

Sermon on Trinity Sunday – May 31, 2015 – Paul Nuechterlein

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Lough Derg, County Clare, Ireland. Bronze. Copyright © The Irish Image Collection/SuperStock. Used by permission.

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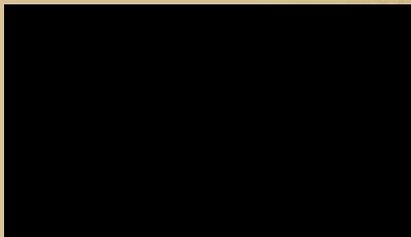
Lost Generation??

- We begin with a spoken YouTube Video
- Follow along in your "Sermon Notes" insert
- When you reach the end of the text, follow reading it in reverse



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Lost Generation??



YouTube video text — “Lost Generation”:
*I am part of a lost generation
and I refuse to believe
I can change the world
I realize this may be a shock but
“Happiness comes from within”
is a lie, and
“Money will make me happy”
So in 30 years I will tell my children
They are not the most important
thing in my life.
My employer will know that
I have my priorities straight because
work
is more important than
family*

*I tell you this
Once upon a time
Families stayed together
but this will not be true in my era.
this is a quick fix society
Experts tell me
30 years from now I will be
celebrating the 10th anniversary of
my divorce.
I do not concede that
I will live in the country of my own
making.
In the future
Environmental destruction will be
the norm.
No longer can it be said that
My peers and I care about this
earth.
It will be evident that
My generation is apathetic and
lethargic.
It is foolish to presume that
There is hope.*

*And all of this will come true unless
we choose to reverse it. (Now read
along in reverse)¹*

1. Jonathan Reed, “The Lost
Generation,”
www.youtube.com/watch?v=42E2fAWM6rA.

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Lost Generation??

- A new Pew Foundation study on religion in America: unchurched is the biggest increase among Christians
- The largest portion: ages 20-40
- Are we looking at a “Lost Generation” in church?



Studies show that the generation of people in their 20's and 30's are leaving or have left church. We who are older might also know this by experience: how many of our children and grandchildren have left? What can we do to prevent a “Lost Generation” at church?

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The Great Reversal

- We can reverse this trend by understanding changes in religious experience
- Studies suggest a reversal of our priorities:
- From: Believing — Behaving — Belonging
- To: Belonging — Behaving — Believing



Again, studies suggest another kind of reversal might help. A reversal of our priorities:

From: Believing — Behaving — Belonging

To: Belonging — Behaving — Believing

The younger generations are putting more emphasis on having a sense of belonging, of building relationships of trust.

This does *not* mean what we believe and understand about God is unimportant or should be left out. But younger generations have more of an experience of being free enough to disagree about beliefs, so a sense of trust and belonging is of first priority in order to stay in community together despite disagreements.

And there is reason to believe from the Gospels that Jesus had similar priorities: he simply called disciples first, asking them to trust him and Belong to him; then, he taught them some basic Behaviors, in reaching out in love to the last and lost; finally, their

understanding and Believing took shape as they continued to follow and trust him.

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The Great Reversal

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Quote from *The Future of Faith*:

Faith is about deep-seated confidence. In everyday speech we usually apply it to people we trust or the values we treasure. It is what ... the Hebrews spoke of as the “heart.”

Belief, on the other hand, is more like opinion. We often use the term in everyday speech to express a degree of uncertainty. “I don’t really know about that,” we say, “but I believe it may be so.” Beliefs can be held lightly or with emotional intensity, but they are more propositional than existential. We can *believe* something to be true without it making much difference to us, but we place our *faith* only in something that is vital for the way we live. Of course people sometimes confuse faith with beliefs, but it will be hard to comprehend the tectonic shift in Christianity today unless we understand the distinction between the two.

The Spanish writer Miguel Unamuno (1864-1936) dramatizes the radical dissimilarity of faith and belief in his short story “Saint

Manuel Bueno, Martyr,” in which a young man returns from the city to his native village in Spain because his mother is dying. In the presence of the local priest she clutches his hand and asks him to pray for her. The son does not answer, but as they leave the room, he tells the priest that, much as he would like to, he cannot pray for his mother because he does not believe in God. “That’s nonsense,” the priest replies. “You don’t have to believe in God to pray.”

The priest in Unamuno’s story recognized the distinction between faith and belief. He knew that prayer, like faith, is more primordial than belief.¹

1. From Harvey Cox, *The Future of Faith* [HarperOne, 2009], page 3.

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The Great Reversal

- We can reverse this trend by understanding changes in religious experience
- Studies suggest a reversal of our priorities:
- From: Believing — Behaving — Belonging
- To: Belonging — Behaving — Believing



Emphasize again what this means

From: Believing — Behaving — Belonging

To: Belonging — Behaving — Believing

This does *not* mean what we believe and understand about God is unimportant or should be left out. But younger generations have more of an experience of being free enough to disagree about beliefs, so a sense of trust and belonging is of first priority in order to stay in community together despite disagreements. This is about being able to stay in community when we disagree because our commitment

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to Belonging together is first priority.

Transition to singing Hymn of the Day, “I Bind unto Myself Today”; and to saying the Apostles’ Creed with “trust” substituted for the word “believe” – explaining that the meaning of words change in different eras. “Credo” in Latin is actually related to the word for “heart,” and earlier meanings of credo are “to give one’s heart to.”

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