

Guest Editorial

The New Generation and Missions

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Discussions about GenY and GenZ often quickly switch to exploring such topics as “Disruptions of the Digital World.” Such reductionism can be useful, since these generations born since the 1980s and late 1990s, respectively - both comprising the so-called “new generation” - are not only more familiar with the digital world, but today’s digital world is simply an integral part of life for them. They grew up with those technologies. From a distance, communication and collaboration with the new generation appear to be matters of properly engaging the Internet, the latest gadgets, smartphone apps, instant messaging, and social media.

Similarly, this issue’s topic of “The Next Generation and Missions” (perhaps better termed “The *New* Generation and Missions”) might simply be reduced to issues surrounding proper integration of technologies with the theory and practice of mission. Clearly, however, such a reductionist step would be off-base. A more constructive approach involves seeing how new technologies have changed, and continue to change, the new generation’s social behavior and even worldview. Activities have changed along with the development of new technological tools, hence attitudes toward the activities and fundamental assumptions about reality have changed.

Having noted the intertwined character of digital technologies, the new generation, and Christian mission, shouldn’t there be a healthy scepticism about the global relevance of such a claim? Aren’t there deep contextual differences among GenY and GenZ members’ familiarity with, use of, and having been affected by digital technologies? Some interesting findings from recent research address this scepticism. David Kinnman, for instance, on behalf of Barna Group has suggested the phrase “Connected Generation” to describe a pivotal feature of the new generation all around the world. The Barna Group’s recent global research shows that connectivity of young people from all corners of the globe allows us, at least to some extent, to speak about them as one whole generation, in spite of cultural difference and language obstacles. Indeed, the research shows that young adults around the globe often resemble each other more than people in their own countries (Kinnman 2019:20-23).

Given such global similarities among GenY and GenZ, contextually particular mission initiatives are needed. Such approaches include asking the right questions regarding varied issues. Just as every generation should find its own language and expression for the gospel, every generation has its own issues that need to be resolved, including - perhaps especially including - theological issues. Faced with many contemporary challenges, the new generation may approach them differently than would we who are older. For GenZ, questions of gender equality are less theological than they are issues of practical implementation. The movement #FridaysforFuture has shown that the new generation has solidarity in the fight for the environment. Connectivity easily makes local initiatives global as well as vice versa: a global movement can readily be implemented as a local movement.

In some sense, finding theological answers to practical questions is a missiological task per se. Currently, almost the whole world is locked down and facing new realities because of

COVID-19. It is hard to live isolated in many ways, but the current pandemic-induced situation also presents an opportunity to see real possibilities of digitalization in almost all spheres of life. Digital access provides the only access for many senior Christian leaders to listen to the new generation, who have both created and themselves grown up in the contemporary digital world. Seen in such a fashion, the new generation is not the next generation, it is the generation *now*. Contemporary mission is not just *towards* the *next* generation, it is mission *with* the *new* generation in every domain of life.

References

Kinnaman, David (2019). "From Chaos to Connection," in *The Connected Generation*. Barna Group, 20-23.