agrarian life came certain risks, liabilities, and dangers. Additionally, medical interventions were comparatively low (limited by technology and access). Given this, in 1931, approximately 20% of children would not reach adulthood (10% would die within their first year of life).¹¹¹ The natural response was to have multiple children, evidenced by the high birthrates in the first quarter of the twentieth century – roughly 30 births per 1,000 people. In the years following the Great Depression, birth rates dropped to ~20 births per 1,000 and would not rise until the “Baby Boom” of the 1950s with approximately 25 births per 1,000 people.¹¹² Even though the period between 1946 and 1964 is characterized by as the “Baby Boom,” the actual birth rate was lower than the early 1900s. This reflects a shift in conventional wisdom and practice that prioritized fewer children with higher investment, rather than more children with lower investment. This represents the “Slow Life” pattern as a category of *Life History Theory*. Life History Theory posits that parents are confronted with two general choices: have many children and push them to grow up quickly (with the hope that one reaches self-sufficiency before one or both parents die) – a “fast life strategy” – or have fewer children and invest in their own slow, intentional development – a “slow life strategy.”¹¹³

¹¹¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Mortality Statistics 1931*, National Center for Health Statistics, 1934, accessed July 1, 2025, https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/vsushistorical/mortstatsh_1931.pdf.

¹¹² National Center for Health Statistics. *Table 1-1: Live Births, Birth Rates, and Fertility Rates, by Race of Child: United States, 1909–1980*. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics, 1982. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/statab/t1x0197.pdf>.

¹¹³ Jean M. Twenge, *Generations: The Real Differences between Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, Boomers, and Silents—and What They Mean for America’s Future* (New York: Atria Books, 2023), 15

One of the consequences of the urban migration was the construction of community without shared/common history: everyone was a transplant. In rural communities, there was a degree of ancestry/history, a connection to place, and a social trust that was innate to the community. Robert Putnam observed in his sociological study, *Bowling Alone*, that “residents of small towns and rural areas are more altruistic, honest, and trusting than other Americans.”¹¹⁴ When migration took place into a suburban community from a spectrum of rural communities, that social trust was not immediately there because experience had not yet been shared. Putnam identifies two types of social connectedness: bonding and bridging. Suburban development encouraged bonding type social cohesion – a “sociological superglue” that connects people to one another. However, this metaphorical glue did not stick for long.

Metropolitan migration, coupled with the baby boom, coincided with technological innovation. Following World War II, there was a promise of a better tomorrow. The nation’s economy was booming and there was a sense of prosperity. “The economy boomed because the United States stopped producing bullets and started producing more than a third of all the world’s manufactured goods.”¹¹⁵ This production boom is largely attributed to the rest of the industrialized world’s decimation in the wake of the World War. When the United States was the only country with manufacturing potential, it was easy to manufacture lots of things to be bought by lots of people. This set up a decade of post-War prosperity. With this product boom, the American ethos

¹¹⁴ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 205

¹¹⁵ Hayden Shaw, *Generational IQ: Christianity Isn’t Dying, Millennials Aren’t the Problem, and the Future Is Bright* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2015), 47

shifted from an “obligation to serve to an obligation to buy.” Technological innovations in the 1950s led to the mechanization of the household – there was to be a gadget for everything. The dishwasher, washing machine, vacuum, and microwave were all consumer products that reduced household management from a fulltime job to a weekly chore. Alongside this dazzling innovation was the need for advertisement.

The invention of the television changed consumer purchasing through advertisement and market segmentation. Prior to World War II, the radio was the primary connective cultural experience. President Franklin Roosevelt used the radio to connect with the American people in his weekly “fireside chats” that reached 58% of the American population during the War years.¹¹⁶ This encouraged an appeal to “experts” within their field. As television became affordable and common place, so did visual advertisement and market segmentation. With radio advertisement, you were left to your own creativity to imagine a new product; with television, the neighbor’s new gizmo was covetously beamed into your living room. These consumerist tendencies were amplified by the Silent Generation’s commitment to duty, except the “call to duty in the 1950s had nothing to do with the experience of transcendence; it was about the imminent act of buying and consuming new products, keeping the gears of mass society moving.”¹¹⁷ By the late 1950s, companies adopted a practice of planned obsolescence to drive continuing

¹¹⁶ Douglas B. Craig, *Fireside Politics: Radio and Political Culture in the United States, 1920–1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 156

¹¹⁷ Andrew Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age: Responding to the Church’s Obsession with Youthfulness* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 23; see a fuller discussion of generational designations in Chapter 5, page 10

consumer consumption. This practice ranged from changes in car models from year-to-year to designing products to have short lifespan with a prohibitively high cost to repair.

The advent of the television and segmentation (e.g., Saturday morning cartoons) mutated this duty to consume into an appeal to authenticity, which ironically was about emulation. Advertising projected what the “real” American family looked like, not only in terms of the products they should buy, but the hair styles and clothing they should wear. Further, television allowed society to visualize tropes, such as the high school quarterback and cheerleader winning prom king/queen as the all-American couple. Conversely, representation of Black Americans in television was nearly non-existent. There were three television programs in the 1950s that had Black leads: “The Beulah Show” (1950-1953), “Amos ‘n’ Andy” (1951-1953, cancelled after protests by the NAACP for promoting racial stereotypes), and “The Nat King Cole Show” (1956-1957, cancelled because it failed to obtain national sponsors). These cultural pieces of the social imaginary informed what it meant to be “authentic” and “authentically American,” particularly for the youth of the 1950s. To be American meant to be white, middle class, suburban, and protestant.

Segmentation helped the mass society buzz, while driving a deeper wedge between the experience of the young and the experience of parents and other adults. In the 1950s, a distinct and powerful National Youth culture built not on obligation but on the segmented products of mass society formed for the first time. These segmented products served as the markers of who was young and youthful and who was not. Parents conform to adult segmentation marked by their suits and dresses, their cars and washing machines and houses, but youth conformed to a different segment within the mass society, giving them a feeling of distinction, born both from the freedoms of the middle class and home ownership and from the products of

mass society. Youth conformed to youthful segmentation by consuming blue jeans; juke boxes; and finned-out, fast cars.¹¹⁸

The early Boomers who experienced childhood in the 1950s were quickly separating themselves from their parents, and the rest of society by the 1960s. The age of duty was becoming the age of authenticity, which became about emulating and projecting the social imaginary, propagated by television.

Institutional churches responded to this appeal to authenticity by segmenting their religious formation. Young Life serves as the prime example of response to segmentation. The organization was founded in 1941 with the intent of evangelizing high school students. What began in Texas rapidly expanded in the 1950s to multiple cities across the United States. Their strategy was to recruit the model students, “the captain of the football team and the homecoming queen, to come to its weekly club, then others would in turn conform and follow. The mass society and its magnetic pool of conformity could draw many, if you could simply get the right magnet to participate.”¹¹⁹ This period saw the rise of “youth group” with its segmented message, focused on behavior and right and wrong action.

The segmentation of the mass society allowed for the assumption that a youthful version of Christianity must be presented to the young by the young, only for the young, just as products needed to be created for the young, to be sold by the young only to the young. Pastors, then, needed to be turned into youth pastors; Or, even better, churches could just hire older youth as endorsers to show how Christian faith could be lived out in the time of youthful segmentation.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age: Responding to the Church's Obsession with Youthfulness*, 26

¹¹⁹ Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age: Responding to the Church's Obsession with Youthfulness*, 29

¹²⁰ Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age: Responding to the Church's Obsession with Youthfulness*, 29

An unforeseen consequence of capitulating to the culture and segmenting the congregation was the ease with which subsequent generations could justify their split from the faith of their parents. The faith practiced by “parents” was for someone like *them*, and not for someone *like me*. The church infused this thinking into the congregation by their own programmatic structure. Likewise, the practice of segmentation and the lessons taught, laid the foundation of what the Boomers would then instill in their Gen X and Millennial children: Moral Therapeutic Deism (see Chapter 5).

As Baby Boomers came of age in the 1960s, they began to experience doubts about what they had been taught they were supposed to desire. When early Boomers began attending college in mid-1960s the Civil Rights protests challenged what they had learned (and seen) while growing up. Landmark cases (i.e., *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education*) began challenging the social imaginary. How society perceived itself – white, middle-class, suburban, Protestant – was no longer affirmed by proscribed cultural practices. The Civil Rights Acts fundamentally changed the United States, because it gave the government the power to regulate private institutions in order to prevent discrimination and “implied a revocation of the old freedom of association altogether.”¹²¹ Chris Caldwell argues in *Age of Entitlement* that the Civil Rights Act effectively created two parallel Americas, because “rights cannot simply be added to a social contract without changing it.”¹²² These two Americas represent those who have assented to equal

¹²¹ Chris Caldwell, *Age of Entitlement: America Since the Sixties* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2020), 14

¹²² Caldwell, *Age of Entitlement: America Since the Sixties*, 17

protection under the Law for all people (with the government's ability to enforce), and those who did not.

The Civil Rights Movement coincided with the Vietnam War, and the protests associated with it. For the first time in American history, a class divide began emerging between those who would join the armed services, and those who would not. The individualism of the 1950s crystalized in the 1960s, where there was little individual cause to fight in a war, let alone a war that did not involve American citizens.

In 1966, when 22-year-old John Kerry [(b. 1944, Silent Generation)] got out of Yale, the war in Vietnam was still at an early stage. It was not yet unthinkable that the wealthy and privileged should serve in the military and Kerry enlisted in the Navy. By the time the three future presidents finished college just two years later [(Clinton, Bush, and Trump, all born 1946, Baby Boomer Generation)], the war had heated up, the summer of love had intervened, and better off Americans were desperately seeking ways to avoid active service.¹²³

The United States was “afraid to ask the men of Harvard to stand alongside the men of Harlem, same uniform, same obligations, same country.”¹²⁴ By the time of the Paris Accords in 1972, resentment and mistrust had taken hold of the United States by young and old alike. Two Americas were emerging, one that held onto the values and ideology of the Silent Generation, and another that began to challenge conventional wisdom.

The feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s also contributed to the generational interrogation of American assumptions. Commonly referred to as “Second Wave Feminism,” the feminist movement of this period reflected a cultural rejection of patriarchal structures, encouraged by the Civil Rights movement. The role women

¹²³ Caldwell, *Age of Entitlement: America Since the Sixties*, 84

¹²⁴ James Webb, “Idealism and Practicality,” *The Atlantic*, April 1980, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideastour/military/webb-full.html>.

played on the homefront during World War II (stylized by Rosy the Riveter), the increased mechanization of home tasks (with the consequential reduction of time spent on homemaking tasks), and the rise of womanist groups contributed to this awakening. The innovation of common household appliances (washer, drier, and dishwasher) reduced the time required to care for a household. With this new freedom, women found themselves with time to gather and reflect and pursue their own passions outside of the home. In 1961, John F. Kennedy established the President's Commission on the Status of Women, chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt, to examine the relationship between women and education, employment, and social independence. The commission published its findings, "American Women," in 1963 and concluded that women were being discriminated against. The Equal Pay Act (1963) and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (1964), and then Title IX of the Educational Amendments (1972), were all attempts to rectify the inequality. However, the dissatisfaction women experienced with the patriarchal structure persisted. Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) and Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970) argued that patriarchy was a deep-seated social system akin to racial or class oppression. The proposed Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) would attempt to establish the equality of sexes in the Constitution – however, when the deadline for ratification in 1982 arrived, the proposed amendment was three states short. Opposition to the ERA grew in the late 1970s, due in part to fundamentalist religious conservatives.

Christian fundamentalists gained prominence in the 1970s, in response to the shifting cultural values of racial and gender equality and the failure of Vietnam. In 1973, the Supreme Court guaranteed a woman's right to an abortion through the right to

privacy of the Fourteenth Amendment. Fundamentalist Christians, citing a “traditional family structure,” found the protected right to abortive medicine (along with access to hormonal birth control) to visibly challenge the stability of the family unit and order. In tandem to these novel feminist rights, divorce rates were increasing, and birthrates out of marriage were rising. Evangelical figures such as Jerry Falwell and Billy Graham lamented those changes and rallied against them under the umbrella of “family values.” Central to this concept was the strong male leader – both in the family unit and society. In their reading, the Vietnam War had revealed a crisis of (particularly male) leadership in the country that they deemed soft. The simultaneous elevation of women in the public square in conjunction with this supposed failure of male leadership enraged the religious right. Evangelicals sought a political vision of Christian manhood that continued fusing religion with nationalism, anti-feminism, and cultural conservatism.

Embedded in “family values” was the continuing presence of racism. In 1662, the Virginia Colony established the principal of *partus sequitur ventrem* – “that which is born follows the womb.” This principle held that infants born to enslaved mothers would themselves be enslaved, regardless of the status of the father. This legal principal served as the basis for chattel slavery in the United States.¹²⁵ *Partus sequitur ventrem* absolved male slave owners of rape, by guaranteeing that they would never have to consider the ramification of their actions. However, if the opposite were to occur, and a black man had raped a free, white woman, the child would be free. This fear led to the myth of the “angry black man” that persisted through the Civil War and Reconstruction

¹²⁵ Thomas D. Morris, *Southern Slavery and the Law, 1619–1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 43.

and found a home in the 13th Amendment and Jim Crow Laws. The theme of “family values” promoted within the evangelical tradition, in addition to rejecting feminist equality, stood in contrast to the alleged values of non-white Americans, specifically targeting the “angry black man.” This fear led to Red Lining practices in the 1960s and later, the War on Drugs of the 1980s. Ronald Reagan, as a champion of “family values,” declared a “national crusade” through his War on Drugs. However, his war had two different standards, targeting black Americans: possession of 5 grams of crack would carry a five-year sentence, the same penalty as possession of 500 grams of cocaine.¹²⁶ These “family values” were taught in youth groups and Sunday Schools and promoted a strict sexual ethic for youth and traditional gender roles for adults. The pressure of conformity was meant to be enough to maintain the social order.

James Dobson’s *Focus on the Family* attempted to instill the patriarchal family system into the American culture, again rooted in power and authority. His book, *Dare to Discipline*, emphasized strict parental authority, especially the father’s role as the leader and disciplinarian in the home. He warned that failing to enforce obedience would lead to moral decay, rebellion, and societal collapse.¹²⁷ Dobson connected family discipline to broader cultural fears. Feminism, secularism, divorce, and the sexual revolution were all framed as threats to traditional family order—and by extension, to the nation itself. To resist these dangers, Dobson and other evangelicals promoted a hierarchical family model: husbands as strong leaders, wives as submissive helpers, and children as obedient followers. The later segmentation of media amplified this vision

¹²⁶ Comprehensive Crime Control Act of 1984, Pub. L. No. 98-473, 98 Stat. 1837 (1984)

¹²⁷ James C. Dobson, *Dare to Discipline* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1970)

and helped create a national evangelical subculture deeply invested in maintaining “biblical” gender roles. Dobson tied personal family dynamics to national survival, asserting that the nation’s strength depended on restoring traditional masculinity and authority. This visibly connected evangelical fundamentalist values and the social conservatism of the Republican Party in the American eye.

The connection between evangelical fundamentalism and political party affiliation appears today in the normalization of White Christian Nationalism, and the evangelical alliance with the Make America Great Again (MAGA) movement. According to the MAGA perspective, the United States will be great *again* when it rejects the “woke” policies of Critical Race Theory and the “radical left.” In essence, the social policy prescribed by the MAGA movement essentially recreates the 1950s – the era before the Civil Rights Act and Second Wave Feminism, when Church attendance was highest, and the United States (from their perspective) was clearly white. A mistrust and doubt of the social system of the 1950s, which promoted patriarchy and racism, seeped into progressive American culture – and the Church would be guilty by association in the collective conscience.

The economic realities of the 1970s and 1980s continued to feed the mistrust of the then young adults who are the near retirees of today. Stagflation—an unusual economic condition marked by high inflation, high unemployment, and stagnant growth—became a defining feature of the 1970s U.S. economy. The 1973 OPEC oil embargo and the 1979 Iranian Revolution each sent oil prices skyrocketing, driving up the cost of goods and fueling broad-based inflation. By the mid-to-late 1970s, inflation was above 10%, with unemployment around 7.5% - right as the tail end of the Boomers were moving into the

job market. The economy endured two recessions from 1973 to 1975, and again at the start of the 1980s. These conditions led to widespread economic frustration and discredited many prevailing economic theories and the institutions that propagated them. When elected in 1980 amid high inflation, high unemployment, and widespread public dissatisfaction, Reagan took office in 1981 during the height of the economic turmoil.

Reaganomics was just a name for governing under a merciless contradiction that no one could admit was there: Civil rights was important enough that people could not be asked to wait for it, but unpopular enough that people could not be asked to pay for it... [he] permitted Americans to live under two social orders, a pre-Great Society one and a post-Great Society one. Paying for both soon got expensive. The cost can be measured roughly by the growth of debt, public and private, over the decades after Reagan's arrival in the White House.¹²⁸

In addition to the Federal Reserve's shift in economic policy, Reagan oversaw a massive increase in defense spending, contributing to a large rise in federal deficits. The federal spending on the military affirmed the connection that fundamentalist Christians drew between the United States' prosperity, "Biblical principles" (including "manhood"), and the failure of Vietnam. While the spending provided short-term economic stimulus, it also sparked long-term debates over fiscal responsibility. Nevertheless, by 1983, inflation had dropped significantly, unemployment began to decline, and the economy entered a prolonged period of expansion. This encouraged an opulent consumerism, exacerbating the individualism and segmentation driving American cultural life. Simultaneously, college admission rates continued to climb (even while the birth rates continued to fall). The slow life pattern continued.

¹²⁸ Caldwell, *Age of Entitlement: America Since the Sixties*, 111

In the 1980s, cable television had taken hold in the United States, with entire channels now dedicated to market groups. Nickelodeon, MTV, ESPN, and CNN all launched between 1979 and 1980. The array of choice began to individualize the American common experience by providing niche television channels. In the 1950s, a television showed three channels (ABC, CBS, and NBC) and Americans saw virtually the same thing at the same time. However, with the advent of cable, there was no guarantee that neighbors were watching (and experiencing) the same things at the same time. This fracturing of American common experience would be compounded in the 1990s. The launch of MSNBC and Fox News in 1996 now gave Americans three 24-hour cable news channels (in addition to the national networks). All three competed for viewership, which drove the niche market into a more siloed viewership. For example, Fox News was founded to be “fair and balanced,” a thinly veiled critique of CNN’s assumed partisanship, that ironically pandered to a conservative base. Likewise, the rise of the personal computer and the internet in 1994 (with the launch of Ebay and Amazon in 1995) continued to fragment society while driving consumerism. It was at this time that Walmart shifted away from their “made in America” branding of the 1980s to focus more on price. Church congregations embraced the advent of new technology and mimicked the cultural practice of segmentation. Congregations began expanding their worship services to include “contemporary” Christian music and non-traditional organ and piano hymns. This Sunday morning segmentation represented an attempt at relevance not only at meeting musical tastes, but in demonstrating a willingness to evolve with cultural trends, particularly in mainline traditions.

Economic insecurity continued to influence cultural life in the 1990s and 2000s. The Dotcom Bubble (1998-2000) and the Great Recession (2007-2009) greatly impacted the economy just as members of the Silent Generation and Baby Boomers were beginning to retire, and the subsequent generations were formed by what they heard at the dinner table. In both cases, overzealous lending due to overvaluation (the Dotcom Bubble) and confidence in subprime mortgages (the Great Recession) led to debt that could not be repaid, in the first case by Initial Public Offerings (IPOs) and then by individual homeowners. Under Barack Obama, the United States government bailed out numerous corporations as part of the Great Recession in an attempt to stave off the effects and provide a stimulus to kickstart the economy. The skepticism of corporations that began with a perceived planned obsolescence in the 1950s, now included the government itself. The fear of financial insecurity contributed to the declining birth rates and the preference of a “slow life” pattern with greater individual investment through education and training. The slow life pattern drove generational change that prioritized individualism, authenticity, and self-fulfillment that, at its nature, was skeptical of any institution that promised it had the answer.

The connectivity of the internet pushed the United States towards a global perspective, which complicated the myth of Christian American exceptionalism. The Pacific Theater of World War II (1941-1945), the Korean War (1950-1953), and the Vietnam War (1965-1973) all exposed a subset of the American population to a foreign, non-European culture. But now, the general American populace could see and experience world cultures from the comfort of their own home at their own convenience. Globalism in the United States reached a crisis moment in the wake of the September 11,

2001, terrorist attacks, which raised the profile of Muslim-Americans. The “War on Terror” quickly became another endless war, targeting Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden. Despite George W. Bush’s proclamation of “Mission Accomplished” in 2003, the conflicts in Iraq (2003-2011) and Afghanistan (2001-2021) lingered with the impossible objective of eradicating terrorism in the Middle East. The religiously motivated terror attack on American soil pushed the Church into an uncomfortable position: supporting the country in a “holy war” against Islamic terrorism (invoking crusade imagery) or rejecting the religious undertones of the terror attack and interpreting the conflict as a secular country engaging a foreign adversary. Simultaneous with this, a public distinction had to be made between militant Islam of Al-Qaeda and the peaceable Islam practiced by many American Muslims – raising the profile of religion and religious tolerance in the United States. When placed in conversation with the individualism and authenticity of the 1960s and 1970s, which manifested in a self-defined personal spirituality, religious tolerance became a public virtue: “What’s good for me is good for me; what’s good for you is good for you.” This resulted in a rejection of institutions that appeared exclusive, particularly religious institutions began making exclusivist truth claims. Religious organizations that claimed to have the whole truth were not to be trusted.

The innovation of social media and smart phones contributed to societal shift towards tolerance and inclusion, and further self-determinism. MySpace (2003), YouTube (2005), Facebook (2005), and Twitter (2007 – now X) introduced the concept of personal online self-expression and normalized online personas, driving interconnectedness. More recently, in conjunction with smartphones and mobile phone

cameras, Instagram (2010), Snapchat (2011), and TikTok (2016) empowered authentic “lay” reporting on current events, which provided non-corporate (and therefore, not scripted) accounts of the day’s news. The recent progress on AI and the use of Big Data has only driven the market segmentation by personalized algorithmic calculation. The general skepticism of corporations at the time was not about conspiracy, but motivation. Just as planned obsolescence was geared at consumerism in the 1950s, profit margins motivated decisions in the 2010s.

Social attitudes experienced a significant swing in the 2010s. In 2010, Barack Obama signed the Affordable Care Act into law. This was the largest expansion of social safety net since Lyndon Johnson’s *Great Society* vision of the 1960s, providing (and requiring) all Americans to hold health insurance. Environmental awareness also gained prominence and general acceptance, with the Paris Climate Accords (2015). Simultaneously, the United States was witnessing a significant cultural swing from opposing same-sex marriage under Bill Clinton and the Defense of Marriage Act (1996) to the legalization of same sex marriage through the *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) decision. The two Americas forged by the Civil Rights Acts now began to reverse roles. The long time, dominant, “family values” moral-majority social conservatism –wedded to the evangelical church – was losing the cultural war. Society was shedding its Christian identity in favor of a tolerance approach, rooted in self-determinism and authenticity.

The evangelical tradition’s prominence within American culture influenced what the culture believed Christianity to be. The evangelical tradition’s interpretative strand (fundamentalism) was and is projected onto other Christian traditions (see Chapter 1).

Denominations such as The Episcopal Church, with its inclusive stances, ethos of tolerance, and rejection of fundamentalism, are lumped into a caricature of what evangelical Christianity is. The church – regardless of its theological position or connection to evangelical Christianity – is guilty by association.

The last ten years have produced several significant cultural events, whose consequence has not yet been fully realized in American society. Among these events are:

- the 2016 election and rise of the MAGA movement
- the 2020 election, the claims of the election being “stolen,” and the January 6 Riots
- Covid-19, vaccines (and anti-vaxers), government mandates, and the “Make America Healthy Again” (MAHA) movement
- #MeToo and the Epstein Files
- #BlackLivesMatter, Charlottesville, and George Floyd
- 2025 Immigration Protests, the mobilization of the National Guard, and the ICE shootings of Renee Nicole Good and Alex Pretti.

These represent threads of the last seventy-five years that are simultaneously being yanked into a cultural knot – forcing polarization. We are too close to these events to gauge their long-term significance, and we must also acknowledge their disproportionate influence on conventional wisdom due to their proximity to our time. In this survey of United States cultural history, so many events have been omitted – not because they were or are not significant – but because the further from the event, the less role specific

events play in the collective conscience. Instead, trends and movements are documented to give a sense of how individuals are perceiving their moment in time.

The 2024 election (as an extension of 2016 and 2020) was framed as a referendum on progressive social policy. Christian Nationalists saw this as an opportunity to reassert fundamentalist social teaching to a culture which had rejected it, in the name of tolerance and pluralism. The church has been constant throughout this time – always present but not always adapting. A cultural war is taking place, where half of Christianity fights on the side of Empire to impose its will, while the other half cedes its power and begs for mercy.¹²⁹

There is a complicated relationship between the church(es) and the United States. Evangelical Protestants and Conservative Catholics have found an ally in the second Trump administration. Progressive Mainline Protestants (and some Catholics) express their support for the marginalized and reject the resurgence of conservative social policy championed by the current administration’s evangelical supporters. If someone is a member of an evangelical congregation, they probably are reading the events of the last two years as evidence of God’s hand guiding the United States back to “Biblical Principles”– affirming the myth that the United States is a Christian Nation. As shown in Chapter 1, 59% of Americans do not hold this position. This implies that while evangelical Christians contributed to the 2024 Trump coalition, their world view does not reflect the majority of Americans – including all of those who voted for him. Evangelicals may currently have an ally in the White House, but the cultural shift

¹²⁹ Mariann Edgar Budde, “Sermon at the National Prayer Service,” Washington National Cathedral, January 21, 2025, <https://cathedral.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Service-of-Prayer-for-the-Nation-2025-Online.pdf>.

towards pluralism and tolerance, the general skepticism of corporate motivation, and the rise of individualism and self-determinism pushes the United States towards a secular, post-Christian reality. Christianity is now a tolerated religion in the United States – but it is no longer the exclusive religion of the nation. We now turn to the church and its previous experience co-existing with an empire in the third and fourth centuries.

Christianity and the Roman Empire

The third century was a dangerous time to be Christian in the Roman Empire. Between 235 and 284, nineteen individuals reigned as Emperor, averaging 2.6 years per reign, with seven of these Emperors holding power for one year or less. This political instability produced an erratic oscillation of domestic policy, of which Christians were often the target. The first Emperor of this period, Maximinus Thrax (235–238), ordered the execution of Christian leaders, especially those connected to the previous emperor, Severus Alexander. According to Eusebius, Maximinus targeted clergy, seeing their influence as a threat.¹³⁰ Decius (249–251) ordered the most significant and systemic persecution through empire-wide policy against Christians. He mandated that all citizens must offer sacrifices to the Roman gods and obtain a *libellus* (certificate) as proof. Many Christians who refused were executed or imprisoned. It was during Decius' reign that Pope Fabian and Origen were executed. Decius was succeeded by Trebonianus Gallus (251–253), who continued anti-Christian measures, possibly motivated by a plague sweeping the empire and the need to restore public order. Valerian (253–260) escalated

¹³⁰ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. Kirsopp Lake, in *Loeb Classical Library*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), 6.28

the persecution beginning in 257, initially banning Christian worship and assemblies, and by 258, ordering the execution of bishops and clergy. Christians also faced the loss of property and legal rights.

The end of the third century saw Diocletian's rise to power in 284. His twenty-one year reign provided much needed stability to the empire – and for a time, apathy towards Christians. However, influenced by his co-emperor, Galerius, Diocletian began to adopt a policy of suppression. According to Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History* and Lactantius's *On the Deaths of the Persecutors*, the Emperors perceived Christianity as a threat to imperial unity and traditional Roman religion. Beginning in 303 CE, a series of increasingly severe edicts were issued to eradicate Christianity from public life and restore traditional Roman piety.¹³¹ The first edict ordered the destruction of churches, the burning of Christian scriptures, and the dismissal of Christians from government service.¹³² This was followed by a second edict mandating the arrest of clergy, and a third edict offering clemency to those who agreed to perform sacrifices to the Roman gods.¹³³ The most sweeping came with the fourth edict in 304, which required all Christians, not just clergy, to offer public sacrifice—on pain of imprisonment, torture, or execution. Enforcement of these edicts varied widely across the empire.¹³⁴ In the Eastern provinces, ruled by Diocletian and Galerius, the persecution was especially harsh and long-lasting.

¹³¹ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 8.2.4

¹³² Lactantius, *On the Deaths of the Persecutors*, trans. William Fletcher (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1984). 13–15; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 8.2–3

¹³³ Lactantius, *On the Deaths of the Persecutors*, 16 and 17; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 8.6

¹³⁴ Lactantius, *On the Deaths of the Persecutors*, 19

Despite its brutality, the persecution ultimately failed to destroy the Christian movement. After Diocletian's abdication in 305, Galerius continued the persecution, but by 311, even he acknowledged its failure. On his deathbed, Galerius issued the Edict of Toleration, which granted Christians the right to worship and asked them to pray for the empire's well-being¹³⁵. This proclamation marked the end of the Great Persecution, which was soon followed by the Edict of Milan in 313 under Constantine and Licinius, which granted universal religious liberty across the Roman Empire and returned property back to the Christians. It was under Constantine's reign that the Church would gain prominence and influence in public life.

Constantine's interest in ecclesiastical unity reflected a growing relationship between Church and Empire. In 325, Constantine called the Council of Nicaea to resolve the question regarding the relationship between the Father and the Son. Later ecclesiastical histories described two central factions at the Council – the position we recognized as Christian orthodoxy and the heretical position of Arius. At the Council, Eusebius recorded that

“The emperor gave patient audience to all alike, and received every proposition with steadfast attention, and by occasionally assisting the argument of each party in turn, he gradually disposed even the most vehement disputants to a reconciliation. At the same time, by the affability of his address to all, and his use of the Greek language, with which he was not altogether unacquainted, he appeared in a truly attractive and amiable light, persuading some, convincing others by his reasonings, praising those who spoke well, and urging all to unity of sentiment, until at last he succeeded in bringing them to one mind and judgment respecting every disputed question.”¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Lactantius, *On the Deaths of the Persecutors*, 34

¹³⁶ Eusebius of Caesarea, *The Life of the Blessed Emperor Constantine*, trans. Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999, 3.13

Constantine acted as mediator between the positions – seeking unity and compromise – in a meta-role of host and convenor. Eusebius suggests that Constantine’s devotion and commitment to the Church’s unity is an act of thanksgiving and devotion in response to his own conversion and subsequent victory at Milvian Bridge (which allowed him to claim sole emperorship over the empire). Constantine’s successors did not hold the same commitment to unity or orthodoxy.

Following Constantine’s death in 337, his three sons, Constantine II, Constans I, and Constantius II ruled the western (Gaul), southern (Italy and Africa) and eastern provinces of the empire, respectively. Constantine II was killed by his brother, Constans I in a civil war in 340. Constans was then later killed by Magnentius in 353, who was killed by Constantius II in 353 – briefly reuniting the Empire under one ruler. Significantly, Constantius was a professed Arian, which rejected his father’s commitment to unity over theological position. After Constantius’ death, his cousin (and Constantine the Great’s nephew), Julian, ruled both halves of the empire. Julian was known as “the Apostate” because of his revival of pagan practice. Julian’s religious agenda aimed to restore paganism as a unifying imperial religion. He reopened temples, reinstated sacrifices, and supported pagan clergy.¹³⁷ While he did not initiate violent persecution, his laws marginalized Christians and aimed to restrict their influence in civic life.

¹³⁷ Julian the Apostate, *Against the Galileans*, trans. Thomas Taylor, accessed July 12, 2025, https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/julian_apostate_galileans_1_text.htm) and Julian the Apostate, “Letter to a Priest (19),” trans. Wilmer Cave Wright, accessed July 12, 2025, https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/julian_apostate_letters_1_trans.htm)

After Julian the Apostate's unexpected death in 363 the Roman army hastily elected Jovian as emperor. Jovian, a Christian, immediately reversed Julian's pagan revival. He restored Christianity's favored status, ended the Persian war, and died after only eight months in power.¹³⁸ His brief reign was followed by the accession of Valentinian I in 364, who ruled the Western Empire and appointed his brother Valens as co-emperor in the East. Valentinian was a capable military leader who maintained a policy of religious tolerance, allowing both Nicene and Arian Christians—as well as pagans—to practice freely. Valens, however, was an Arian Christian and supported Arian clergy while clashing with Nicene leaders.¹³⁹ His reign ended in 378 when he was killed at the Battle of Adrianople, fighting Gothic invaders—a defeat that deeply shook the empire. Following Valens' death, Theodosius I was appointed emperor of the East in 379 by the Western emperor Gratian. Theodosius inherited a precarious situation: military threats on the frontier and internal religious division. Unlike Valens, Theodosius was a staunch Nicene Christian and quickly began reversing Arian influence.¹⁴⁰ In 380, he issued the Edict of Thessalonica, declaring Nicene Christianity the official state religion and labeling other forms of Christianity—including Arianism—as heretical¹⁴¹. Theodosius actively promoted orthodoxy by supporting the institutional Church,

¹³⁸ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, Book 25.10.14, trans. John C. Rolfe, in *The Roman History of Ammianus Marcellinus*, vol. 2 (London: William Heinemann, 1940), accessed July 12, 2025, https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Ammian/25*.html

¹³⁹ Socrates Scholasticus, *Church History*, Book IV.1, 15, trans. A.C. Zenos, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 2, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890), accessed July 12, 2025, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/26014.htm>

¹⁴⁰ Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book 5, accessed July 12, 2025, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/26015.htm>

¹⁴¹ Codex Theodosianus, Book 16, Title 1, Law 2. Translated and edited by the University of Grenoble. Accessed July 12, 2025. <https://droitromain.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/Constitutiones/CTh16.html>

convening councils (notably the First Council of Constantinople in 381), and legislating against pagan practices, closing temples and banning public sacrifices. It was at this point that the Church and Empire became one. Whereas Constantine the Great promoted religious tolerance within the Empire, with preference to Christians, it was Theodosius' edict in 380 that made Christianity the only licit religion in the Empire.

Rome and the United States: Tolerance and Pluralism

The period of church history between 313 and 380 most closely resembles the relationship between church and empire in the United States in 2025. Prior to Galerius' Edict of Toleration in 311, the relationship between Church and Empire would be characterized as hostile. While this edict allowed for Christian practice, it fell short of the broad religious tolerance that Constantine's edict promoted. Additionally, Galerius died shortly after issuing the edict, whereas Constantine continued to reign for an additional twenty-four years (including thirteen years as the sole emperor). Prior to Theodosius' edict, which required absolutely fidelity to Nicæan orthodoxy (and consequently outlawed all other religious practice), Christianity enjoyed a preferred status within the Roman Empire. During these sixty-seven years, emperors might express their preference for either Nicæan orthodoxy or Arianism (or even paganism, in the case of Julian), but they always stopped short of re-establishing a state religion in the way that Diocletian had and Theodosius did.

The United States holds a similar commitment to religious tolerance because of its commitment to *not establishing* a state religion. As mentioned earlier, profound changes in the American religious landscape have occurred in the last seventy-five years – including individual perception of that religious landscape. While the United States,

by definition, has never had an established Church or religion – the social imagination of the United States as a “Christian Nation” has dominated conventional wisdom. This 1950s imagination is perhaps the closest that the United States has been to an Edict of Thessalonica-type proclamation. The McCarthy era litmus test of a Christian United States (in contrast to the atheist Soviet Union) effectively established the United States as Christian in the minds of Americans. Of course, there was some diversity allowed (primarily with regards to Judaism) – but to be American meant that you were Christian. As argued in Chapter 1, this is no longer that case. When comparing the 1950s to 2025, Christianity has certainly lost elements of its privileged role in society. We are a post-Christian nation.

The rise of Christian Nationalism in alliance with the MAGA movement implicitly acknowledges that Christianity is no longer the standard bearer for American society. In July of 2024, U.S. Senator John Hawley (R-MO) delivered a speech to the National Conservative Conference, which asserted that “the hope of the nation is to recover the Christian tradition.”¹⁴² The admission that the Christian tradition needs recovering concedes that it has been (at best) demoted. He is in part reacting to the shifting public policy of the last seventy-five years, which he interprets to be anti-Christian because these policy changes violate his fundamentalist reading of Scripture.

“The Left preaches its own gospel, a creed of intersectionality, of deliverance from tradition, from family, from biological sex—and of course, from God. They regard the faith of our fathers as a fetter to be broken. They deem our common moral inheritance as cause for repentance. Instead of Christmas, they want Pride Month. Instead of

¹⁴² Hawley, Josh. “Sen. Josh Hawley: America Founded on Christian Nationalism.” *The Daily Signal*, July 9, 2024. Accessed July 12, 2025. <https://www.dailysignal.com/2024/07/09/sen-josh-hawley-america-founded-on-christian-nationalism/>.

prayer in schools, they venerate the trans flag. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are their watchwords, their new holy trinity.¹⁴³

His argument is that “the Left’s” commitment to each person pursuing their own definition of happiness – a moral relativism that provides space for autonomy, self-determination, and human dignity – de-prioritizes the Christian moral standard and violates the Christian Nationalist projection of the Deuteronomic Covenant onto the United States. To an extent, Senator Hawley is correct: whenever a privileged position, which excludes other positions, is then made equal with those previous excluded positions – making them all viable – then yes, that initial privilege position is de-prioritized because others are elevated. However, he interprets the normalization of a previously excluded moral behavior to be equivalent to his own persecution. Senator Hawley experiences his life as if he lived during The Great Persecution under Diocletian, while proclaiming we should be living under the strict religious orthodoxy of Theodosius. He believes that upholding a Christian moral standard – following a list of prohibited behaviors under the guise of “Judeo-Christian values” – is what allows the country to be blessed (in resonance to the Deuteronomic tradition of ancient Israel). The imagination of Christian Nationalists (among others) is that the United States was (and in theory, is) a Christian nation; however, the political Right’s need to reassert Christian values suggests that those values are lost and demonstrates that the country is no longer dominantly Christian.

¹⁴³ Hawley, Josh. “Sen. Josh Hawley: America Founded on Christian Nationalism.” *The Daily Signal*, July 9, 2024. Accessed July 12, 2025. <https://www.dailysignal.com/2024/07/09/sen-josh-hawley-america-founded-on-christian-nationalism/>.

The United States finds itself in a post-Christian era. While the period between 313 and 380 was the “courtship” between Church and Empire, in 2025 the two find themselves going through a divorce. It is possible that Christian Nationalism may win the day and re-prioritize a fundamentalist Christianity in the public square.¹⁴⁴ I would consider this a vain hope of evangelical Christianity, much like the denial experienced by one party in a dissolving relationship. More realistically, I think the Church will accept that the United States is a pluralistic society with relativist tendencies – and find ways to continue existing as the Church, without the fear of persecution (whether by “the Left” or Diocletian).

Given today’s parallel trajectory of the Church coexisting separately from the Empire as it did in the fourth century, it is prudent to examine the practices of fourth century baptismal preparation. As recounted in the historical survey presented in Chapter 2, the process of Baptismal formation through the Church’s history has evolved in tandem with its relationship to secular authority (i.e., from persecuted to coexisting to privileged). Because the practical shifts in catechumenal formation were slow (that is, neither universal nor immediate), baptismal preparation did not immediately shift with the Edict of Thessalonica to reflect a full integration with Church and Empire.¹⁴⁵ This would not come until the changes made by Charlemagne and the Holy Roman Empire. As we turn to the post-Edict of Milan practices, which are most closely aligned with the period with which we draw the greatest comparison to today, we must understand that

¹⁴⁴ I think this is unlikely given the First Amendment – time will tell as recent state laws in Oklahoma, Texas, and Louisiana regarding the teaching of Christianity and posting the Ten Commandments in schools will more than likely reach the Supreme Court

¹⁴⁵ See Chapter 2 and the discussion on the dating of the *Canons of Hippolytus*

over time that any practice will evolve to respond to external realities to the mode which is most productive. While acknowledging the limited primary sources we have about fourth century baptismal preparation (and prior), we can make a fair assumption that the documented models we have are not exhaustive in terms of all the ways catechumens were prepared for initiation across the empire – they are simply the ones documented and surviving. From there, we must make another educated assumption that they were recorded because they were the particularly effectual models of forming committed Christians during that era. The documented evolution of the rites of initiation demonstrates that the rites were not static but adaptive to their context. Discarded elements of the various rites suggest that the surviving components (and those added) reflect an effectual model of evangelization and formation for its given time – because otherwise they would have been discarded, too. Based upon the commonalities of the American Church in 2025 with the experience of the Church in the mid-fourth century, we should look to the wisdom of that era in terms of Church structure, evangelism, and initiation and adapt it to our time and context.

Chapter 4: Congregational Development in a Post-Christian Context

Post-Edict of Milan practices of initiation reflect the practices of the Church in a pluralistic society. The key attributes are:

- A “tiered” membership progression moving from *catechumen* to *competentes* to fully initiated (that is, baptized) member – with an expectation of continued education
- The desire of Church authorities to baptize one who holds an authentic faith
- A practice of secrecy via *disciplina arcani*.
- A series of renunciations, adherences, and exorcisms as part of the preparation, with increasing degrees of vigor
- An extended time of preparation (usually two to three years)
- A practice of candidates to self-initiate the formation process

These six elements share similarities to the pre-Edict of Milan practices yet contrast particularly with practices within the Holy Roman Empire. Perhaps the greatest difference between a mid-fourth century model and a ninth century model was the *requirement* to have children baptized within the first year of life. A civil mandate for baptism would have been unthinkable in the fourth century, let alone the concept of baptism without personal faith commitment. However, when one lived in the Christian world of the Holy Roman Empire –the physical manifestation of the City of God on earth – one did not need “faith” to participate. Existence itself was the participation, and baptism was the seal upon that oath of fidelity. The practice of infant baptism, while rooted in the Biblical witness, complicated the catechumenal process from a fourth-

century perspective by placing the full initiation before an adequate level of formation. We observe the fruits of this phenomenon by noting the significant levels of infant baptisms in the 1950s that are not reflected in membership and participation numbers, today, as evidenced by the rise of the Nones. Furthering the theme of a 1950's American Christendom compared to a 2025 post-Christendom Church – it would be prudent for the church to reexamine its practice of infant baptism, or at least the minimum standards of parents (and godparents) seeking to have their children baptized. To adapt the fourth century model would be to revive the status of “catechumen” as a bearer of the title of Christian (and valid mode of being within the Church) in addition to baptized members of mature faith and practice.¹⁴⁶

Baptismal preparation in the fourth century focused on forming “mature practitioners of faith” who were devoted to discipleship.¹⁴⁷ The process of formation matriculated an individual from *catechumen* to *electi* to *competentes*, all before the actual rite of baptism. Martin Thornton, an Anglican priest, theologian, and spiritual director, began the work of describing this transitional-formation concept in his work *Pastoral Theology: A Reorientation* (1956). Thornton observed that the church began to stratify its membership following the conversion of Constantine. He argued that two options were before the Church: the first was to remain an exclusive sect with rigorous membership requirements, the other was to be a community committed to individual

¹⁴⁶ Exploring the theological and practical underpinnings of infant baptism is not within the scope of this project.

¹⁴⁷ The phrase “mature practitioner” is language used by Melissa Skelton, which is to be discussed

formation that “[compromised for] the failures of its members.”¹⁴⁸ He drew a model of parish life that held a group he termed “the Remnant” at the center, surrounded by varying degrees of commitment. He traced this ecclesial structure through the apostolic period, during the Middle Ages (exemplified by monasticism), and through today. The remnant was comprised of mature practitioners of faith who were grounded in Eucharist, the Daily Office, and Private Prayer. This core group was to serve as the leavening to the wider “parish organism” to draw them into deeper faith.¹⁴⁹ The strategy of congregational transformation characterized by Thornton shared strong similarities with his characterization of the Medieval Church, when formation followed Baptism. The Most Rev. Melissa Skelton, then Canon in the Diocese of Olympia and an architect of *The College for Congregational Development*, took Thornton’s work and derived into two complimentary models: Faith Development in Community and Gather-Transform-Send.¹⁵⁰

Faith Development in Community

The two core models of Faith Development in Community and Gather-Transform-Send tease out elements of the catechumenal process in the fourth century in the context of the twentieth century. Faith Development in Community maps the local parish using four concentric circles of membership. In this model, Skelton recognizes

¹⁴⁸ Thornton, Martin. *The Heart of the Parish: Theology and Practice in the English Parish*. London: Faber and Faber, 1958, 65

¹⁴⁹ Thornton, *The Heart of the Parish: Theology and Practice in the English Parish*, 248

¹⁵⁰ The Episcopal Diocese of Olympia: College for Congregational Development, *College for Congregational Development Manual*, 29

the degrees of commitment to spiritual development that exist in every parish community.

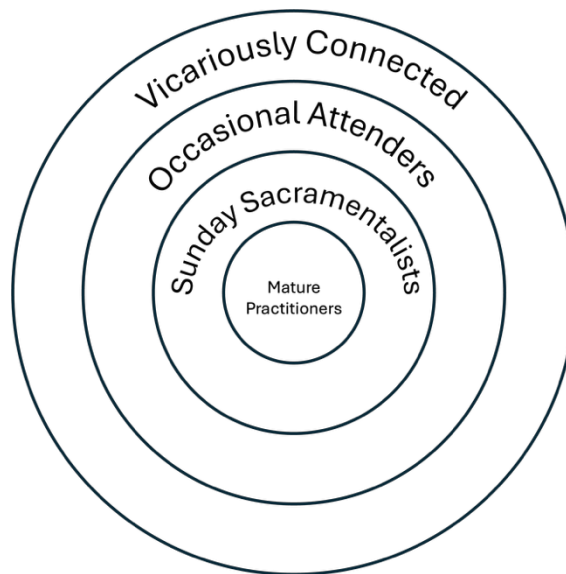


Figure 2: Faith Development in Community. Taken from Vital Christian Community (Brochard and Newton)

She correlates *Mature Practitioners* with Thornton’s “Remnant” and likewise recognizes their necessity for the overall health of the parish community. In her view, *Sunday Sacramentalists* are those with varying degrees of attendance/participation but recognize the congregation as a spiritual home independent of their commitment level. The *Occasional Attenders* are those who have some connection to the congregation, but it is not their spiritual home. Based upon Skelton’s model, the Occasional Attenders exist in relationship to a parish because of (1) an individual’s immature/lapsed faith or (2) geographic distance¹⁵¹. Finally, the *Vicariously Connected* are those who do not claim the congregation as a spiritual home, but are connected to it. These are individuals who

¹⁵¹ This model assumes that mature faith requires regular participation in corporate worship. One cannot be a mature Christian and *not* attend Eucharist. If someone is by choice not coming to Sunday worship, then their faith – by definition – is immature. It is important to note that an occasional attender for one congregation might be a mature practitioner at another congregation – for example, if an adult is visiting a parent for a holiday, that child might attend the parent’s parish for Easter.

walk past the physical building, receive outreach services (food pantry, clothing closet, etc.), encounter the congregation’s social media, etc. Placing this model in conversation with the fourth century, we would likewise identify those in the center circle with those who have participated in the rites of baptism – placing the moment of the water bath somewhere inside the “Sunday Sacramentalists” circle. Further, the entry point of the catechumenate would be somewhere within the “Vicariously Connect” circle. This contrasts with Thornton, who was writing in a more Christianized society.

The second model Skelton developed out of Thornton’s work was the “Gather-Transform-Send” model. This multilayered understanding of the ministry of the Church provides a quick heuristic for congregations to analyze the function of their communities. As the model suggests, the function of the church is to gather individuals, “turning [their] hearts more towards Christ and transforming [their] lives more and more into extensions of God’s love in a broken world,” and then send them out to repeat the process in a contextually appropriate way.¹⁵² The core assumption of this model is that every congregation engages with this process – how it manifests is particular to the local context (which can be different between two congregations within the same geographic community). Within the “Transform” portion of the model are four categories, with their own three subcategories. At the center of Transform is *Worship* with the same three subcategories as Thornton: Eucharist, Daily Office, and Personal Prayer. This sits at the center of the other three sources of transformation: Life in Community, Study and Learning, and Action. Skelton roots these not only in the apostolic model of Acts 2, but

¹⁵² Philip Brochard and Alissabeth Newton, *Vital Christian Community: Twelve Characteristics of Healthy Congregations* (Indianapolis, IN: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2022), 7

to mature practitioner via the sources of transformation takes time. The wisdom of the fourth century adds labels to these stages of development (i.e. *catechumen, electi, competentes*) and uses ritual to mark their progression.

The Bridges Model of Congregational Development

I want to propose a model that continues Skelton’s work as the Church gains awareness of its post-Christendom context. What I am calling the “Bridge Model” of parish development reimagines the sources of transformation within a congregation that considers our post-Christendom context with an eye towards evangelism. Returning briefly to the Faith Development in Community Model, the primary mission field of the local parish are those vicariously connected. Again, these can be individuals who either walk past the congregation on their way to work, know someone in the parish, engage with the parish on social media, or benefit from an outreach of the parish. Essentially those who have an awareness of the parish, but do not consider it a spiritual home. I propose shifting two of the sources of transformation – Studying/Learning and Action -- from a source of transformation within the parish into a bridge that draws others into the congregation. Worship and eucharistic fellowship remains at the center of the Communities’ life (like in Skelton and Thornton’s work).

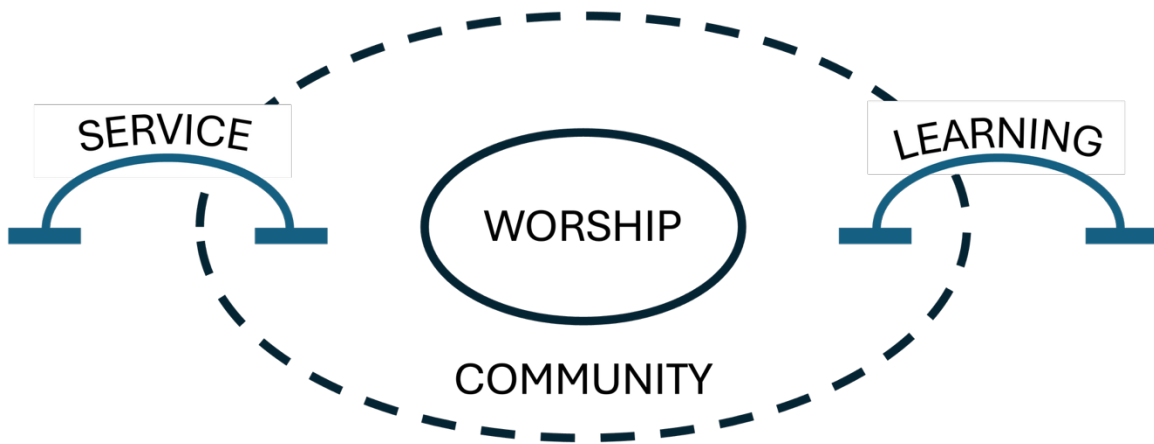


Figure 4: The Bridges Model of Congregational Development

The two lines used – solid and dashed – attempt to convey a sense of the principle of *disciplina arcani*. While there is no practical way that we could return to the secrecy of the Liturgy of the Table following the dismissal of non-baptized persons at the conclusion of the Liturgy of the Word, creating *mysterium* around the ritual of corporate worship would yield a similar result. This *mysterium* is signified by the solid line demarcating “worship.” In contrast to the solid line around worship, the line encompassing the community is dashed, indicating its intentional structure as a permeable boundary. There are certainly defining characteristics of Christian community that set it apart from other community-forming organizations; the permeability of the boundary acknowledges there are qualifying characteristics while reminding the community that it is always dynamic and evolving. A further difference highlighted by the choice of the solid and dashed line is to what the initial invitation is made. The Gather-Transform-Send model relies on an invitation, and in the literature, that invitation is presumably to worship. The same is true for programs such as *Invite-Welcome-Connect*. The assumption is that the invitation made is to Sunday Eucharistic worship, where a newcomer is then welcomed and connected to other ministries. In a Christian-

saturated cultural context akin to the 1950s, this model makes sense because there is a statistical assumption that the newcomer has had some Christian formation. As the surrounding culture migrates to a more pluralistic position, the invitation should be to “get on the bridge,” rather than jump to the heart of Christian community in sacramental worship. Not only does this emphasize the *mysterium* and sacredness (that is, set apartness) for Eucharistic worship, but it leans into the fourth century principal of *disciplina arcani*. Rather than Invite → Greet//Welcome → Orient →

Incorporate//Connect, I would propose a fourth century influenced model of:

1. Invite to Service
2. Invite to Learning
3. Invite to Worship.

This progression facilitates the inclusion of a new individual into the community and fosters the behavior norms of service to the community and ongoing formation. This progression also challenges the hesitancy of a secular (Vicariously Connected) individual skeptical of the church’s motivations – by first inviting the person to service, the congregation leads with the centrality of its mission. This progression also acknowledges the cultural reality of degrees of catechesis and understanding.

Using the Faith Development in Community Model, we can observe the shifts in different standards of baptism.

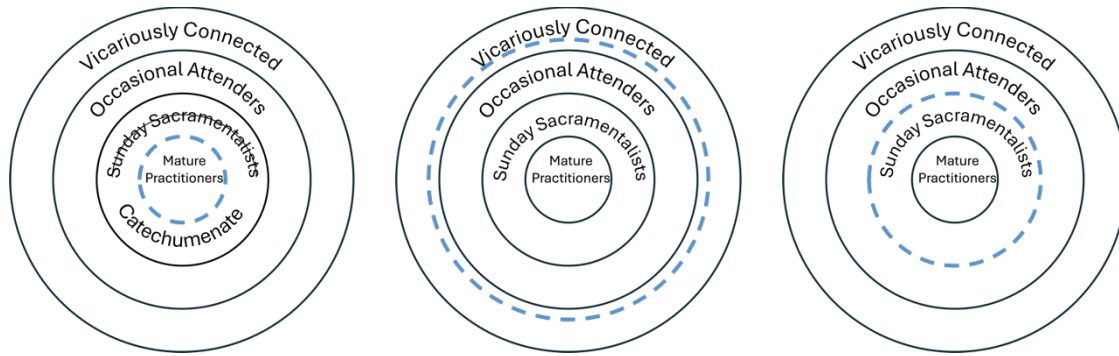


Figure 5: Faith Development in Community overlaid with point of Baptism in blue in the Fourth Century (left), Thornton Model – 1954 (center), and Bridges Model (2025).

In the fourth century catechumenate, only those recognized as “Mature Practitioners” would be admitted to the baptized fellowship. “Sunday Sacramentalists,” as Skelton refers to the next circle, would either be those actively engaged in the catechumenate: committed, regular in attendance, but not yet baptized. The occasional attenders would be those who were admitted to the catechumenate as children (like Monica did with Augustine) but not engaged in the life of the congregation. The second depiction would be more consistent with Thornton’s understanding where there would be a “low bar” of baptism, and where the work of faith development would stem from the “mature practitioner” drawing others into a full spiritual life. The third “Bridges” model attempts to reconcile the fourth century model with Thornton’s model (published 1956), given the shifting cultural context. In this model, there is a slightly higher threshold for baptized fellowship, requiring a demonstration of consistent participation, belonging, and engagement. In essence, it would be baptizing those “on their way” to mature practitioners. In the fourth century, an individual’s formation continued post-baptism with the *mystagogy*. This phase of formation focused on explaining sacramental rites and rituals in the context of what was learned during the catechumenate. By shifting the

point of initiation to between “occasional attender” and “Sunday Sacramentalist,” a larger pattern of life-long learning is established, while assuming regular participation.

The significant difference between the fourth century model and those of today, is the practice of infant baptism. In the eighth century, when Charlemagne required infant baptism in the Holy Roman Empire, the purpose of the rite shifted. Instead of identifying mature practitioners, baptism became the oath of fidelity to Empire with the “low bar” of having memorized the Apostles’ Creed and Lord’s Prayer (not unlike Confirmation practices in the mid-twentieth century). The Sunday School model, prevalent in the twentieth century, attempted to adequately form children into mature Christians. However, the message received by participants of Sunday School was “Moral Therapeutic Deism (MTD).”¹⁵³ Christian Smith’s work observed this phenomenon in his survey of religious youth in the early 2000s. He concluded that faith formation towards the end of the twentieth century imbued youth with an understanding of Christianity that was moralistic (taught right from wrong), therapeutic (there to make them feel good), and deist (God was not active in their day-to-day lives). The Church writ-large failed to catechize the vision of the Kingdom of God, and substituted moralism for Scripture’s hope for cosmic redemption.

This shift is in part motivated by three classifications of those coming into local congregations. These classifications are not clear cut. In the same way that the Faith Development in Community model distinguishes individuals based upon participation, I am proposing a spectrum scale ranging from a high degree of familiarity with mature

¹⁵³ Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005)

practice of the Christian tradition to those who have minimal formal understanding and practice of the Christian Tradition. I have shied away from giving these classifications descriptive labels, and instead defer to the generic Class I, II, and III.

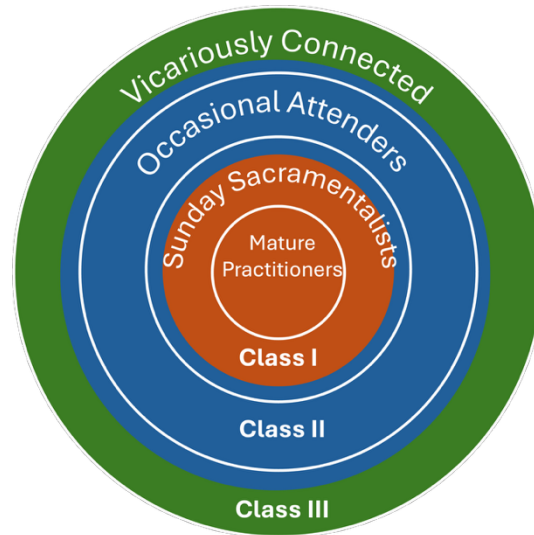


Figure 6: Groupings of those coming into Christian community. Class I (orange), Class II (blue), and Class III (green) - with the Faith Development in Community Model overlaid.

Class I members (orange) are committed practitioners who are moving to a new congregation for one reason or another. This could be due to relocation, congregational leadership changes, etc. Regardless of what is prompting the change, this first group represents those who have a mature faith and look to exercise it – these individuals encompass the *Sunday Sacramentalists* and *Mature Practitioners* categories. Class I individuals do not need to be *Mature Practitioners* in the sense that Skelton identifies the group, but they are those who look to participation in a faith community as a necessary part of life. The second broad group (Class II – blue) are those who have some faith exposure but are not regular practitioners. Individuals in this group would be represented by children who went through Confirmation as teenagers but did not participate in corporate worship during emerging adult years (i.e., during college). In

practice, these are the individuals who have a gap between their working faith, the faith of the church, and their experience of the world.¹⁵⁴ These individuals could be found in the Vicarious Connected, Occasional Attenders, and (to a lesser extent) Sunday Sacramentalists circles. The third broad conceptual category are those who have little to no exposure to Christianity, other than what is presented in the media (green). These individuals may have Christian acquaintances and friends, but the imagination of Class III individuals is what they experience in various forms of media. These would primarily be the Vicariously Connected circle. Media exposure would include how Christianity is presented in movies (i.e., *The Pope's Exorcist* or *The DaVinci Code*), the news (MAGA Christian Nationalism or Bishop Mariann Budde's Sermon at the 2025 Inauguration of President Trump), and popular culture (Presiding Bishop Curry's portrayal on Saturday Night Live following his homily at the wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle in 2018 and "The Cleveland Show"):

Cleveland: But Christianity makes sense! A virgin had God's baby who then grew up to be murdered by the *clears throat* Romans so you and I could be forgiven for Eve eating that apple she got from the talking snake. Three days later, Jesus rose from the dead to tell everyone he was coming back someday to fight the devil. Then he flew up to his mansion in heaven where he sits in judgment of the gays. How can you not believe that?"¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ The "gap" described would be the space between an individual's conception of God when their formal faith development ceased (say, at the end of Confirmation at age 16) and their current state of life (for example, in their mid-30s). Undoubtedly this individual would continue conceptualizing God and developing their own understanding. But this would take place without the "guardrails" provided by the Church when constructing the individual's systematic theology, creating a situation where the individual's systematic theology was in conflict with the Church's systematic understanding of the nature of God. This would be best exemplified by the varying answers to "what happens when someone dies?" with the Church's commitment to the doctrine of the Resurrection of the Body. It requires "undoing" in order to teach the Christian framework.

¹⁵⁵ *The Cleveland Show*, season 3, episode 2, "The Hurricane!," directed by Anthony Agrusa, originally aired October 2, 2011, FOX. 09:22

This brief monologue was delivered to Junior, Cleveland's son, in the context of a hurricane. Cleveland was urging the family to pray. Junior expressed that he no longer believed in God. When asked if he was an atheist, Junior replied no (because that was a religion, too). In response to Junior's implicit self-identification as a "none," Cleveland provided the above "synopsis" of Christianity and concluded by rhetorically asking Junior why he thought this unreasonable and not convincing. This vignette exemplifies generational differences in approach to religion, and for the uncatechized ear, provides an account of what Christianity supposedly believes – from the salvation history that reads like superhero fantasy to condemning LGBTQIA+ persons. This third group can have both positive and negative impressions of Christianity. The Episcopal Church embraces an intellectual tradition and fully supports LGBTQIA+ inclusion; but, from the perspective of someone whose understanding of Christianity comes from "The Cleveland Show," The Episcopal Church is guilty by association. Overcoming those impressions is a challenge, but the Bridges model speaks to their need to "see" the Christian virtues at work, not just hear about them. This responds to the generation tendency towards authenticity.

The three step progression of (1) Invite to Service, (2) Invite to Learning, (3) Invite to Worship is aimed at evangelizing Class II and Class III individuals. Not inviting someone to Sunday morning corporate worship may seem counter-intuitive when discussing evangelism; but, as the share of the population that falls under the Class I grouping decreases, Classes II and III increase as a percentage – the Bridges of Service and Learning will lead to Worship, and is where the formation should start.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ I am not advocating that non-Baptized members should never attend a worship service, nor am I denying the transformative power that the mysterium of worship can have on a non-baptized person.

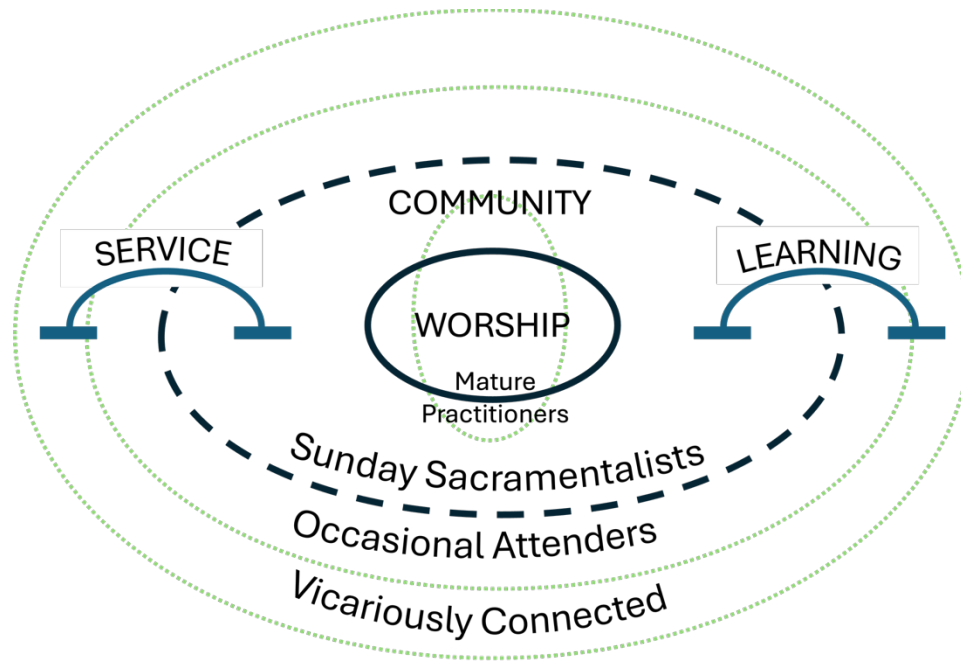


Figure 7: The Bridges Model superimposed on the Faith Development in Community Model.

The “bridges” into a congregation/community come with two foundations, one on each side of the bridge, and the bridge itself. Beginning with the “Service Bridge,” the bridge itself is the current ministry of the church. Examples of this would include a feeding ministry, a clothing closet, or an annual fundraiser benefitting the wider community: anything directed at benefiting those outside the congregation. The external foundation are ways to invite others outside the parish community to join in that ministry and the internal foundation are ways to connect the service with the congregation. Internal foundations are the shared experience and relationship building with members of the congregation.

Instead, I am suggesting that a congregation’s evangelism efforts would be better placed in inviting non-church members to serve and learn alongside congregants, rather than simply attending worship.

The “Learning Bridge” creates similar opportunities, based upon what the congregation is already doing. Existing “Learning Bridges” in a congregation might be an adult forum, weekly Bible Study, children’s Sunday School, or one-off speakers/lectures. Each of these examples can be recorded and shared. External foundations would be the points of contact that *Vicariously Connected* persons have with the congregation: signage, social media, and word-of-mouth. Internal foundations would be hosting the recordings on the parish website (instead of YouTube), creating space and structuring future classes to have time for attendees to express their curiosities and doubt, and experience affirmation in a place of emotional safety when expressing those doubts. The best built “Learning Bridge” will have multiple on-ramps where individuals at different stages of their spiritual development are all able to come, participate, and learn. As curiosity increases, the individual can then be invited to worship, where they step into the center of the community’s life as full members of the community. This emphasis on learning corresponds to the slow life phenomenon that has strengthened throughout recent generations. This model authentically takes time.

The Bridges Model invites congregational reflection on how the current programs and practices of the congregation can be leveraged for evangelization. Embedded in the model is a mental shift where outreach and formation become tools for faith development, not the result of faith development. To frame outreach and education programs as tools for evangelism reflects a fourth century evangelization and catechumenal model that meets today’s cultural context – both on a corporate and individual level. Examining our contemporary context becomes crucial as the Church is confronted with the need to adapt its practices in an effort to evangelize.

Chapter 5: The Effect of Generational Change

When confronted with the decline of the institutional church and the secularization (and thus, the de-prioritization of Christian privilege) within society, it becomes apparent that the Congregation itself must reimagine its structure and operating practices. The congregation is the locus of the church's work and the primary tool of evangelism from an institutional (and specifically for The Episcopal Church, diocesan) perspective. Individual people practically find Christian community primarily through the local congregation, and not denominational structures. The bishop may be chief pastor of a diocese and therefore of a congregation, but it is the ongoing personal relationships that define community. Change for adapting to our cultural context can be suggested from a parochial level but ultimately must be enacted on the congregational level.

The Life Cycle of the Congregation

Alice Mann's adapted a model for understanding secular organizations to give insight into the lifecycle of a congregation.¹⁵⁷ In Mann's model, healthy congregations practice ongoing renewal. She identifies a natural process of Birth → Formation → Stability → Stagnation → Decline → Disintegration → Death. After "birth" the congregation undergoes a "formational" process where the founders answer essential questions regarding the congregation's core identity. These questions include "Who are we as followers of Christ?", "What are we here for?", and "Who is our neighbor and how

¹⁵⁷ Alice Mann, *Can Our Church Live?: Redeveloping Congregations in Decline* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1999).

are we related to them?” These formational questions, once answered, propel the congregation into the growth model that yields stability. The life cycle process will unfold, unless the congregation practices a self-reflective mindset that adapts to the proximal culture and context, essentially testing and re-evaluating the embedded answers to the formational questions. The greater the commitment to the embedded answer as “the right answer,” the further along the life cycle continuum a congregation moves. As a congregation rounds the “stagnation bend” the work shifts from renewal to redevelopment to intervention, in an attempt to avoid death. Inevitably, congregations resist change – the proverbial “we’ve never done it that way before” – and yet, change is required for their continued existence. At each stage, the work of leading a congregation back to a place of formation/growth becomes more taxing as institutional forces resist the enculturated roadblock.

The mental image of a city block is helpful in conceptualizing the implications of Mann’s work. In this model, city blocks are one-way streets with only right-hand turns: in order “to go back,” you must go around the block. The work of “going around the block” is the assessment and context of both the congregation and the neighboring community required for the congregation to remain relevant (see below). Too often, congregations attempt to recreate the successful program of yester-year to return to a place of growth. This is the equivalent of making a “U-turn” in the middle of a one-way street – it pays little attention to the “surrounding neighborhood” and context. To return to the place of growth, congregations must go around the block. Healthy congregations simply continue making a circuit around their block: learning about their local community, both in terms of their membership assets and needs, and in service to the

wider community in collaboration and response to their assets and needs. If a congregation misses that first proverbial right-hand turn, they continue down the road into stagnation – with the next available right-hand turn being three blocks away from their congregation, adding an additional four blocks to the imaginary journey that is now classified as revitalization. The same trend occurs for missing the stagnation turn-off as the congregations continues into decline (now 12 block lengths that must be traveled - redevelopment) and disintegration (16 block lengths - intervention). The further down the road the congregation gets, the longer the journey back to a dynamic model with an openness to evaluating the answers to those embedded formational questions – and the greater the temptation to “attempt a U-turn.” And the sad reality is that going the wrong way down a one-way street will only lead to disaster.

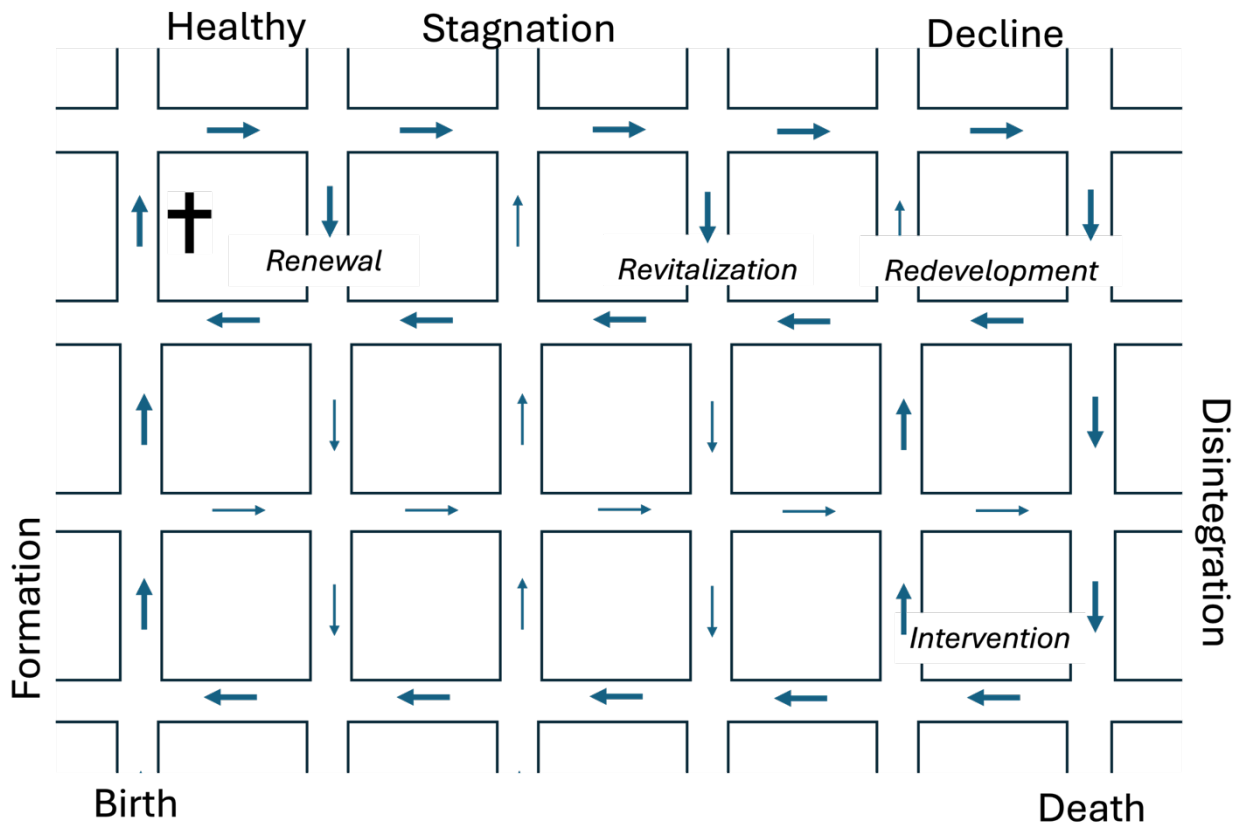


Figure 8: Life Cycle of an Organization imagined as a city block.

As evidenced through the cultural history survey presented in Chapter 3, the “cultural neighborhood” of our congregations has changed. Younger generations are “colonizing” the proverbial neighborhood and the assumptions and practices of the 1950s are no longer relevant. The church must examine the cultural and generational trends of those to whom they seek to minister and strategically deploy their ministries to meet those preferences.

Tracking Generational Change

Tracking changes within a culture proves difficult because three variables are simultaneously changing: life stage, generation, and period. Life stage change is the experience of aging. This is the progression identified by Erik Erikson in his stages of development analysis: different life stages value and prioritize things differently, beyond the process of maturing as an individual.¹⁵⁸ Generational change is how the cohort within each of those life stages is influenced by external events/technologies. In other words, how a child, adolescent, middle adult, and older adult experience and make sense of the same event is different based upon both life stage and experience. Using the example of the September 11 terrorist attacks, how different age cohorts made meaning of that event is an example of generational change. A teenager in 2001, with Erikson’s theorized psychosocial task of “Identify v. Confusion,” would make different meaning of the September 11 attacks than an adult in their middle adult years with the psychosocial task of “Generativity v. Despair.” The impact of this event on a teenager who

¹⁵⁸ Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1950).

hypothetically interprets 9/11 to confuse their identity as an American (compared to previous generations) is an example of the generational change. Comparatively, period change is described as a shift that is experienced across the generations simultaneously. Using the example of 9/11, a superficial period change would be the FAA regulations regarding air travel (only ticketed passengers past security, only 3oz liquids bottles, etc.). This is something that effected all generations simultaneously, yet memory of “what it was before” is held only by those old enough to remember. No one born after 9/11 can remember a time when travelers did not have to hold an airline ticket to go past TSA security. Moving beyond the superficial example of ticketing regulation, into the long-term psychological effects of that national trauma, it is quickly understandable how September 11 marked a period change.

There are two dominant theories that govern social-generational change. The first, proposed by Karl Mannheim in the 1920s, suggested that significant cultural events experienced in youth determined generational identity.¹⁵⁹ This was observed in the 1970s by Glen Elder when researching effects of the Great Depression on children (compared to adults).¹⁶⁰ William Strauss and Neil Howe took this a step further and theorized that national traumas (i.e., war) would initiate a generational cycle, where each subsequent generation would present with predictable characteristics as a response to the trauma of the previous generation.¹⁶¹ A second theory, proposed by Jean Twenge,

¹⁵⁹ Karl Mannheim, “The Problem of Generations,” in *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. Paul Kecskemeti, trans. Paul Kecskemeti (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952).

¹⁶⁰ Glen H. Elder, *Children of the Great Depression: Social Change in Life Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

¹⁶¹ William Strauss and Neil Howe, *Generations: The History of America’s Future, 1584 to 2069* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1991).

focuses on the technological developments that often precipitated those significant cultural events.¹⁶² Here, Twenge’s analytical work *Generations* is particularly useful. She observes that generations are different and theorizes what she calls “The Technology Model of Generations.” In this theory, she posits that the impact of technology, and its subsequent promotion of individualism and slower psycho-social development, as well as external formational events (such as wars, pandemics, collective traumatic events like September 11) are what drive generational change.

Twenge’s theory expands aspects of Strauss and Howe’s generational theory, which they developed in their works *Generations* (1991) and *The Fourth Turning* (1997). They proposed that American history unfolds in recurring cycles, or “saecula,” lasting approximately 80 to 100 years. Each cycle consists of four distinct periods, called “turnings,” each lasting about 20–25 years and characterized by a specific societal mood and historical dynamic. The first turning, the High, is marked by strong institutions and social cohesion, such as the post–World War II era. This is followed by an Awakening, a period of spiritual upheaval and rebellion against established norms, exemplified by the cultural revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s. The third turning, the Unraveling, sees a weakening of institutions and a rise in individualism in the 1980s and 1990s, while the fourth turning, the Crisis, is a time of major upheaval and transformation, during which society rebuilds from the collapse of old systems. Strauss and Howe predicted in 1997 the next Fourth Turning would begin around 2005 and culminate in a climactic societal transformation by the mid-2020s. They were not far off.

¹⁶² Jean M. Twenge, *Generations: The Real Differences between Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, Boomers, and Silents—and What They Mean for America’s Future* (New York: Atria Books, 2023).

Central to their theory are four recurring generational archetypes: Prophets, Nomads, Heroes, and Artists. Each archetype emerges in a fixed order and reflects the era in which its members were born and came of age. Prophets, such as the Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964), are values-driven and visionary, born after a crisis during a time of social order. Nomads, like Generation X (born 1965-1980), grow up during periods of individualism and are often pragmatic and skeptical. Heroes, including Millennials (born 1981-1996), come of age during a crisis and are known for their collective orientation and resilience. Artists, such as Generation Z (1997-2012), are born during a crisis and are typically sensitive, adaptive, and cooperative. Each generation both shapes and is shaped by the turning in which it matures, contributing to the larger rhythm of societal change. Strauss and Howe's framing gained renewed interest in light of events such as 9/11, the 2008 financial crisis, and ongoing social and political instability in the 2020s (i.e. Covid-19 and the rise of the MAGA movement).

Twenge acknowledges that Strauss and Howe's work correctly predicts that "American history goes through a somewhat predictable cycle of stability followed by conflict," but it falls short in explaining how the generations respond to that cycle of stability-instability. She observes that Strauss and Howe's prediction that Millennials would mimic the tendencies of the Greatest Generation of unity and service to common-good rule following was found untrue in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, where Millennials prioritized their individual autonomy and freedom.¹⁶³ Hence, Twenge's

¹⁶³ As a millennial, I disagree with Twenge's conclusion that Millennials prioritized their autonomy and freedom over common-good rule following during Covid-19. My own experience was public health decisions disproportionally preferenced the needs of older individuals (who were at greater risk of dying from Covid-19) to the mental health detriment of younger generations (children isolated from school and friends). As a millennial, I preferenced what was best for my children and their development over and above what was best for the older individuals in my life.

expansion of Strauss and Howe’s work to cite technological development and its two “daughter turtles,” individualism and slower life.

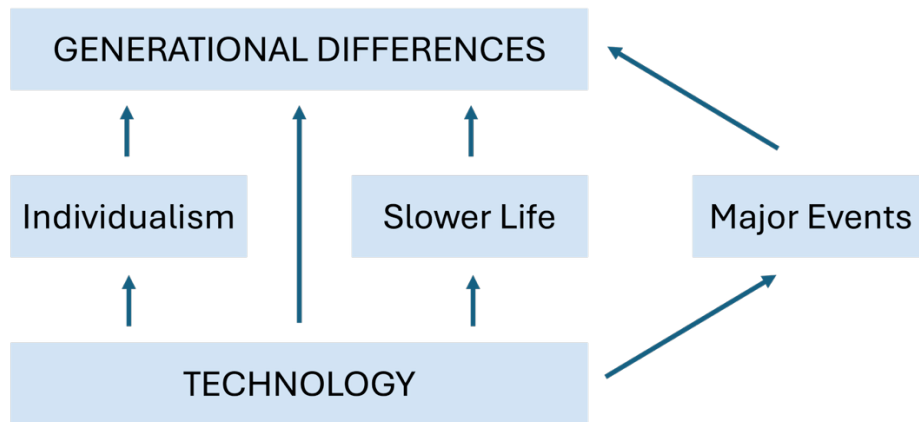


Figure 9: The Technology Model of Generations, cf. Generation, Twenge

Twenge’s model brings relevant perspective to a conversation about churches as social organizations that must “turn the block” to continue a practice of ongoing renewal.

Twenge suggests that without technological development, Strauss and Howe’s theory might prove accurate. However, because of the exponential increase of technology’s presence in contemporary life, there is a fundamentally different force driving generational development and identity. The two “daughter turtles,” as Twenge calls them, are individualism and slower life. The first, individualism, speaks to the freedom of preferential choice, which we traced in Chapter 3. We experience a vast array of choice that was unimaginable one hundred years ago. The rise of individualism carries with it a negative effect of social isolation, paradoxically experienced in this era of vast interconnection and information sharing.

The second “daughter turtle” Twenge calls a “slower life.” This trend, she concedes, “isn’t about the pace of our everyday lives, which has clearly gotten faster, but

about when people reach milestones of adolescence, adulthood, and old age”.¹⁶⁴ The Fast Life Strategy was preference in the nineteenth and early twentieth century when infant mortality rates ranged from one in six to one in fourteen by 1925 and child mortality rates were around one in ten at the beginning of the twentieth century. Today, the infant mortality rate is one in two hundred and the childhood mortality rate is one in three hundred.¹⁶⁵ The need to “fast track” the next generation is significantly lower, which provides the opportunity for greater investment in development and formation of each child (the slow life strategy). Children take longer to grow up, adolescents take longer to achieve independence, emerging adults now exist as a developmental category, and middle-aged adults take longer to retire. Other phenomenal aspects of the slow life strategy include extended education and specialization – all trends traced in Chapter 3.¹⁶⁶

Embedded in this reading is an assumption that the differences in generational identity experienced between 1950 and 2025 initiated by technological development are significantly greater than generational identity shifts experienced by those living between 1750 and 1825. In other words, a twenty year old’s experience would be significantly different in 2025 compared to 1950 – but a twenty year old would not have as profound of a difference in 1825 compared to 1750. Thomas Friedman’s *Thank You for Being Late* posits that the technological growth experienced over the last seventy-five years has

¹⁶⁴ Twenge, *Generations*, 14

¹⁶⁵ Twenge, *Generations*, 16

¹⁶⁶ Bryan E. Robinson and James R. Arnold, *Emerging Adults: The In-Between Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021)

accelerated at a rate that now supersedes our human ability to adapt.¹⁶⁷ He cites Moore's Law, the assertion that computing power has the ability to double every two years (which has proven incredibly accurate), as evidence that at some point we will not be able to keep up with the improvement. Friedman's book, published in 2016, was able to anticipate the looming AI revolution and the ethical concerns now being considered.

Academic literature on generational development fluctuates between empirical data and anecdotal evidence. It is an exercise in generalizing trends, not establishing hard and fast rules. Twenge notes that individual experience may not necessarily resonate with the "average" experience of a generational group; yet that does not mean the average experience is not the normative experience. She names this temptation (the claim that a trend does not exist because an individual does not personally experience it) the NAXALT fallacy: "Not All [X] Are Like That."¹⁶⁸ An individual's non-normative personal experience does not invalidate the generalized experience of a group; while personal for the individual, it exists as a static outlier for the collective.

All three components of change (life stage, generational, and period) influence social change, but only generational and period changes cause social change. Generational change is often much slower than period change, because it takes time for a generation to gain enough influence to shift societal norms. This influence can be either literal voting power in terms of a segment of the population, or in changing the metaphorical temperature of the culture waters. This does not imply that a generation

¹⁶⁷ Thomas L. Friedman, *Thank You for Being Late: An Optimist's Guide to Thriving in the Age of Accelerations* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016).

¹⁶⁸ Twenge, *Generations*, 24

votes as a block, but rather that the social temperament in terms of values and priorities is fluid. Understanding generational trends and preferences is the first step in “going around the corner” to assess the context in which the church’s ministry is to take place.

American Generations

Contextual analysis is the first step in implementing the bridges model, because it provides insight into the ground the that the “Bridges Foundation” is being laid. To extend the metaphor of the model, congregations are building bridges with two foundations. Like any construction project, understanding the context of the foundation is crucial to laying a strong foundation.

Baby Boomers (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1980), Millennials (1981-1996) and Generation Z/iGen (1997-2012) currently dominate cultural life. The generations preceding the Boomers (the Greatest Generation, 1901-1924, and Silent Generation 1925-1945) have declined in their influence. The generation following Gen Z, Gen Alpha – (2013-2023) does not yet make up an influential share of the population (i.e., unable to vote), other than in commerce and marketing.

Generation	Age Range in 2025	% of Population in 2025 (est.)
Silent (1925-1945)	100-80	4.5%
Boomer (1946-1964)	79-61	19.7% (71.6M)
Gen. X (1965-1980)	60-45	19.3% (65M)
Millennial (1981-1996)	44-29	21.8% (74.6M)
Gen. Z (1997-2012)	28-13	20.8% (70.8M)
Gen. Alpha (2013-2023)	12-2	13.85%

Table 4: American Generations

Each generation embodies certain qualities, characteristics, and values that demonstrate the generational culture shifts that have occurred in the United States.

The Great Depression and World War II formed the Silent Generation. They grew up in a time of mass migration and urbanization and were the first generation to experience mass marketing through the radio. Characteristics of this generation include high levels of cooperation, a commitment to service and the common good, and financial generosity. This is the generation that led the United States through the Civil Rights movement (the youngest members of the cohort turned 18 – voting age – in 1963) and were the last generation to embrace the “fast life strategy” in terms of family structure, but also inaugurated a “slow-life strategy” as the first cohort to broadly embrace higher education, compliments of the GI Bill. There is a strong strain of conservatism within this generation, compared to other generations, along with a deference to authority. Members of the Silent Generation initiated a shift in religious perception (most likely attributed to the cultural exposure experienced in World War II) where God dwells both within the individual and in the external world (previous generations would understand God primarily as an external reality). They share a continuity with previous generations where an institution’s particular theology influenced their own religious and spiritual practices, because spirituality and religion had not yet separated in the collective conscious. In this age cohort, there is a:

“distinct shift from an older group that defines religion in relatively limited or concrete terms to a younger group that places greater emphasis on the intangible and deeply personal aspects of spirituality. This transition may reflect the dramatic social changes that began during the 1960s when the silent generation entered adulthood – changes that had profound effects on the Baby Boomers as well.”¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ Vern L. Bengtson, Norella M. Putney, and Susan Harris, *Families and Faith: How Religion Is Passed Down across Generations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 31

The challenge of the Silent Generation is encapsulated by this shift: younger generations perceive them as lecturing, because they do not understand how this shift they started would precipitate in the subsequent generations. One way this is manifested is in the authority of Scripture for determining religious life and how “propositional preaching” is the preferred style (one where sermons have “more answers than questions”).¹⁷⁰ The Silent Generation was the first generation to struggle with retirement (and the freedom that it provided). They also were the first to experience “free time,” what Shaw labels as a “second adulthood” that was free from commitment, obligation, and duty.¹⁷¹ This has presented a challenge to the church, because if the Silent Generation’s commitment to the church was a reflection of cultural duty (which it was in the 1950s and beyond), then this second adulthood might witness the drop in participation.

Baby Boomers were the byproduct the post-War years. This age cohort grew up in a period of United States history marked with stability and prosperity. The generation receives its name from the surge of births after WWII, even though birth rates decreased as the “slow life trajectory” began to take hold in the United States. This cohort is considered the “most optimistic generation in American history,” coming to age in the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁷² This is the generation that embraced individualism (perhaps in response to the Silent Generation’s commitment to duty) and began to break traditional rules that have governed American life. They are more accepting of both premarital sex

¹⁷⁰ Hall, 49

¹⁷¹ Hayden Shaw, *Generational IQ: Christianity Isn't Dying, Millennials Aren't the Problem, and the Future Is Bright* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2015), 40

¹⁷² Shaw, *Generational IQ*, 45

and homosexual sex than previous generations and were more likely to become divorced than any preceding generation. Baby Boomers also pushed the work of equality initiated by the Silent Generation forward by expanding the scope of the Civil Rights movement to include gender equality. The Boomer's hyper-individuality yielded an emphasis on self and how the individual related to God, as well as the manifestation of "church shopping" and the rise of being "spiritual but not religious." This personal emphasis on the spiritual began to remove the authority of the church from determining licit religious/spiritual expression. For early Boomers, the *feeling* produced by religious activity became the authoritative voice, and the voice that would be chased later in life. As the age cohort became *more* skeptical of institutions, Baby Boomers sought the spiritual feeling – particularly if it fell outside a religious structure. In 1991, when Boomers were in their 30s to 50s, nearly 50% of the cohort attended a worship service weekly; by 2011 (when the cohort had aged to their 50s and 70s), weekly attendance dropped to 38% with 41% not involved in any religious life.¹⁷³ This mimics the "second adulthood" of the Silent Generation, only amplified by the hyper individualism of the Baby Boomer cohort. Skepticism of authority also appears in the preaching preferences of Baby Boomers, which reflects the authority prized by the Silent Generation, but only after the sermon "teases out tension before it ends with a proposition."¹⁷⁴ Baby Boomers value authentic application – religion experienced as spiritual feeling – bridging the gap between the Silent Generation and Generation X.

¹⁷³ Hall, 59

¹⁷⁴ Hall, 61

Generation X morphed the Baby Boomer's authentic individualism into cynicism. The world was tough, and the idealism of reform in the 1960s had come home to roost when Generation X came of age. "Gen Xers are the generation of after – at least from the Boomers' perspective: after Woodstock, after Vietnam War protests, and after the civil rights and feminist movements... with the idealism of the 1960s ground to dust."¹⁷⁵ They find themselves squished between the Boomer and Millennials as a generation 25% smaller than either neighboring cohort. They are the first generation that bore the brunt of socially pervasive divorce and gross economic inflation (despite the optimism projected by the larger Boomer cohort). These individual experiences produced a further weariness of not only institutions, but institutional ideas (like marriage). They are the cohort identified as "latchkey kids," with the individual sense of independence and self-determinism. This is reflected in marriage ages – in 2004 (when the tail end of the Gen X cohort turned 25), the average age of marriage rose from 21 as Boomers in 1968 to 25 for women, and from 23 to 27 for men.¹⁷⁶ Simultaneously, the age of first sexual encounter fell from college-aged for Boomers to high-school aged for Gen X. With this, the rise of unwed mothers increased from 1 in 20 in 1960, to 1 in 6 in 1980, to 1 in 3 in 1993 (when Gen X would have been 28-13 years old). By the time Generation X reached adulthood in the last of the 80s/early 90s, violent crime was reaching its highest level in American history, and the promises made to a generation of social prosperity were beginning to be unrealized. This yielded a cynicism that extended beyond institutions and towards individuals. "Gen Xers were saying they personally [did not]

¹⁷⁵ Twenge, *Generations*, 149

¹⁷⁶ Twenge, *Generations*, 166

trust others, and that you have to be very careful when dealing with other people. Everyone is out for themselves, they agreed, so you have to protect yourself.”¹⁷⁷ As Generation X moved into middle adulthood (2005-2020), their skepticism challenged societal trust in the press, medicine, and government – giving insight into the rise of “fake news,” conspiracy theories, and the response to Covid-19 Pandemic (as a gauge, Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA) was born in 1974). In reaction towards institutional skepticism, Generation X turned towards creation, and prioritized care for the environment and animals (like the Audubon Society and SPCA).¹⁷⁸ This was extended into religious life where Generation X began to infuse their religious practices with every aspect of daily life, to the extent that God became “a state of mind.” With this mindset came a double-edged sword, where if a member of the cohort did not find value in religion, they would double-down on their own “independent thinking,” “skepticism,” and the “certainty” of science. In essence, they were the first American generation to determine their own truth and laid the foundation of relativism that would ultimately cede to pluralism.

Millennials inherited a relativism foundation and produced a culture that emphasized tolerance and acceptance. They were born primarily to Boomer parents and were “the most planned and wanted generation in American history to date.”¹⁷⁹ Their parents were hands-on in their rearing. They took the hyper-individualism of Boomers and molded a generation of self-confidence where “it doesn’t matter what anyone else

¹⁷⁷ Twenge, *Generations*, 196

¹⁷⁸ Bloomerang, *Generational Giving Report*, vol. 2 (Indianapolis, IN: Bloomerang, 2024)

¹⁷⁹ Twenge, *Generations*, 231

thinks of you... as long as you believe in yourself.”¹⁸⁰ Naturally, this produced entitlement and accusations of narcissism. This cohort took the emphasis on education received from their parents and have become the most educated cohort in American history. This slow-life trend of educational specialization is mirrored by the delay in marriage (28 for women and 30 for men, as of 2021) and decrease in birthrate. Due to this slow-life pattern, a new psychosocial developmental stage has been created: Emerging Adulthood (ages 18-26). Millennials would rebound the apathy of Generation X, and pursue political engagement and activism, this time migrated to social media. The Social Media era (My Space, Facebook, and Twitter) began as Millennials were reaching adolescence and early adulthood, and they became proficient with this revolutionary technology. Religious participation decreased steadily for Millennials: whereas 90% of high school seniors attended religious services in the 1970s, only 66% of high school seniors attended in the 2000s. Christian Smith’s 2005 study *Soul Searching* attempted to map the religious landscape of Millennials – and what he found was not Christian. According to Smith, the teenagers who attended religious service were more likely to espouse a moral, therapeutic deism – this “de facto creed is particularly evident among mainline Protestant and Catholic youth, but is also visible among black and conservative Protestants, Jewish teens, other religious types of teenagers, and even many non-religious teenagers in the United States.”¹⁸¹ Smith explains that this generational predisposition prioritizes good (moral) behavior, that is supposed to make you feel good (therapeutic), despite God being non-immanent (deism).

¹⁸⁰ Twenge, *Generations*, 237

¹⁸¹ Smith, *Soul Searching*, 163

This embedded theology shifted the role of the church from anchor of an individual's spiritual life (the experience of their grandparents, the Silent Generation) to the simplistic arbiter of determining right and wrong. The purity pledges of the 1990s and 2000s that exemplify Smith's Moral Therapeutic Deism represent a "hacked" Christianity.¹⁸² As Millennials migrated into adulthood (with its exposure to premarital sex, drugs, and alcohol), the church's obsession with moral behavior was interpreted as hypocritical and disingenuous. Millennials "may have gone [to church] when they were young and are glad they learned right and wrong, but now that they've learned it, there is less need for church."¹⁸³ There is an increase in religious diversity and tolerance, because in their mind the purpose of religion is to teach us how to be good moral people – and all religions can do that. In adulthood, religious practice has taken the form of gleaning from various religious traditions (not even within just Christianity). Millennials value intellectual honesty and stimulation, particularly when dealing with complex topics within sermons.

Generation Z – also referred to as iGen – came of age with the smartphone and internet. The cohort is still relatively young, with most of the cohort being between 28 and 12 in 2025. As such, there is limited research on the group, and their generational preferences are not yet defined. There is a tension between life-stage need and generational culture that Gen Z has not yet moved through. The cohort is clearly more affirming of gender identities and sexual identities than previous generations, further embracing a spirit of tolerance and self-expression that will seem foreign to previous

¹⁸² Shaw, *Generational IQ*, 99

¹⁸³ Shaw, *Generational IQ*, 94

generations. There is a preference for emotional safety and physical safety, evidenced by the prevalence of “safe space” in academic institutions beginning in the mid-2010s. Generation Z was developmentally impacted by Covid-19, and the mental health challenges facing this generation are nearly double those faced by the Baby Boomers during the same period.¹⁸⁴ Because many members of the Gen Z cohort are still in college or grade school, their preferences and response to Christianity and the church has not yet had time to develop.

In addition to the shifting generational values, the United States is undergoing a generational shift where voting power is shifting from Baby Boomers to Millennials (skipping Generation X, because of their smaller size). For the first time since the early 1960s, Baby Boomers are no longer the majority share of the U. S. population. At the height of their influence, Boomers constituted 30.1% of the population, and it took another 30 years for another generational cohort to overtake them: the Millennials in 2019.¹⁸⁵ This is representative of the further movement of the United States shifting in a post-Christian direction. According to a 2012 Pew Survey, 15% of Boomers identified as “nones,” whereas 34% of Millennials classified themselves as “nones.” The Episcopal Church has been dominated by the Baby Boomer generation for decades. Ryan Burge, a political scientist at Eastern Illinois University, notes that in 2019, the median age of an Episcopalian was 58, with the modal age of 69 (adapted for 2025, those individuals would now be 64 and 75, respectively). In 2020, Berge authored a piece that

¹⁸⁴ Twenge, *Generations*, 447

¹⁸⁵ Statista Research Department, “Population Distribution in the United States in 2022, by Generation,” *Statista*, 2023, accessed July 28, 2025, U.S. Census Bureau. *1990 Census of Population and Housing: Summary Population and Housing Characteristics*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992

claimed that the Episcopal Church “will be dead in twenty years.”¹⁸⁶ He then revised his prediction in 2022 in response to the Covid-19 Pandemic to suggest it will only happen sooner.¹⁸⁷ Berge’s hypothesis is not unfounded: by membership data and key demographics, without a significant shift in operating imagination and structural evangelism, the Episcopal Church will be forced to confront its disintegrating reality. Naturally, leadership decisions the Baby Boomer generation has made has reflected the principals, values, and preferences of the Baby Boomer generation. The first step of rounding the block for revitalization is to examine the surrounding culture and notice the differences – not only between the community and the surrounding culture, but the individual leaders and the surrounding culture. What is naturally appealing to the leadership guiding the revitalization may not resonate with those to whom the congregational leaders are seeking to minister.

Understanding the values and preferences of Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z is fundamental to understanding those vicariously connected to the congregation: the mission field of evangelization. The Baby Boomers are not included in this list, because in five years, the median age of the Baby Boomer generation will be 74 – one year shy of the average life expectancy for males in the United States – and their relative cultural influence is waning. The Baby Boomer share and influence in the population is only decreasing, while Millennial, Generation Z and "Generation Alpha" (2013-2025) are generally increasing. It is as if the proverbial neighborhood is being

¹⁸⁶ Ryan P. Burge, “The Data Is Clear – Episcopalians Are in Trouble,” *Religion in Public*, November 23, 2020, accessed July 13, 2025

¹⁸⁷ Ryan P. Burge, “COVID-19 Only Accelerated the Decline of The Episcopal Church,” *Religion in Public*, July 19, 2022, accessed July 13, 2025

colonized by a new generation. Particular attention should be paid to Millennials, because they are the generation overwhelmingly entrenched in child rearing. The older the individual, the more likely their religious affiliation (or none) is established. Further, if Churches want to focus on ministries to children and families, they need to focus on meeting the needs of their parents— and chances are, their parents are Millennials.

Chapter 6: The Bridges Model of Congregational Development

Implementing the Bridges Model involves contextual awareness, contextual need, congregational awareness, and self-emptying discernment. As Congregations look to apply this model to their own communities, the leadership implementing the model requires education and spiritual maturity. Ultimately, the Bridges Model considers the needs of those outside the community when designing congregational programming, whether that be generational needs or specific, material needs. The general assumption is that those targeted with this strategy are either Class II or Class III individuals (cursory catechesis as a child or minimal exposure to the Christian tradition, see Chapter 4). Using a backwards design framework, the congregational leadership begins by determining its goal (i.e. evangelism and growth), then determine its metrics for success (e.g. increase in attendance, increase in spiritual growth, etc.), and finally design their programming to meet those metrics that measure those goals. As in an educational context, the design of the program must reflect a differentiated approach. Just as students learn concepts in different ways, teachers must adapt their methods to meet those different learning styles. Likewise congregational leadership must differentiate in how they reach their “students” vicariously connected to the congregation. The generational trends identified in Chapter 5 represent the “learning preferences” (to extend the metaphor) of different generational cohorts.

A common example of this backwards design model is the content and delivery of a sermon. As alluded to in Chapter 5, each generation has a preferred sermon style which reflects broader characteristics of each generation. Congregational leadership can make an informed choice of how much they lean into a particular sermon style. The complication comes when the style that resonates with the current dominant generational

demographic of the congregational (statistically Baby Boomers) does not resonate with the generational cohort that the leaders are trying to reach. Based on generational context, a sermon targeted towards a Millennial will introduce complex topics, without much resolution, while avoiding moralizing and respecting the individual's ability to draw their own conclusion. By contrast, the Baby Boomer generation prefers clear resolution to an introduced problem, generally relying on the authority of scripture, which validates their feelings about justice. The same theme and main idea could be introduced in each of these hypothetical sermons, but the delivery style and structure would be different. Backwards design suggests that if a congregation sets the goal of attracting families (a common goal for congregations), then they should prioritize the needs and values of Millennial parents who run the family and drive the kids to church, as the strategy to meet that goal. In examining the Service and Learning Bridges (and their respective External and Internal Foundations), I am working primarily with a Bridge connecting those who are vicariously connected with the congregational community. The same structure and theory would also be effectual for Occasional Attenders and Sunday Sacramentalists as they seek to grow in their own faith.

Service: The Bridge and Foundations

Building the Service Bridge requires the greatest investment from the congregational community in both time and resource (due to ongoing operating costs). The Service Bridge is generally not focused on benefitting those who are already members of the congregation but targeted for those outside of the congregation. There are exceptions, but most congregational membership preforms outreach service primarily to non-members: outreach is something we as members do to others. The practice of

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) provides a model for the work of the proverbial “going around the block” and answering some of the formational questions posed in the genesis of a congregation. ABCD, developed in the late 1980s by John McKnight and John "Jody" Kretzmann, is a framework for community development that emphasizes the strengths, skills, and resources already present in a community. This contrasts with a “expert knows best” model that focuses solely on a community’s needs or deficiencies. McKnight and Kretzmann found that many traditional needs-based models of development overlooked the capacities of residents and organizations, often relying too heavily on external experts and outside funding.¹⁸⁸ This foundational text introduced key concepts such as mapping individual and institutional assets, building relationships across community groups, and mobilizing local leadership.

Conceptually, ABCD is about discerning the intersection of an organization’s assets, the wider community’s assets, and the wider community’s needs: what Bridge needs to be build. Luther Snow, an adjunct professor at Northwestern University alongside McKnight and Kretzmann, adapted their work for congregations as agents of local change. His text, *The Power of Asset Mapping*, provides a step-by-step guide for congregations to engage in ABCD type work.¹⁸⁹ Snow identifies three steps: (1) discover assets, (2) find the commonalities, and (3) follow the synergy. Asset discovery focuses on the congregation and surrounding neighborhood’s literal physical resources, individual skills and affinities, community connection (e.g. where congregation members

¹⁸⁸ John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight, *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community’s Assets* (Evanston, IL: Asset-Based Community Development Institute, 1993).

¹⁸⁹ Luther K. Snow, *The Power of Asset Mapping: How Your church Can Act on Its Gifts* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2001)

volunteer), and financial realities. Once the data is collected, the commonalities are noted and then placed in conversation with community needs – the ones that find enthusiasm within the congregation are the ones first pursued. These discerned focal points (the blue arrows in the diagram below) then feed into the intersection of community development by responding to community needs as opportunities for development. A strength of ABCD is a “positive cycle of affinity” where individual members begin to experience affirmation and success, thus encouraging others to participate – with the effect exponentially increasing. Snow also identifies that ABCD as a process encourages open-sum dynamic where “your gain is my gain is our gain,” compared to a closed-sum dynamic where “your gain comes at my expense.”¹⁹⁰ This aspect of collective “win” encourages a growth mindset where failure is received as learning, instead of criticism.

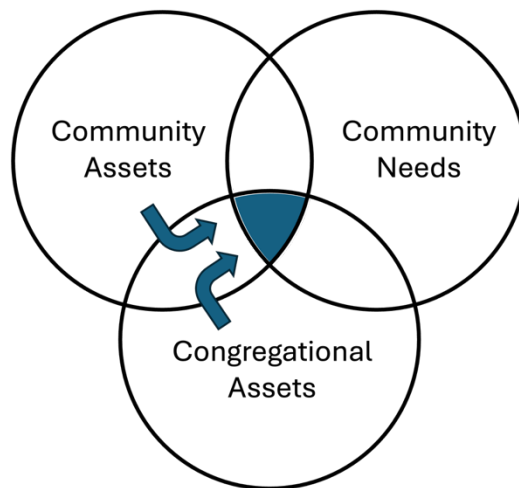


Figure 10: Work of Asset Based Community Development -- discerning the intersection of community assets, community needs, and congregational assets.

¹⁹⁰ Luther K. Snow, *The Power of Asset Mapping: How Your Congregation Can Act on Its Gifts* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2004), 94

The Service Bridge is designed to meet the needs of the local community. If the goal is to build a bridge into the congregation for those vicariously connected, then the needs of the vicariously connected must be considered. The strength of ABCD is that it supposes that congregations do not do the work in isolation, but in partnership (which coincidentally extends the ministry of the Bridge through alternative External Foundations).

The External Foundation of the Service Bridge is set in the context of community needs. Aspects of community need can be largely conceptualized by Metrics for Healthy Communities, as well as individual needs – the macro- and micro-level. Metrics for healthy communities assess how well a community supports the physical, mental, social, and economic well-being of its residents. These metrics extend beyond clinical health outcomes to include social determinants of health, equity, and the conditions of daily life. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) identifies five primary domains of social determinants of health: economic stability, education access and quality, healthcare access and quality, neighborhood and built environment, and social and community context.¹⁹¹ Economic stability is assessed through indicators like poverty and unemployment rates, median household income, and food insecurity. Education metrics include high school graduation rates, literacy, and early childhood education access. Environmental and neighborhood conditions are measured through housing affordability, crime rates, access to green space, and walkability. Equity and inclusion metrics help assess disparities by race, income, gender, and geography. These include

¹⁹¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) at CDC*, last modified January 17, 2024, <https://www.cdc.gov/about/priorities/social-determinants-of-health-at-cdc.html>.

differences in life expectancy, healthcare access, disease burden, and economic opportunity. In addition to health and economic indicators, the civic and social fabric of a community is an important part of its health. Metrics here include voter turnout, volunteerism, membership in community organizations, public meeting attendance, and the perceived sense of belonging. Responding to real community need is where the Kingdom of God breaks through and is the locus of transformation for those inside and outside the congregation.

Setting the External Foundation of the Service Bridge, based upon real need, provides multiple “on ramps” to the Bridge leading into the Community of the Congregation. Meeting the expressed need is itself an on ramp for those who will benefit from the outreach service. If a community health metric reveals the congregation is in a food desert, then the congregation may decide to build “Service Bridge” in the form of a food pantry. Meeting the need of providing food serves as an “on ramp” to the Bridge for those who receive the food. As suggested earlier, an “on ramp” also exists for members of the congregation by providing an opportunity for them to engage in hands-on ministry that simultaneously grows their connection to the congregational community. A benefit of using an ABCD model is that the foundation to the Service Bridge is set in such a way that community partners also have an “on ramp” get on the Bridge. Outreach programs are a practical way to respond to the common human tendency towards justice and mercy, by inviting those who are not members of the congregation to work alongside the congregation. Examples include organizing parishioners to solicit can food donations from their neighbors, intentionally inviting a neighbor to volunteer with the parishioner to sort food at the pantry or going to a nearby

restaurant and conversing with the owner. In each case, someone vicariously connected to the congregation is invited to participate in service to others, while reflecting authenticity in fulfilling the church's mission. As an outsider to the congregation, the leading invitation to serve others communicates a profoundly different ethos than being invited to a worship service where the offering plate gets passed and the visitor is talked at.

Internal Foundations are equally important to the External Foundations of the Service Bridge. The Internal Foundations are the practices and procedures by which visitors become members. They are the most difficult foundation for congregations to set, because it requires the congregation to be open to changing their identity and patterns of the congregation by the addition of new perspectives. The central question that motivates the Internal Foundation is "How ready is the congregation to receive and build relationship with new people?" *Invite-Welcome-Connect* touches on the work of the Internal Foundation; however, a solid Internal Foundation goes beyond a "Connect Card" and membership 101 classes. A strong Internal Foundation relies on members being ministers and evangelists. The Episcopal Church's *Embracing Evangelism* models the mindset of evangelism required for a robust Internal Foundation of the Bridge into the Community.

Embracing Evangelism teaches a sequence to intentionally engage others in faith-filled conversation. The first step is to engage someone in conversation. In the case of our food pantry, this could either be the client or a non-member volunteer. Over the course of that conversation, the evangelist-minister listens for moments when God is breaking into the individual's life. This could be the act of having a need met, or the joy

experienced by serving others. This is named as such and celebrated as a sign of the Good News. This is an important step, because it begins dismantling the assumptions of Moral Therapeutic Deism of God's inactivity in the world.¹⁹² Finally, the evangelist-minister is to invite their conversation partner "to more." The "more" could be to continue the conversation, to continue building relationship with one another, or to attend something at the church that directly responds to the conversation shared. If a hypothetical client of the food pantry shares they need the services of the congregation's food pantry because of their financial mismanagement, then it would be appropriate to invite them to the congregation's financial management class. If this same client instead shares that they come to the food pantry because they seek community, then an invitation to coffee hour might be appropriate. From the other External Foundation "on-ramp" of parishioners inviting neighbors to contribute to a can food drive, the corresponding Internal Foundation might be the invitation to attend an evening class on "God's Vision of Justice in the Magnificat." Other examples could be sharing information about the church's ministry and the impact it makes on those experiencing food scarcity, giving a canvas tote to the neighbor (with the church's logo!) with an invitation to support the pantry next time they go grocery shopping, inviting them to volunteer in the future in person at the Food Pantry. Notice that at no point has there been an invitation to attending Sunday worship: the invitation is ultimately the next step of the Service-Learning-Worship progression. The *Embrace Evangelism* model reminds lay members that they are lay *ministers*, and part of their reconciling ministry is to draw others into relationship with God through Christ.

¹⁹² Footnote on Arnold Moral Therapeutic Deism

Learning: The Bridge and Foundations

Building the Learning Bridge requires trust and expertise. Much like the Service Bridge and the use of ABCD, a similar approach must be taken when designing learning opportunities for those outside (and inside) the congregation. Using the backwards design model, the goals for the Learning Bridge should reflect the intersection of the Christian Tradition with individual needs and curiosities. I use the umbrella term “Christian Tradition” to encompass the disciplines of mature discipleship. These would include scripture, liturgy, church history, and ethics – the tools in the lay member-minister’s proverbial toolbox for framing their experience in the world through a Christian lens. The Service-Learning-Worship invitation sequence (of which, the Learning Bridge is the second step), assumes a level of familiarity between the person being invited and the congregation. To participate in a learning environment suggests an openness and willingness to learn that is ultimately rooted in trust. This posture reflects the same desire to grow in faith that prompted Augustine to seek Ambrose and become a *competentes*. On the Learning Bridge, the church knows where they are going. The disciplines of the Christian tradition are the Internal Foundation that leads “to more.” Mature Practitioners exemplify the task of crossing the Learning Bridge, because they have undergone a process of formation that frames their engagement with the world in such a way that is consistent with the Christian tradition and draws them into worship.

The External Foundation of the Learning Bridge, just like that of the Service Bridge, is set in cultural and generational contexts and in individual needs and curiosities. Understandably, the church cannot be all things to all people (particularly those with limited resources); however, congregations can structure what they do to meet the needs of their target demographic. Using the example of a congregation wanting to

attract young families, a congregation may decide to start a “Sunday School.” Several questions would quickly emerge: (1) what is the structure and content, and (2) when will we do it? One possibility is that the church might structure their Sunday School program based upon Bible stories that teach good, moral behavior. This Sunday School class would take place during Worship so it “can be relevant” to kids. Older generations will probably resonate with this model – because it reflects a 1950s trend that carried through the end of the twentieth century. However, younger generations – and the current parents of young children – will hesitate with this model. An alternative that meets the Millennial needs and preferences would serve as a stronger external foundation when working towards the goal of attracting families. In this formulation, Bible stories would still be taught, but instead of teaching it as a moral lesson to be internalized, it is taught as a story to explore through a program like Godly Play. This avoids the moralizing implicit in Moral Therapeutic Deism and encourages curiosity and wonder. This Sunday School class would take place either before or after worship so that families could worship together and so that parents could model life-long learning themselves by attending their own class or participating in the class with their children. If attending a separate class, the parents might mirror what their children were doing so that (1) they can trust that the congregation is teaching things that line with their family values and (2) be given the skills and knowledge background to further the conversation at home. Much like in the sermon style from earlier in the chapter, learning preferences of cohorts must be considered when building this Bridge. The content remains the same, but the delivery must be catered to learning preferences and styles (both in a literal individual learning style sense, and in the generational preferences). Additionally, Learning

Bridges can take different forms (and need not necessarily be in conjunction with Sunday worship). Weekday Bible Studies, independent lectures, and stand-alone events are other modes of engaging the Learning Bridge, each with different External Foundations. Each of these learning opportunities can be recorded, livestreamed, and publicized. Holding learning opportunities separate from Sunday worship can be a benefit, by telegraphing that the Congregation offers education (on religious, secular, and current event topics) for the sake of the individual, rather than for the presumed benefit to the community.

Part of laying the External Foundation of the Learning Bridge is anticipating the social, emotional, and intellectual needs of those outside the Community. The Christian Tradition holds a deep wisdom for interpreting and making sense of our times – but for those outside the Tradition, they may not know that. In 2025, offering a public seminar on Christian Nationalism would be a good guess as to what those outside the congregation might be curious about. The topic is in the news, and it is something that Christianity has a relevance to that warrants an address. This public seminar would differ from a Sunday forum on Christian Nationalism targeted at parishioners, with the goal of informing and equipping. The goal of this hypothetical public seminar should be to provide a Christian perspective and framing on Christian Nationalism for those outside the Christian Tradition – while this might include critique, it should not constitute “bashing.” The goal is to get people on the Bridge and encourage them to keep walking. As an entry point into the Community, this seminar would be held at a time apart from the Congregation’s principal worship (i.e., Sunday mornings), with the invitation to continue the conversation later. Social media, print media, and parishioner

word-of-mouth are crucial to inviting those outside the Community to get on the bridge. The ministry of the Congregation in the Learning Bridge is inviting others to participate and being present to form part of the Internal Foundation.

The Internal Foundation of the Learning Bridge is rooted in community. Responding again to Generational Trends, the landing spot of the Learning Bridge must be a place of emotional safety and security, particularly for the younger generations. Participants must know that they are safe to vocalize doubt and uncertainty (expression of their authentic selves), while remaining in conversation with the Tradition's conviction. A healthy Internal Foundation of the Learning Bridge would be a place where someone could articulate their doubts about the historicity of the Resurrection and know they are loved and cared for, while the church maintains its conviction of the Bodily Resurrection. In essence, the Congregation is self-differentiated from the member or inquirer. The Congregation is confident in its understanding of the Christian Tradition and is willing to hold space for disagreement. This is a soft skill that requires maturity and self-work, and these take time to develop. Forming a leadership team to facilitate the Learning Bridge is essential, because intentional training and checks-ins should be held to reflect and grow these soft-skills.

The Center of it All: Community and Worship

The Service and Learning Bridges have their Internal Foundation in the Community of a congregation. In this setting, the Community represents those who are bound to one another through love and mutual affection, outdoing one another in

showing love.¹⁹³ This is the context where pastoral care take place, where burdens are shared, deep listening is had, and continued transformation (as in the Gather-Transform-Send model) takes place. In healthy settings, Community is a powerful source of transformation because it embraces vulnerability: the intimacy of foot washing after a shared meal on Maundy Thursday is the vision of Christian *koinonia*. The boundary demarcating Community in the model diagram is permeable, reflecting the posture of the Community of always being open to receive new members. There is an inherent risk to a community that embraces this openness: they will change. Congregations, much like people, either embrace change or resist it – and the more a congregation resists change, the further along the Life Cycle of a Congregation the congregation will go. It is in the throes of change that congregations will sabotage the implementation of any new initiative (both passively and actively). Maintaining awareness, self-differentiating through dissent, and communicating vision are essential leadership skills for navigating potential opposition. Building leadership teams for each Bridge is essential to overcoming the fear of change, because the leadership teams model the vision of Community that is hoped for the whole congregation. The Community itself can be a tool for evangelization by promoting opportunities for human connection; however, common experience is what generally bonds people together – which is why the focus is on the Service and Learning Bridges as the entry points into the Community.

At the center of the Community's life is Worship. The boundary between Worship and Community is solid to communicate the eternal, immutable substance of the Congregation's worship. This does not mean that the style of worship or the words

¹⁹³ cf. Romans 12.10

never change, rather, it emphasizes that the congregation is the custodian and steward of the Tradition, to which they have an obligation. Worship is held in the center of the Community because – particularly Eucharistic worship – is the central act of the Community. With this centrality comes a reverence for worship as something set apart. This posture mimics the *disciplina arcani* of the fourth century – not by forcing people to leave at a particular part in the service (as in the fourth century), but by reserving the invitation to joining the community for worship, for last. In the Service-Learning-Worship progression, the invitation to worship for an unbaptized person is the penultimate step before beginning formal baptismal preparation. The practice of reserving a worship invitation for last cultivates a reverence and a sense of *mysterium* that allows that participant to be drawn deeper into the Tradition once they attend worship. This delayed invitation does not imply a non-baptized person cannot or should not attend worship at any point in their journey – our worship is always open to those who feel stirred by the Spirit. To the contrary, a delayed invitation simply affirms that the member-minister-evangelist waits until the individual is ready to explore the central function of the community, before directing them into that space. The give time allows for the non-baptized person to self-initiate and thereby affirms the work of the Spirit in their life. This mimics the self-initiated conversation Augustine had with Ambrose to enter the formal catechumenal process in Milan. Augustine engaged the Learning Bridge provided Ambrose, had a conversion experience (“Tolle, lege!”), and then self-initiated his own baptismal preparation.

The Bridges Model minimizes the use of Worship as a Bridge into the Community. Church signs and websites generally list the worship time with coded

language about the service (e.g., Holy Eucharist, Rite II – 10:00 a.m.). This practice reflects an embedded practice of treating Worship as Bridge and is the assumption of programs like *Invite-Welcome-Connect*. While an effective tool for recruiting Class I individuals (those with a high level of exposure and formation within the Tradition), this formulation can be a foreign language to Class II and Class III individuals. If the worship service is the only time that a congregation announces that it gathers, it reduces the entry point for those unfamiliar or skeptical of Christianity to the central act of Christianity. Congregational leaders must remember that the Ordo of the Eucharist is a foreign thing, especially to those outside the Christian Tradition. Much like Cleveland’s explanation to Junior of the Christian story (recounted in Chapter 5), an unformed person present at the Eucharist could hear cannibalism (“Take, eat: This is my Body”), experience hocus pocus magic (incense, Sanctus bells, and chant), or participate in a giant superspreader event (sharing a common cup). Preserving all these elements of the Ordo is central to the congregation serving as the steward and custodian of Eucharistic Worship – and I would not remove them to accommodate those outside the tradition. Instead, I would just not lead with inviting someone to participate in it, without the opportunity to explain and provide context for what was happening. If someone self-selects to participate, then that is their choice – at which point the same strategy of building Internal Foundations of connecting them with members of the community is pursued.

Chapter 7: Case Studies

The Bridges Model provides a framework for discernment as Congregations look to evangelize and grow. At the forefront of this work must be the Church's mission: to reconcile all people to God and one another through Christ. If Congregations desire to grow for the sake of balancing the budget, they will fail because of the self-serving motivation: this is inauthentic to the Church's true mission. Instilling the Church's mission into the congregational ethos takes time and common experience. It is best to start small, celebrate the successes, learn from the failures, and then regroup, replan, and repeat in the future. Below are two real examples of the Bridges Model being implemented in two separate congregations, each with its own context.

Case Study 1 – Urban Parish

Parish 1 is an urban parish in a struggling downtown setting. There is a large homeless population, and only a few of the parishioners live in the downtown area (parishioners must drive to attend worship). The surrounding area has restaurants, but no housing. ASA initially hovered in the high forties, with a broad age range in attendance, with numerous working families with children, a few working “empty nesters,” and a majority portion of retired individuals. Parish finances are at a deficit, thus little disposable income. The congregation has a strong outreach ministry with a food pantry (financed by the Sunday morning offering) and clothing closet (facilitated through community donations). Both of these ministries are open for a few hours during the workday for the last two weeks of every month. These ministries are staffed entirely by retired parishioners. I have only been at the congregation for 10 months and am still beginning the process of implementing the Bridges Model.

To build the Service Bridge, I would focus on developing ways for the families to get involved in the outreach ministries. Because the clothing closet and food pantry are only open during the workday, this precludes working families from participating, other than bringing old clothes or canned goods. One way to begin building the Bridge is by creating opportunities for the families to get involved, so that they might become evangelists to their peers about what their congregation is doing (building a larger external foundation). I would start by trying to link an opportunity to participate in the clothing closet with Sunday morning worship. I would make the connection to Sunday morning because (1) families are busy and scheduled, and (2) Sunday morning is already generally reserved for Worship. I would focus on the clothing closet, because the closet is run off donations and does not cost money to fund (in the way that the food pantry does). Further, the clothing closet has a regular source of “work” that needs to be done, such as folding clothes. I would design a regularly occurring (maybe once a month) event on Sunday mornings where families could come for 45 minutes before worship and fold recently donated clothes to be given away at the clothing closet. The regularity is important because it provides predictability and multiple opportunities to engage the ministry (compared to a one-off event). As the *koinonia* was edified, I would pivot the focus to encouraging those involved to periodically (perhaps, quarterly as the seasons change) go door-to-door in their neighborhoods to solicit donations of clothes. This expands the External Foundation to invite others to join in service and provides an opportunity to introduce the Learning Bridge by sharing *why* this is important to the congregation. Another expansion of the External Foundation would be partnering with neighboring restaurants to host collection sites for clothing. This would provide

additional advertising for the Church's authentic mission and allow the local business to share in the care of their homeless neighbors.

To build the Learning Bridge, I would focus on ways to share what the congregation already does with those outside the congregation. I would be intentional to record any weekly Bible Study and then upload and share on social media. I would highlight sessions that are particularly relevant to current events and promote them extensively. For those currently involved in the congregation, I would begin by aligning the content of children, youth, and adult classes. If necessary, I would shift any potential children's Sunday School curriculum to a Godly Play (Montessori) and create parallel materials that encourage families to practice faith at home. I would also leverage the Worship service to include opportunities for education by creating a bulletin with commentary on the liturgy, and encouraging lay participation in the worship (Lay Reader, Acolyte, Usher, etc.). I would continue cultivating relationships with the neighboring restaurants and seek permission to advertise church programs on a community notice board. I would also seek collaborative partnerships such as using a local coffee roaster to provide coffee for the weekday Bible Study (or possibly even having the Bible Study at the coffee shop).

Case Study 2 – Rural Parish

Parish 2 is a rural parish in a rural county. There is a relatively small homeless population, known to and cared for by the wider community. The congregation is on multiple acres of land and has a historic cemetery surrounding the Church building. ASA hovers around 40 with the youngest active member around the age of sixty. Parish finances are at a deficit, with little disposable income. The congregation has no outreach

ministry or education – they gather for worship and coffee hour, and leave. A passion of the congregation was art and music. At the time, the Covid-19 pandemic had been raging for almost a year, and the congregation was only able to gather in-person outdoors. The congregation wanted to grow, particularly through attracting families – but they had no families currently attending. I served at the congregation for just over four years, and within that time increased the ASA to the mid-90s (growth was primarily through new members, not “lapsed” members returning) and increased giving to balance the budget.

To build the Service Bridge, the congregation took stock of its assets, which was (1) the physical property and (2) the historic cemetery. Simultaneously, the congregation’s desire to engage young families encouraged them to reach out to local elementary schools (where several parishioners had taught). Through those conversations, a need was determined for children to be able to gather and socialize because of the public health restrictions at schools. The congregation began to brainstorm events that would meet the following criteria: (1) outdoors, (2) focused on kids, and (3) involved art. The event that was born was “The ArtWalk” – an outdoor art exhibit featuring children’s art procured from the local elementary school. It was held on the congregation’s campus throughout the Historic Cemetery. The event was designed to require many volunteers (from parking to welcome to refreshments) and include multiple community partners or provide activities for the participants. The event took on the feel of an art exhibit block party with games, giveaways, and learning opportunities (all facilitated by organizations from outside the congregation). The brainstorming of the event incorporated elements of ABCD, Generational Trends, and backwards design –

while moving the congregation into a “Bridges Model.” This event was then repeated twice a year and became a fixture in the local community. The success of this event then led the congregation to repeat the process and expand their outreach ministry by founding the only operating Farmers Market in the county. This reassessment represents a healthy process of renewal within the Life Cycle of the Congregation Model. The Church grew significantly in the years following, and the source of that growth was through the community partnership leveraged with the ArtWalk. A number of families began to join the congregation because of the congregation’s commitment to service. These families all participated in the ArtWalk through the inclusion of community partners who provided activities at the event for the child-artists.

To build the Learning Bridge, the congregation used the new attendance and growth. Ultimately, most new members drawn in by the ArtWalk and Farmers Market were families with older elementary and teenage children. This demonstrates the Service-Learning-Worship progression. We sought to meet the new participant needs by structuring occasional an evening dinner series that met their curiosities (a series would run during the Lent and during the fall from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. for six weeks). Series topics included Episcopal 101, Intro to the Bible, Church History, and Spiritual Practices: the majority of these new families were Class II with some exposure to Christianity as children but had not been baptized. Over the course of two years, the congregation with an ASA of forty, baptized nine adults. It was done in the catechumenal model as defined in the Book of Occasional Service, culminating at the Easter Vigil. It is worth noting that these families chose to begin attending worship before their baptism (or any formal invitation), and they were spiritually at a place to

honor the Tradition of Baptism prior to Eucharist. The work of service and learning prior to worship cultivated a desire to grow into the Tradition, not change the tradition to meet their desires.

The model provided a framework to integrate components of congregational development, sociology, and the Christian Tradition that responded to the contemporary needs. This second case study reflects the success of the model. Of the nearly forty new members we added over four years, all of them (with the exception of one couple) had their initial contact with the church through either the ArtWalk or Farmers Market, with 25% leading to adult baptisms, representing Class II and Class III individuals (not to mention the additional 20% infant/child baptisms). Within the remaining 55% of new members, 40% were lapsed Episcopalians who had not been to worship in years (either since high school, or their children graduating high school). The remaining 15% had been involved in their local congregation but relocated to the area.

Conclusion and Further Opportunities

The Bridges Model for Congregations provides a conceptual framework for congregations to deploy their common work for evangelism. It integrates other models of congregational development (the Life Cycle of the Congregation, Faith Development in Community, and Gather-Transform-Send) to provide a cohesive, yet dynamic model for congregations to frame their current ministries. It also relies on Asset Based Community Development, Embracing Evangelism, and Invite-Welcome-Connect principles to build the foundations of the bridges into Christian Community and Eucharistic fellowship. The model considers cultural context, generational trends, and

community health metrics when discerning how to move forward and build a bridge as a congregation.

This model is firmly planted in the Christian tradition by adapting the practices of the fourth century to meet our contemporary context. The model is derived from a pattern of initiation from the fourth century, where the Christian church was one of many options within a pluralistic Empire. This resonates with the American Church in 2025, where Christianity is no longer privileged over other traditions in the United States and deference is given to plurality and tolerance. The qualities of the fourth century catechumenate are adapted to meet the cultural context and generational needs of those to whom the congregation is evangelized through their programmatic structure.

Further work in this field would include long range studies of the relative success of the Bridges Model compared to evangelism strategies which place recruitment to worship at the primary growth model. Likewise, in a few years' time, the generational trends can be updated to reflect better data on Generation Z and then Generation Alpha. The content of this project could be adapted as a Vestry resource for leading congregational growth, with coaching for implementation. Investigations into the opportunities and challenges of infant baptism would also be appropriate.

Bibliography

- Barna Group. *The State of the Church 2018*. April 17, 2018.
<https://www.barna.com/research/state-church-2018/>
- Bengtson, Vern L., Norella M. Putney, and Susan Harris. *Families and Faith: How Religion Is Passed Down across Generations*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Bloomerang. *Generational Giving Report. Vol. 2*. Indianapolis, IN: Bloomerang, 2024.
- Brochard, Philip, and Alissabeth Newton. *Vital Christian Community: Twelve Characteristics of Healthy Congregations*. Indianapolis, IN: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2022.
- Burge, Ryan P. “COVID-19 Only Accelerated the Decline of The Episcopal Church.” *Religion in Public*, July 19, 2022. Accessed July 13, 2025
- Burge, Ryan P. “The Data Is Clear – Episcopalians Are in Trouble.” *Religion in Public*, November 23, 2020. Accessed July 13, 2025
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). 2024. “Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) at CDC.” CDC. January 17, 2024.
https://www.cdc.gov/about/priorities/social-determinants-of-health-at-cdc.html?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/about/sdoh/index.html
- Codex Theodocianus. Translated and edited by the University of Grenoble. Accessed July 12, 2025. <https://droitromain.univ-grenoble-alpes.fr/Constitutions/CTh16.html>
- Craig, Douglas B. *Fireside Politics: Radio and Political Culture in the United States, 1920–1940*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005.
- Dobson, James C. *Dare to Discipline*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1970.
- Dujarier, Michel. *A History of the Catechumenate: The First Six Centuries; Translated from the French by Edward J. Haasl*. New York: Sadlier, 1979.
- Eusebius of Caesarea, *The Life of the Blessed Emperor Constantine*, trans. Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999)

- Eusebius of Caesarea. *Ecclesiastical History*. Translated by Kirsopp Lake. Vol. 1, *Loeb Classical Library*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926.
- Evans, Ernest. *Tertullian's Homily on Baptism*. London: Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, 1964.
- Harmless, Willian. *Augustine and the Catechumenate: Revised Edition*. Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2014.
- Hawley, Josh. "Sen. Josh Hawley: America Founded on Christian Nationalism." *The Daily Signal*, July 9, 2024. Accessed July 12, 2025.
<https://www.dailysignal.com/2024/07/09/sen-josh-hawley-america-founded-on-christian-nationalism/>.
- Johnson, Kenneth M., and Daniel T. Lichter. "Is Rural America Failing or Succeeding? Maybe Both." *Carsey School of Public Policy*, September 8, 2020.
- Johnson, Maxwell E. *The Rites of Christian Initiation*. Minnesota Liturgical Press, 2007.
- Julian the Apostate. "Letter to a Priest (19)." Translated by Wilmer Cave Wright. Accessed July 12, 2025.
https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/julian_apostate_letters_1_trans.htm.
- Julian the Apostate. *Against the Galileans*. Translated by Thomas Taylor. Accessed July 12, 2025. https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/julian_apostate_galileans_1_text.htm.
- Krodel, Gottfried. "Luther's Work on the Catechism in the Context of Late Medieval Catechetical Literature." *Concordia Journal*, October 1999.
- Lactantius, *On the Deaths of the Persecutors*, trans. William Fletcher (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1984).
- Lara, Jaime. "'Precious Green Jade Water': A Sixteenth-Century Adult Catechumenate in the New World." *Liturgical Press "Worship"* 1997, vol 71, issue 5.
- Luther K. Snow, *The Power of Asset Mapping: How Your Congregation Can Act on Its Gifts* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2004)
- Mariann Edgar Budde, "Sermon at the National Prayer Service," Washington National Cathedral, January 21, 2025, <https://cathedral.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Service-of-Prayer-for-the-Nation-2025-Online.pdf>.
- Morris, Thomas D. *Southern Slavery and the Law, 1619–1860*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

- National Center for Health Statistics. *Table 1-1: Live Births, Birth Rates, and Fertility Rates, by Race of Child: United States, 1909–1980*. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics, 1982.
<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/statab/t1x0197.pdf>.
- Phelan, Owen M. *The Formation of Christian Europe: The Carolingians, Baptism, and the Imperium Christianum*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000.
- Ristuccia, Nathan J. *Christianization and Commonwealth in Early Medieval Europe: A Ritual Interpretation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Root, Andrew. *Faith Formation in a Secular Age: Responding to the Church’s Obsession with Youthfulness*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017.
- Shaw, Hayden. *Generational IQ: Christianity Isn’t Dying, Millennials Aren’t the Problem, and the Future Is Bright*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2015.
- Smith, Christian, and Melinda Lundquist Denton. *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Smith, Gregory A., Alan Cooperman, Becka A. Alper, Besheer Mohamed, Chip Rotolo, Patricia Tevington, Justin Nortey, Asta Kallo, Jeff Diamant, and Dalia Fahmy. “2023–24 Religious Landscape Study: Executive Summary.” Pew Research Center, February 26, 2025.
- Socrates Scholasticus. *Church History*. Translated by A.C. Zenos. In *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 2, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, 1–36. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890. Accessed July 12, 2025. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/26014.htm>.
- Socrates Scholasticus. *Ecclesiastical History*. Translated by A. C. Zenos. New Advent. Accessed July 12, 2025. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/26015.htm>.
- Statista Research Department. “Population Distribution in the United States in 2022, by Generation.” Statista. 2023. Accessed [date you accessed].
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/296974/us-population-share-by-generation/>
- Tertullian. *De Baptismo*. Translated and edited by Ernest Evans. London: SPCK, 1964

- The Cleveland Show*. Season 3, episode 2, “The Hurricane!” Directed by Anthony Agrusa. Originally aired October 2, 2011. FOX.
- Thornton, Martin. *Pastoral Theology: A Reorientation*. London: Faber and Faber, 1956
- Thornton, Martin. *The Heart of the Parish: Theology and Practice in the English Parish*. London: Faber and Faber, 1958.
- Twenge, Jean M. *Generations: The Real Differences between Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, Boomers, and Silents—and What They Mean for America’s Future*. New York: Atria Books, 2023.
- U.S. Census Bureau. *1990 Census of Population and Housing: Summary Population and Housing Characteristics*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Mortality Statistics 1931*. National Center for Health Statistics, 1934. Accessed July 1, 2025.
- United States. Comprehensive Crime Control Act of 1984. Pub. L. No. 98-473, 98 Stat. 1837 (1984).
- Webb, James. “Idealism and Practicality.” *The Atlantic*, April 1980.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideastour/military/webb-full.html>.
- Whitaker, E. C. *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*. Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2003.
- White, James Emery. *The Rise of the Nones: Understanding and Reaching the Religiously Unaffiliated*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014.

