

# AN EXPLORATION OF BRITISH MILLENNIALS' INVOLVEMENT IN INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

by

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## Abstract

It is well documented that the decline in religious adherence in Britain is particularly evident among younger generations, the majority of whom have grown up with little exposure to religious discourse. While church attendance continues to decline across denominations and across generations, there nevertheless remain individuals who both believe in the tenets of the Christian faith and belong to a faith community or church. In this thesis I consider a subgroup of these: Millennials (born 1980-1999) who are also Christian missionaries.

This thesis is a qualitative investigation into the lived religion of a cohort whose Christian faith is so salient as to direct significant life choices. Taking a constructionist approach to data gathered from interviews with seventeen Millennial missionaries and four missionaries representing older generations, I explore the motivation to believe and belong of British Millennial missionaries and consider how their negotiation of differing narratives affects their understanding of the world and their own place within it.

This thesis finds that Millennial missionaries merge aspects of the evangelical Christian narrative with elements of the narrative they encounter in the wider British cultural discourse, forming a worldview which frames mission involvement in terms of one's personal faith journey and exploration of identity. Central to this is authenticity: being true to oneself. For Millennial Christians, believing and belonging, in order to be considered authentic, thus require behaving: putting faith into action. I therefore posit *theocentric authenticity* as a framework to explain how the Millennial authenticity paradigm is interpreted by Millennial missionaries. As such, this thesis contributes to the sociological study of religion in Britain by offering insight into the lived religion of a subgroup of the Millennial generation for whom religion remains salient. This study also has implications for research into generations, demonstrating the significance of age and period effects as well as the way in which the changes brought about in one generation become the norms of the next.



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## Introduction

Since its very beginnings, Christianity has been a proselytising religion. Within a few centuries, it grew from a small sect within Judaism to become the state religion of the Roman Empire. In more recent centuries, that zeal for proselytism has seen the expansion of ‘foreign missions,’ particularly within the evangelical wing of Christianity. Evangelicalism teaches that Scripture (the Bible) is inerrant and that the only way to ‘salvation’ is through a personal faith commitment. This leads to a concern among many Evangelical believers for the salvation of those who have not heard the Christian message: those who follow non-Christian religions or no religion. From a United Kingdom perspective, the expansion of the British Empire introduced British Christians to the existence of millions of people apparently in need of salvation, while regular trade between the British Isles and the Empire made travel possible. Both the practice and the theoretical understanding of Christian mission have undergone substantial changes since the days of Empire. Indeed, British society itself has changed, with religion in the twenty-first century very much on the periphery of most people’s lives.

### 1.1 Rationale for and Contribution of the Study

This thesis contributes to discussions within the Sociology of Religion about religion and spirituality in contemporary Britain. Much of this scholarship refers to the decline in religious adherence and Britain’s increasing secularity, such as the work of Bruce (1996; 2002), Voas (2005; 2019) and Woodhead (2012). Where research has been carried out into the continuing practice of religion, this is often in relation to minority religions and new forms of spirituality. As far as Christianity is concerned, much of the literature looks at its demise or at those who self-identify as Christians yet do not engage in religious practices or are not affiliated to churches (Davie, 2014; Day, 2011). There is remarkably little written about the lived religion of those Christians for whom faith remains salient. An important exception is *Christianity and the University Experience* (Guest *et al.*, 2013), which describes how Christian students practise and develop their faith while at university as well as their relationships with congregations and peers. *Young People and Performance Christianity in Scotland* (Vincett *et al.*, 2012) demonstrates that the practice of faith takes precedence over ‘propositional belief’ for young Christians. More recently, Perrin (2020) has examined the faith or lack thereof of adult Millennials who in their youth were active Christians. Further discussion of the

lived religion of evangelical Christians is also found in the work of Aune (2008; 2010), Montemaggi (2017) and Strhan (2013; 2015).

Despite the undoubted decline in church attendance and in the practice of Christianity in the United Kingdom, which I discuss in *The Religion of British Millennials* (Chapter 2), there are still young people choosing to become ‘missionaries’ in the traditional sense:<sup>1</sup> moving to another country in order to share the Christian faith. Much of the study of religion in Britain today considers the population as a whole, with a focus on trends in both thought and practice (Woodhead, 2000; Furseth and Repstad, 2006). Rather than taking a large group within society and finding that a small proportion remain religious, I follow the example of scholars such as Aune and Strhan in electing to begin with a subgroup whose commitment to their religious faith is clearly reflected in their life choices. As such, Christian missionaries can help us understand the questions of why and in what form personal religious faith persists in an otherwise largely secular society. At the same time, my own involvement in Christian mission means that I was already aware of mission leaders bemoaning the decline in levels of both recruitment and financial support. What fascinated me, however, was why people still embark on a missionary career at all, having spent their formative years in a post-Christian Britain. A brief survey of research into religion in Britain suggests that a fall in mission participation is easier to explain than its continuation.

I decided to focus on the Millennial Generation for two main reasons. Firstly, Millennials have been much maligned in popular media (Stein, 2013; Hoyle, 2017). Related to this, mission leaders I had met through my previous involvement with *Member Care Europe* and the *European Evangelical Missionary Association* were concerned not only with difficulties in recruitment, but also that those recruited appeared to them markedly different from previous generations. I wanted to find out whether the differences perceived by Generation X or Boomer leaders<sup>2</sup> would be reflected in interviews. Secondly, my research encountered Millennials in adulthood: those at the younger end of the cohort were exploring and developing career options, while the older Millennials had already spent years in a given role, experienced a

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<sup>1</sup> In Chapters 3 and 6, I discuss contemporary understandings of mission.

<sup>2</sup> Generation X is usually understood as those born approximately 1965-1979, while Baby Boomers were born 1946-1964.

career change, or moved into leadership. This was also my reason for choosing Millennials over Generation Z: I wanted to hear from people whose life choices had already been impacted by their faith and to consider how this played out in their working and domestic lives. At the time of my data collection, few of Gen Z had reached working age.

I have limited my study to British participants as mitigation against the impact of cultural and national differences within the cohort. I have not, however, set out any criteria defining 'Britishness,' thereby allowing participants to self-define by responding to an invitation to participate. One potential participant refused my invitation on the grounds that, having grown up overseas as the child of British missionaries, he did not consider himself sufficiently 'British.'

This thesis also comments on the changing understanding and practice of Christian mission. As Catto's (2008) work on 'reverse mission' has highlighted, contemporary Christian mission is no longer about 'the West to the Rest.' Indeed, Britain is viewed as a mission-field by many in its former colonies. This study will identify the justifications offered by individual British Christians for their continued involvement in other nations, many of which now have a larger Christian population than does the United Kingdom. I will explore Millennial missionaries' uneasy relationship with the term 'missionary;' an unease for which colonial connotations are only one of several explanations discussed in *Being: The Identity of a Missionary* (Chapter 6).

## 1.2 Research Questions

In this project, I carried out and analysed qualitative interviews with a view to exploring the following questions:

- RQ 1    What motivates Millennial Christians to become missionaries?
- RQ 2    How do Millennial missionaries negotiate differing narratives in order to explore their own personal identity?
- RQ 3    How is this negotiation worked out in their professional and personal lives?
- RQ 4    To what extent do Millennial missionaries reflect the characteristics and values usually associated with their generation and/or those of previous generations of missionaries?

As such, this study adds to the body of research which demonstrates that while fewer Britons than ever are practising Christianity, there remains a minority for whom faith is salient (e.g. Guest *et al.*, 2013; Aune, 2008; Clements and Bullivant, 2022). Exposed from a young age to the often contradictory discourses of Christianity on the one hand and secular society on the other, I find that Millennial Christians seek to live out their faith in a way they understand to be authentic, thereby forming the basis of a coherent sense of self. This thesis therefore contributes to the sociological understanding of the lived religion of British Millennials, considering how faith impacts on the everyday lives of those who believe, while the narratives of the society in which they live interact with and alter their beliefs (Ammerman, 2021, p.18; Bebbington, 1989, p.272). I explore how the Millennial authenticity ethic (Taylor, 2018/1991) is interpreted through a Christian framework, lending meaning to one's identity, one's activity and one's place in the world. This I term *theocentric authenticity* because God is seen as the initiator in the journey to discover the authentic self.

### 1.3 Language

I am using 'Millennial' or 'Generation Y' to refer to anyone born 1980-1999, giving preference to the former term as outlined in *Generations and the Millennial Generation* (Chapter 1). As I demonstrate in that chapter, authors and scholars have employed different labels and different birth-years to discuss the same cohort, making the use of secondary literature confusing at times. Given that I will be employing terms such as 'Generation X' and 'Boomer Generation,' I will follow Mannheim (1993/1928) in using 'generation' in the popular sense, while recognising that a 'generation' thus defined should more properly be referred to in sociological terminology as a 'cohort,' with 'generation' reserved for the description of kinship relationships.

I use the terms 'mission' and 'missions' to refer to the phenomenon of people relocating to another country with the purpose of sharing one's religious faith with others; 'missionary' is used for an individual who does so. In *Contextualising Christian Foreign Missions* (Chapter 3) I discuss the changing understandings of 'mission' as a concept, while in *Being: The Identity of a Missionary* (Chapter 6) I outline my Millennial respondents' views on the term and its use. Despite general acceptance among both my participants and mission theologians that 'missionary' may refer to any Christian active in what Wright (2006) calls "The Mission of God," I follow popular

understanding both among Christians and the wider British society in using 'mission' in its various forms as short-hand for 'foreign mission,' 'overseas mission' or 'international mission.'

#### 1.4 Thesis Overview

I begin, in *Generations and the Millennial Generation* (Chapter 1), with an introduction to the study of age cohorts or generations. This then leads into an examination of the literature around the Millennial Generation. I discuss the characteristics of Millennials as shown in the literature under four headings: *Private World*, *Public World*, *Wider World* and *Inner World*. The first of these sections looks at parenting and family. *Public World* refers to Millennials' interactions with others both at work and at play. I then turn to their connectedness to the *Wider World* through technology, travel and their experience of growing up in multicultural Britain. The section headed *Inner World* considers issues of identity and spirituality, leading into *The Religion of British Millennials* (Chapter 2), where I address the religious context in which British Millennials have been raised. In that chapter I discuss the data regarding the decline in religious belief and practice in the UK, particularly as this affects Millennials. I then focus on the lived religion of British evangelicals and contemporary expressions of Christianity. Finally, I set out some of the emphases in the faith of Christian Millennials. My third chapter, *Contextualising Christian Foreign Missions*, provides a short overview of the history of Christian foreign mission in the modern era, as well as a discussion of contemporary issues in mission. These three chapters serve, therefore, to set the scene for my research.

As described in *Methodology* (Chapter 4), this research is based on twenty-one semi-structured interviews, seventeen of which were with British Millennial missionaries. I also interviewed four missionaries from previous generations for purposes of comparison. Participants were recruited initially through mission organisations and through personal contacts. In order to widen my reach, I encouraged those I interviewed to pass my information to others they encountered in their work. Due to the locations of foreign mission workers, I anticipated that the majority of interviews would be carried out over the internet using Skype or similar VoIP programmes; the coincidence of my data collection phase with COVID-19 lockdowns meant that this was exclusively the case. *Methodology* (Chapter 4) therefore includes a discussion of

internet interviewing from both ethical and practical perspectives. Given my own background in Christian missionary work, I also address the “insider-outsider” issue in research and my own positionality.

In Chapters 5-7 I present the qualitative data I gathered, under the headings *Becoming: The Journey into Mission*, *Being: The Identity of a Missionary* and *Doing: The Work of Mission*. These mirror the first three of my four research questions set out above. The final research question, regarding the differences or similarities between Millennial missionaries and their older counterparts, is referred to throughout where the data offer such insight. In *Becoming* (Chapter 5), I show the significance of exposure in childhood to a Christian narrative through parents and involvement in churches, youth groups, etc. I also discuss the concept of vocation, considering how participants’ sense of calling develops. *Being* (Chapter 6) sets out the various identities through which participants understand themselves. Beginning with their relationship with the *missionary* label, I go on to look at their identities as Christian, foreigner, family member and professional. Here I also discuss issues regarding mental health which were raised by participants. I consider the practical aspects of their work in *Doing* (Chapter 7), exploring the nature of the mission carried out by participants as an expression of authentic faith as they seek to align believing, belonging and behaving. Related to this, I discuss their professional relationships with local teams, mission organisations and individual supporters.

In *Theocentric Authenticity: The Millennial Missionary Identity* (Chapter 8) I further explore theoretical implications arising from the data, showing how the evangelical Christian discourse to which participants are exposed forms the foundation of their theocentric self-understanding, while elements of the wider discourse of twenty-first century Britain interact with and are interpreted through this Christian framework. I show how Millennial missionaries share with their nonreligious peers the salience of authenticity, nevertheless doing so from a theocentric understanding of the self. Chapter 9 presents my *Conclusions and Recommendations*, in response to the Research Questions set out above. I conclude by reflecting upon the usefulness of generation as a category for sociological study.

I begin, therefore, with three introductory chapters which provide the context for my research from three different perspectives: *Generations and the Millennial Generation*

(Chapter 1), *The Religion of British Millennials* (Chapter 2) and *Contextualising Christian Foreign Missions* (Chapter 3).

## CHAPTER 1      Generations and the Millennial Generation

As I embarked on this study of the Millennial Generation, the first hurdle I faced was to define them. In common parlance, the word *Millennial* is often synonymous with ‘young person,’ with no attempt at definition made. In this first chapter, therefore, I set out how I am using the term. I look at the definitions and descriptions of the Millennial Generation offered by previous authors and identify key influences on the formation of Millennials. I begin, however, with a discussion of the history and usefulness of “generation” as a means of categorisation.

### 1.1 Generational Theory

Terms such as “Generation X”, the “Boomer Generation” or “Gen Y” are in common usage, but are often employed without proper scrutiny or even definition (White, 2013). At first glance the concept of a generation may seem obvious, denoting the kinship within human families made up of children, parents, grandparents and great grandparents. Yet even within one family overlap can occur, with a child being perhaps older than his or her uncle, or having grandparents the same age as an aunt. Taking this to the level of society as a whole, generations are constantly overlapping. The term has, therefore, come to be used more often with reference to people who co-exist within the same historical period, experiencing the same events and influences. In his seminal essay regarding generations, however, Mannheim (1993/1928, p.281), shows that while all generations alive at a certain time may experience the same event, its impact on them may be quite different depending on their age at the time, an effect termed “the non-contemporaneity of the contemporaneous” by Pinder (cited in Mannheim, 1993/1928, p.285). Thus a generation cannot be defined simply as all those existing when a given event took place, but rather as a group who experienced that event in a certain way. The recent COVID pandemic, for example, has impacted contemporary generations in different ways, with younger cohorts deeply affected (Governale *et al* 2023; Maunder *et al.* 2022). For many members of older generations, COVID-19 and its related restrictions are already fading as a brief – if unpleasant – memory; for younger people, those two years were formative. According to Mannheim

(1993/1928, p.298), it is our “early impressions” – the experiences of childhood – which together form our inner “natural view” of the world. It is in this period that primary socialisation occurs, providing the lens through which we interpret reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1991/1966). Thus significant events and experiences come to shape the thinking of those who are children when they occur, creating a generational effect among those of a similar age. I therefore discuss below some of the formative events in the lives of British Millennials.

As Mannheim points out, involvement in the events of the day does not necessarily mean that everybody thinks alike. Rather, different groups may respond in different ways to the same experiences and interpret in different ways the same ideas (Bristow 2019:78). Mannheim (1993/1928, p.304) refers to such groups as “generation units.” If this is indeed the case, we may expect Millennial Christian missionaries to reflect many of the same priorities and principles as secular members of their generation, while interpreting them in different ways.

Mannheim (1993/1928, p.303ff) goes on to show that it is not simply the age of an individual but rather the degree of participation in significant events of the period which determine whether or not he or she can be considered part of an “actual” generation. Mannheim’s illustration is of the differing “active or passive experience” of rural versus urban youth, arguing that “mere contemporaneity becomes sociologically significant only when it also involves participation in the same historical and social circumstances.” This could be said to equate to the modern notion of one’s being socially included or excluded. Certainly, there are differing degrees to which British Millennials participate in the same “social circumstances.” However, within Britain at least, most Millennials, regardless of their racial or economic background, have grown up watching the same TV shows and *YouTube* clips and listening to the same music, and have for the most part been through the same education system. The internet and 24-hour television have increased their equality of access to events, ideas and trends, or what Mannheim (1993/1928, p.303) termed exposure to “...the social and intellectual symptoms of a process of dynamic de-stabilization,” leading to a greater proportion of Millennials sharing that “active” experience through which Mannheim argues that they can be identified with an “actual” generation .

A generation, then, is defined as a cohort of people born within a defined time period with the result that certain key events are experienced when they are at approximately similar ages, while significant ideas circulating in society during their childhood form part of their primary socialisation, thereby creating a basis for their interpretation of reality. A generation's response to and interpretation of such stimuli endow it with specific characteristics, which are less likely to be evident in contemporaries who experienced the same events whilst at a different age or indeed in cohorts who lived through a different set of events.

#### *1.1.1 Age, Period and Cohort Effects*

Until recently, much of the literature on Millennials was also a literature of youth, with criticisms of this generation reflecting the criticism often levelled at young people by older generations throughout history (Arnett, 2013, p.5; Duffy, 2021, p.13). As the oldest Millennials are now in their forties, this is an interesting time to examine which characteristics have faded with youth and which have indeed become entrenched. Pilcher (1995, p.24) warns us to be wary of the interplay between historical effects, biological ageing, and sociological or cohort effects, while Duffy (2021) illustrates these effects using global data on a range of issues. For example, Duffy (2021, p.77) shows to be false claims that Millennials are less committed to their job than previous generations: in fact they change job less often than Generation X did at the same age. Job instability itself is a period effect, having become more prevalent for all age-groups; however, it always impacts the least experienced employees the most and therefore has disproportionately affected Millennials, thus being also an age effect. Therefore individuals are moulded by the interplay of physiological age, contemporary events and trends and also society's expectation of what we ought to be and do. These cultural expectations may include gender roles and the life course, which until recently were clearly defined for most people in British society: one would finish education, then begin working, get married, buy a house, have children. Such linear progression is no longer the expectation of most Millennials, with key life course events often occurring in a different order or not at all.

#### *1.1.2 Generationalism*

The popularity of generations as a concept can in part be explained by the increased separation between generations (Falk & Falk, p.2005). Children grow up surrounded by

children, in schools and leisure activities where they are separated from the adult world (Pilcher, 1995, p.2). Many young adults live in a world of studies and socialising with their peers, whether on- or off-line. At the other end of the spectrum, older people may live in retirement homes and attend day-time social activities. This segregation of each generation from the others increases the sense of a “generation gap.” A lack of personal contact between generations can bring about a tendency toward suspicion.

The focus on intergenerational conflict in the popular media certainly has this tendency, with “Boomer blaming” common (Bristow, 2019) and Millennials absolved of any responsibility for the challenges they face by some, while dismissed as “Snowflakes” by others. White (2013, p.217) warns that generationalism can “...mask diversity, marginalize individuals, and evoke a deterministic conception of human agency.” That is to say, we are what we are because of our birth cohort and there is nothing we can do to change it, a perspective which can lead to discrimination on the basis of generation, with all members of a given generation considered to share certain negative traits. Strauss and Howe (1997) fall into this category, with their deterministic notion of a “Fourth Turning,” whereby every fourth generation (around every 80-100 years, or once in living memory) is particularly significant in US history. They suggest that US history can be interpreted as a cycle of eras each lasting 20-25 years, with the generation coming of age during each era reflecting its mood. It is this generation’s move into middle age and therefore positions of influence, coupled with significant events at the time, which combine to bring about the next “Turning.” Strauss and Howe liken the Millennial generation to the GI generation (born 1901-1924), who are largely characterised as heroes in US history. It is important to remember that Strauss and Howe were writing in the 1990s, when Millennials were still children: their understanding of Millennial traits is based on their conjectures regarding US history. Therefore White’s point (above) is crucial in the study of generations. As Bristow (2019, p.55) has said, “Generations are not scientific units of measurement – they are stories by which we make sense of our lives.” I contend, however, that there remains a distinction to be made between individual traits and generational traits. We cannot deny the role of parenting on the formation of the individual, yet siblings may respond differently to the same parents. In the same way, when trends in thought and life experience change, we can expect this to be reflected across an entire generation,

although some individuals may respond in different ways. Generational trends are changes in culture: to some extent we are indeed determined by our culture, whether national or generational. My aim in this research has been to allow the voices of individual interviewees to come through, measuring the extent to which they do or do not reflect popular understandings of their generation.

#### *1.1.2.1 Defining the Millennial Generation*

“Generation Y” was originally a place-holder title for the generation following on from “Generation X.” As the generation grew and began to develop its values and express itself, other suggestions were made, including “Generation dotcom” and “Generation Next.” Epithets such as “Echo Boom” and “Boomerang”<sup>3</sup> were popular because many expected – or perhaps hoped – that the new generation would be similar to the Boomers, not just in numbers but in the kind of societal changes wrought. In an ABC poll in the United States reported by Strauss and Howe (2000), however, the term “Millennials” came top among young people themselves as a term for the generation, followed by “Don’t Label us.”

In this thesis I have chosen to define as “Millennial” those born 1980-1999, thus entering adulthood in the early years of the new Millennium. I recognise that these dates are not absolute boundaries: clearly there is little difference between an individual born on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1979 and one born 1<sup>st</sup> January 1980 (Trzesniewski & Donnellan, 2010, p.62). Lynch (2002) suggests we talk about people with a Generation X “attitude” rather than those born between specific dates. While helpful as an idea, this is impractical when designing research. I argue that generational traits are on a continuum, being identifiable in some individuals sooner than in others: some of Generation X will display Millennial characteristics before members of Generation Y. That said, it is often the desires of one generation – the ideals they fight for – which become the norms of the next. Tolerance, for example, was the buzz-word of the 1990s: it was a contested area when Generation X were young adults. For many of those growing up in or after that period, it is not even an issue (Twenge, 2006). Mannheim (1993/1928, p.298ff) stated as “fact” the idea that “...any two generations

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<sup>3</sup> Millennials are referred to as the Boomerang Generation in two different ways. Early use of the term referenced the expectation that they would be similar to Boomers. More recently, Millennials have been called the Boomerang Generation because so many have returned to live with their parents as adults.

following one another always fight different opponents....” He then goes on to show how this contrast between generations with a thirty year gap is eased by “intermediary generations” which are not so starkly different. Thus while Mannheim is proposing a profound difference between generations, he also allows that change occurs gradually over the thirty-year period he sees as dividing one generation from the next.

Various dates for the birth years of Millennials have been put forward by different authors (see Table 1.1), some defending strongly their view. The Pew Research Center, which many commentators take as their source, defines Generation Y as those born 1981-1996. Strauss and Howe (2000) argue that the Millennial generation must begin in 1982, pointing to a change in attitudes toward parenting in the United States. Even they, however, allow that generations are “fuzzy at the edges” (Howe, 2000, p.41). Tapscott (2008) uses the terms “Net Generation,” “Net Gen” or “N Gen” to refer to those born 1977-1997. Sheahan (2005, p.3) defines Generation Y as born between 1978 and 1994, because of the increased birth rate in the US and Europe during that period. Twenge (2006) creates her own category – GenMe – with birth years stretching all the way from 1970 to 1999, just enough to include her own birth in 1971 through to the youngest schoolchildren when her book was published. However, in her more recent book, *iGen*, looking at those with birth years beginning from 1995, Twenge (2017, p.5) seems to accept more conventional definitions of Generation X (1965 – 1979) and Millennials (1980 – 1994). Strauss and Howe (2006, p.19) list Millennials as born “1982 – Now” and a number of authors define Millennials as those born “after 1980” (Kalpathi, 2016).

I have chosen the birth year parameters 1980 – 1999 in order to encompass most of the periods put forward by previous literature. Employing a wide range of birth years enables me to use the interview process to determine whether there is indeed a strong case for setting the boundaries in particular years. The extent of disagreement between authors also makes it difficult to compare literature on Millennials reliably and might justifiably be said to weaken the very concept of the generation. There remains, however, a remarkable level of agreement as to the defining characteristics of the Millennial generation, wherever one draws the line. I summarise some of these traits below.

| Author                 | Publication Date | Millennial Birth Years |                    |
|------------------------|------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
|                        |                  | From                   | To                 |
| Pew Research Center    |                  | 1981                   | 1996               |
| Strauss & Howe         | 2000, 2006       | 1982                   | "now"              |
| Tapscott               | 2008             | 1977                   | 1997               |
| Twenge                 | 2006             | 1970                   | 1999               |
| Twenge                 | 2017             | 1980                   | 1994               |
| Carlson                | 2008             | 1983                   | 2001               |
| Possamai               | 2009             | 1981                   | 2000               |
| Ng, Schweitzer & Lyons | 2010             | 1980                   | "in or after 1980" |
| Tulgan                 | 2001             | 1978                   | 1984               |
| Tulgan                 | 2009             | 1978                   | 1991               |
| Alsop                  | 2008             | 1980                   | 2001               |
| Savage et.al           | 2005             | 1980                   | "after 1980"       |
| Sheahan                | 2005             | 1978                   | 1994               |

Table 1.1 Millennials in Literature

The literature also covers a range of nationalities and cultures, with studies carried out all over the world meaning that the cultures and experiences of the particular Millennials under study can vary. Nevertheless, as I argue below, this is the most global generation to date. I have drawn on literature from various nations, while attempting to give greater weight to my own (UK) context.

## 1.2 Key Events

As major events and societal changes take place, children look to their parents and other significant adults for clues as to how to interpret and respond to the world around them. Berger & Luckmann (1991/1966) describe this as the primary socialisation by which individuals learn the narratives of the families and cultures into which they are born. It is these early experiences and the discourse employed in their interpretation which set the tone for the individual's subsequent understanding of reality. Mannheim (1993/1928, p.298, emphasis in original), too, points to the common experience of certain events in one's youth as formative in creating a "...*natural view* of the world. All later experiences then tend to receive their meaning from this...." It is therefore necessary in any study of Millennials to think about the events which took place during the formative years of their childhood and adolescence (Bristow, 2019, p.74). In this section, I review some of the key events of the 1990s and 2000s, when each of those I am defining as Millennial reached ten years old.

Britain's oldest Millennials were born into a world epitomised by comic creation *Loadsamoney*<sup>4</sup> and Glasnost.<sup>5</sup> It was a period of hope and high expectations. At the end of 1989, as these first Millennials were becoming aware of the wider world, the Berlin Wall fell and with it communism's hold on Central and Eastern Europe. This wave of positivity continued with Nelson Mandela's release in 1990 followed by the end of Apartheid in 1994. In Britain, New Labour came to power in 1997, emphasising hope and a better future. 1998 saw the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, formally ending decades of violence in Northern Ireland.

There were, of course, negative events too. Terms such as "ethnic cleansing" and "genocide" entered common parlance through the civil wars of Bosnia and Rwanda. Britain was involved in the first Gulf war in 1990-92, but it was a short and distant war which quickly achieved its aims ending with a peace treaty, so did not undermine the general sense of peace and stability. This was, however, shattered on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001 by the attacks on the World Trade Center, followed by other suicide attacks including those on the London transport system in July 2005. These events led to the so-called "War on Terror," including Britain's lengthy and increasingly unpopular involvement in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Natural disasters occurred too, most significantly the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami on Boxing Day 2004. Then came the financial crash of 2008, just as older Millennials were entering employment. For Millennials, the world no longer seemed the safe and prosperous place they had been taught to expect.

What distinguishes the Millennial generation from its predecessors is not the ups and downs of the world events during childhood and youth, but rather Millennials' ability to watch news updates and video footage continually. Wars and disasters are no longer summed up in a headline and some statistics: they are real people's stories of suffering, survival and loss. Instead of merely hearing about violence, it is now possible to watch it in real time or on repeat either on TV's 24-hour news channels or via the internet.

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<sup>4</sup> Harry Enfield's comic character *Loadsamoney* was a vulgar twenty-something who waved wads of banknotes while boasting of his spending and denigrating the poor.

<sup>5</sup> Meaning "openness" in Russian, *glasnost* was a policy introduced by Gorbachev in the USSR in the 1980s, which was an important step towards greater freedoms for citizens of the USSR as well as better relations with the West.

The expansion of communications technology during the period of Millennials' childhood and youth was phenomenal. Early Millennials remember using a dial-up internet connection to send email. By the late 1990s Instant Messaging services were becoming popular and in 2004 *Facebook* was launched, although for some years it was less popular than the music-sharing social network *MySpace*. By this time laptop (or notebook) computers had become common, allowing access to the internet away from home, school or the office. The late 1990s and early 2000s saw an increase in the popularity of personal mobile telephones and of communication by text message. However, it was only in the mid-2010s that smartphones and tablet computers became widely used for accessing the internet. Millennials therefore grew up with an incredible pace of change and with an expectation of easy communication. They are not, however, to be confused with the generation that has had touchscreens and mobile internet from their earliest years; Millennials simply used these to their full as and when they became available. *Wikipedia* was launched in 2001 and *Twitter* in 2006, the same year that "to google" officially became a verb in the Oxford English Dictionary. The formative years of Millennials thus saw massive growth in the availability of information and in what one might call the "democratisation" of information: the ability of anyone anywhere to contribute their ideas and opinions.

One of the greatest successes of 1990s and 2000s popular culture was – perhaps surprisingly – a series of books: *Harry Potter* was first published in 1997 and first adapted for film in 2003. Video games also became more popular, allowing the user to participate in increasingly realistic situations in ways which they could not in real life. Reality TV was born during this period, with *Big Brother* beginning in the UK in 2000, and the launch of competitions such as *X-factor* and *Come Dine With Me*. Some programmes of this genre offered viewers the ability to influence the outcome by voting, while participants in such shows gained the potential to move from obscurity to stardom. Lawrence (2012, p.8) suggests that there has been a "...shift from heroes, who were generally honoured for doing something good or noble, to celebrities, who are generally known for their antics...." I now consider how these and other changes have impacted the thinking of the Millennial Generation.

## 1.3 Private World

### 1.3.1 *Parenting*

Changing trends in parenting have had a profound impact on the Millennial generation. With the increasing availability of contraception and abortion leading to fewer unwanted pregnancies, this has been called the most wanted generation ever (Howe, 2000; Twenge, 2006). Many Millennials have nevertheless grown up in single-parent households, or in “blended” families with their parent’s new partner and his/her children (Lawrence, 2012). Popular parenting styles have given rise to a confident generation with a strong sense of entitlement. The term “helicopter parents” has come to be used for those who always seem to be hovering around their children, whatever they are doing (Raymo & Raymo, 2014; Lawrence, 2012); GenX parents determined not to be like their own parents who they felt were never around. As the children grew up, the constant connection was continued through technology. Such parents have been instrumental in articulating and reinforcing discourse, providing a foundation on which Millennials have constructed identity. As is reflected in my own data, many Millennials have a very strong relationship with their parents (Bristow, 2019; Espinoza, 2012), confiding in them and respecting their wishes (Raymo & Raymo, 2014). So many parents now play an active role in deciding their children’s choice of university that some British universities offer a dedicated parent track at open days for prospective students.<sup>6</sup> As independent adults, many of these young people now seek mentors who will give them the time and attention they had from their parents. Having grown up with parents who were involved in all aspects of their lives and proactive in helping them overcome difficult experiences, regular feedback is their expected norm (Lawrence, 2012).

### 1.3.2 *Emerging Adulthood*

The “...time in-between adolescents’ reliance on parents and adults’ long-term commitments in love and work...” (Arnett, 2012, p.13) has become known as “Emerging Adulthood,” a term coined by Arnett (2000) to refer to those in their late teens and twenties. While physiological maturity is occurring earlier (Arnett, 2012,

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<sup>6</sup> Parental investment in a child’s choice of university is, of course, not simply emotional: tuition fees were introduced in 1998, just as the first Millennials were entering higher education.

p.11), many are arriving later at the traditional markers of adulthood, such as having children and finishing full-time education (Pilcher, 1995, p.78). This leaves a considerable number of years in which people are neither fully child nor fully adult. It is a period in which contemporary society places fewer expectations on young people, allowing them the freedom to explore and experiment in work, love and worldviews (Arnett, 2000, p.473). Arnett (2000, p.471) describes emerging adulthood as “...the only period in life in which nothing is normative.” While Twenge (2013) sees today’s young adults as increasingly narcissistic, Arnett (2012, p.12-13) argues that emerging adulthood is a time of identity exploration and therefore necessarily self-focused.

Data from the UK Office for National Statistics clearly shows changes to the life course impacting Millennials in early adulthood (ONS, 2019b). Significant life course events such as having children, leaving the parental home and getting married are occurring later (Pilcher, 1995). By the time all Millennials had reached adulthood, the average age at which people leave full time education had risen to 19.3, compared to 17.8 twenty years earlier (ONS, 2019b). The most recent census demonstrates how many adult Millennials are living with their parents, with an increase across all age groups of such “adult children” as compared to the previous census (ONS, 2023). The order in which key life course events occur is also changing, with Millennials in their twenties more likely to have children than to be married (ONS, 2019a). Twenge (2017) sees this slowing of the life course as evidence that young people are seeking to remain in the safety of childhood for longer, rather than taking on the responsibilities of adulthood. She points out that parents of “iGen” (born after 1995) always know where their teenagers are; but the teens themselves do not see that as restrictive or intrusive. Tapscott (2009, p.221), however, explains that when Baby Boomers were children they would roam freely outside, escaping parental control; they were therefore eager to leave the constraints of the family home as soon as they were old enough. He sees the willingness of today’s young adults to move back into the parental home as a result of the increasing democratisation of the family. “Net Geners” or Millennials, he argues, have grown up having a voice in family decisions and teaching their parents about technology. However, whenever they have left the home they have been watched and accompanied, constantly shielded from possible dangers. Today’s young adults, Tapscott suggests, have found their freedom and independence through their smartphones and computers without leaving the safety of the home.

## 1.4 Public World

### 1.4.1 *Safety and Risk*

As children Millennials were constantly supervised and accompanied, with latchkey kids<sup>7</sup> going out of fashion (Twenge, 2017) and after-school clubs flourishing. Child car seats have been vastly improved with legislation to match, and even playgrounds and ponds offer a safety-first approach. During the school careers of Millennials, British schools introduced increasingly stringent security measures. This was, in part, a reaction to the tragic killing in Dunblane of sixteen children and a teacher in 1996 (when the oldest Millennials were finishing high school), followed by a knife attack at a nursery in Wolverhampton a few months later.

As a result, Millennials have grown up more wary of risk than preceding generations (Twenge, 2017, p.143). A Department for Transport factsheet (2015) shows that the number of young drivers involved in accidents had fallen substantially since the 1990s. The rate of pregnancy among under 18s in England and Wales has shown consistent falls since 2007 (ONS 2019a), encompassing the teenage years of those born in the 1990s. An annual survey of 16-24 year olds in England from 2005 (when the oldest Millennials were 25) to 2015 (when the youngest Millennials were 16) showed that levels of alcohol abstention rose from 18% to 29%, while not having a drink in the previous week increased from 35%-50% (Ng Fat *et al.*, 2018). Twenge (2017, p.143ff) argues that it is young people's focus on safety, rather than a new moralism, which has led to falling rates of alcohol consumption and teenage pregnancy. Parents of Millennials sought like never before to protect their children not only from actual harm but also from anything which might be deemed upsetting. Twenge (2017, p.177) describes young adults whose "...definition of safety has expanded to include their emotions as well as their bodies." There is a sense that one should be protected from opinions which might offend. Universities have created "safe spaces" to allow students to avoid a speaker they disagree with, and Student Unions have curtailed the activities of societies whose beliefs might offend others. In response to the ensuing debate

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<sup>7</sup> Latchkey kids were children who came home from school alone and let themselves into their homes before their parent(s) returned from work. The exact origins of the term are difficult to establish, but it appears to have been in use in Britain during the Second World War, when increasing numbers of mothers went out to work. As women's employment grew in the post-war years, the term's popularity also increased.

around freedom of speech, a British Parliamentary Committee found that some of this curtailment came about as a result of Millennial students themselves protesting, while much was also due to university bureaucracy and a misunderstanding of guidelines from the Charities Commission (Weale, 2018).

#### 1.4.2 *Having a Voice*

From childhood Millennials have been encouraged to make their views known, not just at home but through their schooling. Education systems taught young people that their opinions matter, while Millennial children and teenagers were much more likely than preceding generations to have a say in family decisions such as choosing a new car (Tapscott, 2009; Espinoza, 2012). The internet, too, enables them to express an opinion in the public domain on anything from the latest *YouTube* video to world affairs. As one charity leader has said: “My tweet affects people, for real, and can affect people across the world. The way Millennials communicate has changed the way people engage with social causes” (Hicks, cited in Feldmann *et al.*, 2019, p.3). While older generations use the resources the internet offers, Millennials are constantly changing it (Tapscott, 2009, p.10). They like to work with others and are comfortable doing so without necessarily being in the same location, wanting to contribute to bringing change and innovation to the products and services they use (Tapscott, 2009, p.11).

#### 1.4.3 *Work*

Millennials carry into the workplace this expectation that their views will be heard. If they can “tweet” anyone in the world regardless of status, they struggle with traditional hierarchies (Lawrence, 2012, p.5) and expect to be able to take their ideas directly to leadership (Tapscott, 2009). Regarding Millennial involvement in non-profit organisations, Saratovsky and Feldman (2013, p.74) suggest that “Millennials don’t just want to help non-profits; they actually want to play a role in leading them and making them better by putting their brains, expertise and skills to work.” Of course, this attitude is often construed by management and older employees as arrogance.

Millennials want paid employment with a good salary that will enable them to be active members of the consumer society, yet they “...approach paid employment with a volunteer mentality; if things do not work out I will leave and find something else” (Lawrence, 2012, p.20). Whereas popular opinion often criticises Millennials for their

supposed lack of commitment, constantly hopping from one job to the next, it may be the case that this is simply a reflection of the job market they find themselves in: having to take any job they can, then moving on when either that job ends or something better suited to their skills and education turns up (Duffy, 2021). Yet while older generations bemoan the loss of security, “...today's young people are generally comfortable about handling uncertainty” (Roberts, 2008, p.82), indeed, they may “...find a job for life boring” (Savage *et al.*, 2005, p.7). Tapscott (2009, p.75) suggests that young adults enjoy the freedom of trying different jobs and moving on “...if they find another one that offers more money, more challenging work, the chance to travel, or just a change.” Many will take a career break or change careers entirely – even more than once – as they become bored or disillusioned with what they are doing. Talk of a “quarter-life crisis” has even become popular (Mercy, 2017; Rosen, 2018).

Where many in Generation X learned the importance of a healthy work-life balance, Millennials are blurring the boundaries of work and home or social life (Saratovsky & Feldman, 2013, p.150). Research carried out by Tapscott’s organisation has shown that “...they expect to choose where and when they work; they use technology to escape traditional office space and hours; and they integrate their home and social lives with work life” (Tapscott, 2009, p.75; Lawrence, 2012, p.5). So Millennials will stay connected to work email and take phone calls outside of office hours, but in return they expect to be able to check their social media while at work and to have flexible working hours (Tapscott, 2009, p.92, Saratovsky & Feldman, 2013, p.150).

Because authenticity is a key value for Millennials (Tapscott, 2009), they are likely to leave an organisation which appears dishonest or secretive and more likely to choose an employer whose ethos is in line with their own (Cantero-Gomez, 2019). For some the reality might be a brief “gap-year” experience, after which they find themselves in a regular job. Others will invest their spare time and money in supporting a cause, such as environmental issues. Vincett *et al.* (2012) note that many of the Christian young adults who participated in their research are in caring professions. Many Millennials want a job which is more than just a job: something that feels worthwhile (McGinnis Johnson *et al.*, 2016; Agovino, 2016). Egger (2011p.23) claims that Millennials are “... hell bent on merging their personal, professional, and spiritual lives... and... want a job that does good—a job that is my philanthropy.” A survey of 18 to 29-year-olds found

that “...80% agreed with the statement, ‘It is more important to me to enjoy my job than to make a lot of money,’ and 86% agreed that ‘It is important to me to have a career that does some good in the world’” (Arnett *et al.*, 2013, p.18). However, Duffy (2021) points out that every generation wants work that is enjoyable and worthwhile: in the event, most are pragmatic, taking whichever employment meets their financial needs.

#### 1.4.4 Finance

Studies show that the Millennial generation in Britain is worse off financially than the previous two generations at the same age (Duffy, 2021; Financial Times, 2018). Even prior to the current cost-of-living crisis, student debt and the rise in rents relative to starting salaries made saving challenging, with “...a combination of skyrocketing housing costs, stricter mortgage lending rules, stagnating incomes, rising debt and faltering economic growth...” (Duffy, 2021, p.46). Millennials are sometimes referred to as the Boomerang generation because so many have returned to live in the parental home as young adults. For those who do move out, so much of their income is spent on rent that becoming a home-owner can seem an impossible dream.

#### 1.4.5 Friends and Others

Millennials value friendship (Day, 2011) and love to spend time with friends, whether in person or through communications technology. When older generations observe their constant virtual communication, the tendency is to criticise the hours spent in these “unreal” relationships. Yet for Millennials who have had this technology since their youth, virtual friendships and virtual conversations are every bit as real as if the person were in the room. Indeed, an experience may seem to them less real if it has not been shared with their network of online acquaintances. Millennial authors Saratovsky and Feldman (2013, p.14) argue that “...what drives Millennials even more than technology and social media are the personal relationships and human connections they forge along the way.”

As mentioned above, tolerance has always been a key value for Millennials (Savage *et al.*, 2005, p.41), who grew up watching their elders win increasing rights and acceptance for minority groups amid a discourse of equal rights. With the expanding visibility of diversity across the population, Millennials are more accepting of difference: “...they support gay marriage, take racial and gender equality as givens, and

have a generally open and positive attitude toward immigration” (Saratovsky & Feldman, 2013, p.6).

### 1.5 Wider World

While the oldest Millennials remember dial-up internet connections and the earliest mobile telephones, the generation has been referred to as “digital natives” (Willetts, 2010, p.55; Lawrence, 2012, p.5) because of the speed and ease with which they adapted to the frequent technological developments of their youth. Younger Millennials do not merely use the internet: it has become part of who they are. “Steeped in digital technology and social media, they treat their multi-tasking hand-held gadgets almost like a body part – for better and worse” (Pew Research Center, 2010, p.1). This connectivity extends beyond their own network of friends and experiences to the entire world. They might play online games with opponents in Australia, watch music videos from Asia, and enjoy the soap operas of Latin America. Today’s young adults are more aware of the rest of the world than ever before. They can access news stories and perspectives from around the world and hear the opinions of their peers in other countries while themselves contributing to a global conversation. Millennials are able to appropriate aspects of different cultures and traditions in a process which has been described as “glocalization” (Savage *et al.*, 2005, p.7).

Millennials are frequently described as a “me-first” generation or simply “Generation Me” (Twenge, 2006). A level of narcissism can also be viewed as a normal part of youth and the process of self-definition (Arnett, 2000). If we acknowledge that short-term happiness is a key value for their generation (Savage *et al.*, 2005), it makes sense for Millennials to be self-focused to some extent. However, combined with the greater awareness of events around the world brought about by their connectedness on the one hand and belief that all individuals and lifestyles are equally valid on the other, this Millennial emphasis on happiness can lead to activism, particularly in support of individual causes (Egeler, 2003), as Millennials believe such happiness to be a right shared by all.

### 1.6 Inner World

Savage *et al.* (2005) use the expression “midi-narrative” in contrast to a “meta-narrative” to show that British Millennials taking part in their research appeared to

have little desire to find one grand story through which to interpret life, preferring to focus on the immediate. Few of the participants had any significant connection to religion, yet they found a coherent sense of identity in their present (Savage *et al.*, 2005, p.37). Whereas in past generations one's identity was conferred by society, today it is constructed through an exploration of the self. Rather than conforming ourselves to a standard ordained for us by society, we are to discover the true self which dwells deep within us, thereby realising our potential through an examination of the inner being (Guignon, 2004). Millennials seek cohesion between their inclinations or feelings, their beliefs and their behaviours leading to a culture of authenticity, as noted above. Taylor (2018/1991) argues that authenticity itself has become a moral ideal: being true to oneself rather than trying to fulfil society's expectations (Twenge 2006, p.39, Savage *et al.* 2005, p.41). His interpretation is that the right to personal choice has become so elevated as to assume the position of a moral because the route to personal fulfilment is seen as being in touch with one's inner being and living in accord with its inclinations (Taylor, 2018/1991, p.64). Rather than a means to fulfil a moral ideal outside of oneself, self-discovery is seen as an end in itself. Taylor (2018/1991, p.37) argues that "All options are equally worthy, because they are freely chosen, and it is choice that confers worth." Millennials therefore tend to respect those seen as following their own path to self-realisation.

Though individual choice is lauded, every step in the journey is posted on social media for the approval of others. While we are urged to search inside ourselves for our true identity, in practice this never occurs in complete isolation (Taylor, 2018/1991, p.34ff). Our exploration of self takes place in the context in which we are raised, including our family of origin and other close relationships as well as the wider society. Taylor (2018/1991, p.40-41) terms these external influences "horizons of significance," arguing that it is they which confer meaning to one's identity:

Only if I exist in a world in which history, or the demands of nature, or the needs of my fellow human beings, or the duties of citizenship, or the call of God, or something else of this order matters crucially, can I define an identity for myself that is not trivial. Authenticity is not the enemy of demands that emanate from beyond the self; it supposes such demands.

On this view, searching inside oneself without reference to the people or ideals one holds dear can lead to an identity devoid of meaning for the individual. Once

discovered and expressed, the individual identity requires recognition and acknowledgement from others (Taylor, 2018/1991, p.50; Guignon, 2004, p.66), with all expressions of identity being treated with equal respect.

For the Christian, it is God who determines who one is. Yet how this identity is to be played out in each individual case is discovered in dialogue with Him through prayer and discernment. In past generations, to live as a Christian was to abide by one's position and duties as given by society. Today's Christians, in contrast, are encouraged to discover who or what God wants them to become (Thomas, 2018). Contemporary British culture's call to "be who you really are" for Christians becomes "be who God made you to be!" This is not a return to the premodern era (Guignon, 2004), where feelings and desires were to be subordinated to the fulfilling of the role or place externally defined for the individual; rather God is seen as the originator of emotions and inclinations, which should be explored so that the individual might fulfil God's intentions for their life.

## 1.7 Conclusions

This thesis considers the formation of a Millennial Christian identity in which the close relationship members of this generation often have with parents leads to the inheritance of an evangelical narrative, which is then sustained and developed through interaction with leaders, friends and life partners. At the same time, however, I show how these young Christians are influenced by the events and trends common to their generation in Britain as outlined in this chapter, seeking to negotiate a path which is personally authentic. In the next chapter I will continue this exploration of what Millennials believe, examining the religious context in which British Millennials have grown up and their relationship to religion and spirituality.

## CHAPTER 2      The Religion of British Millennials

The 2021 UK Census produced a significant headline: for the first time ever, fewer than half of Britons identified as Christian (Roskams, 2022, p.4). In this chapter I discuss the religious context in which the Millennial missionary participants in my research have grown up and been educated, demonstrating how atypical for their generation is the decision to follow a religious vocation. I consider the trends relating to religion in Britain, before giving an overview of British Evangelicalism and some contemporary expressions of Christianity and discussing the nature of Millennial Christianity.

### 2.1 The UK Religious Context

The religious landscape of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Britain would be unrecognisable to the 18<sup>th</sup> century pioneers of modern Christian foreign missions. In the Britain from which they set out, religious diversity meant little more than a few dissenting groups within Christianity; non-Christian religions were encountered only by contact with Britain's colonies. Christianity in Britain used to be assumed: Britons were baptised into a Christian church in infancy and attendance at services was expected. Today, even the declining number of contemporary Britons baptised or socialised into the Christian faith in childhood no longer feel a sense of duty to continue their adherence to the denomination or even the religion into which they were born. The growth of Christian sects such as the Methodists and the Baptists began a trend towards voluntarism which has since impacted the historic churches as well. By the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, as British foreign missionary societies were becoming organised, sociologists such as Max Weber and Emile Durkheim were already predicting that increasing modernization and rationalism would lead to the demise of religion (Hamilton, 2001/1995, p.183). With the advance of individualisation, even those who remain religious feel free to choose those beliefs and practices which suit them (Day, 2011, p.22). Bruce and Glendinning (2010, p.109) see this as proof of the secularization theory: industrialisation and democratisation bringing about a rise in religious individualism. For Millennials becoming foreign missionaries today, even regular church-attendance has been a conscious personal choice which places them in a minority within their generation.

As noted above, the 2021 census was significant in showing those in England and Wales who identify as “Christian” dropping below half of the population for the first time, at 46.2% (Roskams, 2022, p.4). This represented a fall of 13.1% since the previous census, but is the continuation of a long-term trend. The Evangelical Alliance’s own survey in 2022 produced a similar result, with 48% identifying as Christian (Jordan-Wolf, 2022). Most of this loss was to “no religion,” which category increased from 25.2% in 2011 to 37.2% in 2021 (Roskams, 2022, p.4). Those who continue to self-define as Christian on the basis of their baptism as infants or an upbringing which involved some level of church attendance are becoming fewer. Davie asserts that such Christian nominalism is declining, while baptism is “...initiation into a voluntary community rather than a mark of Englishness” (Davie, 2014, p.51). The Church of England itself is seeing an increasing proportion of baptisms and confirmations among adults (Davie, 2002, p.149), showing that it is becoming less common for parents to present their infants for baptism.

#### *2.1.1 Believing and Belonging*

Nevertheless, in spite of falling church attendance, ‘Christian’ remained the most frequent response (Roskams, 2022) in the 2021 census. The question of why so many continue to self-identify as Christian while not attending churches led Davie (2000) to put forward the theory of *believing without belonging*, later amended to *vicarious religion* (Davie, 2015, p.81), with both theories centring on the idea that individuals continue to feel some level of connection to the religion which formed part of their primary socialisation and therefore require that churches continue to function in order to provide certain services in society. Voas and Crockett (2005, p.24) argue, however, that “...the only form of BWB [believing without belonging] that is as pervasive as Davie suggests is a vague willingness to suppose that ‘there’s something out there,’ accompanied by an unsurprising disinclination to spend any time and effort worshipping whatever that might be.” Guest *et al.* (2013, p.77) have shown that students who regularly attend church are more likely also to express traditional Christian beliefs: when individuals stop attending church, their beliefs soon fade also. Belief and belonging are, therefore, deeply intertwined, with those who belong having their beliefs reinforced by the common discourse of the community (Stanford, *et al.*, 2023, p.14). Others will cease attending because their beliefs are no longer in complete alignment with those of the community; in doing so, they lose the immersion

in discourse which enabled them to maintain their remaining beliefs, and so these also wane. Thus BWB could be said to be a step in an individual's withdrawal from faith (Voas & Crockett, 2005). However, increasing numbers of Britons have never believed nor belonged.

### 2.1.2 *Faith Inherited*

The continuing rise in those who state that they have no religion is evidence of a growing confidence in their position among those who have left a religion, alongside the rise of the younger generations who have not been socialised into any religion during childhood and have not since chosen to affiliate. Day explains the relatively high numbers continuing to self-define as Christian by arguing that many believe not in the tenets of the professed religion but rather in the social structures it provides, hence *believing in belonging* (Day, 2011). This idea also emerges from the emphasis on the significance of relationships in religious adherence, which is identified in Guest *et al.*'s study of university students in the United Kingdom (Guest, 2013). Individuals do not form their beliefs in a vacuum, but rather through interaction with others, particularly with those closest to them, such as family and friends. Indeed, it is through the primary relationship with one's parents that one learns to interpret the world (Berger and Luckmann, 1991/1966). It is in the reduction of faith transmission from parents to children that we find the root of the falls in religious adherence from one generation to the next (Voas, 2006, p.582). In earlier generations it was common even for non-church-attending parents to send their children to Sunday School for an hour of quiet on a Sunday morning; for parents of Millennials this was no longer the easiest option, as the development of safeguarding legislation (Collier, 2020) meant that children cannot simply arrive unaccompanied at Sunday School, while the availability of television, video/DVD and computer games made it easier to entertain children at home. The relaxation in Sunday trading laws and societal attitudes towards the "Sabbath" also resulted in an increasing availability of alternate activities for children on Sundays. Data from the Church Census shows that while 1,165,200 under 15s attended church in 1980, this had fallen to 796,600 in 1995, representing the 1980-1995 birth cohorts, and to 555,000 by 2010 (Brierley, 2015). This has led to fewer children of "nominal" Christian parents growing up with any level of exposure to a Christian narrative: there is no religious socialisation for the children of parents who

believe without belonging (Davie, 1994) and consequently the younger generations claim no religious affiliation. The British Social Attitudes Survey found that:

... people tend to be less religious than their parents, and on average their children are even less religious than they are.  
...Two nonreligious parents successfully transmit their lack of religion. Two religious parents have roughly a 50/50 chance of passing on the faith. One religious parent does only half as well as two together...  
(BSA, 2018, p.5).

In *Generations and the Millennial Generation* (Chapter 1), I note that many Millennials have a close relationship with their parents and that parental influence and involvement continues well into adulthood. This is borne out in the religious context by Bengtson's (2013) research in the United States, suggesting that children are more likely to inherit the religious beliefs of parents where these are strongly held. For example, parental church attendance that is either frequent or non-existent is more likely to be emulated by children than occasional attendance (Bengtson, 2013, p.56-64). Thus those parents who socialise their children into a clear narrative with regard to religion have a greater likelihood of their beliefs being inherited by the children. Bengtson's data regarding the offspring of parents who do not demonstrate such a strong commitment is less clear-cut. Bengtson argues that "...family influences on the religiosity of the younger generation have not weakened to the degree that has been widely reported." Day's (2011, p.93) doctoral research echoes this, highlighting the importance of 'family' in the formation of belief. It seems that a feeling of belonging to a particular group with its associated belief structures has replaced the externally imposed sense of duty characteristic of previous generations. A qualitative study of evangelical missionaries of all ages found the example or encouragement of family members to be an important factor in an individual's decision to become involved in Christian mission; even where research participants reported parental opposition to their mission involvement, this underlined the significance to them of their relationship with their parents and their desire that their parents be supportive of their life choices (Matenga & Gold, 2016, p.113).

It is, then, overwhelmingly clear from statistical data regarding faith in the UK that the change is generational (Duffy, 2021; Voas & Crockett, 2005). Older generations are more likely to attend church regularly or to identify as "Christian" or "Church of England" in spite of non-attendance (Lee, 2010, p.178). The Evangelical Alliance

likewise found that only 29% of those aged 18-24 described themselves as Christian, compared to 60% in the 55-64 age bracket (Jordan-Wolf, 2022, p.5). As the very oldest pass away, they are not being replaced by similar numbers of younger people (Curtice *et al.*, 2019, p.21).

### 2.1.3 *Public vs. Private*

Secularization theory postulated that religion would withdraw from the public arena, becoming increasingly irrelevant to society as a whole and to public debate (Day, 2011, p.20). A minority were expected to continue gathering quietly in their churches, practising their faith behind closed doors without disturbing the secular lives of those around them. This separation between the public and private spheres is exemplified by Tony Blair who, as Prime Minister (1997-2007), maintained a clear divide between his private faith and his political persona, with his communications director interrupting interviews to state that “we don’t do God” (Brown, 2003). However, only two decades later, when then-leader of the Liberal Democrats Tim Farron attempted to take a similar approach during the 2017 general election campaign, the press focus on his private beliefs became so intense that he eventually resigned saying, “to be a leader, particularly of a progressive liberal party in 2017 and to live as a committed Christian and to hold faithful to the Bible’s teaching has felt impossible for me” (BBC, 2017); the Scottish National Party’s (SNP) Kate Forbes faced a similar scenario in 2023. In Britain today, religion is constantly in the headlines in one way or another, more often than not being portrayed negatively (Davie, 2012, p.277). Often this is due to a fear of Islam, brought about by instances of violent Islamic extremism. Cases of child abuse carried out by Christian leaders have also undermined the respect once felt towards clergy. Increasingly however, it is the private religion of individuals coming into conflict with LGBTQ+ rights which makes the headlines. It appears that the secular media regularly brings faith into the public sphere in order to reiterate that religion has no place there; individuals who attempt to keep their private faith separate from their public persona find that this is no longer possible. Modood feels that the attempt to contain religion within the private sphere has belittled believers. He argues that it is now time for religion once again “...to be recognized as a legitimate basis of public engagement and political action” (Modood, 2013). The 2019 British Social Attitudes Survey states:

Religion may be declining, but it is also diversifying and deepening, as some believers, like non-believers, become more

committed to their worldviews. This means a world in which there may be significant tension between the political and social attitudes of the religious and nonreligious, meaning faith is likely to remain an important part of our national conversation. (Kelley, 2019, p.10)

The once seemingly clear dichotomy between a religious society on the one hand and secularization on the other has been undermined by today's reality. As Woodhead has argued, post-war Britain must be seen as both religious and secular (Woodhead, 2012). Religion has not disappeared and then re-emerged, neither is the religion currently found in Britain entirely that of immigrant populations. What has changed is not the presence of religion in Britain, but its role and influence in individual lives and in society as a whole.

#### *2.1.4 Conservative and Fundamentalist Religion*

In the above quotation, Kelley (2019) suggests that individuals are becoming “more committed to their worldviews.” Britain remains home to people who continue to be highly committed to their religion, even in the midst of a secularising society. Despite dramatic falls in religious affiliation, the British Social Attitudes Survey (Curtice *et al.*, 2019, p.2) shows little change in the percentage of people in Britain who attend a religious meeting at least monthly, stable at around 18%. At the same time those who previously may have maintained a non-attending allegiance to religion are now becoming more committed to their nonreligious stance: “As it becomes more acceptable to say that you have no religion, even vaguely religious people who in the past would have identified themselves as belonging to the Church of England or another group no longer do so” (Curtice *et al.*, 2019, p.7). Secularization theorists assumed that religion itself would modernise, becoming increasingly rational and cerebral (Bruce, 1992, p.21); in reality it seems to be those very liberal forms of religion which are dwindling fastest. Those congregations which have experienced growth in attendance numbers are most often cathedrals on the one hand and Pentecostal/charismatic churches on the other (Davie, 2012), which appear to be drawing people precisely because of their more experiential, even mystical, flavour. The English Church Census of 2005 (2008) showed a 34% increase in attendance at Pentecostal churches and a 9% rise at other smaller denominations. Davie (2007, p.146) suggests that “late modern Europeans are much more likely to go to places of worship in which an experience of the sacred is central to the occasion.” Yet even here

attendance appears to have peaked, with Sunday attendance at cathedrals stable from 2011 until the lockdown of 2020, and midweek attendance growing from 7000 in 2000 to 19,900 in 2015, where it stabilised (Church of England, 2022, p.7). While some charismatic or independent congregations have continued to grow, their share of the population as a whole has fallen, albeit at a slower rate than that of the established churches (Curtice *et al.*, 2019, p. 2).

Davie also points out that Christians are more likely to choose a conservative than a liberal church (Davie, 2014, p.142). Churches not in decline tend to be those which “...combined a clear and often a conservative theological and moral message with the capacity to make effective adaptation to a rapidly changing social and cultural environment” (Guest *et al.* 2012, p.65). It is these conservative believers who are more likely to come into conflict with an increasingly secular society, often being labelled “fundamentalist” as a result. The fundamentalist movement grew out of a series of booklets called the *Fundamentals* which sought to define foundational Christian doctrine in the face of cultural change in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century United States (Bebbington, 1989, p.182; Ruthven, 2007). The term has since become familiar to us in reference to a particular interpretation of Islam, but has also been applied to followers of other faiths (Armstrong, 2001). Possamai (2014, p.112) defines fundamentalism as “... religious groups that claim their religious system is the truest – if not absolutely and exclusively true – and that no other religious system can compete with its sole true way of life.” A more popular understanding, however, is one in which fundamentalism “...has been constructed as a moral panic whereby movements defined as non-liberal, or as non-liberal Christian, are swept together to occupy a shared fundamentalist category...” (Martin, 2016, p.111), with religion portrayed as the cause of conflict and oppression. Bruce and Voas (2007, p.4) similarly point out that most usage of “fundamentalist” in Britain is the general sense of “any religion taken too seriously,” with the acceptable level of commitment in continual decline. While the evangelical churches in Britain have much in common with their North American counterparts, most British evangelicals uphold the division of public and private as far as they are able until, as in the case of Tim Farron or Kate Forbes (mentioned above), they find it impossible to reconcile their faith with a given position, decision or situation. There is, of course, much sharing of ideas and practices across the Atlantic, yet the connotations of the term “Fundamentalist” are not applicable to mainstream conservative Christians

in the UK, who are more likely to avoid confrontation with their secular neighbours and to accept their status as members of a minority group (Perrin, 2015, p.229).

#### *2.1.5 Immigration*

One explanation put forward by secularization theorists for the continuing presence of religion in Britain has been immigration: populations moving into Britain were expected to hold onto the religion of their homeland in order to preserve their cultural identity (Bruce, 1992, p.17). This is undoubtedly a real phenomenon (Crockett and Voas 2006, p. 579), with allegiance to non-Christian religions seeing a steady increase as a proportion of the British population, while an increase of 37% between 1998 and 2005 in non-white attendees at British evangelical churches goes some way to countering the decline in attendance among the white population (EAUK, 2018; Owolade, 2023, p.23). By 2022, the UK's Evangelical Alliance (EAUK) reported that "25% of practising Christians are from black and non-white ethnic minority groups, which make up 12% of the UK population" (Jordan-Wolf, 2022, p.7). In an article for *Christianity Today*, Peter Brierley states that church attendance in London actually rose by 16% between 2005 and 2012 (Brierley, 2019). The 2012 London Church Census showed that 48% of those attending church in inner London were black; while 38% were white, rising to 66% in outer London (Brierley, 2013). In this context both "black" and "white" must include recent waves of immigration as well as those who have lived in Britain for generations; studies employing narrower ethnic categories would offer clearer results regarding the relationship between ethnicity and religious affiliation.

#### *2.1.6 Gender*

In a different approach to explaining Christianity's decline in Britain, historian Callum Brown has traced it to the 1960s and specifically the changing roles of women (Brown, 2009, p.169), using various quantitative surveys to support his view. He argues that church attendance actually grew during the early postwar years (Brown, 2009, p.170), and therefore cannot be linked to urbanisation as postulated by secularization theory. Brown suggests that sociologists are failing to question why church-going is currently falling because it is assumed to be part of this long process of secularization (Brown 2009, p.30). Indeed, Aune (2008, p.286) has pointed out that the decline among women in religious attendance has much exceeded that of men, suggesting that "...as

men and women's roles become less differentiated in post-industrial society, their religious behaviour becomes more similar."

## 2.2 Lived Religion

Given these data and the significant falls in the numbers of – particularly younger – Britons who follow a religion, the lived religion of the minority who both believe and belong is of sociological importance. In view of the strength of cultural trends toward nonreligion, the reasons for continued belief, and how that belief is worked out in practice, merit greater sociological attention than they have sometimes been afforded (Perrin, 2015, p.14). Just as the BSA survey (mentioned above) found the proportion of the population regularly attending religious gatherings to be remarkably constant, so data gathered by the UK's Evangelical Alliance in 2022 shows the percentage of the population whom they designate "practising Christians" as virtually unchanged from their previous survey in 2015, at 6% and 7% respectively (Jordan-Wolf, 2022, p.7). While these data mask the increasing age and ethnic diversity of the average congregation (noted above), they nevertheless demonstrate that those who continue both to believe and to belong represent a significant minority of British society. In this project I have elected to study Christian missionaries because their lifestyle attests to the depth of their faith commitment; in following a religious vocation, Millennial missionaries are going against the tide of their generation.

The sociology of religion began in a context of modernising Christianity and has therefore often emphasised the cerebral aspect of religion as rational assent to a defined set of beliefs. Yet religious faith cannot be defined simply by its theological content. Scholars of religion are therefore focussing more on the varied ways in which religious belief interacts with other aspects of life, recognising that belonging to a faith community and believing in its tenets are only a part of what it means to live out a religion (Strhan, 2013, p.225). For today's Christians, faith must be embodied in practices such as prayer and Bible reading, whilst abstention is required from other practices common in contemporary society, such as drunkenness or extra-marital sex. Yet lived religion also goes beyond the behaviours associated with faith: for believers, the emotions arising from their experience of God constitute an essential aspect of faith (Murphy *et al.*, 2022). Thus an individual's religious faith encompasses a blend of emotions, behaviours, beliefs and communities.

In our postmodern secular society, individuals decide whether and how to practise religion. Nevertheless, even this individualised religion is lived out within organised groups, as Ammerman (2021, p.40) explains: “Lived religious practice happens in the sanctuaries of... organizations and in habits they encourage.” Such organisations are not simply a meeting one must attend or the source of doctrinal statements; rather, they become communities of faith where adherents are exposed to the religious discourse which determines expected norms of practice and in which faith struggles can be aired and solutions sought (Strhan, 2013, p.235). I now turn, therefore, to the religious structures and groups through which my research participants have developed their own beliefs and practices.

### *2.2.1 Evangelicals, Pentecostals and Charismatics*

Though practising Christians in Britain represent a variety of traditions, the participants in my research could all be described as evangelical, although some may prefer not to use the term due to its association in the US with fundamentalism (Smith, 2018, p.160). I therefore focus this discussion of lived Christianity on British evangelicalism. Evangelicalism is not a denomination nor even an organisation: rather it is a term designating a particular set of emphases within Christianity. Some denominations are evangelical while others have evangelical elements within them: “...it influenced the existing churches during the eighteenth century and generated many more [churches] in subsequent years” (Noll, *et al.*, 2019, p.31). For a comprehensive understanding of the development in Britain of evangelicalism as a whole, as well as pentecostalism and the early charismatic movement, one must turn to Bebbington’s history, first published in 1989. While conservative evangelicalism claims to hold firm to eternal truths found in Scripture – and is often viewed by society as old-fashioned for this reason – in reality there have been many twists and turns in both belief and practice as evangelicalism has adapted to cultural change in the surrounding society (Bebbington, 1993/1989). Bebbington (1993/1989, p.3) sets out four defining characteristics of evangelicalism which have become known as the Bebbington Quadrilateral:

1. Conversionism: individuals enter the faith voluntarily, moving from an old pattern of living to a new Christian lifestyle and belief;
2. Activism: all believers are to share the faith with others through their words and their actions;
3. Biblicism: the Bible is believed to be the Word of God;

#### 4. Crucicentrism: salvation is on the basis of the crucifixion of Christ.

These four priorities set evangelicalism apart from the rest of protestantism. There are many evangelical groupings who emphasise one aspect over another, or who express the elements in different ways, yet the Quadrilateral has remained remarkably consistent in its ability to define what it is that unites them. No similarly detailed history exists to cover the period since Bebbington's, though scholars have addressed specific aspects of, or groups within, evangelicalism. Marsden (2019, p.29) argues that evangelicalism constitutes a single movement on the one hand because of "... common heritages, influences, problems, and tendencies" and on the other hand as "... a conscious fellowship... who have some stronger sense of belonging together." In Britain there exists an Evangelical Alliance (founded in 1846) to which many denominations, congregations and parachurch organisations subscribe.

As shown above, pentecostal and charismatic churches in Britain are more likely than traditional denominations to be avoiding significant decline. Having noted above their beliefs, I now summarise their historical development and present some contemporary expressions of Christianity which either arose out of or have been significantly influenced by the charismatic movement. Pentecostalism traces its roots to a religious revival based at Azusa Street, San Francisco in 1906 (Hunt, 2004). This saw a new emphasis on supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit such as healing, prophecy and glossolalia or "speaking in tongues." This was seen as a return to the biblical account of the Day of Pentecost (Acts of the Apostles 2:1-36) and therefore became known as pentecostalism. Now referred to as "classical pentecostalism," it is represented in the UK by two denominations: Assemblies of God (often abbreviated to AoG) and Elim. However, many of the large black-majority churches in Britain also fall into this category, including the Nigeria-based Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG). The internationally known Hillsong Church, which now has several congregations in the UK, began as an Assemblies of God congregation in the Hills district of Sydney, Australia.

During the 1960s some members of mainstream churches sought to appropriate the "charismata" or "spiritual gifts" such as those noted above, giving rise to the Charismatic movement. Bebbington sees this as a reflection of the cultural trend towards self-expression, with an exploration of self and emotion valued over structure and tradition (Bebbington, 1989, p.233). Decades later Perrin (2015) describes "... a

Christian form of self-actualisation” among charismatics. In practice, the desire for greater spiritual experience accompanied by modern music and dress caused division in some local churches (Bebbington, 1989, p.229), while others found ways of accommodating those of a charismatic persuasion (Robbins, 2004, p.121). Some who had been personally impacted by the charismatic renewal were frustrated by the lack of change in their congregations and so went on to found their own, characterised by contemporary music, lay leadership, and active evangelistic campaigns. This became known – and is still often referred to – as the British house-church movement, although it had already out-grown the living rooms in which it began by the time Andrew Walker published a detailed account of the movement’s early years in 1985. Walker (1985) chose instead to use the term “Restorationism,” reflecting the movement’s emphasis on restoring the kingdom of God. Some of the groupings beginning to emerge at the time of Walker’s history have since become established networks of local congregations (Kay, 2008), which include Pioneer, New Frontiers International, Ichthus Christian Fellowship and Harvesttime. In my description of participants, I have used ‘neocharismatic’ to describe the affiliation of those who self-defined by naming one of these networks. While Christians with a charismatic orientation are found across denominations, ‘neocharismatic’ is more often used of independent charismatic congregations and the networks into which they are organised. In terms of sociological categorisation these networks are now essentially denominations in their own right, although most would reject the term because of their ecclesiology (Walker, 1985) and because they view the decline of the established denominations as evidence that these have failed (Kay, 2008, p.37). Kay (2008, p.39) argues that such apostolic networks “...are not exactly denominations nor are they exactly sects nor are they broad national churches. They are a new kind of way of organising church that fits in with the network society of which we are all part.”

Being highly evangelical in orientation, these groups began changing aspects of church services in an attempt to appeal to the counter-cultural young people of the 1960s and 1970s (Bebbington, 1989, p.232, 246). As the leaders of the charismatic movement were themselves young adults at the time, it is not surprising that one result of this was the emergence of the ‘worship leader,’ who would lead the congregation in singing contemporary songs. Although US evangelist Billy Graham represents the conservative wing of the evangelical movement, by the time of his mass evangelistic

campaigns entitled 'Mission England' in 1984, the singing of contemporary songs was so commonplace that a new songbook – *Mission Praise* – was launched and began to replace or at least supplement hymnbooks in churches around the country, until it and its like were forced to make way for the overhead projector and later the video projector. In 2004, Hunt concluded that "...from the 1960s to the close of the twentieth century a preoccupation with religious experience and happy sing-along songs associated with the charismatic movement has dominated the evangelical world" (Hunt, 2004, p.45).

Kay (2008, p.40) suggests that the established denominations "quietly emulated" many of the practices and emphases of the neocharismatic networks. As the freedom to express oneself which had been so counter-cultural in the British society of the 1960s gradually became mainstream, the charismatic movement enabled such individualism to become embedded in British Christianity (Bebbington, 1989, p.234, 248). Therefore Millennials born into or frequenting British evangelical churches in the 1980s and 1990s would have at least encountered such reflections of contemporary culture as modern music (Myrick, 2018, p.21), lay leadership (often including women leaders) and dressing down, even in congregations where these were not always the norm. I now turn to key examples of movements which have been catalysts in the spread of this charismatic emphasis and a missional orientation since the 1990s.

### 2.2.2 *Alpha Course*

Based at Holy Trinity Church, Brompton (popularly known as HTB), the 'Alpha Course' aims to introduce people to Christianity through participation in a ten-week course. Each weekly meeting begins with a meal, which is followed by a talk on a theme such as "Who is Jesus?" or "Why and How Should I Pray?" Participants are then encouraged to discuss issues raised. The course also includes a residential weekend, during which three talks are given regarding the person and role of the Holy Spirit. This aspect of the course shows its roots in the charismatic wing of the church and has been contentious in the course's adoption by churches of different traditions.

At the start of the Millennium, sociologist Stephen Hunt carried out qualitative research into the Alpha course, including interviews, a survey and personally attending the course at three different churches. Among his conclusions, Hunt argued that the Alpha Course had reached "critical mass" (Hunt, 2004, p.249), but would nevertheless

continue to spread. Hunt suggests that Alpha is most attractive to the middle class and middle-aged, although attempts have been made to reach other groups, most notably through Prison Alpha and Youth Alpha. In Hunt's view, Alpha's major success has not been in bringing about conversions but rather in encouraging personal renewal in church members or the previously churched. Such comprehensive independent studies as Hunt's have not been carried out more recently. In 2016 Alpha commissioned the Barna Group to carry out research into its global impact, which showed highly positive results both in terms of non-practising Christians becoming more committed and also those described as "non-Christians" becoming "followers of Jesus" (Barna, 2016). In my own research, four Millennial participants mentioned Alpha as significant in their personal faith journey. For one the Holy Spirit weekend was significant in deepening her faith; two see it as the point that they made a faith commitment. The fourth credits Alpha with establishing friendships with Christians which eventually led him to faith a year later.

In the context of this study of Millennial faith, I am less interested in the overall effectiveness of Alpha in the recruitment of new believers, than its relevance to Millennials in terms of both model and content. At the time of Hunt's study, very few Millennials had reached adulthood and Youth Alpha was a new concept. His methodology also counted participants on the basis of numbers completing and returning written questionnaires, perhaps something which few teenagers of any generation would have done. His conclusion, then, that Alpha is not reaching the next generation requires further investigation. The Barna Group's study in 2016 similarly found "youth" to constitute a mere 4% of participants, putting Millennials and Generation X at 35% each, suggesting that their lack of involvement at the time of Hunt's study was age-related rather than generational. One of my participants noted that as a young adult he was drawn to Alpha out of boredom and because of free food.

### *2.2.3 Conferences, Camps and Festivals*

For generations mass conferences and festivals have been a focal point of British evangelicalism in its various forms, creating a platform for new thought or emphases which would then be carried home to congregations around the country. Given its long history, its reputation for conservative Bible teaching and indisputable impact on British foreign missions, remarkably little attention has been paid by scholars to the

Keswick Convention, although it is mentioned as a key influence in many biographies and histories. A detailed history of the Convention was published in 1965 and updated in 2013 (Pollock and Randal, 2013). The Convention began in 1875 with a few hundred attendees seeking instruction and encouragement to holy living. Since 2001 the Keswick Convention has run across three weeks, hosting 12,000 people of all ages. It draws evangelicals from a range of backgrounds. While Keswick opposed the charismatic movement in its early years and has always been regarded as conservative (Bebbington, 1989), many charismatics now feel comfortable attending.

Spring Harvest began in 1979, drawing together 2,700 people for a week of Bible teaching and worship (Church Times, 2006). At its peak, Spring Harvest drew 80 000 people across several weeks in 1991; it now sees around 50,000 across five weeks (Field 2010). Spring Harvest has brought Christians from many backgrounds and consciously seeks to address contentious issues. It has launched many popular new worship songs and has introduced thousands of evangelical Christians to a charismatic style of worship (Church Times, 2006). A 2009 survey found that 67% of attendees were in some level of Christian leadership, with 60% of those being voluntary roles (Field, 2010). This demonstrates Spring Harvest's influence, as lay leaders engage with ideas and practices which they then reproduce in their home congregations.

Greenbelt began in 1974 as a festival of music and the arts with a Christian ethos. Attendance rose from an initial 2,000 to 20,000 in the 1980s (Greenbelt, undated). Attendance declined so much in the 1990s that Greenbelt nearly ceased, however it re-launched itself and is thriving once again. Besides its focus on the arts, Greenbelt highlights social justice, the environment and inclusivity. As such it is the most liberal of the Christian mass events.

The British House Church movement (see above) saw the impact of the Keswick Convention and sought to emulate, creating their own charismatic mass gatherings such as the Dales Bible Week in the 1970s and 1980s or Stoneleigh Bible Week in the 1990s. Anglican charismatics launched the New Wine festival in 1989 which now gathers around 20,000 each summer.

Soul Survivor grew out of the popularity among young people of New Wine and drew thousands for a week-long Christian festival each summer from 1993 to 2019: encompassing the teenage years of all Millennials. Latterly it was running a week

especially for families: clearly the older Millennials now wanted to bring their own young children. Soul Survivor prioritised supernatural encounters and experiences. These would be heightened by the use of contemporary music, the crowds and a festival atmosphere. Soul Survivor announced in 2018 that it would end the following year, citing divine leading and a desire to “make space for others to rise up” (Williams, 2018). Notwithstanding issues which have come to light more recently, in an article discussing Soul Survivor’s impact when it ceased, *The Times* reflects: “The festival has left a deep imprint on British Christianity. It has set the agenda, won hearts and minds, and created a new generation of believers infused with the movement’s distinctive DNA” (Wyatt, 2019). Assisted by music from the event, recordings of teaching and online communities which could be accessed individually or by local youth groups, young people were encouraged to continue the same style of worship when back home.

Such large-scale events draw Christians together from a wide range of local congregations, exposing them to a particular discourse and to forms and styles of worship. Individuals then carry these back to their own churches. Mass events therefore play a pivotal role in defining the discourse of British Christianity and in encouraging the dilution of denominationalism which I discuss below.

#### 2.2.4 *Fresh Expressions*

During the 1990s, some UK Christian leaders began experimenting with alternative ways of expressing communal faith. Large Anglican churches such as Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB) were beginning to “plant” new churches, following the model of non-conformist churches and moving away from the traditional parish structure of the Church of England. Some set up new monastic communities or “café church,” while others turned their church buildings over to child-focussed games and activities to create “Messy Church.” These – and other – developments became known as “fresh expressions,” sometimes referred to simply as “FX.” Around the turn of the Millennium, denominations and mission organisations reflected on these fresh expressions (Moore, 2022), with a view to encouraging rather than suppressing them. Also supportive of Fresh Expressions was the 2004 *Mission-Shaped Church* report published by the Church of England.

As a term, *Fresh Expressions* encompasses any “...form of church for our changing culture, established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church.” They are therefore highly evangelistic in outlook, seeking to draw in the unchurched and those who have left the church. The EAUk (Jordan-Wolf, 2022) shows that 4% of practising Christians report that Fresh Expressions such as Messy Church were significant in their coming to faith; this rises to 8% among 25-34 year olds (Jordan-Wolf, 2022, p.34), who are less likely to have attended Sunday School themselves but now as parents have been drawn to activities aimed at young children.

#### 2.2.5 *Emerging Church*

While often referred to as the Emerging Church Movement (ECM), this is not an organised or unified movement (Woodbridge, 2007). Individual Christians and small groups began asking questions about the nature of faith and “church” and experimenting with different forms of communal worship. Where Fresh Expressions has largely been outward-looking and evangelistic with the aim of drawing people into existing churches, the Emerging Church has often formed as a place of refuge for evangelical Christians disillusioned with the structures and traditions of mainstream churches. By 2007 Guest (2007, p.157) was already noting that many of the “key figures” had joined mainstream denominations or had simply become busy with careers and family life. As I note below (Section 2.3), the distinctiveness of the different denominations and congregations appears to be fading, meaning that those who left mainstream churches either because they were disillusioned with forms and style or because they felt they could not invite their friends to a church which was out-of-touch with the wider culture, now feel able to return. If, as Woodbridge (2007) argues, the Emerging Church began as a form of protest against the influence of modernity in the churches, changes to church culture have made protest less necessary. It seems, then, that the Emerging Church movement was almost entirely a Generation X phenomenon. At most, some Millennial Christians will have been influenced by it in their youth.

#### 2.2.6 *Microchurch*

A more recent phenomenon, described by its practitioners as “microchurch,” aims to take the Christian message to post-Christian society through unstructured, lay-led gatherings in homes (Sanders, 2022; Kreider, 2020). Proponents argue that this model

differs from the small groups run by many mainstream churches because the emphasis is on mission: strong relationships within the group are important, but it is a community on a mission to draw in those of no religion. The microchurch is viewed as a church in its own right rather than being part of a larger congregation. Without using the terminology of microchurch, participant John (b. 1982) appears to be exploring similar ecclesiology because he has found himself practising such a model – albeit unintentionally – in a West European city.

#### *2.2.7 Globalisation*

As noted above, there has always been international communication between evangelicals, with developments in one country impacting evangelical churches in another. In past generations, however, this was most likely to take the form of letters between leaders and occasional visits of distinguished preachers or theologians. Of course the international missionary movement (which I discuss in the next chapter) also saw churches in one nation impacted by those of another, although this was almost entirely one-way. Walker (1985) details the interactions of British and North American leaders in the early years of the Restoration movement. It is only with the advent of mass air travel and the internet that ordinary believers have had ready access to religious products from around the world, such as music, preaching or training. Hunt sees this as symptomatic of Christianity's marginality: "More recently, a weakened movement has moved towards a greater unity, sometimes displaying a homogeneity on an international scale, in order to maximize its opportunities in the spiritual marketplace" (Hunt, 2004, p.44). Yet it is more likely that this is simply an expansion on the basis of technological advances of the already vibrant global market for Christian books initially and later audio tapes of music or sermons. The development of contemporary worship music which began in the 1960s and 1970s became a global phenomenon with the popularity in the 1980s and 1990s of songs composed by Britain's Graham Kendrick, who blazed a trail for other British song-writers. The 2010s saw the music of Australian mega-church Hillsong exported around the world, while today many of the most popular songs originate at Bethel church in the United States. The contemporary worship music industry has been dominated by English-speaking nations, which have therefore influenced evangelical discourse globally, transmitting not only the songs themselves but also their theological

emphases and the style of singing (in Kendrick's day it was one man with a guitar; Hillsong saw a shift to a large choir, lighting and professional equipment).

The COVID pandemic forced churches of all kinds to switch to an online format. While this is too recent for evidence of lasting impact to be empirically assessed, it seems likely that those churches whose online performance was most professional drew the greatest audiences; as these may have been located anywhere in the world, it is hard to say whether this will translate into larger congregations in the post-pandemic world.

### 2.3 Belief and Belonging of Millennial Christians

"Young people are hedonists," argues Miles (2000, p.87). "...They are more concerned about enjoying themselves from one minute to the next than they are worried about what the future may or may not hold for them." The question remains whether this is because of their age or their cohort. As exemplified by the so-called "swinging sixties," young people have always poured their energies into having fun. A qualitative study carried out among young British Millennials summed up their worldview as a "Happy Midi-Narrative" (Savage et.al., 2006, p.35ff). This suggests that Millennials are not interested in finding a metanarrative to explain the world; rather they are content to seek enjoyment in the present. The Millennial interest in social justice and environmental issues could be said to reveal a 'bigger picture' focus. However, these may simply reflect the intersection of an acceptance of the equality of all people with the assumption that to be happy is a basic human right which should be available to all. More research needs to be carried out into not just the activities of Millennials as adults but also the motivations which lie behind them. If it is true that the focus on short-term happiness is not simply an age-related aspect of a generation enjoying their youth, then Millennials will continue to have this focus as adults. There is a need for research into the worldview of Millennials now in their thirties and forties in order to test this thesis.

Sociologist Christian Smith describes the faith of many Christian young people in the United States as "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism" (Smith, 2005): "It is *moralistic* in that teens today believe that being a good and moral person... is central to living a happy and fulfilled life. It is *therapeutic* in that... religion is about providing therapeutic benefits... [and it is] a form of *Deism*, in that God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when needed to solve a problem" (Richardson, 2013, p.79,

emphasis in original). In agreement with this is the BSA finding “...that belief in heaven is much more popular than belief in hell suggests that traditional Christian doctrine is being displaced by positive thinking” (Curtice, *et al.*, 2019, p.13). However, Perrin (2015, p.229) found “no evidence of MTD” in her research among British evangelical Christians. This would suggest that such therapeutic beliefs are more likely to be held by those who believe without belonging.

It is very difficult to say what Millennial Christians actually believe, and this will of course vary from person to person. Those on the periphery of church “...show a great deal of fuzziness and uncertainty concerning traditional Christian beliefs. Yet Christian ideas show a surprising degree of resilience in that they remain in the background of young people’s minds” (Savage *et al.*, p.2005). Studies of Millennial faith have found a dearth of doctrinal knowledge (Guest *et al.*, 2013, p.24) and Perrin’s (2015) research found that Millennial evangelicals held to the traditional beliefs of the faith, but were less sure of details around specific doctrines. However, this appeared to be an age effect rather than generational, as the older Millennials raised fewer theological questions (Perrin, 2015, p.212), suggesting that some of the theological uncertainty evident among Millennial believers a decade ago may now have been resolved. However, Perrin also emphasises that all participants were open to a range of views within defined boundaries: even those who had formed their own opinions were willing to explore the opinions of others and to hold in tension differing standpoints within a broad evangelical framework. Those joining a mission agency are generally required to sign a ‘Statement of Faith’ to confirm that they agree with the basic tenets of faith; in the UK this is often based on the Evangelical Alliance’s own statement, which aims to be inclusive of differing denominational stances whilst setting out foundational beliefs of evangelicalism.

Perrin’s (2015) study of Bible reading among British evangelical emerging adults demonstrates that while their beliefs are largely orthodox, they avoid criticising other views and frame as personal opinion anything which may be deemed contentious by other Christians. Participants were comfortable with multiple interpretations of a given text rather than believing their own view to be absolute, revealing a tendency toward relativism within defined boundaries. In 2016 Oxford Dictionaries declared their “word of the year” to be “post-truth” (Williams, 2016). While the massive growth in usage of

the term reflected the political situations in the UK and US in 2016, its meaning arises from societal discourse in which “truth” is subjective: whatever one perceives it to be. In a religion such as evangelical Christianity, which claims that Jesus is the only way to God and to eternal salvation, this is challenging (Possamai, 2014). Smith (2018, p.181) shows that younger people are more “inclusive in their view of other faiths and religious diversity.” In his interpretation of data from the European Values surveys and the International Social Survey Programme, Lambert (2004, p.13) suggests that “a kind of positive relativism” is prevalent, with only a minority even of regular churchgoers being convinced that there is only one true religion.

More important than abstract truth to the Millennial mindset is being ‘true to oneself.’ Niemela (2015, p.173) has shown that for Millennials who leave Finland’s Evangelical Lutheran Church “...Church-leaving is not so much an expression of their disappointment in it as an institution, but more an act of authenticity in which they follow their own true selves.” A study of Christianity among young Christians in Scotland (Vincett *et al.*, 2012) emphasises the importance of performance in participants’ faith. It is not enough simply to affirm certain doctrines; the Millennial value of authenticity requires that belief is lived out or “practice-centred” (Day, 2013), reflecting the ‘activism’ element of Bebbington’s Quadrilateral (1989, p.3). In her report on Fresh Expressions of Church (see above) among young adults in the UK, Keith (2013, p.12) notes that: “Honesty, integrity, and ‘realness’ were emphasised over ‘rightness;’ church was described as journeying together, working out faith, together, in the messy realities of life, rather than the teaching of truths”.

The importance to Millennial Christians of a supportive faith community is demonstrated in much research, including Strhan’s (2015) study of a conservative evangelical congregation in London. Although Strhan studied an entire congregation spanning generations, most of those she observed and interviewed were students and young professionals (Strhan, 2015, p.13) and therefore within the Millennial age bracket. This is also reflected in Guest *et al.*’s (2013, p.31) study of university students, which shows “Christian identity as something primarily shaped by and expressed in social relationships.”

However, while belonging is clearly a significant aspect of Millennial faith, it is more about being part of a community than identification with a specific denomination

(Guest *et al.*, 2013, p.37). Bengtson's study shows that nearly one Millennial in five self-defined as either "just Christian" or "nondenominational Christian" (Bengtson, 2013, p.49); in my own data the proportion is closer to half (see Chapter 6 *Being: The Identity of a Missionary*). This reflects a respect for diversity and a flexible approach to belief rather than simply a lack of understanding of a given denomination's creed. It is important for Millennials to be able to choose or reject different strands of theology, but also to be accepting of those with whom they disagree (Perrin, 2015). It seems that the young people Bengtson interviewed (2013, p.56) were more likely to inherit from their parents a sense of the importance of faith than of loyalty to a given denomination. Thus the 'believing without belonging' thesis may be applied to Christian young people for whom faith itself is salient, while allegiance to a particular church or denomination is not: the nature of *belonging* has changed. Millennials often frequent a number of different churches and parachurch gatherings, whether because of repeated relocations or simply to experience large-scale events. Alongside such physical attendance, they may access music, preaching or blogs from a range of sources around the world, contributing to the development of a Christian identity which is "just Christian" instead of Baptist, Anglican, Pentecostal, etc. While it might be suggested that they are disloyal or uncommitted, it seems rather that Millennial Christians are more willing to accept and respect a range of doctrinal stances. Instead of subscribing to the entire doctrinal framework of any one given denomination, Millennials are likely to reach their own conclusions. They appear to be comfortable with the tension of believing something to be true while also respecting those who hold a different view. Guest *et al.* (2013, p.103) describe this as "...a kind of tentative, polite relativism, prioritizing the maintenance of healthy relationships over any sense of definitive truth...."

One significant area of divergence among evangelicals is with regard to gender roles, with some holding an egalitarian view in contrast to complementarianism, by which other evangelical Christians believe that men and women are assigned different (but "complementary") roles by God. Aune's research into the lived religion of evangelical Christians offers insight into gender roles in areas such as marriage (Aune, 2006), fatherhood (Aune, 2010) and singleness (Aune, 2002). She demonstrates apparent inconsistencies between the beliefs regarding gender roles articulated by both leaders and church members and their lifestyle. Perrin (2015, p.218-219) also describes how

research participants showed an acceptance of churches with a traditional stance on gender whilst nevertheless believing themselves to be egalitarian. In a study carried out among single women in a charismatic church, Gaddini (2019, p.409) found that “...the ideal Christian woman was formed by intersecting markers of whiteness, middle classness and femininity.” Many of the women who took part in these various studies are professionally successful, yet committed to churches in which they are expected to submit to male-only leadership. Again, this shows them holding in tension two apparently contrasting positions.

## 2.4 Conclusions

As religion is pushed to the margins of British society, there appear to be two significant impacts on those who remain committed. Firstly, believers are more likely to overlook doctrinal differences where there is agreement on the basic tenets of faith, increasing the numbers who self-define as “just Christian.” Secondly, those who continue their adherence do so with a level of commitment which might in previous generations only have been expected of a few. European research has shown that those who self-defined as Christian in 1999 were more likely than those in 1990 or 1981 to also portray personal beliefs and practices in keeping with their religion (Lambert, 2004). Thus while Millennials are less likely than previous generations to be religious in any way, religion has greater salience in the lives of those Millennials who choose to practise it.

It is therefore evident that Davies’ “believing without belonging” thesis no longer paints an accurate picture of the religious composition of the British population, although its prevalence among Generation X may have contributed to the lack of religious socialisation experienced by Millennials and therefore to their present non-affiliation. Rather, individuals are now choosing strong commitment to either a religious or a nonreligious stance. The BSA survey (2018, p.10) hints that this may reflect greater “honesty.” Besides the accuracy of their self-assessment in survey responses, I suggest that this is symptomatic of the Millennial value of authenticity, which seeks a greater alignment of belief and behaviour. Participants in my present study are those who both believe and belong but also behave, their commitment to their faith being demonstrated not just by self-definition but by faith-based life choices

which are often personally challenging. In the next chapter I describe the evangelical missionary tradition which they are both continuing and at the same time redefining.

## CHAPTER 3      Contextualising Christian Foreign Missions

*“Certainly over the course of my time in, you know, ‘professional missionary-dom’, the understanding of what mission work is about and the justification for it and all of that kind of stuff, has changed radically. ...I mean, even the word “mission” means something completely different in churches these days.”*

*(Susan, GenX Missionary)*

Susan’s experience, articulated in the quote above, reflects the “crisis in mission” identified by missiologist David Bosch in his seminal text *Transforming Mission* (1991). Like Bosch, Susan is referring to significant changes in the understanding and practice of mission which have taken place over the past several decades and the dust from which has yet to settle. Bosch sees this crisis as a paradigm shift resulting from the decline of Christianity in the traditional missionary-sending nations of the West, combined with a sense of guilt regarding the colonial past of a number of these countries including Britain. At the same time, mission theologians and practitioners were beginning to treat as equal thought and theology from non-Western sources. Therefore, as I show in this chapter, the interpretation of Christian mission has expanded and adapted as the concept has interacted both with changes in British or Western culture and also with interpretations grounded in other cultures. A global project in which I was involved as a researcher found “...considerable fluidity in concepts of mission” (Matenga & Gold, 2016, p.1), suggesting the term ‘missional anomie’ to describe the contemporary understanding of mission.<sup>8</sup> Such controversy or confusion relates to (1) the *locus* of mission, (2) the practice or content of mission, and (3) the do-er of mission. I discuss these below as the *where*, the *what* and the *who* of mission. Does mission have to take place beyond one’s borders? Does it have to reach from one culture to another? Must mission focus on spiritual activities such as conversion, starting new congregations or Bible study, or can social justice be its aim?

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<sup>8</sup> As part of its *Globalization of Mission* series, the World Evangelical Alliance’s *Mission Commission* commissioned a team to explore the concept of *mission mobilization*, or recruitment to mission. The project was overseen by Malone University, Ohio, and its Lead Researcher and Research Analyst was Dr. Malcolm Gold. I joined the team in 2007 as researcher for Central and Eastern Europe as I was then based in Romania. Interviews were carried out with participants from India, Japan, UK, Romania, New Zealand, USA, Korea and Argentina.

Must the missionary be in full-time Christian ministry? Does a missionary have to be a white male?

This chapter does not pretend to be a comprehensive history or theology of mission. The interested reader may find these in works such as Manktelow's *Missionary Families* (2013), Robert's *Christian Mission* (2009), Kirk's *What Is Mission?* (1999), Bosch's *Transforming Mission* (1991), and Wright's *The Mission of God* (2006). Instead, I intend in this chapter to make reference to aspects of history and theology in order to illustrate and discuss the areas of anomie set out above: the *where*, the *what* and the *who* of mission. This provides the context in which participants in this study have perceived and acted upon a call to mission. Regardless of their particular relationship with the word 'missionary,' which I discuss in *Being: The Identity of a Missionary* (Chapter 6), participants view themselves as part of the contemporary expression of the mission history here outlined.

### 3.1 The 'Where'

Theologically speaking, mission comes from the Greek word for sending (Robert, 2009): God the Father sends the Son, the Father and Son send the Spirit,<sup>9</sup> and the Son sends the Church (John 20:21). For many Christians, mission is mandated firstly by the direct instruction of Jesus to take His message to people around the world (Matthew 28:19) and secondly by the monotheistic nature of Christianity and the resulting belief that the Christian message is for all (Bosch, 1991, p.5). Bosch (1991, p.1) states that mission "... presupposes a sender, a person or persons sent by the sender, those to whom one is sent, and an assignment." While Christian mission began in the New Testament and has continued in many varied ways and places throughout church history, 'modern missions' grew with the expansion of Empire. In this section I focus on this more recent era, because it is with this tradition that today's British missionaries continue to identify or be identified by others.

Popular interest in early exploration such as Captain Cook's voyages awoke British Christians to the existence of peoples who had not heard the Gospel message (Stanley,

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<sup>9</sup> The insertion into the Creed by the Western Church of the *filioque*, stating that the Spirit proceeds from the Son as well as from the Father, was one of the major issues causing the Great Schism of 1054 leading to the separation of the Eastern (Orthodox) churches from the Western (Roman) church. It is not my intention here to enter into this debate.

1990, p.58). Just as Roman roads aided the initial spread of the Christian message in the first century, so the trade routes of Empire helped Christian missionaries to reach new destinations. In the eyes of British Christians, God had clearly entrusted Britain with the privilege and responsibility of spreading throughout the Empire both the Christian religion and what they saw as 'Christian' culture (Barnhart, 2005, p.712; Stanley, 1990, p.68). At the same time as the British Empire was expanding abroad, the church at home was experiencing growth in the popularity of evangelicalism, with its emphasis on individual life-impacting religion (Manktelow, 2013, p.2-3; Stanley, 1990, p.59). Evangelical faith stressed pious living and proselytism; a commitment to foreign missions became an expression of both. Barnhart (2005, p.724) suggests that "...the new ideal of Christian manliness, as defined by the evangelical middle class, stressed the refinement of one's moral character through prayer, hard work, self-discipline, and more godly pursuits." Thus the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century saw growth in the overseas missionary movement. So much so that for many today the term 'missionary' conjures up a particular image: "...a 19<sup>th</sup>-century white European male subjugating local people" (Smith, 2017, p.64).

### **3.1.1 Mission and Culture**

#### *3.1.1.1 The Civilising Mission*

Many of us are simply unaware of our own culture: the term encompasses those attitudes and practices we regard as 'normal.' Colonisers and missionaries alike viewed their own 'normal' as superior to that of the colonised peoples. Indeed, the very existence of Empire was taken as proof of their superiority (Rieger, 2004, p.204). Thus missionaries saw it as part of their mission to 'civilise' the peoples they encountered, by teaching them Western 'Christian' cultural norms. Enlightenment thinking had produced a belief in human progress which convinced Western Europeans that the rest of the world was destined to follow in their footsteps in order to attain to a higher level of "civilization" (Stanley, 1990, p.161). Such assumed racial superiority meant that even advocates of the rights of colonised peoples would continue to see themselves in the position of leader, instructor or guide. Regarding the abolition of slavery, Hall comments that "The freed men and women thanked the abolitionists and the British public, the planters blamed them, and the abolitionists congratulated themselves for what they had achieved. In the abolitionist view, the emancipated peasantry owed good behaviour to the British nation for their magnanimous gift of

freedom...” (Hall, 2002, p.128). The very people who fought for the rights of the slaves, then, saw themselves as benefactors rather than equals. The missionary interpretation of Christianity came from a narrowly European perspective, sometimes demanding that converts take on European dress, customs and thought. Biko (1978, p.56) argues that in spite of its Middle Eastern roots, the Christianity brought to Africa, required converts to “...cast away their indigenous clothing, their customs, their beliefs which were all described as being pagan and barbaric.” Racial bias both conscious and unconscious existed throughout English thought and society, with an attitude of racial superiority fundamental to the way the English related to others (Hall, 2002, p.8; Jeremiah, 2020, p.85). Thus “Historians, anthropologists and theologians unite in their judgment that missionaries have been guilty of foisting their own cultural values on their converts” (Stanley, 1990, p.157).

#### *3.1.1.2 Cultural Change*

Nevertheless, Stanley (1990, p.170) regards as “mythical” the “...supposition that indigenous cultures prior to the missionary impact were in a condition of static perfection.” Cultures are constantly changing as they interact with other cultures and as they encounter and overcome challenges (Dunch, 2002, p.305). Even the most culturally-sensitive researcher seeking only to ‘observe’ will, by their very presence, subtly change the nature of the culture under observation. Sanneh has argued that it is too simplistic to focus only on the cultural “sins of omission and commission” of the missionaries, stating that “... to view missionaries as perennial historical villains is too one-sided to be useful for any dynamic understanding of change, and that to view Africans as a victimized projection of Western ill will is to leave them with too little initiative to be arbiters of their destiny and meaningful players on the historical stage” (Sanneh, 1991, p.2; cf. Schroder, 1999, p.814; Sanneh, 1992, p.105). Dunch (2002, p.302) agrees, arguing that an emphasis on the missionaries’ imposition on their converts of their own lifestyle standards undermines the agency of the local people. While this may seem like an attempt to excuse the cultural imperialism of missionaries, there is indeed a valid point to be made. Stanley (1990, p.159) notes that some missionaries were shocked by the perceived indecency of native clothing and encouraged local people to switch to Western clothing; however, “Western dress inevitably became a symbol of prestige and social advancement, and it is more common to find missionaries deploring the inhabitants’ insatiable appetite for

European clothes than to find them deploring the immodesty of native dress....” Thus while missionaries were indeed guilty in many cases of cultural imposition, there was also an element of the local community choosing to experiment with or take on foreign practices.

On a personal note, I have witnessed a great deal of change in Romania, having first visited soon after the fall of Communism. Summer visitors from the West sometimes bemoan the changes they see in the romantic idyll of rural life: gradually horse-power is replaced by motor vehicles and bathrooms and kitchens are added to homes instead of buckets of water drawn from the well. Is this Western culture being forced upon Romanians? Or simply that Romanians who have now seen labour-saving technology want to enjoy it as well? Culture is never static; it is constantly changing, whether from within or without. The issue is whether such change is chosen or imposed: I would argue that it is often a combination of the two. The complexity of this debate can best be understood when one looks at ethical issues such as medication. Is it an imposition of alien culture to insist on hygiene practices proven to improve health, or to offer Western medication which is known to save lives? What about COVID-19 vaccines for indigenous tribes in the Amazon Basin? Education is another area to consider. When the modern missionary movement was beginning, mass education was new and counter-cultural in Britain itself. Hall (2002, p.104) comments that “Planters [in Jamaica] did not want the enslaved to learn to read any more than conservatives in England in the 1780s and 1790s had wanted working-class adults or children to learn those skills.” In British culture today, formal education for all is accepted as a basic norm and many in both the religious and the secular spheres are involved in projects to improve the provision of education – particularly for girls – around the world. Does this mean imposing Western styles and standards of education in the name of improving access for all? In the case of colonial-era missionaries, there was clearly much that was imposed, or at the very least tied to Christian conversion in such a way as to make cultural change necessary. For example, missionaries would often refuse baptism (symbolic of acceptance into the Church) to those who did not renounce practices such as polygamy or ancestor veneration (Hofmeyr, 2000, p.1070). Yet, when we consider missionaries’ contributions to education and healthcare, “To insist that missionaries should not have promoted cultural change is, at the very least, to insist

that these improvements in the quality of human life in the societies which received them should have been withheld” (Stanley, 1990, p.171).

Robert (2009, p.68) argues that “With the end of colonialism came a radical critique of the concept of European Christendom, including the rejection of missions as western impositions on other cultures and religions.” Western missions are often criticised – and Western missionaries embarrassed – because of the historical connectedness of colonialism and the growth of missions (Loewenberg, 2009). In order to gain access to different regions, missionaries were keen to demonstrate the benefits to colonial rule of a Christianised populace. To whatever extent they cooperated with the colonial powers, “...missionaries are perceived to have acted as agents of imperialism” (Jeremiah, 2020, p.88; cf. Hofmeyr, 2000, p.1082). Yet, while paternalism and superiority were indeed rife and must not be excused, many missionaries were shunned by their colonialist contemporaries because they insisted on learning the languages and cultural practices of local peoples (Woodberry, 2010, p.4). Sanneh (2006, p.119) argues that “...the pioneering work of the Western missionary movement in documenting non-Western languages and cultures has been the single most important engine for creating movements of cultural renewal and diversity....” In parts of Africa by the 1950s, British missionaries often sided with local nationalists in their struggles against colonial rule (Stuart, 2011, p.8), leading to friction with the colonial powers. Some helped local communities to negotiate with the colonial authorities over land rights (Woodberry, 2010, p.6,9). In the West Indies missionaries were seen as enemies by the colonialists because they educated slaves (Manktelow, 2013, p.42). Likewise in Jamaica “Planters... did not want them treated as spiritual equals, partaking of communion, addressed as ‘brother’ and ‘sister’” (Hall, 2002, p.104). Indeed, early anthropologists criticised missionaries’ tendency to believe that all people are equal before God (Woodberry, 2010, p.4; Hall, 2002, p.398).

#### *3.1.1.3 Inculturation*

Christian mission is, therefore, often equated with colonialism and its enforcement of European cultural norms, which early evangelical missionaries and other Europeans of that era understood to be the height of civilisation (Kirk, 1999, p.23). Because Christianity had for so many centuries been associated with European culture, thought and practices, its spread into other continents often came with European ecclesial

structures and lifestyle norms attached (Kirk, 1999, p.80). The challenge for missionaries and their converts was to disentangle Western culture from Gospel message: to recognise that the adoption by non-Western peoples of the Christian religion does not necessitate the wholesale imposition of Western culture. Hofmeyr (2000, p.1082) argues that “...the Christian message has revealed an innate capacity to be appropriated and reformulated as the religion of the dispossessed.” Two World Wars shook Western Europe’s confidence in its own cultural superiority, giving rise to a generation of missionaries who were more open to non-Western thought and practices (Stanley, 1990, p.154). Among missionaries there was also a growing realisation that non-Western cultures often resembled that of the New Testament more closely than did their own (Stanley, 1990, p.168).

This led to the idea of *inculturation*, defined by Kirk (1999, p.89) as “...the transformation of a culture by the Gospel, and the reexpression of the Gospel in terms of that culture.” New believers from other cultures were to have the freedom to interpret their new faith through the lens of their own culture. Makofane (2019, p.139) attributes the growth of African Independent Churches (AICs) at least in part to “...their successful attempt to make Christianity home in Africa and Africa home in Christianity.” Maluleke criticises the dualism of Western missionaries, who saw African religious and cultural practices as incompatible with their understanding of Christianity (Hofmeyr, 2000, p.1062). Ancestor veneration, for example, was regarded as idolatrous, whereas many African Christians today consider that it can be linked to the Biblical concept of the “communion of the saints” (Makofane, 2019, p.140). Tabor-Hamilton (2021, p.180) likewise argues that “honoring the ancestors is in the spiritual DNA of the Christian tradition,” referring to the Christian church’s honouring of its spiritual predecessors including the apostles and the saints.

#### *3.1.1.4 Majority World Christianities*

The Christian Scriptures – The Bible – were written in times and cultures very different from our own: the interpretation of Scripture has therefore been the task of every generation of Christians. Yet early missionaries regarded their own interpretations, formed through the lens of their own culture, as the only ones. It took time for them to realise that Scripture can and should be understood and applied differently in different contexts. While missionaries had long seen the need for local leadership (Hall, 2002,

p.142, 225), Western-based denominations and missions had continued to require that such leaders be trained in Western-style Bible colleges, teaching as normative Western hermeneutics. It was only during the post-war era that missionaries began to recognise that this presupposed the imposition of Western thought and Western educational traditions (Stanley, 1990, p.23), spawning an emphasis on the right of national churches to determine their own culture, theology and strategy. Such autonomy has led to the growth of movements such as 'Black Theology' or 'Liberation Theology,' the latter arising out of the Latin American context. As Maluleke underlines, however, even such umbrella terms may mask racist attitudes; there is not one single Black Theology any more than there is one white theology. He argues that "...African Christianity need not have 'one' Christian theology in order to be valid and authentic" (Maluleke, 2007, p.484-485).

Taking further the need for national churches to be truly national, the notion of a *moratorium* on Western missionaries was first raised in 1971 by John Gatu, General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, and endorsed by other Christian leaders throughout the 1970s (Robert, 2009, p.68; Stanley, 1990, p.29). Gatu's proposal sought to allow the younger churches of Africa to "...find their own identity and feet" (Makofane, 2019, p.129). It was considered both more effective and more economical to fund national missionaries than to send Westerners. Often, though, Western funders have maintained a tight hold on the purse strings (Makofane, p.2019), thereby limiting the independence of non-Western theology and strategy. Gatu recognised this danger, including in his moratorium plea the desire that local churches and missions be self-funding. Stanley (1990, p.84) argues that the "...progressive diminution of the British missionary force since about 1960 may be related to the passing of the imperial era, but it also reflects the growing self-sufficiency of the younger churches...." Thus, while there has never been the kind of sudden and complete moratorium envisioned by Gatu, an increasing recognition of and respect for local leadership in the post-colonial era has played a role in the reduction of foreign missions personnel.

#### 3.1.1.5 *Cultural and Historical Awareness*

Western missionary training today seeks to address these issues, making missionary candidates aware both of the mistakes of history and of the indigenous Christianities

developing around the world. Emphasis is placed on approaching the other as learner rather than teacher. In Wartenweiler's (2018, p.232) study of staff working for a Faith-Based Organisation, participants had each spent their first year "...just living in a slum community and learning language and culture." Wartenweiler (2018, p.235) describes them as "...highly sensitive to cultural circumstances and their role in possibly importing inappropriate Western values." Heist and Cnaan (2016, p.5) have shown that such "...organizations and their workers reach people at the grassroots level, speak their language and respect their sentiments and culture." Yet learning about another's culture can be simplistic if one does not also consider the nature of the relationship between the missionary and the local community. In their study of short-term missions (STM), Hopkins *et al.* (2015) found that young and inexperienced Westerners were offered opportunities to teach and lead which would not have been extended to local youth. Rieger (2004, p.202,221) warns that the missionary encounter must not teach Westerners only about the other, but also teach them to know themselves, their position of power and their connection to the colonial past. I address the cultural preparation for mission in sections on *Being a Missionary* and *Being a Foreigner* in Chapter 6.

### 3.1.2 Recent developments

Meanwhile, in the traditional missionary sending countries of Western Europe, nationality was becoming divorced from religious adherence and Western Christians' concern for the salvation of their neighbours was growing. 'Mission' began to be spoken of in terms of sharing the Christian message locally among those who professed no religion. It has been pointed out that recent decades have seen the 'centre' of Christianity move from the global North to the global South (Matenga & Gold, 2016, p.4); the traditional missionary sending countries of Western Europe have become largely secular while the former 'mission fields' have seen the growth of both western-style and indigenous forms of Christianity. Coinciding with increasing migration from the Global South into the Global North, which offered non-Western Christians first-hand insight into the state of the Western church, this has led not only to the founding in the West of many churches targeted specifically at particular immigrant groups, but also to 'reverse mission,' whereby non-Western missionaries seek to take the Gospel message to the indigenous populations of the former colonial

powers (Catto, 2008; 2012). From a British perspective, this means that we are now a receiving as well as a sending nation: a mission field.

To conclude this section on the 'Where' of mission, then, the history of the modern missionary movement is closely linked to colonialism (Rieger, 2004). As Empire waned, Christianity was declining in Western Europe, as shown in *The Religion of British Millennials* (Chapter 2). The growing diversity within Christianity increasingly came to be reflected in international bodies such as the World Council of Churches and the World Evangelical Alliance. Practitioners and theologians of mission came to understand that mission is "from everywhere to everywhere" (Nazir-Ali, 1990). Nevertheless, while progress has been made, Rieger (2004, p.202) warns that "...if we repress our colonial and neocolonial histories, they will come back to haunt us all the more."

## 3.2 The 'What'

### 3.2.1 *Understandings of Mission*

Mission in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was eschatological: as the existence around the world of different people groups was discovered, European Christians became concerned for the eternal salvation of those who had never heard the Christian gospel. The goal of the earliest missions was conversion. Soon though, the realities of a lack of conversions coupled with changes in British views of domestic life and roles led to 'civilisation' becoming just as important as 'conversion.' As discussed above, the 'civilising mission' involved the introduction of Western technologies, Western medication and Western education. While the attitudes were patronising, missionaries sought to improve the lives of the people they lived among. Just as some evangelical activism at home was causing Christians to become involved in humanitarian work (Bebbington, 1989, p.120), so abroad there grew a connection between social action and missions, whereby missionaries supported the local population in their struggle against foreign oppression or offered medical care, education and other social assistance. David Livingstone was a medical doctor and is often seen as a champion of the anti-slavery movement, yet he saw himself as a missionary first and foremost (Robert, 2009, p.83-87): the different strands of his work were deeply inter-connected. However, Bosch (1991, p.281-282) argues that evangelicalism later followed the Enlightenment trend in separating the private from the public, leading missionaries to

return to a focus more on personal salvation than on the rights or wellbeing of peoples. This view is still prevalent today, as reflected in Spitters and Ellison's (2017) book, *When Everything is Mission*. Their argument is that this divide between spiritual and social – private and public – should endure, with only the preaching of the Christian gospel and the making of 'converts'/'disciples' being considered true 'mission'.

Spitters and Ellison are reacting to a more general move away from conversion as a missionary goal and back towards social action. Stanley (1990, p.84) describes a "...discernible shift in the evangelical world conscience from evangelistic to humanitarian concerns." In a study undertaken in 2011 for the UK's mission network *Global Connections*, "Many interviewees talked about their personal journey from a 'proclamation' to an 'integral' (or holistic) understanding of God's mission, where personal salvation and demonstrating the Gospel is a part of God's wider plan for the redemption of the whole world" (Hildreth, 2012, p.3). What is here described at an individual level, is also occurring at an organisational level, as "...many religious organizations began to downplay their interest in conversion in favor of improving the lives of local peoples..." as early as the nineteenth century (Barnett & Stein, 2012, p.4). In today's post-modern context, evangelism is often seen as an "...arrogant claim to a monopoly on the truth" (Kirk, 1999, p.58). I discuss this further in *Being: The Identity of the Missionary* (Chapter 6), where I look at the relationship that participants in this study have with the term 'missionary.' In recent years a new term has grown in popularity: 'missional.' This is commonly used to refer to an individual or congregation whose focus is on spreading the Christian message within or beyond their community, more frequently through actions and attitudes than by preaching.

The postwar period saw "...western interest and involvement in Africa now widening greatly to include aid and development agencies and their workers. In the context of this phenomenon and of indigenous criticism of missions, western Christian thinkers worked to re-evaluate and re-define mission" (Stuart, 2011, p.172). As secular NGOs grew, Christian relief organisations professionalised their own involvement in development, whilst downplaying their commitment to religious proselytism. Well-known British relief agency Tear Fund grew out of a desire in the Evangelical Alliance's Relief Fund Committee for a "...radical understanding of the gospel as a message that

truly was 'good news to the poor...'” (Tear Fund, 2021). Tear Fund’s mission is “...to follow Jesus where the need is greatest, responding to crisis and partnering with local churches to bring restoration to those living in poverty.” Another major relief agency, *World Vision*, offers no mission statement on its UK website where the only reference to faith is in its claim to be “inspired by our Christian faith...” (World Vision UK, 2021), whereas the US website states that “...World Vision is an international partnership of Christians whose mission is to follow our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in working with the poor and oppressed to promote human transformation, seek justice, and bear witness to the good news of the Kingdom of God” (World Vision, 2021). Perhaps this is simply a decision around website design, but it may also reflect the differences the organisation sees between its UK and US markets.

There is a view that the development work begun by early Christian missionaries has now been replaced by secular development agencies in the realm of social action (Smith, 2017, p.65). Yet Lunn (2009, p.948) argues that religious organisations continue to have an important role to play in “...social development... or ...human flourishing,” given that secularism is largely a Western phenomenon while much of the world remains resolutely religious. Those who criticise the religious ethos of Faith-Based development organisations (FBOs) often fail to recognise that secular NGOs can also be guilty of seeking to impose their own Western ways of thinking or behaving in non-Western societies. Smith (2017, p.64) points out that “...the focus of proselytization is on religious activity, leading to the conclusion that proselytization is a problem only for religious groups rather than for all groups espousing political or religious beliefs.”

According to Stirrat (2008, p.414-415):

“The goal of their activities is the person who is free from social or other forms of constraint, who is empowered, who is no longer marginal or oppressed, whose knowledge is recognized as being as good as anyone else’s. All of this is based on a concept of the social which is ultimately premised on the idea that society should consist of individuals entering into forms of social contract with each other which deny pre-existing forms of hierarchy, dependency or powerlessness. At the back of all this is the model of the ‘individual’ in the sense that has evolved in the post-Enlightenment West.”

Indeed, some countries and cultures view all Western development agencies as ‘missionary,’ due to their promotion of Western ideals (Smith 2017, p.66), be they religious, cultural or ideological.

### *3.2.2 Education*

Since its beginnings in the era of colonial expansion, the modern missionary movement has prioritised Bible translation and literacy (Woodberry, 2010, p.5). The Protestant Reformation's emphasis on the individuality of faith necessitated the translation of Scripture into local languages. Coming shortly after the invention of the printing press, this led to the availability of printed Bibles in the vernacular and to the spread of literacy. According to Wycliffe Bible Translators, the entire Bible is currently available in 704 languages and the New Testament in a further 1551 languages (Wycliffe UK, 2021). Missionaries from around the world continue to work on translations into thousands of other languages and dialects: four participants in this project were involved, either directly or indirectly, in Bible translation. Early missionaries were themselves well-educated and set out to educate local peoples, in order that they might be able to read Scripture (Bebbington, 1989, p.123). As mentioned above, this included the education of women and slaves (Robert, 2009, p.50, 127; Woodberry, 2006, p.5). Whilst the primary aim of missionary education was to enable local people to study Christian Scriptures, a Western-style education once received enabled people to access a range of literature and ultimately to understand themselves as equal to the colonisers. Thus education was a key driver behind calls for social reform and democracy (Lankina & Getachew, 2012, p.467,475).

### *3.2.3 Support Services*

Surrounding mission work itself has grown up a significant infrastructure. If we take the work of Bible translation as an example, this requires not only linguists but also theologians, administrators and even an aviation service to reach remote locations. These workers, many of them still foreign missionaries, are then supported by pastoral staff and in some instances schools for their children. A similar infrastructure may surround organisations which focus on gospel proclamation or on development work. Thus 'mission' as a concept comes to include not only 'missionary' as preacher, but also those whose support enables him or her to carry out their work.

### *3.2.4 Business As Mission*

With the increasing avoidance of anything that might be construed as condescending or colonialist has grown an interest in the use of business to spread the Christian message. Examples of this are varied and not all will fit into the descriptions offered by

proponents of what has become known as 'Business as Mission' (BAM). In some cases, a business might be opened in a poor community in order to create jobs; others may offer microloans to local small business. BAM has also grown out of the desire of many to move away from the colonialist overtones of the traditional aid model, which sees the wealthy West giving to poorer countries, often with strict controls on how assistance is distributed. Through business creation, it is argued, local people can be helped to gain both financial independence and self-respect. BAM itself can, however, be construed as a form of neocolonialism in that it often assumes the superiority and universality of a Western model of business (Rieger, 2004).

### 3.2.5 *Creation Care*

The goal of exploration in the colonial era was, of course, not simply conquest for its own sake; colonialists were motivated by the exploitation of the lands and resources they conquered. Human actions from industrialisation until the present day have led to the ecological crisis the world now faces, with the bulk of the damage done by the wealthiest countries, yet disproportionately impacting the poorest (Warners et.al., 2014, p.222). Thus social justice and care for the poor must go hand-in-hand with a change in our attitudes towards the natural environment. In her description of the inter-relationships between indigenous peoples, their environments and Christianity, Tabor-Hamilton (2021, p.182) shows that:

Those who came from Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries brought with them a set of beliefs about the natural world in which indigenous peoples were placed in the same category as nature. Consequently, indigenous peoples were viewed as wild, undomesticated, uncivilized, and an exploitable commodity for enslavement – along with every other creature, mineral, tree, and plant in the wilderness. Growing beyond the ongoing consequences of such a worldview requires genuine partnership with the indigenous peoples who are the frontline protectors and conservators of the environments in which they live.

Christians used the Judeo-Christian idea of humanity being given dominion over creation to justify the exploitation of the environment. Increasingly, however, "...the same concept is now viewed in terms of the sustainable stewardship of nature" (Lunn, 2009, p.946). Simmons (2009, p.51) cites Francis Schaeffer's (1970) publication of *Pollution and the Death of Man: the Christian View of Ecology* as the first important step in this process, while Bossman (2008, p.54) attributes the term 'Creation Care' to Richard Cizik, a Vice-President of the USA's *National Association of Evangelicals*. The

*Cape Town Commitment*, penned by mission leaders from around the world as part of the Lausanne Movement's centennial commemoration of the Edinburgh 1910 mission conference, included the care of creation in its definition of mission (Lausanne Movement, 2010, emphasis in original):

The Bible declares God's redemptive purpose for *creation* itself. Integral mission means discerning, proclaiming, and living out, the biblical truth that the gospel is God's good news, through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, for individual persons, *and* for society, *and* for creation. All three are broken and suffering because of sin; all three are included in the redeeming love and mission of God; all three must be part of the comprehensive mission of God's people.

In this project I have not restricted in any way the range of activities carried out by participants. Many participants were involved in church-based work or in Bible translation. Some saw their work in education or health as 'mission,' while others viewed it simply as a means to live in a particular country to which they sensed a divine call. While some participants were involved in social projects linked to churches or as health professionals, none had social justice or creation care as their primary occupation. This may reflect my means of recruitment – through mission agencies and mission-related personal contacts – more than the actual involvement of British Millennial Christians working overseas. It may also be that my use of "involvement in Christian mission" in my title put off those who do not term their work 'mission'. Further research into Millennial involvement in international social or environmental projects could look at whether faith is a motivating factor.

### 3.3 The 'Who'

#### 3.3.1 *Early Trends*

As public interest in other lands grew, evangelical Christians began to voice concern for the salvation of 'pagan' peoples. By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, missionary organisations were emerging (Manktelow, 2013, p.3): for example, the Baptist Missionary Society (1792), the London Missionary Society (1795), the Scottish Missionary Society (1796) and the Church Missionary Society (1799). These sought to recruit and place missionaries, while administering their financial support and transmitting their news and activities to Britain's emerging missionary public. Individual church members would donate money to send and support one of their peers as a foreign missionary. Robert (2009, p.46) suggests that the voluntary society

grew out of the Enlightenment's emphasis on personal choice and the growth of capitalism. Evangelical Christians believed (as they do today) that salvation required a personal commitment. This provided both the push and the pull for overseas mission: believers were drawn to offer this individual choice to all, while the depth of their own commitment would be expressed through involvement in missions whether by going or by supporting.

At first, missionary organisations sought to recruit single men, deemed cheaper to support and less complex than those with wives and families (Manktelow, 2013, p.26). The dangers of the mission field were not considered appropriate for white women (Manktelow 2013, p.25). Manktelow (2013, p.28) has shown that the London Missionary Society (LMS) intended that these single male missionaries would marry early local converts, raising children who would speak local languages as well as English and, understanding the local culture, would themselves become effective missionaries. Interracial marriage was not, at this point, frowned upon, particularly as many of the first missionaries were of working class or artisan backgrounds, already considered inferior by the upper classes. This policy ultimately failed, in no small part because conversion did not occur as quickly or as extensively as the LMS had predicted. Responding to their isolation and sexual frustration, many single male missionaries either requested that they be allowed English wives, married local women who were not converted, or had to leave the mission because of sexual practices considered inappropriate.

### *3.3.2 Women and Children*

It therefore became increasingly common for missionaries to marry before travelling to their mission location, with the voyage sometimes constituting their honeymoon (Manktelow, 2013, p.38). Missionary wives were, for the most part, willing partners in the mission endeavour. For some, marriage was a legitimate route into an adventure otherwise closed to women. With missionary wives came missionary widowhood, to which the LMS responded by decreeing in 1818 that missionary widows were to remain members of the mission and independently to continue their work. This recognised the significance of the mission work carried out by women, and "...confirmed a space for female activism in the missionary enterprise" (Manktelow, 2013, p.41).

As missions increasingly became the domain of the upper working and lower middle classes, these families came to reflect the values of their class in the demarcation of gender roles. In Britain, the wives and daughters of those aspiring to middle class status no longer needed to seek paid employment, meaning that the role of women was largely restricted to child-bearing and home-making. Therefore the message proclaimed by missionaries came to include the role of husband as breadwinner and wife as home-maker and mother. This was one aspect of what came to be known as the 'civilizing mission.' Missionary wives, who were too busy with their domestic responsibilities to have much of a role in the mission, were thereby able to turn their accepted role as homemaker into a missionary vocation, demonstrating to the local people what they saw as the norms of Christian domestic life. "Female vocation became tied to mission domesticity, and the ability of women to find spiritual fulfilment in and through their domestic obligations. Female mission became exemplary, civilisational and companionate..." (Manktelow, 2013, p.59). While women continued to be recognised as missionaries alongside their husbands, their direct role in the work of the mission was reduced. Though the concept of a civilizing mission is no longer used, this continues to be the experience of many missionary mothers: frustrated by their lack of direct involvement in missionary work, they are encouraged to regard as their 'mission' the raising of their children and the example they show of Christian family life.

Missionary wives had, however, demonstrated their value to the mission, not just as companions for the men, but as co-workers ministering to the practical and spiritual needs of the local women and children. The change in emphasis toward the domestic role of women, coupled with the pressures of pregnancy and childcare, meant that the mission activities which had previously been carried out by women were added to the men's workload. This led missionary organisations in the latter quarter of the nineteenth century to begin recruiting single missionary women in order to continue the work begun by the wives (Hall, 2002, p.91). Missionary wives, argues Manktelow, "...were increasingly professionally sidelined through a late Victorian rise in maternalism, and the parallel emergence of social maternalism, that is, single female evangelical and philanthropic action" (Manktelow, 2013, p.48). So single female missionaries took the place of wives in the work of the mission, allowing the wives to focus on their domestic role. While today most missionary couples will both be

involved in ministry and both play a role in the children's upbringing, a distinction often remains. In my own experience as a single missionary in the twenty-first century, I have been told by married male missionaries that single women are needed to bring a female perspective to meetings and conferences because childcare responsibilities prevent their wives from attending.

### 3.3.3 *Missionary Training*

As mentioned above, early missionaries were largely drawn from the upper working or lower middle classes. They were literate but not highly educated. As missionary sending organisations became more established, they began to require that their recruits have theological training, leading to the establishment of mission-focused Bible colleges such as All Nations Christian College in Hertfordshire and Cliff College in Derbyshire. Later, organisations such as Operation Mobilization (OM, founded in 1957) and Youth With A Mission (YWAM, founded in 1960) developed models of providing young people with a short-term mission experience which included cultural and theological training; some of these young people would continue long-term, running local projects and training others. In recent years many traditional mission organisations have dropped the requirement for formal theological training, fearing that it puts off Millennial mission candidates, and Bible colleges have responded by developing shorter introductory courses and online learning.

### 3.3.4 *Short-term Missions*

Robert (2009, p.73) comments that "...globalization created a vast network of mission amateurs." Aided by the increasing accessibility and decreasing expense of air travel, 'short-term mission' (STM) has grown in popularity in recent decades. Varying in length from a week or two to a gap-year, these 'mission trips' see groups take part in social, educational and spiritual projects away from their home country. Though the benefits of such short-term missions on the local project concerned remain debatable and differ widely from case to case, they have been shown to have a positive impact on those who take part (Matenga & Gold, 2016, p.62-65). A short-term experience seems to be a common way for people considering long-term mission involvement to decide whether it is really for them, as I discuss in *Becoming: The Journey into Mission* (Chapter 5).

### 3.3.5 *From Anywhere to Anywhere*

As I demonstrate above, mission is no longer from the West to the Rest, but now from anywhere to anywhere. While the United States continue to send more foreign missionaries than any other country, South Korea is now in second place (Johnstone & Mandryk, 2005, p.6; cf. Moon, 2003; Oh & Meiring, 2009): in 2016 Moon estimated that there were 20 672 Korean missionaries working in 171 countries (Moon, 2016). By the 1980s, missionary sending in and from Latin America was becoming so established that a congress of 3000 Latin American leaders was held in 1987. Known as *Comibam* (*COngreso Misionera IBeroAMericana*), this event led to a movement of the same name which continues today to assist Latin American evangelical missions. African churches are commonplace across Europe: in the UK there is a tendency to think of them as serving our black and African communities, yet the incoming missionaries themselves often come in response to a call to evangelise secular Britain and many are ministering in white-majority denominations (Olofinjana, 2020; Catto, 2008). In Eastern Europe, where there are far fewer residents of African heritage, African-led churches are expanding among the local populations (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2006).

Colonialism and the resulting power dynamic mean that there remains a significant difference between the early evangelical missionary movement and the current movement of missionaries from the Global South (Catto, 2008). Those who come as missionaries to 21<sup>st</sup> Century Britain do not carry the same economic or social status as those who went out from 19<sup>th</sup> Century Britain.

### 3.3.6 *Churches, Agencies and Individuals*

When asking who the missionaries are, one must also address the question of who they are sent by. As stated above, missionary agencies began to emerge early in the modern missionary era. Many of these early agencies were denominational (e.g. Baptist Missionary Society, Church Missionary Society) in terms of their sending base, or geographical in terms of the area of the world in which they operated (e.g. China Inland Mission, Sudan Inland Mission). While most agencies today would affirm that the local church community is the sender – or at least require a missionary candidate to demonstrate the backing of their congregation’s leadership – the relationship between agency and congregation can be strained, with local churches sometimes feeling that the agencies are “taking” their young people with leadership potential.

This is the case particularly for those agencies which do not have a denominational affiliation. While individual church members are free to give financially wherever they like, some denominations require that their congregations give only to missionaries sent through their respective agencies.

As the world has become more inter-connected – whether through internet, cheaper air travel, or increasing migration – many local congregations now have personal connections with other congregations around the world. This has led to an increase in independent overseas mission work, unconnected to sending organisations. For example, an individual may decide to spend a gap-year or a career break working with a congregation in another country, funded by their own savings and supported only by their own congregation. In some cases the individual may then decide to remain longer term. This can give the missionary and their local church a greater sense of control over their ministry and strengthen the relationships between the sending and receiving congregations. However, the need for the involvement of a professional mission agency is often felt when things go wrong: be it a breakdown of trust with local leadership, political upheaval, or a personal mental health crisis.

### *3.3.7 Challenges*

The financial crisis of 2008 had a lasting impact on UK-based missions and on young adults in particular and it is to be expected that the current cost-of-living crisis will similarly reduce financial contributions to Christian mission. As well as being unable to support themselves at least partially by rental income from UK property, younger missionaries' peers have less disposable income which might be donated to missions. At the same time, older people are healthier and enjoy longer retirements than in the past, which has led to an increase in self-funded retirees becoming missionaries.

It is too early to say what lasting impacts the Covid-19 pandemic might have on missionary work around the world. One immediate and obvious effect of the pandemic was the restriction on international travel. Some mission agencies required all of their international workers to return to their passport countries; others allowed people the choice. For some it was simple enough to find a flight back to the UK; for others it was virtually impossible. Some happened to be visiting the UK and became "stuck." In some cases, projects which for years had been staffed – or at least led – by foreign missionaries were left in the hands of the local workers: the moratorium called for in

the 1970s brought into being by a 21<sup>st</sup> century pandemic. Some discovered that their largely administrative roles could be carried out effectively from a distance. Whether these changes endure beyond the pandemic remains to be seen.

### 3.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, I would concur with those who argue that mission occurs when Christians of any national or ethnic background are sent to a different location or group with the aim of sharing the Christian gospel through words or actions. It is not the location or the nature of the activity which defines it as mission, but rather its intentionality. My focus in this thesis on British missionaries is in no way intended to negate the validity of the mission work carried out by people of non-British nationality, nor by those whose mission is within their own borders. I have chosen to limit my research to participants from the UK whose mission involvement is (or in some cases was) in another country because I am interested in the interplay between the British missionary narrative on the one hand, and the largely secular environment in which Millennials grew up on the other. Given the prevailing critical view of missionary involvement in Britain's colonial past, it is remarkable that any young adults continue to be drawn to a missionary career. In this thesis, therefore, I consider how Millennial missionaries construct an identity within the evangelical missionary tradition which nevertheless prioritises diversity and the individual's right to choose his or her own path.

## CHAPTER 4      Methodology

Having in my introductory chapters given a summary of the context in which these questions arise, I now turn to the methods used in this research and my reasons for choosing them.

### 4.1 Research Questions

In this thesis, I address a number of questions regarding Christian international missionaries who are also British Millennials:

- RQ 1    What motivates Millennial Christians to become missionaries?
- RQ 2    How do they negotiate differing narratives in order to explore their own personal identity?
- RQ 3    How is this negotiation worked out in their professional and personal lives?
- RQ 4    To what extent do Millennial missionaries reflect the characteristics and values usually associated with their generation and/or those of previous generations of missionaries.

In any research project, a decision on the methods to be used must be based on the research questions: which methodology will best equip the researcher to answer the questions posed? As the research questions set out in the present study seek to explore a culture – the thoughts, feelings and actions of a subgroup of the Millennial generation – my aim was that my research would create what Geertz (1973, p."2) termed a "thick description," offering detailed insight into the behaviours, motivations and mindset of my research participants. I therefore decided to carry out a qualitative study based on semi-structured interviews. Qualitative research allows the researcher to explore areas of interest in depth, ordinarily with a smaller number of research participants. By allowing participants to respond in their own words, qualitative studies offer insight into individuals' understanding of themselves and of the world around them. While a range of qualitative methods were possible, I elected to undertake interviews because these gave me the opportunity to probe more deeply into the motives behind actions or emotions related to me by participants.

Although quantitative methods were therefore unsuitable for my research, I have drawn on the results gained by others using quantitative methods where these are

relevant to provide context for my own study, or to support or contrast with my findings. As Glaser and Strauss (1967, p.18) point out, "In many instances, both forms of data are necessary ...both used as supplements, as mutual verification...." Prior to interview, I asked participants to complete an optional questionnaire (Appendix 4) containing some basic demographic details such as year of birth and denominational affiliation. My aim in so doing was to have a little background information in advance of the interview, however these data also proved useful during the analysis phase in considering how age, gender or denomination, for example, influenced an individual's responses. It is also the case that some quantitative data has been gleaned incidentally from my qualitative interviews. For example, I realised early in the interview process that many of my participants responded to "Tell me about your faith history" with a description of their Christian parents and upbringing. This data can be recorded as a percentage of the participants, allowing for comparison with the findings of quantitative studies into faith transmission. The qualitative interview setting, however, then allowed me the freedom to probe more deeply, asking follow-up questions such as 'how did that faith become your own?' Or 'have your siblings responded in a similar way?'

The research questions I set out at the start of the thesis also required that I employ an inductive rather than a deductive strategy in my research. I was not aiming to prove or disprove an existing theory, but rather to address questions whose responses would lead to the development of theory. As such I have been guided to a large extent by the 'grounded theory' of Glaser and Strauss (1967), whereby theory is developed as data is analysed and coded, leading to the formation of analytic categories which arise from the data itself (Charmaz, 2006). Although 'grounded theory' was important in the development of a methodological approach to this research project, it has not been employed in its purest form. Whereas Glaser and Strauss (1967, p.37) advocate that a researcher "...ignore the literature of theory and fact on the area under study, in order to assure that the emergence of categories will not be contaminated....," I found it helpful in the design of my interview questions to have gleaned from existing literature an understanding of the findings of previous research. The design of my interview schedule was thus informed by reading about traits commonly attributed to Millennials, with questions aiming to elicit responses regarding areas such as relationships, commitment and diversity.

I therefore chose to use semi-structured interviews as my main means of data gathering. While I hoped to uncover useful data from the participants' telling of their own stories, it was necessary to provide some structure both because a small pilot study early on demonstrated that this was clearly expected by interviewees and because I could thereby ensure that certain areas of interest were addressed. This also meant that interviews usually covered most of the same areas, allowing responses to be compared and contrasted. Too structured an interview, however, would risk missing areas of importance to the participants but which I, as the researcher, had not considered. For example, a comment made by an early interviewee led me to add a question regarding the ways participants' faith had been challenged.

There is a risk in interviews that participants may not give entirely accurate accounts, opening the study up to an accusation of unreliability. This is also the case in quantitative studies, where participants may not want to admit to something, may misunderstand the question or genuinely believe themselves to act otherwise. In the case of qualitative interviews, the researcher has the option to ask for further explanation or clarification. My interest in this thesis is in how individuals interpret their own experiences and construct an identity, rather than in the accuracy of their recall.

## 4.2 Researcher Positionality

In any qualitative research project, it is important to consider the positionality of the researcher in relation to the group or population on which the research is focused. A researcher who is a member of the group under study is known as an 'insider,' while an 'outsider' has no affiliation to the group. In this section, I reflect on my 'insider' status in my research into Millennial Christian missionaries. I find that both my experience of living in another culture and my prior study of culture generally have informed and enhanced my understanding of what it is to be an 'insider' or an 'outsider.' My own 'outsider' experience began as an English child in Scotland, followed by an undergraduate degree back in England, which included a year abroad divided between Romania and Germany; a year after graduation I moved to Romania and stayed there fourteen years. Though I spoke the language and for the most part adapted to the culture, Romanians never forgot that I was foreign. When I returned to

the UK, people expected me to be a cultural ‘insider,’ yet many British cultural situations and social conversations left me bewildered.

As an ‘outsider’ in so many situations, I feel most ‘at home’ – an ‘insider’ – among Christian missionaries, who have chosen to live in a country and culture other than their own because of a sense of divine vocation. There is much shared experience and outlook even where location and role differ significantly. Adler and Adler (1987, p.67ff) have referred to a “complete member researcher” as one who identifies entirely with the group under study. Yet, as they (1987, p.67) point out and as I discuss below, no researcher could be a pure ‘insider’ in regard to every aspect of another person’s life. In my present research I am about as close to a ‘complete member’ as it is possible to be; nevertheless a handful of minor differences remain between myself and each individual participant, such as a few years’ difference in age, gender, theological stance, type of work, etc. As a researcher, being an ‘insider’ to such a degree presents both challenges and opportunities, which I set out below. While these are areas I have encountered in my own research, they are also reflected in the literature around the insider-outsider issue in qualitative research (Cumming-Potvin, 2003; Taylor, 2011).

#### *4.2.1 Opportunities*

Firstly, I have found being an ‘insider’ to be an advantage in recruiting research participants (Berger, 2015). My first step in recruitment was to approach mission organisations and personal contacts in positions of leadership. These were the gatekeepers in this project: those who could allow or prevent access to a group of potential participants (Crowhurst & Kennedy-MacFoy, 2013, p.457). Because of my background and personal connections, these gatekeepers were happy to promote my research. Such organisations trust me as a researcher, assuming because of my past that I am sympathetic to their values and aims, sharing their framework of interpretation. At the same time, they also have an expectation that the findings of my research will be of use to them.

Secondly, I have seen interview participants physically relax and become more communicative as I have shared a little of my own experience or expressed understanding of the situations they relate. Again, this easier rapport-building reflects the trust that being an ‘insider’ generates. In her research among bereaved parents, ‘outsider’ Buckle records one of her participants as saying, “...it’s different if you’re a

member of the club” (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p.57). Finch’s (1984) ‘insider’ research among groups of women led her to conclude that female participants are more likely to be open with a woman researcher. She does not, however, compare this with any attempts at interviewing male participants, so we cannot be sure that she would not have had the same ease in rapport building. In my experience to date, I have noticed no difference in response from men or women;<sup>10</sup> it has rather been my identity as a former missionary which has provoked openness among participants. I agree with Finch (1984, p.79) that “...the interviewer has to be prepared to expose herself to being ‘placed’ ...,” however I would argue that this ‘placing’ is within any group with which the participant also identifies, rather than necessarily as a woman. For me, this easing of rapport-building has, for example, been accentuated in the case of single participants: having arranged interview times by email around the availability of childcare at my end, I sometimes found it necessary to reveal that I had been a single missionary into my late thirties in order for them to talk freely about some of the challenges they face. It is important for a participant to feel that they are understood: that their words will not be misrepresented.

#### 4.2.2 Challenges

This leads directly to the first challenge of being an ‘insider’: the danger of assuming that one speaks the same language as the participant in all respects. As an ‘insider,’ I am already familiar with much of the vocabulary of the Christian missions community: terms such as *member care*, *field*, or *furlough*. Yet words like *salvation*, *sin*, or *calling* may mean different things to different speakers. While I lived in Romania, I sometimes worked closely with North Americans. It was not uncommon for us to resort to speaking Romanian in order to confirm that we were in fact talking about the same thing: the English language is not the same everywhere. In my present research it was necessary for me to question participants’ use of language, even when I thought I had understood. My own experience of following a vocation,<sup>11</sup> of preparation for service, and of living as a ‘missionary’ is unique: each of my participants has their own story. I

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<sup>10</sup> The question of which member of a couple agrees to be interviewed has been interesting. Sometimes I have simply interviewed the British partner in a cross-cultural marriage. Where both are British, I was open to interviewing both, either separately or together, but this did not take place.

<sup>11</sup> The notion of vocation or “calling” is significant in this project, as many participants have a strong sense of having received from God personal direction. I discuss this in Chapter 5.

therefore probed each person's answers to my questions, rather than assuming that I had understood what is meant by an initial statement. The challenge for me was to observe as if I were on the outside, describing phenomena in a way which makes them meaningful to outsiders. Similarly, on occasion participants made assumptions about my understanding and therefore did not explain their ideas as clearly as they might to an 'outsider' (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009), as when a participant mentioned in passing the "basic tenets" of evangelicalism.

While I chose not to interview those associated with the mission organisation on whose Board I serve, I did on a number of occasions interview people with whom I share common acquaintances. I have also interviewed a personal friend and a close friend of a friend. This level of connection can lead the participant to conceal challenges they face, or to reveal details I would prefer not to know. Such intimate knowledge of participants can also impact on my interpretation of the data they provide. Taylor (2011) compares this to a portrait painted of her by a friend: the researcher is revealing an acquaintance to his or her readers and must decide how this individual will be portrayed. I have also found that my background in Christian missions has made me more aware than an outsider might be of which questions would prove sensitive; making me therefore more reticent to ask. Areas such as the raising of finance can be difficult, as can relationships with organisational or church leaders back in the UK. On the other hand, as an 'insider' I also know which questions are likely to elicit an interesting response. For example, I went against common advice in qualitative research (Patton, 2002, p.353) by using a closed question: "Do you call yourself a 'missionary?'" This was almost invariably greeted with laughter, followed by an uncomfortable silence, then insight into how the term is understood not only by the respondent but also by his or her family, friends and supporters, and sometimes how it is viewed in the local culture.

Because of my prior knowledge of and involvement in the subject area of this study, I am conscious that there is a risk that I might project my own ideas and interpretations onto my participants (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). This means that I had to be meticulous in my analysis of data, 'bracketing' or laying aside my own expectations or interests (Flaherty, 2009, p. 220) in order to allow the data to speak. I also ensured that I do not simply omit or gloss over data which appeared contradictory. I describe below the

process of data analysis and how I used thorough and detailed analysis to ensure that all statements and perspectives were treated equally. The results and discussion chapters (Chapters 5-8) of my research were also sent to participants, allowing them to verify that their words and views have not been misrepresented. Six participants responded: they were able to identify themselves in my text but were content with the level of anonymity, as well as how their words were construed.

#### *4.2.3 Insider-Outsider Spectrum*

Of course, the 'insider-outsider' issue is not a clear dichotomy: it is rather a spectrum. No one person can be an 'insider' on every aspect of another's life, experience and attitudes (Taylor, 2011): we are always both 'insider' and 'outsider' to some extent. Dwyer and Buckle (2009, p.60) have referred to this as the "space between," arguing that "Holding membership in a group does not denote complete sameness within that group. Likewise, not being a member of a group does not denote complete difference." We are not defined solely by any one aspect of who we are: age, gender, profession, etc. While the researcher may share much common experience with the population under study, there will always be areas of difference also. With respect to my own research, I have no experience of working for ten years in a secular job in the UK before becoming a missionary. I was single in missions: I do not share the experience of bringing up children in another country and culture. I also travelled to Romania independently, with only the support of a local church: I was never part of a large mission organisation. My experience is of living in post-communist Romania; unlike the locations of some of my participants, it was not intolerant of Christianity nor technologically remote (except when I first lived there in the 1990s), and flights back to the UK were accessible and increasingly also affordable. So while, for the most part, I am certainly an 'insider,' having what Hodgkinson (2005, p.3) has described as "...significant levels of initial proximity between researcher and researched," I remain an 'outsider' with regard to specific aspects of each individual participant's life.

My background in Christian missions has been useful in my current research not simply because of my 'insider' status, but also because modern missions training includes a good deal of input on cultural differences and cultural awareness: prospective missionaries are taught to approach the foreign culture as a learner and to reflect on their own cultural bias and the influences by which they have been shaped, as well as a

recognition that "...no simply neutral or value-free position is possible..." (Silverman, 2001, p.260). I have learned, therefore, over many years to reflect on the provenance of my own ideas and interpretations, when these are challenged by the situations or viewpoints I encounter. In my research, too, it is important that I reflect continually upon the role of self – of my own experiences and beliefs – at each stage of the research process (Berger, 2015; Cumming-Potvin, 2013). Dwyer and Buckle (2009, p.55) have described the person of the researcher as "...an essential and ever-present aspect of the investigation" regardless of where on the 'Insider-Outsider' spectrum one is positioned. It is important both for research participants and their 'gate-keepers' and also for future readers that one is open about one's positionality throughout the research process. My unique background and experience may offer me some level of insider insight into one aspect of a given group, but make me an outsider from a different perspective. There can be few groups so completely homogeneous as to permit any one individual to claim absolute understanding of another. Geertz (1999) describes such degrees of commonality as "experience-near" or "experience-distant." As Dwyer and Buckle (2009, p.62) have stated: "A theme throughout human history is our powerful and persistent tendency to frame complex issues as a struggle between two opposing sides. Surely the time has come to abandon these constructed dichotomies and embrace and explore the complexity and richness of the space between the entrenched positions."

Therefore Durkheim's view that researchers should be completely objective is now generally regarded as unrealistic (Bryman, 2001). Every researcher has been influenced by their culture, belief system and values: these form the primary socialisation (Berger & Luckmann, 1991/1966) which determines the researcher's own interpretations of what they see, hear and experience. What is important is therefore a researcher's ability to recognise and reflect on those influences. This allows the reader to make his or her own judgment regarding the extent to which the researcher's values have impacted on the research. A researcher's interest in a given subject area has often arisen out of his or her own past experiences or circumstances. As Flick (1998, p.49) has stated, "research questions do not come from nowhere. In many cases, their origin lies in the researcher's personal biography and his or her social context." In my own case, my interest in the Millennial generation's involvement in Christian mission grew

out of my own mission work and conversations with mission leaders struggling to recruit or to understand the next generation.

### 4.3 Theoretical Approach

My theoretical approach is based on social constructionism, which resonates with me because of my experience of living and working across cultures: the realisation that one's perception of reality differs depending on one's cultural background leads me to conclude that early social influences mould our understanding of the world. Social constructionism, expounded in Berger & Luckmann's (1991/1966) exploration of the Sociology of Knowledge, is the theory that we understand ourselves and the world around us through the lens of social interaction, which teaches us how to make sense of experience. It is through the significant others who surround us in our infancy that we learn to interpret the various symbols, including language, which represent aspects of everyday life. It is, then, the society we are born into which gives us the tools to begin to understand the world around us and our own place within it. Known as 'primary socialisation', this is the way in which a child learns to interpret reality, in line with the narratives of national culture and religious faith communicated through parents and their immediate social circles. It is difficult to change beliefs and values stemming from 'primary socialisation' as these form the foundation of one's 'plausibility structures' (Berger, 1990/1967) or one's understanding of what can or cannot be true. In Romanian culture, for example, there is a belief that draughts can make one ill. As a foreigner living there, I was able to learn about this belief and to adapt my behaviour accordingly, but it did not become part of my own plausibility structures, formed in windy Scotland. This demonstrates that 'secondary socialisation' is rarely as deep-seated as primary, because the agency of the individual is increased in adulthood.

In this thesis I am concerned with a specific aspect of social constructionism, namely that of religious socialisation, defined by Klingenberg and Sjo (2019, p.174) as "the process in which an individual comes to hold preferences in relation to dimensions understood as religious in the surrounding context." This definition allows for a broader understanding of religious socialisation which includes both religious and secular discourse, as I find that my participants merge aspects of these in the formation of their own beliefs. Following Klingenberg and Sjo (2019, p.168), I take the

beliefs and behaviours of participants as my starting point and seek to identify agents of both primary and secondary socialisations, showing how individuals negotiate the differing discourses encountered. I consider how individual agency interacts with socialisation, as a child grows into youth and then adulthood, encountering along the way varying narratives which constitute secondary socialisations (Golo *et al.*, 2019, p.182).

#### 4.4 Participants

I sought to recruit interview participants through a number of means. Firstly, I wrote to mission organisations' UK offices, asking them to put me in touch with their Millennial workers. This connected me to a pool of potential participants, but with the risk of reduced diversity as many may represent the same organisations. Secondly, I posted an announcement on Facebook which was then shared by my contacts who themselves have a network of missionary contacts. This method did not yield as large a number of participants as I had expected, leading me to conclude that people generally prefer to receive a personal invitation. Finally, I employed 'snowball sampling' (Bryman, 2001): asking those who had already responded to pass my details to others in their own network. This method risks narrowing the range and variety of participants. Of the twenty-one individuals who ultimately took part in the project, six were from one organisation and four from another.

I interviewed twenty-one participants in total. A summary description of the participants can be found in Appendix 1 and demographic information is shown in Table 4.1 below. While the sample is smaller than I had anticipated at the outset, the data produced nevertheless provides a unique insight into the lived religion of committed Christians from a generation which is largely nonreligious. Seventeen participants were born between 1980 and 1999, the range I am taking as Millennial for the purposes of this study. In fact, the youngest participant I was able to recruit was born in 1992 and therefore aged around 28 at the time of interview. My eldest participants were just reaching their 40<sup>th</sup> birthdays at the time of interview. The other four people that I interviewed were older, with their experiences and interpretations useful for comparison. One of these, however, was less than two years older than the eldest Millennial participant, allowing me to consider the continuum from one generation to the next, which I discuss in *Generations and the Millennial Generation*

(Chapter 1). Of the Millennial participants, four were male and thirteen female; six were married and eleven single. Six were working in Africa, five in Europe, three in Asia and one each in Australasia and the Americas. The final individual did not disclose their location for security reasons. One person had already relocated from one continent to another, while another was in the process of transition. I have assigned a pseudonym to each participant to protect their identity, as well as listing the nature of their work as part of a very broad category.

| Pseudonym                             | Birth Year | M/F | Relationship Status | Church Affiliation           | Region of Service | Nature of Work    |
|---------------------------------------|------------|-----|---------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Millennial Participants:</b>       |            |     |                     |                              |                   |                   |
| John                                  | 1982       | M   | Married             | Neocharismatic <sup>12</sup> | W Europe          | Church            |
| Catherine                             | 1992       | F   | Single              | Evang. Nondenominational     | S Africa          | Training          |
| Lucy                                  | 1985       | F   | Single              | Nondenominational            | E Africa          | Bible Translation |
| Ruth                                  | 1980       | F   | Married             | Pentecostal                  | Africa / Europe   | Training          |
| Ian                                   | 1980s      | M   | Single              | Conservative Evangelical     | undisclosed       | Education         |
| Philip                                | 1984       | M   | Married             | Neocharismatic               | N America         | Church            |
| Sarah                                 | 1990       | F   | Married             | Anglican & Baptist           | E Africa          | Bible Translation |
| Ainsley                               | 1986       | M   | Married             | Neocharismatic               | N Europe          | Church            |
| Elaine                                | 1983       | F   | Married             | Christian Nondenominational  | Australasia       | Support services  |
| Anne                                  | 1980       | F   | Single              | Baptist                      | CE Europe         | Church            |
| Grace                                 | 1980       | F   | Single              | Evangelical                  | E Africa          | Training          |
| Chloe                                 | 1981       | F   | Single              | Christian Nondenominational  | Africa            | Bible Translation |
| Diane                                 | 1983       | F   | Single              | Neocharismatic               | E Asia            | Education         |
| Claire                                | 1987       | F   | Single              | Anglican                     | E Asia            | Evangelism        |
| Jackie                                | 1980       | F   | Single              | Evangelical (independent)    | E Asia            | Support Services  |
| Megan                                 | 1988       | F   | Single              | Evangelical                  | CE Europe         | Church            |
| Karen                                 | 1980s      | F   | Single              | Christian Nondenominational  | Africa            | Medical           |
| <b>Older Generation Participants:</b> |            |     |                     |                              |                   |                   |
| Rachel                                | 1959       | F   | Married             | Evangelical Christian        | Latin America     | Support Services  |
| Chris                                 | 1978       | M   | Married             | Neocharismatic               | CE Europe         | Church            |
| Susan                                 | 1966       | F   | Married             | Baptist/Anglican             | Africa            | Bible Translation |
| Jennifer                              | 1971       | F   | Married             | Anglican                     | Latin America     | Church            |

Table 4.1 Research Participants

<sup>12</sup> In order to protect their identities, I am using the term “Neocharismatic” for those participants who stated as their church affiliation one of the church networks associated with the British House Church Movement (see 2.2.1 in Chapter 2, *The Religion of British Millennials*)

## 4.5 Ethical Considerations

In this study it was essential that the identities be protected of participants, their families, and others to whom they refer. In the first instance, this anonymity offers participants the opportunity to share experiences, thoughts and feelings candidly without fear of reprisal from organisational or church leaders. It also protects them from accusations of defamation where they have related experiences involving others. Importantly, a small number of participants live in or travel to countries where proselytism and religious conversion are illegal, so identification could endanger them or people with whom they are in contact. This is one reason for my anonymising also the countries and cities in which participants work (one or two countries I was not even told). Because numbers of British Millennial missionaries in any given location or organisation or carrying out any given task may be low, thereby increasing the risk of identification, I have anonymised not only mission location but also organisational affiliation, past occupation, home and university towns, etc. In some cases it has been challenging to disguise the identity of mission organisations, where these work in locations or carry out activities which are very specific. This has meant sometimes omitting direct quotations and often giving the reader less context than I might otherwise have done.

Prior to interview, participants were asked to sign a form giving their consent to audio recording and to the storage and use of their data, as explained in the Information Sheet I provided (Appendix 5). When sending this to participants as an email attachment, I disguised sensitive words such as “mission.” At the start of the interview, I asked participants to confirm that they had received and read this. If I were designing this research now, I would create an online consent form which would be easier to use than an email attachment. As electronic communications leave a trail which could potentially be used to trace research participants, the University requires that communication be carried out via University rather than personal email addresses. When I complete my study and am no longer a student, my email account will be deleted along with the contact details of anyone I have communicated with during my research. At the time, however, no such provision existed for online interviews.<sup>13</sup> I

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<sup>13</sup> The University has since switched to using MS Teams, which allows secure video calling to take place and be recorded.

therefore chose to set up a separate Skype account for use only in this project, which I can then delete on completion of the study.

As mentioned above, around one third of participants were recruited through personal contacts. This meant that confidentiality was especially important. If a participant shared with me their financial or emotional struggles or their thoughts about a possible change of role or location, I could not go and speak to their leaders or friends about it. There is always a risk in semi-structured interviewing of hearing things you would prefer not to: thankfully nobody shared information with me that I would be legally required to report. On a couple of occasions, I sent a participant information about support organisations or other useful contacts relating to issues raised during the interview.

#### 4.6 The interview

I anticipated from the outset that many interviews would take place over the internet, but the COVID-19 global pandemic meant that this was exclusively the case. I had intended to carry out face-to-face interviews in addition, by visiting missionary training centres or Christian festivals, but this proved impossible. All interviews in this research were therefore carried out using Skype or similar VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) technologies. Besides the obvious financial and time savings (Seitz, 2016; Deakin & Wakefield, 2014), this allowed me to speak to people currently based in other countries, offering a wider pool of potential participants. Given the subjects of my research were those working abroad, this also meant that interviews were not confined to periods when potential participants would be returning to the UK. While the majority of my interviews were carried out during the first half of 2020 using Skype, the speed of development of video calling technologies alongside COVID-19 lockdowns meant that Skype itself was quickly being replaced by other platforms such as Zoom, MS Teams, or even WhatsApp. The increase in home-working (and home-worshipping) during the lockdowns of 2020 led to a sudden increase in the popularity of video conferencing. For those who live and work abroad, as do the participants in this project, such forms of communication were already widely used. Many use VoIP to maintain communication with friends and family as well as their organisational headquarters. Participants in this study were therefore familiar and comfortable with the notion of talking freely on an internet-based video call.

VoIP interviews depend on a fast and reliable internet connection. They can be interrupted by poor sound or video and occasionally the connection is lost altogether (Seitz, 2016). This is particularly the case where interviewees are based in areas without high speed internet, which is true of many mission workers. During data collection for this research, connection was lost on a few occasions. Usually this was quickly resolved, but two interviews had to switch to voice only. Because of participants' familiarity with VoIP communications, this did not disrupt the flow of the interviews to any significant extent. Besides technical problems, VoIP interviews may be subject to other interruptions. For example, other people may be unaware that an interview is taking place and even seek to speak to the participant. My interviews were interrupted by a knock at the door, a family member offering coffee, my own cats, etc. This did not, however, cause any major disruption as participants were very comfortable with the use of video calling. In some ways, such natural interruptions helped to put interviewees at their ease by making the conversation less formal. As interviewees must be connected to the internet through a PC or other electronic device, they may be receiving constant notifications as emails and other messages arrive. These can prove a distraction, as occurred during a pilot interview for this project, where I had to wait several times for an interviewee to regain the interrupted train of thought.

Although VoIP communications allow something akin to a face-to-face interview, it is impossible to have eye contact. While one looks at the video image on the screen, the camera is above or off to the side. Lo Iacono *et al.* (2016) suggest, however, that the lack of eye contact was no hindrance where participants were familiar with the use of Skype and that it even proved to be an advantage for shy interviewees. Deakin and Wakefield (2014) found that interviews carried out over Skype produced responses at least as open as those given in face-to-face interviews. On the other hand, Seitz (2016) found that Skype inhibited intimacy and rapport with the participants so that responses to sensitive questions were less forthcoming. In my own interviews, I did not feel that the technology played a role in the openness or otherwise of participants: some individuals are naturally more talkative than others and I do not believe that face-to-face interviews would have produced substantially different results. It was only in the few cases where participants were situated in a country where Christian mission is not legal that the online format impacted upon the freedom to talk openly; even

though secure VoIP technology had been selected, there is always a risk of being overheard, so vocabulary had to be chosen carefully.

My interview schedule (Appendix 2) was initially constructed while I was reading existing literature around the Millennial generation. I considered some of the common themes discussed in Chapter 1, then attempted to frame open questions which could elicit responses related to these themes. For example, Millennials are often said to seek mentors, so I asked “Who have been your models in faith?” The interview itself took the form of a narrative with my role being that of prompter. I began by asking participants to tell their personal faith history and encouraged them to link that to how they came to be where they are now, doing what they are doing. I treated my interview schedule as a guide: some participants answered a number of later questions in their response to the first. Sometimes I asked follow-up questions either to ensure I had understood what was being said or to gain greater depth. This flexibility allowed participants the freedom to emphasise aspects which were personally salient. Several commented afterwards that the experience was cathartic, as they revisited memories they had not thought about for some time.

#### 4.7 Analysis

I carried out a thematic analysis of the entire dataset, meaning that my first task was to familiarise myself with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.87). I therefore transcribed the interviews myself as soon as possible<sup>14</sup>. While I was aware of the existence of transcription software, I found the process of transcription important as it allowed me to revisit the interviews, familiarising myself with their content and noting tone of voice as well as any recurring themes or surprising statements, which I often wrote on sticky notes and attached to the wall behind my desk. It was during this process, for example, that I realised how many of the married participants had a partner from a different cultural background. I also noted that mental health was mentioned on numerous occasions, despite my not asking about this area, leading me to create a code for mental health. It was important to begin data analysis quickly, while the interview process was still ongoing, so that early interviews and my reflection on them could inform later interviews. As well as aiding my analysis, familiarity with early

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<sup>14</sup> Anonymised transcripts are available in the Kingston University Data Repository <https://researchdata.kingston.ac.uk/>

interviews allowed me to adapt my interview schedule in order to gain the most useful data possible. For example, after one participant mentioned how being British was perceived in the host culture, I decided to include a question on Britishness.

I was concerned that my familiarity with some interviews was greater than others. Early interviews would often come to mind, as would those carried out in isolation: where I had interviewed three people in the space of a week, for example, I found the content faded or blurred in my memory. I therefore ensured that I re-read these interviews several times and later checked carefully my coding of them.

I used NVivo software to code each interview. Having begun the process with no particular outcome in mind, I created a large number of codes initially in order to maintain the nuances of difference between statements: if a given statement was not a complete match for an existing code, I would create a new code. For example, I had several codes relating to teams, depending on whether the quotation related to positive or negative experiences or to generational or cultural differences. Some data extracts were coded more than once. While similar or related codes were later grouped together into code families, this multiplicity of codes meant that I could identify different perspectives on the same theme and quickly see which were most common. However, the frequency of a code or theme does not necessarily imply its significance (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.82). Some common codes were, of course, prompted by my interview schedule. For example, I asked participants about their use of social media, anticipating that this may demonstrate a difference between Millennials and older generations or indeed between younger and older Millennials. However, the data extracts coded as 'social media' in my initial analysis were also integrated into other codes such as 'isolation' or 'family,' which were of more significance to my eventual themes. A small number of codes remained unassigned, either because they did not relate to any particular theme or because they related to many in equal measure. For example, one unassigned code with high frequency was "COVID-19," due to the timing of my data collection and the pandemic's impact on people's lives.

When I started writing up the results I found it difficult to group the disparate codes from this first thematic analysis into a coherent structure. However, when I compared the research questions set out at the start of this thesis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to the

potential themes I had found by grouping my initial codes, what stood out were the different narratives encountered by participants and how these played into the development of their own identity and sense of calling. I therefore re-grouped the codes I had created in NVivo in the light of the over-arching themes of narrative, identity and authenticity (shown in Table 4.2). These three major themes then provided the structure for my results chapters (5-7), although they overlap throughout the thesis.

| <b>Becoming</b>                                                                                              | <b>Being</b>                                                           | <b>Doing</b>                                                                           |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Narrative:</b> what are the grand narratives which have informed the development of calling and identity? | <b>Identity:</b> how do Millennial missionaries understand themselves? | <b>Authenticity:</b> how is their self-understanding reflected in their life and work? |
| Calling                                                                                                      | Culture                                                                | Activity                                                                               |
| Changes                                                                                                      | Gender                                                                 | Decisions & Future                                                                     |
| Christian leaders                                                                                            | Mental Health                                                          | Sending                                                                                |
| Church & Events                                                                                              | Missionary Definition                                                  | Team                                                                                   |
| Education                                                                                                    | Relationship Status                                                    |                                                                                        |
| Faith                                                                                                        |                                                                        |                                                                                        |
| Ministry Experience                                                                                          |                                                                        |                                                                                        |
| Parents, Family and Friends                                                                                  |                                                                        |                                                                                        |

Table 4.2 Thematic Analysis

## 4.8 Themes

### 4.8.1 Narrative and Discourse

It is through telling stories – or creating narrative – that the individual moves towards a coherent interpretation of experiences and constructs an understanding of self (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). Giddens (1996, p.54, emphasis in original) argues that identity is found “...in the capacity to *keep a particular narrative going*,” with individuals weaving together aspects of their biography in order to form a cohesive narrative identity. Our earliest and deepest understanding of reality, which Berger & Luckmann (1991/1966) term ‘primary socialisation,’ is formed through the stories that we hear: the ways in which the adults closest to us respond to and interpret experiences. From this we learn to understand reality and our place within it, through the lens of a given narrative. In this thesis, I consider how Millennial Christians have been socialised into two different narratives: that of faith and of secularism. Britain’s Christian history means that these two narratives often converge (a belief in the value

of individuals, for example), yet people of faith are engaged in a constant negotiation by which they sometimes reject one narrative in favour of the other and other times blend both creating new narrative. This is similar to Berger & Luckmann's (1991/1966, p.178) description of the move from primary to secondary socialisation: for most, they argue, this secondary socialisation builds on the foundations laid by the primary. It is only in relatively few cases that those early foundations are deconstructed in order for a completely different worldview to be built.

I take *discourse* to mean the conveyance of ideas and attitudes within a group or society, both influencing and being influenced by members of the group (Souto-Manning, 2014); it has less to do with the content of any given language than its provenance in terms of power structures. It is through discourse that one version of reality is given preference above others within the group in question (Bryman, 2001, p.360). In contemporary society, discourse can be communicated in many ways, particularly through the internet and broadcast media. While these media provide opportunities for exposure to differing discourses, having once chosen the group with which they identify, individuals will often immerse themselves in the discourse of that group (Roof, 1999, p.71).

In this thesis I have not carried out an in-depth discourse analysis, however I have noted the various and sometimes contradictory discourses available to my research participants as they seek to interpret the events and experiences of their lives. I have also noted the changing impact of discourse as an individual moves through their own life course: from parental home to university, or from local congregation to Bible college.

#### 4.8.2 *Identity*

I follow a constructionist understanding of identity, by which we use our experiences and their interpretation by and within a given society as the basis of our construction of identity (Hindmarsh, 2005, p.9). The human self is reflexive, able to think about who one is and what actions one should take: it is this self-understanding which constitutes identity (Giddens, 1991, p.52). Where once this would have entailed knowing one's status based on provenance, the contemporary self has many more options for self-understanding and is therefore required to explore and determine his or her self-identity, within what Berger & Luckmann (1991/1966) call the 'horizons of significance'

established by one's primary socialisation. Taylor (1989, p.27) shows that beliefs concerning the nature of reality or what is right or worthwhile are deeper than mere opinions, providing individuals with a framework by which to understand who they are and where they stand. Without this, he argues, we are "at sea:" facing a crisis of identity.

This thesis is concerned with the way in which people born at a particular time (1980–1999) and into a particular culture (that of the United Kingdom) understand themselves. Yet how that culture is perceived and appropriated by any one individual differs according to a multitude of variants. Holstein and Gubrium (2000, p.106) argue that "Race, class and gender, like other going concerns, always compete for their roles in the self's stories...." It is, then, through story that such biographical elements are interpreted and integrated into the sense of identity.

#### 4.8.3 Authenticity

In their discussion of identity, Berger and Luckmann (1991/1966, p.188) address the issue of individuals playing different roles in different contexts, sometimes leading to psychological distress as the various identities are held in tension. My thesis explores how the Millennial missionaries I interviewed seek to align these identities into a single cohesive narrative identity because of the value they place on the ideal of authenticity. As my participants are people of faith, I develop the concept of *theocentric authenticity*, to explain how Millennial missionaries aim to live by an authentic self which is discovered and developed not by an internal exploration of feelings but rather by a deep-seated belief in a personal relationship with a God who forms, guides and communicates with individuals. Experiences and emotions are therefore interpreted through a combination of Scripture, the evangelical narrative and what the individual believes God to be saying, in dialogue with his or her surrounding community.

#### 4.9 Concluding Remarks

I approached this project as an insider with an awareness of the challenges this entails. I designed the research in a way which allows participants' individual narratives to drive theoretical analysis. I take a constructionist approach to the development of identity as informed by the narratives of significance to those individuals who took part in my semi-structured interviews. In the chapters which follow, I set out the key

themes arising from the qualitative interviews carried out as part of this research, before moving on to theoretical discussion of these findings.

## CHAPTER 5      BECOMING: The Journey into Mission

In this and the following two chapters, I turn to look in detail at themes arising from data gathered through qualitative interviews carried out as part of this study. The next two chapters will discuss the identities and activities of Millennial missionaries.

Foundational to both identity and activity, though, is the journey of self-discovery which I describe in this chapter. I begin by addressing the influences which led to the development of vocation, as described by participants in the study. I then consider how this relates to previous understandings of vocation, with particular regard to Millennials.

Participants talked about a variety of influences which contributed over time to a growing internal desire to engage in mission, a decision they reached through diverse routes. For a small number it was a pragmatic choice: coming to the end of a job or course of study with no clear idea of what to do next. For many, however, it was a lengthy process of study, exploratory trips and discussion with mission organisations. Of course the duration of the process was often due to the participants' youth when the idea of becoming a missionary first arose: the usual progression towards a career from teenage interest through university and vocational training, which commentators agree has lengthened for this generation, becoming known as 'emerging adulthood' (Setran, 2011) as discussed in *Generations and the Millennial Generation* (Chapter 1). Others were advised by leaders to wait and gain experience in ministry at home. Still others were hindered by health issues. Below I examine the various factors arising from data gathered during qualitative interviews for this project, which were significant in the participants' journeys towards both faith commitment and mission involvement.

The code 'families' set out in the first column of Table 4.2 (Chapter 4; reinserted below) form the basis for this presentation of results, although some individual codes have been grouped differently here. I have not included *Education* as these references were few and, where significant, related to Christian teachers or to friends and as such are covered elsewhere. The group of codes categorised as *Changes* refers to changes in thinking, doctrine, or denominational affiliation, which I discuss in the next chapter because they relate to the participants' Christian identity. Those changes which form part of the individual's initial journey to personal faith or a new understanding of

ecclesiology are nevertheless included here. In this chapter I first look at *Parents and Family*, with *Friends* merged into the following section which encompasses *Church and Events* as well as *Christian Leaders*. The group of codes labelled *Ministry Experience* includes *Gap-Years and Short-term Mission* as well as other early ministry linked to local church involvement. The code grouping labelled *Faith* is considered here under the subheading *Influences: God*, but is also significant in the section regarding vocation, as are the codes grouped under *Calling*.

| <b>Becoming</b>                                                                                              |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Narrative:</b> what are the grand narratives which have informed the development of calling and identity? |
| Calling                                                                                                      |
| Changes                                                                                                      |
| Christian leaders                                                                                            |
| Church & Events                                                                                              |
| Education                                                                                                    |
| Faith                                                                                                        |
| Ministry Experience                                                                                          |
| Parents, Family and Friends                                                                                  |

Table 5.1 Column 1 of Table 4.2

## 5.1 Influences: Family

Early in the interview process it became clear to me that parental faith had played the most significant role in participants' initial introduction to Christianity and had often further influenced the continuation and development of that faith as participants entered adolescence and then adulthood. When asked to recount their personal faith journey, most participants said something along the lines of "I don't feel like there was a time when I didn't really know God or I wasn't aware of God in my life" (Anne, b.1980). This reflects 'primary socialisation' as described by Berger and Luckmann (1991/1966), whereby a child learns to interpret the world through the lens of parental worldview. It was in the home that these Millennials imbibed and accepted the Christian narrative. Thus 'religious socialisation' (Sherkat, 2003) led to faith transmission (Arweck & Nesbitt, 2010, p.167), through religious practices and attitudes experienced in the home and the wider faith community (Gunnore & Moore, 2002; Bader & Desmond, 2006).

Nevertheless participants also emphasised their own individual agency in their faith commitment, stressing that they had questioned or tested their parents' faith. Some could remember a specific moment at a young age when they had prayed a prayer

they considered to indicate a personal faith decision; others viewed it simply as a process. Philip (b.1984) described how he “...got saved at 18, well I met Jesus for the first time at 18” despite a Catholic upbringing which included regular church attendance as well as a faith-based education, emphasising the salience of his own personal faith choice. Only Ainsley (b.1986) had come to faith later – at the age of 21 – from a non-faith background. Given participants were aged 20-40 and already in Christian ministry at the time of interview, it was to be expected that they would have come to faith at a young age; yet that so few claim any kind of conversion experience is surprising. This supports the findings of Bengston (2013) and Day (2011) discussed in *The Religion of British Millennials* (Chapter 2) regarding the importance of parental faith in the formation of an individual’s faith.

Elaine and Diane had a slightly different experience in that only one parent was a believer. For Elaine church attendance was always a choice; indeed, her sibling chose against. This is consistent with data from the British Social Attitudes Survey (Curtice *et al.*, 2019, p.5) set out in *The Religion of British Millennials* (Chapter 2). Diane ceased attending around the age of 8 when her parents separated, but made her own faith commitment in her late teens. While she is clear that this was a personal decision, she also highlights the significance of the early years of church attendance and Christian upbringing in that later choice. Millennial participants therefore stress individual agency in their choice of religion, yet their narratives demonstrate transmission of faith from one generation to the next through religious socialisation (Golo *et.al.*, 2019).

While the depth of relationship between parent and child clearly plays an important role, participants did not refer to any sense of loyalty or belonging, but rather to their constant exposure to practices of both private and public faith (Stanford *et al.*, 2023). This runs contrary to the finding of Bader and Desmond (2006) that “children express a desire to adopt their beliefs, primarily because they believe it is important to their parents that they do so.” For my participants, the salience of their parents’ faith placed them in a context in which their own individual agency and conviction could develop. John (b.1982) sums this up: “My parents were very committed and sort of brought me up to be praying and reading my Bible and going to church. We went to conferences and events and things.” Here we see that prayer and Bible reading formed a part of

home-life, while children were able to relate this to a wider faith community through attendance at both local congregations and larger church events.

The worldview introduced by the primary socialisation in the home was therefore reinforced by the community to which the child was exposed. This meant that the meta-narrative of the Christian faith was integrated into participants' upbringings. Other participants described their parents as more quietly committed, with faith confined to the private realm. Lucy (b.1985), for example, says that "...they're quite sort of British middle class about their faith, so they're not completely really like open and, er, vocal about it." Here there was less explicit stating of faith in the home, yet parental behaviours and attitudes deriving from the Christian faith, including the prioritisation of church attendance, nevertheless formed the foundations for the child's primary socialisation.

Regardless of the extent to which faith was vocalised in the home, participants who claimed a Christian upbringing were convinced of and strongly influenced by the seriousness of their parents' (or parent's) faith commitment (Clements & Bullivant, 2022, p.468). It is this authenticity of parental faith which participants highlight as significant. Catherine (b.1992) told me that her father is "...very humble in his approach and so if he struggles with an aspect of Christianity or faith or if God's challenging him with anything or if there's a bit of Scripture he's struggling with, he's very honest about it, very humble about it, and that I really respect." Chloe (b.1981) talked about learning from how her parents handled stress: "I didn't grow up seeing parents who just threw a wobbly because something didn't go their way or because they were annoyed, they would just, you know, keep going and stay calm, and yeah, and persevere." This is evidence of parents who did not hide the fact that they were stressed, but rather allowed their Millennial children to watch closely how it was handled.

Though similarly grateful for a faith-based upbringing Ian, on the other hand, says of his family that "...we're content to live separately. We get on fine but we don't live in each other's pockets." Here Ian seems bewildered by – and perhaps even critical of – peers whose families do appear to him to "...live in each other's pockets." That this is a lone voice among participants in this research would seem to underline the changes in parenting and family life mentioned in *Generations and the Millennial Generation*

(Chapter 1), whereby parents have sought to become “friends” to their children, through emotional openness and shared decision-making.

The parental influence towards faith commitment is therefore evident in my data; parental influence toward mission, however, is less clear-cut. Only one Millennial participant had parents who had been overseas missionaries themselves while another had grandparents who were former missionaries, but both Grace and Chloe mention their parents’ involvement in local church ministry in the UK in different capacities, while Catherine’s father was a leader in a Christian youth organisation. For many participants, the discourse of international Christian mission is something they have been exposed to from an early age. In some homes, international missionary work was a topic of conversation. Megan (b.1988) says “So growing up... my parents always talked about missionaries and about mission and stuff, so ... it was always talked about in my house.” A parental interest in mission would lead parents to choose to attend a local congregation active in mission (Bullivant, 2019, p.54; Stanford *et al.*, 2023, p.2). Thus there is a great deal of crossover between the influence of home and congregation on a child or young person’s interest in mission work: together they form the social structure which mediates the external world to the child (Berger & Luckmann, 1991/1966, p.151). As Karen (1980s) says “I guess my parents have always been quite outward looking in that way.... So the churches that I went to were all quite encouraging [of] mission and ... mission in the local area and overseas as well, so always really encouraged that.” John (b.1982) mentions being “very exposed to the causes of mission and evangelism” and regularly seeing the Tearfund newsletter, while Grace (1980) spent her childhood in two different churches but both “had quite a strong mission focus... And I used to follow Tearfund’s news, that was through church, but would be really struck by what I saw in that and the poverty.” Diane (b.1983) “...was really kind of connected into a church where mission was very much at the heart of the church. Some international mission, but like church-planting, mission in our town, that was kind of just evangelism and serving people was just very much at the heart of our life as a church family.” Catherine (b.1992) says “I’ve known about [Mission Organisation] since I was very little because we had some [Mission Organisation] missionaries in the church I grew up in.”

In the same way, growing up in a Christian home led to an availability of Christian literature. Grace (1980) “...always read lots of missionary stories, biographies and that kind of stuff. Erm, and, so I always was fascinated by those sort of stories and I guess I always had a bit of a thing about Africa....” Thus missionary activity was normalised for them, through exposure to discourse expressed in stories, images and models, to the extent that it became a viable career choice within the ‘plausibility structures’ inherited from parents; these are the social structures which enable a given belief system to be regarded as possible by those socialised into the group (Berger, 1990/1967). The congregation attended by Claire (b.1987) even hosted a *Perspectives* course: a detailed introduction to the theory, theology, history and practice of international missions. Claire credits this course with shifting her interest from local to international mission.

At the same time, Ruth (b.1980) expresses concern that churches no longer showcase international missions as they once did: “Certainly people older than me, they will remember very clearly missionary services, where missionaries came in. We don’t have anything quite like that any more. So I think that is impacting on the next generation. I think they’re just, yeah, they don’t have that inspiration.” Ruth puts this down in part to fewer churches maintaining the tradition of having both a morning and an evening service. When her missionary career began, many churches would be willing to give their evening service over to hear from a visiting missionary, but they are less willing to do this now that they only have one service per Sunday.

Ruth met her spouse while she was still at high school. Both were already convinced of a divine call to ministry and mission, though the emphases differed. She reflects:

“...we kind of felt like that was God showing us that actually both of our callings could be meshed together and that actually there’s different times, there’s different seasons. And so because [husband] had this strong call to Africa, then, er, that was something that then began to grow in me as well.”

Here the process can be seen whereby two individuals develop their identities together in parallel with their romantic relationship, whilst still viewing the individual relationship with the divine as paramount. This is the expectation even of those who are single, with Lucy (b.1985) saying: “...you know, I also feel like there are seasons and if God is, you know... if marriage calls me away from the field then I’m sure God can still use me in that context as much as he can here.” This demonstrates that her calling

to a specific place or role is not so concrete as to be non-negotiable should she meet a potential partner; she expects that God would be the initiator of her future marriage and therefore would also redesign her calling. She anticipates that any significant relationship would have an impact on the construction of her identity.

Taylor (2018/1991) stresses that the formation of one's identity is always dialogical. Just as the family of origin plays a significant role in the foundations of individual identity, so too the relationship of the individual with a chosen life partner cannot fail to influence its development, particularly where – as in the case of some participants in this study – the relationship began at a young age. This is underscored by Day (2013, p.73) in her research:

“...most people believe in their relationships with other people  
...with whom they have adherent, affective reciprocal  
relationships, most commonly partners, family and friends.  
...From those people, they trace their moral heritage and consider  
the roots and the formation of their beliefs to be a result of those  
personal relationships and the experiences they have had with  
those relationships.”

Day categorises some interviewees as *theocentric*, where belief in and relationship with God were salient; as such, these individuals correspond to the participants in my study. For these people, the relationship with God is central, yet it is worked out through human relationships as the individual explores their own identity.

It is therefore clear from my data that the family of origin and the formation of one's own family have a very significant influence in the development of an individual's interpretation of the world and their place within it. For the majority of participants, it was this early exposure to an evangelical narrative which led to the transmission of faith. Parental influence on their interest in international mission was less direct, but I have shown that parental openness to people of other cultures coupled with the decision to attend a mission-oriented congregation played a significant role. I turn now to consider the wider relationships of the group or community contexts in which young British Christians find themselves.

## 5.2 Influences: Church, Youth Groups and Festivals

In their discussion of the development of narrative identity, Pasupathi and Hoyt (2009) refer to the important role played by “listeners” as young adults explore their sense of identity in conversation with others, while Bloom *et al.* (2021) mention that

“significant others” play a confirmatory role in relating an individual’s perceived calling to “actual self-elements.” The social context is highly significant in the development of identity (McAdams & McLean, 2013), creating a narrative within which experience can be interpreted and then offering feedback on that interpretation (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). While those who came to faith as young adults came to this later, for Millennial Christians brought up by believing parents, the initial social context to which they were exposed was the local congregation; the discourse of this community therefore made a significant contribution to their understanding of the Christian narrative. This discourse is communicated not only through preaching and song lyrics, but also through its repetition and reinforcement within the relationships that children and young people have with their leaders and with one another (Klingenberg & Sjo, 2019, p.166).

Participants in this study described their church affiliation in a variety of ways, including Anglican, Baptist, nondenominational, Pentecostal and Evangelical or Independent Evangelical. I will consider this in more detail in the next chapter, noting here, however, that denominational background did not appear to result in substantially different beliefs, so far as these were expressed during interview. As mentioned above, most had attended church regularly as children, inheriting from their parents a sense of the importance of church attendance to the expression and continuation of faith. Relationship with fellow Christians is highly significant, with encouragement and prayer of peers noted throughout the journey of faith. For Ainsley (b.1986), who was brought up with no religion, it was not the content of the Alpha Course but rather the relationships formed which led ultimately to his conversion. This underlines the importance of the social or community element of church attendance. When talking about ways of maintaining faith, Jackie (b.1980) lists “...being part of Christian community that’s always key as well, whether that’s a local church, whether that’s, in my context at the moment I’m surrounded by Christians so... being part of that.” At the same time as emphasising the importance of church attendance though, Jackie’s words also suggest that Millennial Christians may be more flexible in their understanding of what constitutes ‘church’ or Christian community. John (b. 1982) has clearly been considering the implications of the failure of traditional church-planting methods in a European city and suggests that “...actually we can try and build a Christian community that’s maybe not so... maybe would look strange to someone

from a very church background but actually can be accessible to someone from a completely non-church background.”

While the activities and emphases of the local congregation may have influenced an individual to take an interest in missionary work, it is Christian leaders who often play a role in a person’s journey of discovering their own sense of calling. Sarah (b.1990) and Elaine (b.1983) mention significant relationships with youth leaders, both as people they could talk to about their emerging vocation and as role models whose lifestyle and ministry they want to emulate. John (b.1982) and his wife shared their sense of calling with church leaders and

“...local leadership in two different contexts were like, ‘yes we really believe this is for your life, but we would counsel you now to just take your time a bit more.’ ...So yeah, there was definitely that sense of patience and submitting to healthy church authority.”

This shows church leaders both affirming calling and offering advice regarding major life decisions in such a way that John felt he should “submit,” even where his preferred course of action may have been different. I discuss further this idea of obedience to leadership in *Doing: The Work of Mission* (Chapter 7).

Local congregations also provided the opportunity to become involved and gain experience in ministry from a young age, whether this was regularly in the congregation itself or a short-term opportunity elsewhere promoted by the congregation locally. Lucy (b.1985) recalls “I did enjoy doing short term missions when I was on summer holidays from school, and did a couple of Crusader or Scripture Union type things.” When Ruth (b.1980) was a teenager “...there was an opportunity to go and do a local mission... and just to go and do some schools work and some street work and different things with other young people... I wanted to do something for God...” This event was significant not only in that she met her future husband, but also because it was an expression of her desire to be involved in mission despite a lack of interest from other young people in her local congregation.

For a number of participants, attendance at large evangelical events such as Soul Survivor or Spring Harvest (discussed in Chapter 2) was pivotal in their journey towards missionary involvement. For some, like Diane (b.1983), this was a moment of either a first or a renewed faith commitment; the emotion of the mass gathering increasing the

sense of urgency. For others, festivals played a role in their desire to spread the Christian faith. John (b.1982) says:

“If I think about some of the conferences and events and festivals I was at, they were probably tapping into the need in Millennials to feel a purpose: that you need a reason, you need a purpose in life. ...you’d often go away from a festival thinking yes, this is my reason, this is my purpose, I can’t wait to go and church-plant somewhere else. ...I can definitely trace back specifically – one of the reasons I am doing mission now is because of being exposed to stuff at places like Spring Harvest and that being a context where you’re open to the voice of God.”

At the age of around 17, Karen (b.1980s) attended Soul Survivor with some friends: they were so inspired by the experience that they began a new youth group on their return home. Some participants recall the impact of hearing missionaries share their experiences at such events, which they credit with inspiring them to become missionaries themselves. Catherine (b.1992), for example, remembers “...being about fifteen and there was this missionary speaker at one of the evening meetings and he was doing something in Africa. No idea what it was. But I remember watching him and being so enthralled and really passionate about it. And just something awakened in me.” Festivals, then, impacted people on a variety of levels. First, there is the sense of being part of something that is bigger than the Sunday service at a local congregation. Second, the often emotionally-charged time spent together at a festival or camp can deepen relationships between those who share the experience. Third, there is the verbal encouragement through preaching or missionary stories which can lead to an encounter with the divine.

### 5.3 Influences: Gap Years and Short-term Mission

While for some the call to international missions was sudden or unexpected, for many it grew out of or alongside a developing interest in other cultures. This might stem from international travel as a child, from simply hearing about other countries and cultures, or from life in multicultural Britain. Jackie (b.1980) says: “I think I was always interested in different cultures and parts of the world and did people have the opportunity to know Jesus.” Philip (b.1984) contrasts his own experience with that of his wife: “I’d always kind of known that there was something more to be explored in the world. ...But I think growing up in South London showed her the vastness of diversity and of the world.” Similarly, Chloe (b.1981) talks of the influence of her

parents' hospitality: "...they didn't just mix with people who were like them, they would mix with lots of different people who had come from different backgrounds or different countries... so that probably taught me how to mix with people who are different to me." Growing up in a multicultural society was not stated as a primary cause of an interest in other cultures or in international mission; where this interest was already present, however, the opportunity regularly to spend time with people from other countries or cultures enhanced and developed it.

All participants had some experience of visiting other countries before committing to move abroad long-term. This included holidays, gap-years, study, military service and mission trips lasting anything from a couple of weeks to months. A 2002 article by one of the then organisers of *Urbana*, a mission conference for students in the USA, stated that it is "...a truism that students do not commit to long-term missions without a short-term experience..." (Harris, 2002, p.39). Among my participants, some had committed internally without any short-term experience, but still sought that exposure as confirmation of their sense of calling before taking firm steps toward a long-term commitment. The increasing accessibility of foreign travel has made this possible: for earlier generations a short exploratory trip was simply not an option. For Millennial participants, short-term trips were seen as exploratory or confirmatory: narrowing the call to a specific country, region, role or team. The call to mission therefore preceded the short-term experience. For example, Grace's (b.1980) sense of calling was confirmed when she deferred university entry for a year in order to take a gap-year in Africa: "It had its challenges for sure, but I think it also confirmed to me that this was something that God wanted me to do, to work overseas and potentially in Africa." Similarly, Catherine (b. 1992) sensed a call to mission as a teenager, then spent six months in Africa after finishing high school, which she said "...both confirmed that I was definitely supposed to go into mission, but it also honed down what area of mission I was supposed to go into." Rather than going to university on her return as originally planned, Catherine became an intern at a local church before later deciding to attend Bible college as part of her preparation for long-term mission. Ian did several shorter trips with the same goal of seeking confirmation of his call to mission in a particular region of the world.

The only participant to have gone on a short-term trip without this aim of either confirming an existing call or exploring a possible long-term future was Anne (b.1980), whose UK church congregation had been supporting the building of a Christian camp in Eastern Europe. Anne was part of a team from the church which helped at the camp over a number of summers. This led to local leadership inviting her to work with them long-term. After initially not taking the idea seriously, she agreed to go for one year and has since stayed ten. That only one participant appears to have embarked upon long-term mission because of a short-term experience suggests two possible conclusions. As noted in *Methodology* (Chapter 4), I was not as successful as I had hoped in recruiting independent missionaries to take part in my research; it is possible that Anne's experience of going from summer team to gap year to long-term is in fact a common one among those who have personal rather than organisational links with a particular location. They are, however, harder to locate when recruiting research participants. On the other hand, it could be inferred that the vast majority of those who embark upon a career in international missions following a short-term experience were already committed to long-term involvement and saw the short-term mission as a means of confirming or narrowing that sense of calling. As mission organisations re-examine their short-term programmes following COVID-19, this is an important consideration.

Both Elaine (b.1983) and Lucy (b.1985) considered taking a gap-year in mission because they were unsure of what to do next, while Karen told me she took several gap-years after high school "...because I didn't really know what I wanted to do." Elaine spoke to a representative of an organisation who suggested that the kind of role she could have just for one or two years would mean "...being a bottle-washer when we can get local people to be bottle-washers and you'll in effect be taking a job away from someone." This led her to begin considering a long-term commitment instead. Lucy agreed to a two-year placement with an organisation, at the end of which she returned to the UK as planned before ultimately deciding to commit long-term. While training with a mission organisation in Africa, Karen felt called to become a nurse with a view to long-term medical mission. It is clear that young people often embark upon a gap-year because of uncertainty regarding their vocation or career goals. Organisations should therefore offer meaningful short-term opportunities where, in Lucy's words,

“...it’s not such a long commitment that if I didn’t like it, it would be the end of the world.”

Jennifer (b. 1971), an older missionary who spent much of her life in Latin America after her parents became missionaries while she was in her teens, voices two frequently heard criticisms of short-term mission teams. The first is that hosting a short-term team takes people away from their regular mission work: “...you could basically say whenever a team came through if you’re responsible for them you had lost that time in terms of you doing what you needed to do or you, you know, it was a full-on burden to receive the team.” Secondly, short-term teams are often seen as tourists:

“Now ... there were times when that burden was wonderful and it was good, but there were times when ... you know, ‘we really want to get our youth equipped and do a short-term mission and then we all want to go to [tourist site]’. And we’re like, well, why don’t you just go visit [tourist site], cos, you know, it would take us over a month of preparation and then we’d lose a whole week while you’re here, and really your only intention to come here is so that you can go to [tourist site], so why don’t you just go to [tourist site]?”

Yet for some participants in this study, tourism was itself instrumental in the call to mission. Lucy (b.1985) moved from holidays, to short-term trips, to long-term mission: “I’ve always liked travelling. My parents have been well-off enough that we travelled quite a bit when I was growing up. So I kind of wanted to do something to combine that in my summer holidays and that started me on doing little short-term missions.” Megan (b.1988) felt that her calling was to work in the UK but spend her holidays taking part in short-term missions overseas. It was, however, a week’s budget holiday in a country she had not previously visited which sparked the shift from a short-term to a long-term perspective.

Evidently there are also many people who take part in short-term missions and who do not go on to a career in missionary work, as Hopkins *et al.* (2015) indicate. What the above data show us is that people who are already considering long-term missions are highly likely to take part in short-term missions as a means of both refining their vocation either in terms of mission activity or location, and confirming their sense of call and their ability to adapt to life in another culture. Thus short-term missions clearly play an important role in the journey toward a missionary career. What we also see from these data is that foreign travel in general – whether missions trips, holidays, or

other travel – contributes towards an interest in international missions which can later lead to a long-term missionary commitment.

#### 5.4 Influences: God

The “transcendent summons” (Dik & Duffy, 2009) by which Millennial missionaries received their calling was described by participants in many different ways. In most cases it was not a one-off event but rather a series of occurrences or a growing feeling which led first to a general call either to *mission* or to a particular place, followed by a refining of this call. People talk about God speaking to them as if this were commonplace; when asked to explain, they tell stories of how they sensed God’s voice through circumstances, sermons, dreams or their own emotions. I explore the wider meaning of vocation further below, but in this section I will look at some of these experiences of the divine.

Ruth (b.1980) described how “...as I sat and watched this TV show on [name of country] I just felt this really strong, I won’t say like an audible voice from God, but this kind of real sense of ‘I need to go there.’ Erm, and this kind of, I was really gripped by it in a way that I’d never been gripped by anything before.” On the same day, her future spouse had received through the post application forms for short-term trips to several countries including the one Ruth had felt drawn to: both interpreted this as evidence of divine orchestration. Ruth’s experience of a “real sense” or of being “gripped” is in line with how most participants would describe their own transcendent summons: very few would claim to have heard a divine voice. Ian (b.1980s), who did unexpectedly hear a voice telling him to go to a particular country during a time of personal prayer, self-identifies as “conservative evangelical,” demonstrating that the belief in a God who directly speaks to and guides individuals is not restricted to those who identify with the charismatic or pentecostal movements, which emphasise supernatural manifestations of faith. Ian reflects that “I spent a long time wondering if I was just going crazy and getting voices in my head.” Those from more charismatic traditions of Christianity were more likely to expect this kind of experience and regard it as the norm. Oftentimes participants used the language of ‘feeling’ rather than hearing God speaking, suggesting that this was an internal experience. Philip (b.1984) says of his wife that she “...hears God’s voice very clearly and just has an amazing gut instinct.” Philip also recounts several occasions on which he felt that God was speaking

to him through dreams, including both the initial call to a specific country and later the timing of his family's move. Chris's (b.1978) young daughter had a dream which contributed to the parents' decision regarding their specific location within the country to which they felt called.

When seeking divine guidance on a decision, individuals will often interpret circumstances as the voice of God. Some participants related detailed stories of events which they believe to have been divinely orchestrated; unfortunately many of these stories are so unique that re-telling them here would undermine participant anonymity. Lucy (b.1985) says that her usual means of discerning what she should do is to ask God to open or close doors: "...[I] kind of walk through doors until those doors shut. And certainly with coming to [country] the first time that was really what it felt like. All the doors were open, you know." For Jackie, too, "...each step was kind of a step of God opening up the doors... not knowing where exactly it would lead." However, this practice of interpreting circumstances can also work in reverse, with a negative experience being viewed as opposition to a God-given calling, thereby confirming the direction to be taken. On a short-term trip, Ruth's (b.1980) team was attacked and robbed. She reflects: "I think it was partly because so many things had gone wrong that there was no kind of human way that we wanted to walk straight back into that. We felt quite strongly that that was, yeah, that we're meant to come back." Among Evangelicals, part of the narrative is that following God will be costly: negative experiences can therefore be interpreted as confirming a given course of action as the will of God rather than the reverse. This leaves individuals in a quandary, which Grace (b.1980) sums up as she describes a possible change of direction at the time of interview: "I don't know whether God's shutting the door... or whether this was just a, you know, just world circumstances and I shouldn't take that as being something from God, you know."

## 5.5 Vocation

In essence 'calling' and 'vocation' have the same meaning, simply deriving from different linguistic roots: 'calling' is a translation of the German 'Beruf,' while 'vocation' comes from the Latin 'vocatio.' In theology and sociology, one cannot overlook the significance of the German language in the development of the concept of vocation. In his translation of the New Testament into the vernacular, Martin Luther

opted to use 'Beruf,' the German word for job or occupation, effectively spiritualising the everyday work of individuals (Scholes, 2010), thereby raising the status of work and contributing to the development of what Weber (1992/1905) was later to term the "Protestant work ethic". Weber (2020/1919) himself employs the term 'Beruf' in the sense of calling rather than mere occupation in his 'Vocation' lectures. For Weber, calling is internal: the focus of one's life which endows it with meaning.

In contrast, for Christians today 'calling' carries a sense of external motivation toward a particular cause or direction: an individual is chosen by God to carry out a specific task. Biblical examples are numerous and include Abraham (Genesis 12) who is called to move from one region to another, leaving his family of origin; Moses (Exodus 3), called to lead the Israelites out of Egypt; Gideon (Judges 6), called from obscurity to lead an army; and Paul (Acts 9), who is called to become Apostle to the Gentiles. Thus calling offers the individual Christian a sense of being part of God's plan and work, conferring meaning on one's own life story (Snyder, 2021). This corresponds to the "transcendent summons" in Dik and Duffy's (2009) definition of what constitutes calling: missionaries in this research described their calling first and foremost in terms of instruction initiated by the divine.

Dik and Duffy's definition goes on to emphasise that calling either demonstrates or derives "... a sense of purpose or meaningfulness" (2009, p.427). While participants view their calling as originating outside of themselves, it is at the same time both an expression of their identity and the path towards discovering or developing it. The interplay between external and internal motivation toward mission is mentioned by a number of participants. Karen (b.1990s) believes that the internal passions, desires and interests have God as their source: "...the thing he wants you to do, it's often in line with like the thing he's put in your heart...." She also tells of having given up earlier career plans because "...I realised it's not something I was passionate about so I felt God just say like 'don't do it', you know, 'do what you're passionate about.'" Claire says that "...the decision to go overseas was just kind of an idea planted in my head by God I think...." On the other hand, Sarah (b.1990) felt God asking her to give up her long-term career plans. After several months wrestling with the decision, she felt that "I didn't have that desire that had been driving me for however many years." So, while

in some cases the external motivator [God] was seen as ultimate cause of an internal passion or drive, in others there was a struggle between the internal and the external.

#### 5.5.1 *Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic*

These external and internal influences differ in kind from discussions of intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivations (Cannizzo and James, 2018, p.99-100), as the terms are used in recruitment or business studies. In the context of this study, such motivations relate more to the specific role or activity in which the individual missionary engages than to the overall desire to become a missionary in the first place. 'Extrinsic motivations' are defined as positive outcomes associated with a given activity: these might be pecuniary, but equally could refer to patients healed, hungry people fed, or 'heathen' converted. 'Intrinsic motivations,' on the other hand, have more to do with one's emotional response to an activity: the extent to which one personally finds it meaningful, rewarding or enjoyable. Some commentators suggest that Millennials are more likely to place intrinsic over extrinsic motivations, with emphasis placed on areas such as flexibility and relationships (Kultalahti & Viitala, 2014). Boyle's (2022) study of British Millennial graduates shows that many take their first job on an extrinsic basis out of necessity, but that intrinsic motivation reasserts itself later, as they seek work they actually enjoy, rather than something that simply pays the bills. However, as I discuss in *The Religion of British Millennials* (Chapter 2), Duffy (2021, p.77) shows that this has been the case for younger workers since at least the 1980s. On the other hand, Twenge *et al.*'s (2010) values-based study of high school seniors' work intentions concludes that extrinsic motivations increase in salience from Boomers to GenX, falling back slightly among Millennials (whom they term *GenMe*). This difference seems to be because Twenge *et al.* use 'leisure, altruistic and social' motivations as separate to intrinsic and extrinsic, defining extrinsic in terms of financial and status rewards alone. Their findings show leisure to be the salient motivating factor, with Millennials viewing work as a means to access their desired lifestyle. For other researchers, however, leisure can point to the importance to Millennials of a work-life balance, and as such would be classed as an intrinsic motivation. Sturges (2020) argues for a gender-based difference in motivation, with men more likely to focus on extrinsic or objective motivations, while women are more likely to give greater importance to intrinsic factors. She argues that this is due to career expectations associated with gender, whereby women remain less likely to achieve objective success (Sturges, 2020, p.974).

I find no evidence of such a gender divide in my data, because each individual sees their calling as an outworking of their relationship with God: an intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivations are absent from my data: it is unsurprising that nobody told me they became a missionary for financial gain, yet it is remarkable that participants did not emphasise a desire to help others or alleviate suffering.

### 5.5.2 *Self-fulfilment*

Taylor (2018/1991, p.29) extrapolates from Herder's idea of being called to live my own life in my own way, that "the point of my life" is to find and live out my own calling. Hammer (2015, p.24) concludes that "...the key to properly utilizing Millennial talent in the workplace is to capitalize on their desire for achievement and self-fulfilment." Calling is therefore about the quest for personal fulfilment: becoming who you were meant to be. No participant in my research talked about choosing mission as a career because of people's need of salvation; perhaps Jackie came closest with her childhood interest in whether people in other countries knew about Jesus (noted in Section 5.3 above). This is a long way from early Baptist missionary William Carey who in 1792 published a pamphlet entitled *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*. Carey urged Christians to take part in international missions because of the need he saw for people to hear the Christian message. In contrast, today's missionaries sense a personal call to mission which is very much seen as part of one's individual faith journey. Of course, even in Carey's day some perceived a divine calling while others did not; and one could say (as preachers often do) that the Apostle Paul was following a personal calling when he set out on his missionary journeys. I argue, however, that the emphasis has slowly and subtly changed. Where the modern missionary era began with a sense of obligation to those who had not heard the Christian Gospel, the missionary vocation now has more to do with the individual's personal sense of obligation to be who one is meant to be.

## 5.6 Conclusions

In conclusion, the journey towards a career in international Christian missions – towards becoming a missionary – begins with a personal faith commitment. For most, this is introduced and nurtured in the family of origin and through involvement in church and youth group which form the young Christian's social group. This agrees with Day's (2011, p.90) findings "...that young people's beliefs tend to be co-produced,

through participating with family and friends in creating and maintaining beliefs.” The Christian narrative introduced in the home is reinforced by the public discourse of local congregations forming the primary socialisation of those whose parents profess faith. In many ways, then, young people inherit beliefs and religious practices, as well as missionary ideas and ideals, from parents and other significant adults. However, there is also a sense of the individualisation of faith, with participants stressing their own faith decisions and having the freedom to explore and experiment with different Christian traditions and denominations, as I discuss in the next chapter.

The step from being people of faith to missionary involvement is described by participants in the language of calling, with a transcendent summons (Dik and Duffy, 2009) central to their decision making. I have shown how this sense of vocation is received, then tested and developed, through various means such as church leadership, circumstances and short-term experiences (Bloom *et al.*, 2021). This is the participants’ journey of self-discovery: rather than examining their inner selves to find who they really are, these young adults frame their search in terms of discovering who God intended them to be. In the next chapter, I look in more detail at the identity – or, more accurately, identities – of Millennial missionaries.

## CHAPTER 6      BEING: The Identity Of The Missionary

In this chapter I address my second research question (RQ 2): how do Millennial missionaries understand themselves? I therefore discuss the different identities which make up the missionary individual. Following philosopher Charles Guignon (2004), I view these various personas as an “ensemble” making up a whole person, rather than competing identities of which one is somehow more authentic than the others. Parent, professional and preacher (for example) can each be a true representation of the self, without undermining the significance of the others. Guignon speaks of a self which is better described as a narrative than an object. It is not that a pre-determined inner self exists to be discovered and expressed – or suppressed by the masks demanded in different situations – but rather that the self is created and developed as the individual lives out their own story (Giddens, 1991, p.78). On this view, the authentic self is able both to find expression in a person’s various identities and also to change over time, as the individual comes into contact with and considers different viewpoints and behaviours.

Guignon (2004, p.17) describes Augustine’s vision of reality as ‘theocentric:’ it is only with God at the core that the individual can become truly human. Participants in my research can also be described as ‘theocentric;’ yet for them this does not imply an obligation to conform one’s desires and inclinations to an external divine-inspired image of who one is supposed to be. Rather, by attuning their innermost feelings to God, they feel they are able to become who they were created to be: the authentic self. Therefore such theocentricity does not mean a return to the premodern ways of thinking described by Guignon; there is no assumed order or acceptance of a preordained rank or destiny. Instead evangelical Millennials describe being on a journey to become who they truly are, to achieve personal fulfilment through discerning and obeying the call of God. In this chapter I use interview data to discuss the identities which make up the Millennial missionary, from being a foreigner and living in a different culture to family life, reflecting the code groupings listed in the second column of Table 4.2 (Chapter 4; reinserted below): *Culture, Gender, Relationship Status* and *Missionary Definition*. I also consider the professional identity of the missionary. Lastly, I discuss the mental wellbeing of participants as they juggle

this interplay of identities. I begin, however, by looking at the relationship Millennial missionaries have with the term ‘missionary’.

| Being                                                                  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Identity:</b> how do Millennial missionaries understand themselves? |
| Culture                                                                |
| Gender                                                                 |
| Mental Health                                                          |
| Missionary Definition                                                  |
| Relationship Status                                                    |

*Table 6.1 Column 2 of Table 4.2*

## 6.1 Being a Missionary

I asked all participants the question “do you call yourself a ‘missionary’?” Many laughed; some squirmed. Why is the term so problematic for individuals who, for the sake of mission, have chosen to live far from home and loved ones? While many do accept and use the term, this is often only in particular circumstances and almost apologetically. Out of all the interviews I conducted, only one of the more mature participants, Jennifer (b.1971), used the term unprompted as self-identification. Elaine (b.1983), though, did say “I’m a missionary” when describing how she alters the language but not the content of her newsletters to make them accessible to non-Christian recipients, and several referred to being part of a “missionary community” or mentioned a colleague as “another missionary.” John (b.1982), Megan (b.1988) and Catherine (b.1992) used the term in the context of sensing a divine call as a child, but not when talking about their actual work as adults. Ruth (b.1980) also mentioned her (slightly older) husband saying “I feel called to be a missionary” when they first met – and both clearly understood this to mean living abroad in full-time Christian ministry. So ‘missionary’ appears to have been part of the calling experience for some and was understood as implying a future overseas in order to share the Christian message. However, they are less likely to self-describe today as missionaries. These early calling experiences took place ten to twenty years before my interview: the intervening period has seen mission discourse change and the individuals concerned exposed to a broader discourse than that encountered in the congregation where they spent their youth. There are three main reasons why the term ‘missionary’ is rejected: links with colonialism, the perceived image of missionary as hero, and a theological stance which sees all Christians as missionaries. I look at each in turn.

### 6.1.1 Colonialism

For some the stumbling block is historical: a discomfort with a term which carries connotations of colonialism. Rachel (b.1959) related a conversation with her Millennial niece who “...thought that a missionary was that person who packed their bags and their coffin and went off to darkest Africa and planted churches.” Megan (b.1988) has no issue with the term ‘missionary’ *per se*, but is careful never to use it when talking to people who are not Christians because “...it seems to have colonial connotations and it comes across as quite negative to people who don’t understand what it actually is.” The colonial overtones have been widened simply to “somebody who’s pious and judgmental and religious and has some kind of superiority complex” according to Chloe (b.1981). Ruth (b.1980) is concerned that “...there is still too much at times of the colonial thing.... Sometimes I speak to people now, going out on say short-term mission trips somewhere, and it’s still a very much ‘oh, we’re going over there to help the poor little black children’ and stuff like that.” Diane (b.1983) admitted that she did not really think about colonialism until she returned from East Asia to the UK, as the only people who brought it up in Asia were American colleagues around their Independence Day. It is worth noting that Diane did not attend a mission-focussed Bible college before going to work overseas, as did many other participants whose awareness of issues of colonial history was heightened. Both Ruth’s concerns around the attitudes of untrained short-term volunteers and Diane’s post-experience musings would suggest that mission training has come a long way in raising among future workers an understanding of the issues of colonialism and post-colonialism. However, there is still far to go and clearly there are still people going into international missions without this level of training. In a traditional missionary role as a nurse in Africa, Karen (1980s) reflects that it is easier to express her faith outwardly now that she lives in Africa; her actions and speech are more in tune with her Christian identity, with the result that she now recognises the constraints her true self was under in Britain. So the traditional image discussed in Chapter 3 of the missionary leaving Christian Britain for “darkest” Africa is now supplanted by the missionary who leaves secular Britain to find a spiritual home in Christian Africa.

### 6.1.2 Hero Image

Others reject the label of ‘missionary’ because they feel they do not live up to the stereotype of missionary as hero. For Karen (b.1980s) ‘missionary’ carries connotations

of being “some kind of saint” with people “put on a pedestal” in churches: this leaves her feeling that she is “not a very good one.” Both Elaine (b.1983) and Sarah (b.1990) felt there were others who were more missionary than themselves, either because of location (remoteness) or longevity. Having initially felt that her one-year commitment disqualified her from using the term, Anne (b.1980) also struggles with an image of ‘missionary’ which was not so much a hero as a “...single old person with cats who nobody really wanted... because they didn’t have all the social skills and they dressed dowdily.” Chloe (b.1981) agrees that many people “...have this mental presentation of a missionary as somebody who is a bit unusual or a bit odd or a bit disconnected from real life.”

The hero image also includes the idea of sacrifice: the missionary seen as an individual who “gives up everything” to share the Christian message overseas. Elaine (b.1983) talked about both her own and others’ experience of getting used to frequent power cuts and learning to cook from scratch: “And when you’re giving up so much, there’s a point where you can’t give up any more. So that’s the kind of thing that’s really challenging.” However, sacrifices go beyond the practical challenges of living in a less developed location. In a city in Northern Europe, Ainsley (b. 1986) spoke of people who joined his team for a time “...but for whatever reason, yeah, there have been ... a few people that have just struggled to really kind of embrace the full kind of amount of costs and sacrifice that it really took for... or really would take for you to kind of stay for longer than perhaps a year or two.” While virtual communication means that the sacrifice of separation from friends and family is not as extreme as it once was, it is still felt keenly by many. Ainsley again:

“... it probably goes on a sliding scale from missing bacon through to, you know, tragically missing out on some really kind of significant moments that you would hope to share with people that you love, I suppose. Not seeing your friends’ babies being born and, er, not being able to go to funerals because – of your dear friends – because you can’t just drop everything to turn up to those types of things.”

Having relocated to work with a church-plant in North America, Philip (b.1984) feels that his family has to convince people of their status as missionaries, as compared to people who work in Asia or Africa. “We’re here not because we like it; ...we’re here because God told us to come. So, that’s for me how I would define a missionary.” For Philip, then, *missionary* is not about location or activity, but rather calling.

### 6.1.3 *Theology*

While some are uncomfortable with the term ‘missionary’ because of colonial overtones or because they do not feel they live up to the hero image, still others argue from a theological position that regards as ‘missionary’ any Christian seeking to further God’s purposes anywhere in the world. So these individuals do not reject the term, but rather expand it to include a friend who is a teacher or an aunt who talks to her neighbours about Jesus. Elaine (b.1983) says “...I consider everyone who calls themselves a follower of Jesus to be a missionary. It’s just that their mission field may not be like mine is – on the other side of the world to where they were born – it may be to their neighbours. In fact, my mum is a missionary to my dad, because my dad is still not a Christian.” In Catherine’s (b.1992) words: “...a missionary is anyone who follows Jesus really, even in your own community, at home, whatever you’re doing.”

It is worth looking at a longer quotation from Lucy (b.1985) in East Africa:

I don’t like the distinction between, I mean, often when people are referring in our office to the Westerners and the [country-ans] they’ll refer to the Westerners as the “missionaries”. I don’t really like that because they’re as much missionaries as we are, because a lot of them are, you know, accepting lower pay than they might otherwise be able to get. You know, they’ve moved from their language communities to be in this central location in order to do what they’re doing. So, you know, just because they haven’t moved country, I feel it’s a little unfair to say that they’re not missionaries. And also, like, back at home I know people who are much more missional than I am here. I mean, yes I do a job that is considered a missionary role, but, and I do that for, you know, that’s my job. But you know, there are people back in my church who are doing regular jobs and then being completely missional in their free time. And I think of them probably more as missionaries than me. It’s just a label.

So being missionary is not about where one comes from or where one ministers; it is about the activities one takes part in and the sacrifices one makes to do so. The historic connotations of missionary as one who moves to a different country can exclude those who move within their own country, particularly in places traditionally seen as ‘mission fields’. Reflecting on the way the term is viewed by the local culture where he lives in post-communist Europe, which saw an influx of Western missionaries in the 1990s, Chris (b.1978) notes that: “they see missionaries as people who come from abroad, bring money, do things, go home. And they think the missionaries are the

people who are meant to do the job that Jesus said ‘go into all the world and make disciples.’ And they don’t see the realisation that actually that includes them: they are to be missionaries.” In this case, the term actually hinders mission because local people cannot relate to missionary as modelled by Westerners they have encountered.

#### 6.1.4 *Ambivalence*

Some prefer not to use the term ‘missionary’ at all. Karen (b.1980s) says she has opted to be called a ‘volunteer,’ while Jackie (b.1980) just tells people “I work cross-culturally” and Megan (b.1988) says she is “going to work for a church.” Sarah (b.1990) and Chloe (b.1981) would describe themselves first and foremost as linguists. Grace (b.1980), though, is pragmatic and confesses that her attitude towards the term changes with her mood. While agreeing in theory that every Christian should be a missionary, she feels that a term is needed to differentiate between those who do mission at home and those who move to another country, but that “cross-cultural missionary” or other such terms are “long-winded.” She is therefore almost apologetic in saying “I’m afraid that I do tend to call myself a missionary just for ease, because most people understand that a missionary is someone who’s gone to another country to tell people about God, you know.” Thus Grace uses the term missionary in accordance with the narrative she believes her interlocutor to hold regarding mission, rather than her own understanding of the term.

Millennial missionaries therefore have different reactions to and relationships with the missionary label. They tend to see their primary identity as Christians whose personal relationship with God has led them to live in a particular place or engage in particular activities. Like Grace, however, most participants accept ‘missionary’ as a term that others use to describe them and which conveys a certain level of understanding of their lifestyle and occupation, particularly in evangelical churches. Diane (b.1983) sums up the confusion:

“How I process like my journey with God is, I do what he asks me to do and if that means going and living in a different country and living a certain way, then I’ll do that. And I’ve just always been up for it. But I wouldn’t use, I wouldn’t say ‘hi, I’m Diane, I’m a missionary!’ No. But, in certain situations and contexts, to some people, that terminology can be helpful. So maybe I would in certain contexts.”

Thus 'missionary' is viewed as a label which can be useful in some situations but is more often problematic. Jackie (b.1980) even admits to using the term to bring an unwanted conversation to a close.

## 6.2 Being a Christian

For most participants in this study, being a missionary is simply an extension of being a Christian: living out the calling one believes oneself to have received. Authentic faith is a journey in which the call to foreign mission is just one of many possible trajectories. What matters is not the activity *per se*, but that one is true to one's calling as discovered in dialogue with God and with His people.

I asked participants in this study to fill out a short written survey containing some basic biographical details, including "Church Affiliation." Out of 17 Millennial participants, eight self-identified simply as either "Christian non-denominational" or "Evangelical." Others named their denomination, church network or congregation, with one Millennial and one older participant both self-describing as "Baptist/Anglican," a combination which would have been unthinkable to early Baptists and their Anglican contemporaries. This suggests that the emphasis for Millennial Christians is on belonging rather than doctrine: being part of a worshipping community where believers encourage one another in their individual journeys. Day (2013) postulates that belief itself may be changing (Day, 2013), with emphasis moving away from statements of doctrine. Belief has become active "believing" (Vincett *et al.*, 2012): an individual journey of faith.

Belonging has also changed its emphasis: rather than loyalty to a specific denomination or tradition, belonging is to a group with whom one shares reciprocal relationships of faith through corporate practice but also through friendship. As I mention in *The Religion of British Millennials* (Chapter 2), Millennial Christians are more accepting of other doctrinal stances and more willing to worship with a range of denominations. Perrin notes that "A more transient lifestyle means it is typical for individuals to belong to a number of denominations" throughout their lives, with individual members often unaware of their congregation's doctrinal positions (2015, p.5). While authentic belief is essential to remain part of the faith community (Niemela, 2015), individuals do not necessarily hold strong views on specific doctrines. Ruth mentioned in passing the "core values of the Bible." She was unable to recall the

clear definition she had once been taught, but listed things like the priority of spreading the gospel message as well as the belief that Jesus is God and that the Bible is the Word of God. As long as they can agree on these basics, Millennials appear able to live with the tension of differing doctrinal stances, both attending congregations affiliated to different denominations during the various periods of their lives and joining non-denominational mission organisations or teams. For participants in this study, there is belonging to the worshipping community of one's sending church but also the community represented by one's local team. From the interviews recorded for this study, it is clear that reading the Bible, personal and corporate prayer, and mission are important elements of the life of faith. Similarly, those who spoke negatively about leaving a church or organisation did so not for doctrinal reasons but because of relationship breakdown.

Yet doctrine is not brushed aside; Millennial missionaries know what they believe and are willing to engage with differing viewpoints, sometimes coming to a new position. As mentioned in *Becoming: The Identity of a Missionary* (Chapter 5), John (b.1982) and his family moved to a West European city to lead a group of Christians who "wanted to become a church plant." This did not work out as planned, and John was left questioning his understanding of what 'church' means:

"...we also found ourselves, through our work and family life, engaging with people from lots of different backgrounds. ...And then you realise that actually we can try and build a Christian community that... maybe would look strange to someone from a very church background but actually can be accessible to someone from a completely non-church background."

Similarly, Philip's ministry in partnership with his wife and another couple caused him to re-think his position regarding the role of women in leadership. Such widening of one's experience may, however, lead to a re-affirmation of one's original position rather than reaching a new understanding: Ian had encountered and engaged with different viewpoints in his university Christian Union, eventually deciding that he firmly believed the doctrines with which he had been raised. The process of engaging with differing beliefs is regarded positively.

Some participants framed their upbringing as Christians in the UK in terms of being part of a minority community or sub-culture. The beliefs and lifestyle of Christians in the UK are seen as contrasting the norms and expectations of society at large. Three

described intellectual struggles between Christian faith on the one hand and a scientific approach on the other. Participants who grew up in Christian families talked about facing in their teens a struggle between their faith and the attractions of the culture around them; Megan (b.1988) was bullied at school for being a Christian. Christians feel that in obeying God they are free to realise their own authentic personhood, in contrast to people in the surrounding society whom they see as conforming to the expectations of the culture (Montemaggi, 2017, p.262).

### 6.3 Being a Foreigner

Participants spoke about the challenges of moving to a different country and some of the things which helped them to adapt to the host culture. Ruth (b.1980) remembers being at a mission training school at the start of her time in Africa, with students from across the continent. She recalls:

“... sitting there and being astounded that somebody would actually genuinely believe this... we were really challenged and it’s one of the few things that I can remember strongly, that actually things can be different but not wrong. And I think that was one of the times that I really had the foundations of my cultural, erm, my ethnocentrism, challenged.”

Claire (b.1987) experienced quite extreme culture shock which lasted for the whole of her first year in Asia. She struggled with having nothing at all familiar and said that she concentrated on the tasks associated with her role but refused to take part in anything beyond that; it wasn’t that she did not like the new culture, but rather that she felt overwhelmed with having to process so much that was new all at once. Ainsley also felt “exhausted” at having to learn so much. Interestingly, Anne (b.1980) had the opposite experience, finding fun in the new experiences of the first couple of years in CE Europe. Now, with ten years’ experience, she reflects that “...I think it’s been more this end, really, of the time I’ve been here, where actually the cultural differences have been harder to deal with....” Perhaps this reflects moving beyond the more superficial aspects of the culture, such as different foods, towards a deeper encounter with people’s thinking and values.

Both Karen and Catherine describe being “like a baby” when learning a new culture. Karen has been learning from other ex-pats who have been in the country for years “because otherwise I think you do offend people” but wrestles with how much to adapt: “I don’t know how to say this without it sounding wrong, but not, like feeling

like you've got to be exactly like a [local person] because essentially I'm not [local]; I don't know if people would actually expect me to behave exactly like them." This demonstrates a sense of wanting to learn about and be sensitive to a new culture whilst remaining true to one's background, echoing Guignon's (2004) discussion of the tension between civility on the one hand and authenticity on the other. The issue is whether by amending one's behaviour to make oneself acceptable and inoffensive to others, one is in fact betraying one's authentic inner identity.

Sarah (b.1990) describes a working life in which there are cultural distinctions between local and ex-pat staff. Sport is used as a way for staff of all backgrounds to unwind together. In the office, however, there are cultural challenges:

"...generally I think our team has worked really well together. I mean there are obviously more challenges when working with [country]-an colleagues. It's tricky, like, as much as you say yes, we do share the same faith and the same vision and we're working towards the same goal. Just the backgrounds and perspectives are so different, in a good way, that you approach a problem in a very different way."

So even though the ex-pat team is drawn from different cultures, she still encounters greater challenge in working with colleagues from the host culture. Diane (b.1983) has also found the different ways of doing things challenging but "...learned quickly you just have to go with it, it's just the way it is.... It doesn't make sense in my British brain but that's just the way it is. And there are times that that felt very frustrating."

Catherine (b.1992) agrees that it is helpful to "take for granted that it's going to be different." Anne (b.1980) comments that there are always people you struggle to get along with anywhere in the world, although cultural differences can "accentuate" that.

Besides their interactions with the local culture in which they were living, many of the participants in this study were working in multi-cultural teams with missionaries from other cultures or, like Diane (b.1983), simply part of an international ex-pat culture. Often they found this more of a challenge than the host culture. Claire (b.1987), for example, described working in an ex-pat team, then an Asian team, then a different ex-pat team: in each case she was "the token British person." She felt mis-understood in the ex-pat teams, but accepted in the Asian team. Others placed in large ex-pat teams seem to struggle most to make friends with local people, as Grace (b.1980) describes:

"And I've also got some [local] friends – it's harder to build those relationships but I've got a couple of good [local] friends that I enjoy

hanging out with as well once in a while. Very different life circumstances to me, but I still enjoy being with them sometimes, visiting their homes. What I do find difficult is when those two come together. I tend to either do stuff with my ex-pat friends or I do stuff with my [local] friends, I don't very often bring those groups together...."

The difficulty in bringing the two groups of friends together would suggest that Grace is unusual within the ex-pat community in her location in even pursuing local friendships.

Ruth (b.1980) found that the little differences she faced working with cultures that she expected to be more similar to her own were much more challenging than walking "...into an African village expecting everything to be utterly different." Philip (b.1984) feels that people do not accept that he and his family experienced culture shock when they moved to a city in North America and that he himself was not prepared for it and "that was part of the issue... why it hit us so much, because we didn't expect it." Expectation is therefore an important part of the extent to which one suffers from culture shock, with both training regarding cultural differences and experience of living with people from other cultures mentioned as helpful in making the transition to life in a different culture.

A few participants commented on how British culture is viewed in their locality, or how they are regarded as Brits. Some found that being British is simply equated with being Western: foreign missionaries are foreign missionaries and people do not necessarily recall that they come from different countries. Where local people did differentiate between the expat missionaries, Britain and Britishness were generally viewed positively, with Ian (b.1980s) mentioning a certain "novelty value" to being British. There is a fascination with the British Royal Family and ordinary British people are seen as polite, while the term "gentleman" is widely known. Sometimes, though, British people can be seen as arrogant, which Ruth (b.1980) blames on the superior attitude of some individual British people rather than colonial history. Part of the country in which Chloe (b.1981) lives was once a British colony. She says that people "...have very mixed views about the British for obvious reasons. But I think the British were not as disliked as the French in terms of how they understood the colonies." A number of participants mentioned how living in another culture (or cultures) had made them realise how British they were, as team-mates laughed at them for constantly

apologising or for drinking so much tea. Chloe points out that British people also have stereotypes, finding “...Americans to be too direct or too confident or too whatever, and conversely Americans maybe see the British as being too indirect and not just getting to the point....” Ainsley (b.1986) reflects on what he has learnt about himself:

“I didn’t consider myself massively prejudiced or close-minded, but I realise that we must all be on a spectrum of understanding and prejudices because I, my eyes were opened as to how I thought things were done, or I... you know... how I believed countries were and stuff.”

Such reflections on the part of participants show that living in a different country and culture offers the missionary a new perspective on the self: beliefs and behaviour considered normal are revealed as culturally conditioned when seen through the lens of another culture. This can lead to a re-examination of one’s motivations and values. Keen to avoid the kind of cultural imperialism which began in the colonial era, missionaries seek to learn and respect the culture in which they find themselves. Nevertheless, they may wrestle with adapting their behaviour where this begins to infringe on their sense of authenticity.

#### 6.4 Being in a Family

Taylor (2018/1991, p.65) notes that authenticity is often constructed in opposition to conformity, understood as following externally imposed standards rather than one’s own inclinations. The changes to society’s norms, however, mean that the nature of conformity itself is contested; behaviours associated with religious adherence no longer being considered normative. As evangelical Christians, participants in this study were either married or single; none were cohabiting and only one hinted at having possibly done so prior to evangelical conversion. Contemporary British culture views this as conformity to tradition; Christians, on the other hand, see their stance on sexuality as radically different from the practices around them and therefore as an authentic expression of their faith. Thus their nonreligious peers may question Christians’ authenticity on the basis of conformity to behavioural standards viewed as externally imposed. Yet participants in this study demonstrate that such standards are internalised, forming part of their self-understanding. For them, acting in a way which is contrary to their beliefs would be seen as undermining their authenticity.

Of the 17 Millennial participants in this study, 11 were single at the time of interview, of whom only one was male. While it may be the case that single women are simply

the most willing to take part in research, it is also true that single women do make up a substantial proportion of the missions community, as they do church congregations (in the 2021 Census, 56% of those who identified as Christian were women). It is often said that two thirds of missionaries are married, one third single women, and the rest single men; it is hard to find data to substantiate this, however it reflects the experience of many involved in Christian missions. None of those I interviewed had purposefully set out to remain single long-term, but they were largely content with the status quo. It is noticeable that those who had just turned or were approaching 40 at the time of interview had clearly wrestled with the issues of long-term singleness and reached a place of peace and contentment. Grace (b.1980) had struggled with singleness when she turned 30, and returned to the UK for a period, partly to study but also partly to put herself in a place where she could potentially meet a partner. On her return to Africa, Grace felt she was making a positive decision to follow her calling, trusting that God can still bring her a partner if that is His plan. At the younger end, Catherine (b.1992), for example, sees the issue as unresolved: "I think if it didn't happen I would be fine with that, but I'm now open to the option. Like, it would be nice if I had a family to do the rest of life with...." Anne (b.1980) feels that it is back in the UK that there is more pressure on her to find a life-partner. Because she is a foreigner where she lives, people view her as different anyway and so somehow accept her singleness as part of that, even though she lives in a culture where "...if you get to 25 and you're not married then you're really seriously on the shelf." Megan (b.1988), on the other hand, does feel like there is an expectation around her that she should be finding a partner, and people often tell her that they are praying for that. Participants also referred to advantages of being single in mission. Anne feels that she is able to have much deeper relationships with people than if she had a family. Grace says, "I don't think I could do what I do if I was married, especially if I had children." Megan talks about being able to support and advise younger girls as they begin looking for a partner in a culture where the pressure to marry young is high.

Of the Millennial participants in this study, six were married at the time of interview. Recognising that this is an extremely small sample, I still found it remarkable that three of these six had non-British partners. Similarly, while all four of the older missionaries interviewed were married, only two had British spouses. All of the non-British partners were either European or North American. Only one pair had met while both were

serving as missionaries; others met while the spouse was in Britain or while taking part in mission training or a short-term mission trip. Only one of these couples (Chris, b.1978) was serving in the spouse's country of origin, though that was following six years as missionaries in a third country to which he had sensed a calling prior to marriage. The prevalence of cross-cultural marriage among missionaries also challenges the traditional model of a missionary family sent from one country to another. Marriage partners from different countries therefore have different support bases and sending structures, complicating the way they use their home leave or furlough. Further research into this area would be beneficial: are missionaries more likely than the general population to choose a life-partner of a different national background? And do these relationships occur because of the individuals' involvement in mission (and therefore international travel and teams) or are people in international relationships more likely to be open to a career in missions?

Uprooting one's children to follow a call to missions remains a challenge for Millennial parents. As I note in *Contextualising Christian Foreign Missions* (Chapter 3), schools were often set up to educate the children of missionaries, so that they would not have to return to their home countries. However, this still meant long separations from parents while children were educated at boarding schools in central locations. Susan (b.1966) comments that:

“... the big change happened ... when people started saying ‘I’m not sending my kids to boarding school.’ That happened in our generation, it’s not the current generation. And I don’t think the current generation would any more think of sending their kids to boarding school than we would have done.”

A general move away from boarding schools for missionary children is therefore part of the shift towards more intentional parenting which I describe in *Generations and the Millennial Generation* (Chapter 1). Regarding the education of missionary children, Jackie (b.1980) has observed in the missionary community that “older [missionaries] would be more, ok, this is what the organisation says, or this is what the expectation is so we’re going to do it. Younger ones are probably more, no we want to be very intentional about raising our children, and a strong family ethos and family identity.” No participant in this study mentioned even considering boarding school for their children. Parents therefore have to consider other options for their children, including

home education or relocating the entire family to a location where a suitable day school is available.

While, as Susan remarked, it was Generation X missionaries who rejected the educational model of sending children away, Millennials have gone a step further in not only keeping their children close to them during their overseas mission postings, but even involving the children in decision-making around these. When they moved to another country, John (b.1982) had one very young child and a preteen. As parents, John and his wife made a conscious effort to involve the elder child in the decision making: “She was very happy to move; we completely involved her in the whole process of moving here. There was another opportunity earlier that we actually declined because she wasn’t happy about that opportunity.” Born slightly outside of the Millennial range used in this study, Chris (b.1978) tells how his seven-year-old child did not want to move, until she had a dream which made her excited about the country and which also contributed to confirming the specific location to which the family would move. Philip (b.1984), on the other hand, says that “we probably live by the principle that if God’s called us somewhere then he’s called our kids....”

Having home-schooled her children in Africa when they were young, Ruth says that they are now enjoying high school in the UK while their parents continue to be involved in mission work across Europe. Thinking about the impact of this on their decision-making as a family, Ruth (b.1980) muses that “...now that they’re in school, that makes things harder. I would still, if we felt... I think for me it’s one of these things where we would need a clear word of God to go and move out and to do something major because of the disruption it would cause.” It is apparent, therefore, that Millennial parents do not often make the decision to move independent of their children. As discussed in *Generations and the Millennial Generation* (Chapter 1), parenting has become more democratic, with parents involving children in decisions. Millennial parents who experienced an element of this as children themselves, now consider the views of their children when taking major decisions, whether intentionally – like John and Chris – or unintentionally – like Ruth. Jackie (b.1980), who does not have children, observes that families contemplating a missionary career experience “...not necessarily fear of missing out themselves, but fear of their children missing out or fear of their parents missing out.” Millennial parents’ closeness to their own parents

therefore impacts on their decision-making as they consider the impact of moving the grandchildren far away.

Looking back on her own life, Susan (b.1966) spoke about her husband changing work-roles and made a passing comment about herself: "...and I had babies." Having three children over a number of years, she feels that about a decade of her life was spent as what her mission organisation called an "unassigned spouse." While Susan feels that there are now more opportunities for mothers with young children, Millennial women themselves continue to perceive a choice between having children or continuing to work. Because of her own experience of growing up with a working mother, Catherine (b.1992, single) intends to prioritise children over the work of mission: "...if I'm going to have children I want it to be that I'm with the children. So I'd need to either have a part time mission role or completely step back from it altogether and be in with the kids because I want to invest in their life and that is like a mission field in its own is raising children." Lucy (b.1985, single) also feels that "...having children in ministry does mean that basically the wife cannot work. Or can do very little." She concludes that she would rather not have children in order to continue working, while recognising that this would need to be agreed with any future partner. Elaine (b.1983) and her husband do not intend to have children. Although she feels that they would have reached the same decision living in one of their home countries, she recognises that the "stresses and pressures" of "living on the mission field" contributed to their thinking on the issue.

## 6.5 Being a Professional

While most interviewees were funded by sponsorship and financial gifts from friends, family and churches, a few had sought paid employment in order to remain in their chosen country. Three were in paid employment as a means of obtaining residency permits, while three others had set out to finance their own living and ministry costs through work as they would in the UK. These three were all from neocharismatic church networks (described in Chapter 2) and all had church leadership as their ministry focus. Interestingly, they were the only participants who seemed at all worried about their personal finances. Those who were supported by the generosity of others had found it easier than anticipated to raise the necessary funds. Catherine (b.1992), for example, has around thirty-five individuals as well as three larger

organisations who each give a monthly sum. Ainsley (b.1986) and his wife had always intended to find employment in order to finance their living costs while starting a new church in Europe. Although they hadn't found work by the time they moved, "...within a week of us arriving...my wife [name] found some work and just happened to be the kind of job that she was really hoping to find so it very much seemed like we were no longer tourists and that we could reside here and that kind of really sling-shotted us into feeling kind of very rooted here and settled in the church culture as well." Thus work can have the effect of embedding one in the local community and culture.

As I will show in the next chapter, fewer than half of my participants have a role that is mainly spiritual in nature. Balancing one's calling as a *missionary* with another role such as teacher or nurse does not appear to cause any sort of identity crisis. Rather these are seen as different aspects of one's identity. The primary identity of Christian leads to a call to mission, yet this can be worked out in a variety of ways. Some, though, feel that their working identity needs to be emphasised because the image people have of a missionary may lead them to imagine a preacher. Despite being supported financially as a missionary, Sarah (b.1990) very much sees her professional identity as a linguist: "I suppose if somebody asks me what do I do – somebody who doesn't know me at all – I would probably say I was a linguist first. Because when you say a missionary, they usually don't think of a linguist. It's kind of quite specialised." By specifying her role in mission, she is helping those she meets to form a suitable mental image of her work.

## 6.6 Being Lonely, Burnt-Out or Depressed

One of the surprises for me in this study was the frequency and frankness with which participants spoke about mental health challenges they or close family members had faced. This reflects a general Millennial willingness to be open and vulnerable; authenticity means owning and accepting one's own struggles. To some extent at least, this openness stemmed from modelling by an older generation, demonstrating how the cultural changes pushed forward by one generation become the accepted norms of the next. Sarah (b.1990) had seen close family members deal with mental health issues; Catherine (b.1992) appreciated the honesty of a pastor who struggled with his own mental health. It seems that Generation X, who grew up at a time when mental health was not talked about, have made a point of normalising such issues

through public discourse so that Millennials now feel free to talk about them and have at their disposal the language with which to do so. Susan (b.1966) related how she supports younger missionaries in a way that would not have been available to her at their age; she felt unsupported by her organisation when her child faced mental health struggles. She feels that “it would be different now,” in her large missionary agency at least. Significantly, no participant suggested that mental health struggles might disqualify them from ministry; rather they talked about coping strategies. These are people who own their mental health: they view their struggles as part of who they are. Indeed, they appeared to be comfortable not only to talk about their mental health but also to live with its ups and downs. Such vulnerability also forms part of the authenticity ethic (Lawrence, 2012, p.10; Klaver et.al., 2017) as individuals describe a faith journey which is filled with struggles rather than idealised plain-sailing.

In *Generation Me* and several articles, Twenge (2006; 2013) argues that those born in the 70s, 80s and 90s are more depressed and narcissistic than previous generations. Arnett *et al.* (2013; cf. Arnett, 2013) have sought to counter her arguments, pointing out the limitations in using college students as representative of an entire generation and questioning the significance of the narcissism measures used by Twenge. Arnett argues that many of the measures Twenge employs to demonstrate narcissism are in fact measures of self-esteem and therefore positive attributes. Some of the increase Twenge highlights can be attributed to the growth among females in traditionally masculine traits such as assertiveness (Arnett, 2013:6). While many media portrayals of Millennials undoubtedly emphasise high levels of depression and anxiety – particularly with regard to their economic situation – later studies have continued to show the generation to have a largely positive outlook on life. An early finding of the *Millennial Impact Project* was that Millennials remain hopeful in the face of uncertainty; an attitude which has continued to be evident through their later research (Feldmann *et al.*, 2019). Research by Savage *et al.* (2005, p.37ff) describes the worldview of Generation Y as a “Happy midi-narrative,” reflecting their hopefulness. This is not because Millennials are unrealistic or unaware of the existence of suffering, but rather due to their belief in their own ability, through relationship with family and friends and through exploration of the self, to maintain the personal fulfilment they regard as the aim of each individual (Savage *et al.*, 2005, p.38-39,141).

For missionaries, being cut off from such significant relationships can prove challenging. Loneliness and isolation are often a cause of emotional struggle, with John (b.1982) saying that this was the “the thing we underestimated most.” Elaine (b.1983) had lived communally prior to her mission placement, so found the isolation very challenging; single at the time, she spent most of her non-working hours completely alone. After a while she got a dog, “...who was such a massive answer to a prayer I didn’t pray. I was really struggling with loneliness and isolation and to be able to come home and have that little dog with a little waggy tail barking and jumping up and so excited to meet me....” The sense of isolation comes on different levels. For others, it was the loss of deep relationships and the people with whom one’s spiritual journey was shared. This underlines the notion that faith, while deeply personal, is worked out in relationship with others. Lucy (b.1985) found the contrast with her home church challenging after some time back in the UK: “I had quite a rough time when I first came back to the field.... Cos I’d been involved in a very sort of intense community church and then I was here by myself and was very much responsible for my own spiritual walk. And I floundered quite a bit. So I think then was probably quite a dark time.” Ainsley (b.1986) talked about losing the network of friends with whom one shares a “deep connection” and having to start from scratch in building new supportive relationships. He also discussed how distance changes one’s ability to relate, when friends wish to be supportive but have no real understanding of the life he is living or the issues he faces. Having suffered from depression in the past, Diane (b.1983) saw the dangers posed by isolation when both her work situation and the congregation she had joined were failing at the same time: “I’d moved to this country by myself and I needed to make sure that I had support and that it was sustainable for me to be there.” This underlines my earlier point that Millennials can be self-aware with regard to mental and emotional wellbeing, changing their circumstances to protect their health.

Mulling over the impact on individuals of the stresses caused by living in a different country and culture, Ainsley (b.1986) wonders “...whether this kind of country, this type of church community, might be a bit of an incubator for bringing those things out in people whereas they may not kind of manifest as quickly if there weren’t the pressures of language barrier, dark winters, and strange food and social awkwardness that comes with being in [country].” The country to which he refers is comparatively

close both geographically and culturally to Britain but, as mentioned in the section on culture above, it is possible that the expectation of similarity increases the likelihood of culture shock for the very reason that it is unanticipated. For some, life abroad has had a positive impact on mental well-being. While talking about adapting to a different culture, Ian commented that he had always felt that he didn't fit in: somehow that was easier in a place where he was expected to be different. There was less pressure to conform to a culture which already viewed him as an outsider, therefore he could be more comfortable with feelings of being different.

In a lifestyle where your work colleagues are often also the people you socialise with, some found it difficult to separate work from private life. Claire (b.1987) wrestled with the demands of a very intense team, saying "I wanted to be there, I just didn't want to do all of those things. So in the end I just did it, but then I was quite ill by the end. It was only... in the end I wasn't very well." She had to return to the UK to recover, then returned overseas officially working a four-day week as she felt that full-time for her team meant seven days a week. This helped to manage her mental health better and avoid stress and burnout, but sometimes led to friction with colleagues. In a similar way to Jackie's comment regarding parents (above), this suggests that Millennials are more likely than older generations to demand or enforce behaviours which protect their own or their families' mental wellbeing. There is an expectation among missionaries of over-work and sacrifice, sometimes externally imposed by older missionaries but also arising from internal pressure caused by the hero image of missionary mentioned above. A study of calling among zookeepers (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009) has shown that those with a strong sense of calling akin to a moral obligation were more likely to sacrifice their own wellbeing for the sake of the work. This can also be seen among missionaries, where suffering is part of the narrative inherited through generations of missionary biographies.

## 6.7 Conclusions

Millennial missionaries identify principally as Christians who happen to be living out their faith in a different country. As I showed in the previous chapter, they see this as a natural step in an authentic faith journey, where decisions are taken on the basis of what one discerns as divine leading. Participants in this study were not altogether comfortable with the 'missionary label,' either for colonial or theological reasons or

because they felt they did not live up to the hero image of the historic missionary figure. There is a disconnect between their being entirely comfortable with what they are doing and why, while being uncomfortable with trying to explain it to their non-Christian Millennial friends. Nevertheless they are able to maintain a sense of personal cohesion and therefore of authenticity because their primary identity is as a Christian and their work and lifestyle are viewed as an authentic outworking of that identity.

Relationships are very important to Millennial missionaries, with many struggling when relocation means that they lose the closeness that they previously enjoyed with family members or friends. Whether for this or other reasons, missionaries can face mental health challenges. Previous generations may have felt that the image of the missionary meant that they could not disclose such struggles, whereas Millennials value such openness as part of an authentic life.

## CHAPTER 7 DOING: The Work of Mission

In generations past an individual's identity was conferred by his or her gender, class and occupation; today one's identity is discovered and developed through an inward exploration of the emotions and then, ideally, expressed through one's actions (Berger & Luckmann, 1991/1966; Klaver *et al.*, 2017). Although many people's professional life will not directly embody their identity, at the very least public actions should, on this view, be seen to agree with one's values. Included in the authenticity paradigm, therefore, is the notion of *consistency*: that one's actions and behaviours be in accord with one's beliefs and feelings (Pessi, 2013; Cranton & Carusetta, 2004), thereby leading to an enhanced sense of self-fulfilment built upon the internal cohesion of one's narrative identity.

With this in mind, I turn in this chapter to the day-to-day working lives of Millennial participants, using the code families listed in the final column of Table 4.2 (Chapter 4) to demonstrate how participants seek to live out their faith. I begin by outlining the mission *activities* in which participants are involved, considering how their values are reflected in their work. I then turn to missionaries' relationships with their *local teams* and *sending structures* such as mission organisations, congregations and friends. Lastly, I look at how Millennial missionaries take *decisions* and think about the *future*. The chapter closes with reflections on how the behaviour of Millennial missionaries relates to their believing and belonging, with the authenticity paradigm filtered through a theocentric understanding of reality.

| Doing                                                                                  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Authenticity:</b> how is their self-understanding reflected in their life and work? |
| Activity                                                                               |
| Decisions & Future                                                                     |
| Sending                                                                                |
| Team                                                                                   |

Table 7.1 Column 3 of Table 4.2

### 7.1 Mission Activities

As discussed in *Contextualising British Foreign Missions* (Chapter 3), the earliest Evangelical missionaries became involved in medical and literacy work alongside Bible

translation and exposition, with an infrastructure of missions support later growing up around them. In my research, Millennial participants represented a range of mission activities which I have grouped in the table below:

| Area of Work                              | No. of Participants |
|-------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Church leadership & planting / evangelism | 6                   |
| Training                                  | 3                   |
| Bible translation                         | 3                   |
| Education                                 | 2                   |
| Medical                                   | 1                   |
| Support Services                          | 2                   |

*Table 7.2 Areas of Mission Involvement*

In Chapter 3 I looked at discussions among theologians and missiologists as to what constitutes *mission*. While all mission can be said to have the aim of directing people toward the Christian God, there is something of a tension between “Word” and “works:” ministering to spiritual vs. practical needs. I note in *Becoming: The Journey into Mission* (Chapter 5) that participants are motivated more by an internal sense of following a calling in their own personal journey of faith than by others’ need for salvation. They do, nevertheless, seek to share their faith, inviting others to embark on or deepen their own spiritual journey. Thus proselytism in the traditional sense remains a key part of roles I define as church leadership or evangelism; it can also be incidental in education and medical roles, where participants take opportunities to pray with others or to use British traditions such as Christmas to share the Christian message.

In the discussion that follows, I will begin with the spiritual and move towards the more practical end of the spectrum represented by roles in Table 7.2, always keeping in mind that some participants work across categories, with those involved in church leadership often also doing much of the related administrative work, for example. Some participants whose primary work is spiritual also do paid work on the side or run social projects, while others whose main role is not classed as spiritual nevertheless volunteer in local congregations.

Among those listed as having church or evangelism as their primary focus, two are starting new churches (church-planting), two are part of church leadership teams, one

is a church-based youth leader and one works with a Christian student organisation.<sup>15</sup> The two church-planters are both men whose wives are working full-time in secular jobs to fund the family's life in their chosen location, supplemented by freelance work on the part of the men. The other male whose primary focus is church leadership also intended to do paid work but has been unable to obtain a work permit; his wife homeschools their children. The other four participants listed in this category are all single women. Claire (b.1987) and Jackie (b.1980)'s ministry is to students in Asia, from the initial sharing of the Christian message with individuals, teaching them to live as Christians, and training local students to share the Gospel with their peers, although Jackie has recently moved into more of a support role, working in personnel within her organisation. Megan (b.1988) works with a local church in Central and Eastern Europe (CE Europe). Her official role focusses on mentoring young women, but she is involved in many aspects of the life of the church. After initially going to volunteer with a local charity in a CE European country, Anne (b.1980) is now on the leadership team of a local church. It is very unusual for a woman to be in this position in an evangelical church in CE Europe and Anne echoes my own experience of having more freedom to minister as a foreign missionary than local women would have. This shows that traditional male and female roles are perpetuated to a large extent in church leadership, sometimes with the unanticipated result of a wife becoming her family's main breadwinner.

Related to this spiritual leadership category is that of training. Ruth and her husband mentor leaders across Europe. Grace (b.1980) and Catherine (b.1992) work alongside Bible translation teams, training local people in the use of Scripture so that they can do the frontline work of exposition and leading Bible study groups. On the one hand, this can be seen as a move towards enabling local people to carry out mission; however one might ask why, after centuries of mission, Westerners are still required to carry out such training. Three participants were directly involved in the translation of Scripture or the preliminary work of creating a writing system for languages which hitherto had been oral. In the early days of the modern missionary movement, this

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<sup>15</sup> I mention below two participants whose ministry focus is students in Asia. One of these had, at time of interview, moved into a leadership / human resources role within her organisation and is therefore listed under "Support Services."

would have been the work of one or two individuals in a remote location; now linguists work in teams of both expats and local people. The Bible translators and trainers carry out work which enables others to share the Christian message rather than doing so themselves. I have further categorised as 'Support Services' two very different roles which both enable the frontline evangelists or Bible translators to do their work.

Education roles have largely become a means to make contact with local people or to secure a residency permit, rather than the historic emphasis on the teaching of literacy in order to study Scripture. No participant mentioned as their motivation the social goal of education: improving people's life chances. Some saw their teaching role as a day-job, supporting the spiritual role they valued more highly. In a country where proselytism is illegal, one participant saw teaching as a means to learn about the local culture and history, in preparation for a more spiritually focussed role should the political situation one day change. Thus while they carry out their role with professionalism, they do not view it as their true identity but rather as a disguise. In their study of the Christian punk scene in the US, Fuist and McDowell (2019) report tension between authenticity and "infiltration," with those who view their participation as a means for mission regarded as insincere. For those in my study whose primary work role was not spiritual, the desire to share the Christian message nevertheless took precedence. In places where proselytism is illegal, such subterfuge or apparent inauthenticity is justified by the individual's sense of authentically living out their faith and calling. Here the intentionality involved in necessary role-play means that the integrity of the narrative identity is not undermined: these are not conflicting identities but rather a role selected in service to the authentic self.

The one participant whose work is in a medical context had trained as a nurse as she considered that it would be useful in mission, similarly viewing her professional role as a means to Christian mission. She is now working in a Christian clinic in Africa where "...the vision is really to impact people through love in action" and where praying with patients is encouraged. This she contrasts with her experience of working in the NHS where her faith was not to be mentioned. She finds greater congruence between her professional and spiritual identities now that she is living in her mission location.

My sample did not reflect the trend towards social justice as a major priority for Millennials, stemming from what Charles Taylor (2018/1991, p.104) calls "universal

solidarity” whereby the ordinary day-to-day life of individuals has gained prominence. Day (2011) similarly found that her participants did not speak of morality in terms of justice or a more general sense of doing good for others, preferring to focus on behaviours toward known individuals. While some participants in my study work to improve the provision of medical or educational services, their primary goal remains nevertheless spiritual rather than practical. I suggest that this salience of the spiritual goal stems from the evangelical identity of the participants in my study: had I been able to recruit Millennial Christian participants who work with aid agencies rather than churches and missionary organisations, the results may have been different. This however, raises an interesting point. As religious belief and practice has moved to the margins of British society, those who continue to practise are more likely both to know and to value the tenets of their faith: *believing* and *belonging* increasingly go hand in hand as the authenticity ethic gains momentum, as I discussed in the previous chapter. While the participants in this study, as those who have chosen to engage in Christian missions, are clearly among the most committed, I show below that significant numbers of UK Christians are also involved in supporting them, thereby demonstrating their own commitment to the missionary endeavour. The authenticity of *their* faith is shown by their following their own personal callings, which include giving time, finance and other resources to support missionaries.

## 7.2 Missionary Colleagues and Supporters

### 7.2.1 Local Teams

I asked participants about their experience of working in team, with responses expressing both the joys and the challenges of missionary teams, the latter being attributed to differences in culture, personality or expectation. As Claire (b.1987) said, “I wouldn’t want to *not* work in a team! But it is sometimes quite challenging when you’re in a team.” Participants described a wide variety of teams, large or small, close-knit or dispersed, local or multi-cultural. Catherine (b.1992) sums up the mixed feelings: “it’s a little community and so many different ages and races and languages and people doing different roles and things so it’s lovely to be a little family. But then, because it’s so diverse you clash with people a little bit and you have misunderstandings and just communication is hard work.”

For many the team is not just a group of work colleagues but also their social circle: having meals together, playing sport together and praying together. Some of the single participants also shared accommodation with a team-mate, which some found challenging but others enjoyed. Chloe (b.1981) appreciates “I think where the teamwork really comes into play is not so much with the technical aspect of our work but more just with the supporting each other socially, emotionally.” For Diane (b.1983) team became like family “...and it was really hard leaving them when I left.” Ruth (b.1980), on the other hand, talks about living in close proximity being “claustrophobic” even in a good team, while Grace (b.1980) discussed the challenge of including everyone in a small missionary community, saying “...you’re used to normal life where you can choose who you do stuff with because there’s such a big community of people... no-one’s going to be offended if they’re not included” whereas in a small team there is always the risk of causing offence. Claire (b.1987) also reflects that “...overseas the team was... more difficult because it was more of a sentiment of it was almost my only support. So if it wasn’t a good support then, then I didn’t have anything else to fall back on.”

Philip (b.1984) has thought a lot about team and leadership. As a keen footballer, he appreciates the importance of team and struggled with the leadership structure of his home church, where he felt that a small group of men took all of the decisions. In his current location, he has been working with others to create a leadership team of men and women. Elaine (b.1983) was “warned... that going into a very male-dominated culture in a developing country and being a woman placed in charge of men who were older than me, that that could offer some real cultural barriers.” Her experience, however, was of a warm welcome from men who respected her expertise and were grateful that she wanted to do a role which previously had been filled reluctantly by a series of different people.

It certainly seems that Millennial missionaries have grown up with a positive attitude toward team which is able to withstand substantial testing. Catherine (b.1992) reluctantly admits that “...I have all these ideas and I want to go off and do them and you have to sit and talk in a team about things.” This was said almost guiltily: as if it were unacceptable to question that teamwork is the best way of doing things. Many of the earliest evangelical missionaries were very independent, with several well-known

names having been rejected by missionary organisations leading to their eventually going it alone; today mission still attracts people with an entrepreneurial spirit, as evidenced by participants' determination to follow their calling. Teamwork is a value which is long established in the participants' belief system having been emphasised through the discourse of their education; nevertheless, they often find the reality challenging. This dissonance between the expectation and value on the one hand and experience which at times is negative on the other can be quite unsettling for Millennials: discovering that their feelings regarding team do not line up with their established beliefs can leave them wondering how to act authentically.

### 7.2.2 *Mission organisations*

Participants in this study were supported personally and professionally in a number of different ways. Some were members of traditional missionary agencies with clear structures and protocols. Some were viewed as "church-planters" within an international network of churches. Others had much less structured support systems, having largely followed their own sense of calling and sought support from personal contacts along the way.

Diane (b.1983) and Anne (b.1980) described the challenges of not being with a missionary organisation. Diane compared herself to other missionaries in her location, eventually choosing to join an international mission agency which would provide her with team relationships locally and pastoral support and spiritual input more widely. Anne was also exploring options for joining a mission organisation, as she felt a need both for peer support and for spiritual guidance beyond that offered by the local church congregation with which she is serving. It can be difficult for those already committed to a specific ministry in a specific location to find an organisation flexible enough to "adopt" them without requiring them to return to the UK and undergo training as would a new recruit. However, the fact that these two individuals in very different circumstances saw the value of joining an organisation reflects both the Millennial openness to mentoring and a level of self-understanding developed through experience.

As I discuss in *Generations and the Millennial Generation* (Chapter 1), Millennials are often said to be frustrated by top-down leadership styles: having been taught as children to express their opinions, they want to be able to offer input. In this context it

is worth looking at a longer quotation from Jackie (b.1980), who works with a large international mission organisation:

“I see the difference in people who come later in life or who have been here longer, having more the ‘well the organisation says it so we’re going to do it how the organisation says it,’ where maybe younger people having more of an idea themselves and willing to push their idea. But I also see a difference in how our leaders react, having been in two different parts of the organisation with very different leadership style in both of them. And the more traditional leadership style being, well this is the organisation’s way and this is it. The other leadership style, which is probably younger – well not too much younger, but culturally different as well – being more, ok, let’s explore this, let’s see if it works. ”

Younger missionaries want to be involved in decision-making and younger leaders are more likely to be open to this. The frustrations of GenX missionaries who felt that they did not have a voice (Tiplady, 2002) in mission organisations, have empowered Millennials by offering them a platform to challenge decisions, particularly as GenX-ers and now Millennials have themselves taken on leadership roles. This expresses the equality of opportunity which is important to Millennials and also reflects the sense that one size does not fit all, both stemming from a belief in the pre-eminence of the individual.

### *7.2.3 Mission supporters*

Besides their mission organisation and local team, most overseas missionaries are also supported by individuals and local congregations in the UK. This mission support can take many forms including financial – which I address below – as well as prayer, friendly communications, advice, accommodation when back in the UK, sending parcels, etc. Claire (b.1987) describes some supporters as “real partners, like I couldn’t do it without them.” Grace (b.1980) emphasises the importance of people who pray regularly and those who maintain communication, besides those who give financially. Likewise Chloe (b.1981) appreciates those who send parcels which show that they are thinking of her. People support missionaries because they believe in the cause, but also, often, because they believe in the person. Because they are living out what they believe, those involved in mission are deemed worthy of respect even by those who do not share their beliefs. For example, Catherine mentions a relative who “...really respects and admires what I’m doing, even though she doesn’t believe in the reasons

why.” In this instance, it is the missionary’s perceived authenticity which engenders respect.

Traditionally missionaries would communicate with their supporters through a regular newsletter. Some still produce a paper newsletter, and most write a regular newsletter which is sent electronically. Many also use blogs, Twitter, Instagram and Facebook to update their supporters, although others avoid mentioning their work on social media. Catherine (b.1992) posts photographs of her location on Instagram, but does not use it for work; instead she has a Facebook group just for supporters in which she shares work-related updates, as does Philip (b.1984). Sarah (b.1990), on the other hand, is aware that her use of Facebook could be seen to reflect her organisation, and therefore posts less than she otherwise might. During my interview with Anne (b.1980), we had an interesting discussion about how our use of Facebook had changed as more local friends and acquaintances had joined the platform: we had each altered the way we presented both our location and our work as our posts were increasingly viewed more often by local people than by supporters. Anne reflected that: “...sometimes when it comes up on my memories things that I posted in that first year, I think, “oh that was a bit patronising.” You know. I can see that actually my cross-cultural, you know, my mindset’s changed a lot and I can see that actually I’d written it from a very British point of view and that kind of thing.” Similarly, Ruth (b.1980) mentioned that she has limited her Facebook posts to updates about her family after observing how those who post about controversial issues only “...create antagonism.” Social media can therefore be said to limit expression of the authentic self, where one remains silent or alters one’s words in order to avoid causing offence. At the same time, social media can be a tool in self-reflection, with Millennials such as Anne recognising previous attitudes.

At the time of interview, WhatsApp was becoming the most popular means of communication with supporters and family at home, partly because it was also being used so much with local friends and for work purposes. It is attractive because short updates and prayer requests can be sent to supporters and instant responses received. It is also easier to express one’s true feelings in this more intimate context: where Facebook or Instagram show the same post to everyone, WhatsApp allows the user to be more selective. Ainsley (b.1986) also reflected that lockdown had led to more

people using video calls to keep in touch, whereas previously only relatives had done so.

#### *7.2.4 Finance*

As noted above, the church-planters (two Millennial and one slightly older) are for the most part self-supporting – among missionaries this is known as “tent-making,” after the Apostle Paul who made tents while travelling to share the gospel message. This works in their locations in Europe, where they can access employment and where levels of pay are comparable with those in the UK. John has, however, had to supplement this with support from UK churches due to the high costs of the European city in which he lives. Some participants used their own savings for the first year or so of their time overseas, raising financial support later when it became necessary in order to remain long-term. Only one participant mentioned renting out property owned in the UK, something which would have been a common source of income among GenX and Boomer missionaries.

Those who join large missionary organisations are required to create a budget and raise the necessary support before they leave the UK. The process usually involves giving presentations in churches and at church meetings (such as women’s groups, youth groups, etc.) as well as asking individuals directly. While this can seem daunting at first, several participants commented on how quickly and easily they were able to secure regular funding from churches, family members and friends. Sarah (b.1990) even has a few financial supporters whom she doesn’t personally know, either through being featured on the organisation’s website or through her former university Christian Union’s dissemination of her newsletters. While Catherine (b.1992) mentioned how “bizarre” it appears to her non-believing relatives to live off donations, Elaine has some non-Christian friends who support her financially, which she attributes to friendship rather than support for what she is doing. Montemaggi (2017, p.260) notes that Christians believe “...that one’s possessions, abilities, and fortune are granted by God and therefore need to be used to serve God. This is contrasted with the capitalist culture, where people feel that what they have is the fruit of their labour, that they own it, and that they have control over it.” So both those who give and the recipients of their gifts can be said to be expressing their faith in their attitude towards money. Fuist & McDowell (2019, p.283-5) show that forgoing personal gain can be

seen as evidence of authenticity. Karen (b.1980s) notes that this is very different to the culture they have grown up in: “People do think you’re a bit crazy also, like not to be paid and you know to actually pay to be somewhere, they do think that’s a bit mad. And I think especially now that my friends are like in their thirties, you know, where you actually can make some money. And obviously that’s what people value: having things, making money.”

Depending on others for financial support can be challenging. An older participant, Jennifer (b.1971), describes how some financial supporters from the US had an “attitude of ‘we hold the purse strings and we’re going to tell you what to do.’” Ruth also told of a time when the church which was her family’s main financial supporter suddenly decided to cut their income. Both of these situations led to hurt and the relationship was undermined.

### 7.3 Future Plans

Most interviews for this research were carried out during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted participants’ ability to think about the future. Some had been forced to leave their country of work and were unsure when they could return; others had had their planned leave extended indefinitely. Still others had remained in the country, though sometimes having to relocate to an urban area. This uncertainty made it challenging for them to state clearly their future plans.

The popular view of Millennials is that they avoid commitment, however participants in this study have demonstrated high levels of commitment to their calling (Hammer, 2015, p.22), going through years of training, exploring or simply waiting, often at great personal cost. While it is certainly the case that many in this study had had multiple changes in job role or location, more often than not this was forced on them either by circumstance (such as illness or a visa not being renewed) or by organisational policies which require a re-commitment every few years rather than a life-long commitment from the outset. There is a great deal of change in the life stories of interview participants of all ages, with some having lived in numerous locations and others having remained in a location while work colleagues moved on.

Ainsley (b.1986) had initially committed for three years but “...realised very quickly within that three years that nothing much is going to happen within such a short window of time.” He was frustrated by those who came to join his team but did not

stay for long, whom he describes as having “...a short capacity for staying in the long-haul.” The few participants who did express a reluctance to commit long-term did so when talking about their very first forays into foreign missions. As they have both matured and gained experience, their openness to view this as a long-term career path has increased. This reflects Duffy’s (2021) conclusion that frequent job-change is an age-related effect rather than generational, as I discuss in *Generations and the Millennial Generation* (Chapter 1). Some, like Ian, were convinced from the start that theirs is a “life-time calling,” although this did not preclude changes in job role or location. At the time of interview, Lucy (b.1985) had been working in mission for 13 years, yet said she “...wouldn’t necessarily term myself a ‘career missionary’ cos I’m not – I haven’t had a career yet.” After initially committing for two years, she had returned to the UK and spent time in prayer before making a longer-term commitment. Claire (b.1987) wanted to commit long-term from the outset, but wasn’t sure that she would cope; so she made two consecutive one-year commitments, followed by an indefinite commitment when she felt ready. Anne (b.1980) had already been in the country for ten years at the time of interview and was beginning to wonder if she should see her commitment as long-term. Those who bemoan Millennials’ lack of commitment often argue that it is due to their short-term perspective: living in the moment. It seems that the outcome can nevertheless be the same, with no significant difference being discernible in the length of service of those in my study who had embarked on mission to take a gap-year or career-break as compared to those who described having a long-term sense of calling from the outset. Living in the moment simply has the effect of causing the individual to re-assess their life-choices at regular intervals to ensure that what they are doing continues to reflect their perceived self-identity.

In the previous chapter I discussed how Millennials own their mental wellbeing, taking decisions accordingly. Such choices can be interpreted by others as demonstrating a lack of commitment. For example, Diane’s decision to leave a small local congregation in order to join a larger international church which would provide her with greater spiritual and emotional support was, from her perspective, made in order that her long-term commitment to the locality be “sustainable.” One can imagine those in the congregation she left seeing the move as evidence of a lack of commitment. John (b.1982) originally moved overseas to take on the leadership of a group who wanted to

begin a local congregation. When the project was abandoned, he and his wife chose to remain in the location and focus on building relationships with local people: his commitment was to a place and its people rather than a specific project.

Four Millennial participants emphasised that they could not say for sure how long they would stay in their current role or location because of their willingness to “follow Jesus” if they sensed Him telling them to move on, while another two stressed being “open” to moving again. Guignon (2004, p.xii) argues that in regarding the self as one’s only guide, we no longer have “an authoritative source of direction” as we take decisions about our lives. Many Christians would assert that for them the Bible is this source, yet how it is to be applied in one’s life decisions is open to interpretation. Historically, this interpretation would have been the role of priest or pastor and it is their authority which is challenged by the rise in prominence of the inner self. Elaine (b.1983) comments that:

“...although they [mission organisation] work in four year contracts, we, in our minds, are there until God says otherwise. ...We might be there for another two years; we might be there for another six years; we might be there until we retire. Only God knows that. But we’re there for as long as He wants us.”

This demonstrates that the personal leading of God is prioritised over an agreed contract. At the same time, though, Elaine recognises the right of leadership to move her within the organisation. Montemaggi’s (2017) study of evangelical Christians in the UK has shown the tension between the value of obedience on the one hand and their individual search for self-fulfilment on the other. In my study, some participants appeared to be wrestling with whether to obey leaders whose decisions were in opposition to their own inclinations. For Claire (b.1987), obedience to leadership is clearly still a value, albeit one she finds increasingly hard to hold onto:

“... [I] just felt like I was pulled along by other people’s decisions... but I think with that just kind of a sense of ‘Oh God...’ I don’t know, like, God directs the leaders and so I trust God and so I trust that he’s directing the leaders and so I trust their decisions, that was part of the process.”

This suggests that resentment can be caused by leaders who take decisions without involving the people concerned. Thus my data show Christians gladly choosing to obey God, yet less sure of their obedience to the leadership of Christian organisations. Often it comes down to trust: it is not the position that a given leader holds which causes

people to obey, but the relationship of the individual to that leader, which John (b.1982) referred to as “...submitting to healthy church leadership.”

Davie (2015, p.7) sees “...a gradual shift from a culture of obligation or duty to a culture of consumption or choice....” For participants in this study, however, a sense of duty remains significant; it is the nature of that duty which has changed. Duty for contemporary Christians could be described as obedience to a personal call from a personal God, as opposed to obeying societal expectations or the demands of authority figures. So while individual choice is indeed involved, it is a choice to obey, with the individual taking decisions in conversation with God and close confidants seen as speaking for God. Montemaggi (2017, p.261) concludes that the “...surrender of the self has the effect of intensifying... individuality,” as obedience to God frees the Christian from conformity to society’s expectations. Nevertheless, Christians could be said to be conforming to the norms and expectations of their own social circle: the evangelical culture. As with any subgroup, by taking on the standards of the group, Christians feel that they have freely chosen a lifestyle which is in contrast to the surrounding society. Yet the norms of the subgroup also create constraints in terms of things one can and cannot do if one wishes to remain within the group. For missionaries as for clergy, the expectations of the wider evangelical group are often more restrictive, both at home and in their place of work.

When asked how they go about taking major decisions, most participants mentioned prayer, described as talking to God about the options until they sense an answer, communicated to them through circumstances, the advice of people they trust, or a sense of peace. It is often the loss of this ‘sense of peace’ that prompts people to consider a change of direction. For example, Anne (b.1980) says, “So I’m kind of feeling like things, something needs to change a little bit, but I’m not quite sure what or when or how or...” while Grace (b.1980) admits, “I’ve kind of got to the point in my work where I’m a bit tired of what I’m doing.” The ‘sense of peace’ is something that one feels internally, yet it is most often interpreted as divine leading. The value of authenticity emphasises that one should be guided by one’s own inner feelings; while Christian missionaries follow what they believe God is calling them to do, this can be tempered by or communicated through their own feelings, as I show in *Becoming: The*

*Journey into Mission* (Chapter 5). Catherine (b.1992) is very honest in describing the interplay:

“I’m constantly just trying to make sure that I’m doing what God wants me to do... like some aspects are fun and some bits are hard and what-not, but my main aim is that I’m constantly working towards God’s goals that he puts in the Bible. And then another goal is to just enjoy life while I’m doing that, with the ups and downs.”

It is also evident from my data that being led by one’s feelings – even for those who believe God to be the source of those feelings – is not always clear-cut: Grace (b.1980), for example, relates that it is only when someone says “it sounds like that’s what you want to do,” that she realises “no – I want to do *this*!” The journey of self-discovery is, then, not purely internal but also dialectic: explored in conversation with others and, in the case of evangelical Christians, with God.

Therefore, I argue that there are various elements at play in Millennial missionaries’ attitude towards future plans and commitments. On the one hand, there is a generational acceptance of transience whereby frequent change is seen as inevitable and met with fortitude even if not actively sought. For some there is a sense of boredom after several years in one role, which arises from a longing for greater self-fulfilment. This can be said to be linked to age and life-stage rather than generation, with GenX participants demonstrating a similar frequency of role-changes across their working lives (Duffy, 2021). While some have made unexpected moves, others have stayed longer than anticipated. When I asked Anne how her original plan to stay one year became ten years, she responded that “...relationships with people was definitely a big key in that.” For others, too, relationships within a close-knit team have played a significant role in keeping them in a given location, or in the grief associated with a move to a new location. This reflects Day’s findings regarding the importance of family and other personal relationships (Day, 2011, p.93). Friendships have changed due to participants’ move abroad, but my data do not show any evidence of Millennials eschewing commitment. All are highly committed to faith, family and friends, with many also demonstrating long-term commitment to their organisation, team or project, despite sometimes frequent changes in job role or location.

#### 7.4 Believing, Belonging, Behaving

While the language of believing and belonging (Davies, 2000) has become established among sociologists of religion, those who study mission and church history have

commonly used these two words accompanied by a third: behaving. Their emphasis, however, is on understanding how individuals come to faith and creating strategies for mission: asking whether belonging precedes believing and behaving, as in the Christendom model (Murray, 2004), or whether acceptance into the community of faith requires an understanding and profession of correct belief accompanied by signs of changed behaviour. While mass membership of a state church allowed for belonging without necessarily believing or behaving fully, for Millennials behaviour that is in accordance with professed belief is essential to authentic faith. As I showed in *The Religion of British Millennials* (Chapter 2), the increasing societal acceptance of nonreligion means that it is becoming less common to profess belief without also both belonging and behaving, or to belong without also believing and behaving.

Ian (b.1980s) longs to see Christians whose lives are consistent with their faith: “The biggest faith challenges I have are about disappointment with the church or with Christians, and with myself at times, about not living out what we say we believe. I think that’s the biggest challenge I have.” He is frustrated with both himself and others when behaviour does not match beliefs, leaving one open to accusations of inauthenticity but also to an inner sense of unease. Philip (b.1982) also stresses the importance of authenticity: “for me to trust people I... I need them to not just say things, I need them to do things or to back their words up.” Elaine (b.1983) wrestled with this as a young person who was drawn to

“all of those things that challenge every 18 year old when they leave home for the first time. Peer pressure, alcohol, social scene, new-found freedom. ...Even though I was publicly saying I was a Christian... I was sort of a Sunday Christian. ...But it was more words than deeds.”

As I discussed in *The Religion of British Millennials* (Chapter 2), this perception of the unity of belief and action as necessary to authentic self-fulfilment has led on the one hand to many young people leaving the church altogether (Niemela, 2015), but on the other hand it has also fuelled a rise in what might be termed ‘fundamentalism’ across major religions. Although Christian fundamentalism is generally defined by its roots among conservative evangelicals in the United States, the focus on doctrine over practice (Armstrong, 2001) of that type of fundamentalism is not reflected in the Millennial generation. Instead, Millennial Christians are more likely to emphasise living out one’s personal faith than holding correct beliefs. As Bielo (2012, p.260) has said in

the context of emerging evangelicalism, "...equating belief with individualized propositional assent is being reevaluated." Millennial fundamentalism is about activity not assertion; doing, not debating. Day (2013, p.61) has also noted the shift in belief "...from a narrow propositional or doctrinal meaning to one that embraces emotion, action and relationships." This leads to Christians being more comfortable with working across or changing denominations in comparison with earlier generations, as I discuss in *Being: The Identity of a Missionary* (Chapter 6).

Fuist and McDowell (2019, p.387-388) have said that authentic Christianity is seen to be "...about walking the walk..." and "...putting your commitment to Christian love into action." Similarly, Clements and Bullivant (2022, p.471 *emphasis in original*) find that younger Catholics in Britain "...go increasingly *all in* with their Catholicism, not merely by the standards of the wider culture, but by those of other (predominantly older) practicing Catholics too." In a study of young Christians in Glasgow, Olson *et al.* (2013) refer to this as 'embodiment:' a faith which is not attached to a particular place, but rather lived out in the individual wherever they are. My data agrees with these previous findings in showing that Millennial Christians value a faith that is authentic precisely because one's public actions mirror one's private beliefs, in contrast to the prediction of the secularisation thesis that religion would withdraw to the private realm. Faith is indeed personal and individual, yet it is lived out in the public space. This space, however, differs from that envisaged by secularisation: rather than fighting for Christianity to regain its former place in national institutions as did the original Christian fundamentalists, Millennial Christians embrace their minority status (Montemaggi, 2017) by allowing their personal faith to impact their public identity.

## 7.5 Conclusions.

Authenticity as a value is expressed by Millennial missionaries in their desire to live out their faith in their daily lives. It is important to them – both for their own peace of mind and how others perceive them – that their actions reflect their beliefs. Whatever the nature of their mission activity, their goal is first and foremost to discover and follow their vocation, as I set out in *Becoming: The Journey into Mission* (Chapter 5). This then forms the foundation of the identities I discuss in *Being: The Identity of a Missionary* (Chapter 6). For most, the desire to move to a specific location or to be involved in mission preceded the decision to carry out a given role: sometimes roles

are chosen in order to facilitate being in a particular place. This underlines the conclusions of the previous chapter, that identity for my participants is first and foremost theocentric: it is relationship with the divine which determines where they go and what they do.

This is worked out through others: friends, relatives, Christian leaders and mission organisations. Although missionaries are often quite isolated geographically, most are linked to support structures which mean that they are not entirely alone. For many there is a formal relationship with a missionary organisation which may have a team working in one location or scattered throughout a country or region. All have the support of friends and congregations back in the UK – sometimes this is financial as well as emotional, spiritual and practical. Relationships are highly salient for Millennials, with significant decisions taken in communication with trusted others.

In this chapter I have shown that Millennial missionaries are highly committed to their faith, their calling and their relationships. A large quantitative study would be required to demonstrate whether they change role or location more frequently than missionaries of earlier generations across their careers. Yet my data shows that the theocentric orientation of Millennial missionaries coupled with the salience of authenticity leads to a strong commitment to living out the personal faith journey. In the next chapter, I discuss the theoretical implications of these findings.

## CHAPTER 8      Theocentric Authenticity: The Millennial Missionary Identity

This study has shown that British Millennials who travel to other countries as Christian missionaries have grown up immersed in different – and at times conflicting – narratives, which have contributed to the development of their self-understanding and sense of identity. These narratives are the stories which form the foundation of cultural ideals and ideas; the reference points for individuals’ interpretation of events and experiences (Howell, 2012, p.22; Bartkowski, 2007, p.154) and their own place within these. Narratives are present in every culture, be it that of a nation or a group, helping to shape the identities of the group and its members. Narrative is transmitted by the means of discourse, offering individuals a shared language and framework by which to describe and appropriate it (Giddens 1991). In this chapter I discuss how the salience of authenticity, central to the cultural narrative of contemporary Britain, combines with the evangelical narrative to create a framework for the self-understanding of Millennial missionaries, which I term *theocentric authenticity*. This is demonstrated in the diagram below, showing theocentric authenticity at the interface of the evangelical and secular narratives:

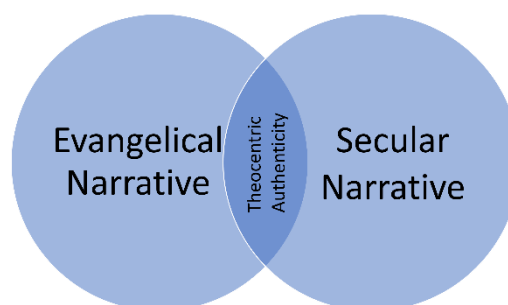


Figure 8.1

I begin this chapter, however, by considering the role played by discourse in the transmission of such narratives

### 8.1 Discourse

*Discourse* reflects the “social conditions of production” of language or text (Chalaby, 1996, p.687), so that the language of discourse must be understood as situated within a given context. In the case of my research, this context is represented by the family and community of faith on the one hand, and the wider British society on the other. Discourse carries with it an element of power (Hook, 2001): in providing a framework by which individuals can interpret their experiences, the authors of discourse mould

the ways in which others understand the world around them (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). Whereas much discourse is highly intentional (Bryman, 2001, p.360) – such as, for example, government public safety messaging – oftentimes it is simply an expression of the culture and beliefs of an organisation or group, which may change gradually over time as individuals come and go and as changes in the wider culture's own discourse leave their mark. The agents of discourse may intentionally create contexts in which children are socialised into a particular narrative, yet such agents are often simply those who offer an infant his or her earliest understanding of self and of beliefs and behaviours considered normative (Klingenberg & Sjo, 2019, p.167). Although some may be more conscious than others of their part in its formation, discourse has a plurality of authors and its impact is limited by their status and by their nearness to the audience (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). Therefore, the power of discourse lies not simply in the language used but in an individual's relationship to and trust in the source of that discourse (Sherkat, 2003). In terms of my present study, this is key to understanding the formative role of parental faith and Christian leaders in an individual's socialisation into the evangelical narrative, but also the influence of teachers and media sources in transmitting the discourse of the secular narrative.

Primary socialisation limits an infant to the discourse of the home and immediate social circle. As the child grows, however, he or she becomes aware of multiple sources of discourse – agents of secondary socialisations (Golo, 2019, p.195) – espousing differing narratives (Bryman, 2001, p.360). The expansion of access to differing discourses, particularly with the growth of digital communications, is such that individuals are constantly weighing options and either selecting one over another or merging several to create a new interpretation. As this occurs, there is also cross-pollination of discourse, whereby the discourse of one group may adapt to the meanings of another. Just as the individual has a plurality of identities dependent on context, so he or she identifies with a number of different social groups, each of which may have a different discourse (Roof, 1999, p.70-71). While exposure to some discourses is unavoidable in society, one may choose to immerse oneself in that with which one most identifies, through attending gatherings of particular groups or reading their literature, as has long been the case, or today also through selecting which internet or media sources to follow. Thus Christian parents choose which congregation or denomination to attend in line with their own narrative, with the

discourse of this Christian community therefore becoming formative in the development of the narrative perceived by their children, as I show in *Becoming: The Journey into Mission* (Chapter 5). Millennial missionaries, however, have also been exposed through education, media and friendships, for example, to British society's nonreligious discourse. While maintaining the salience of their theocentricity, they choose to emphasise those aspects of the evangelical narrative which can be described in terms of secular discourse, such as equality, wellbeing or human potential (Roof, 1999, p.171). These are areas of overlap, where the discourse of evangelicalism meets that of wider society, as I discuss further below.

## 8.2 Meta-narratives

For the Millennial missionaries who took part in this research, the evangelical narrative is highly salient. Yet, at the same time, it is often expressed or interpreted through the lens of 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain's secular discourse. Young Christians are continuously negotiating a response to these two key narratives as they construct their own understanding of reality and of self. At times they will side with one over the other, but they are also participating in a merging of narratives, building an individual story as they interpret lived experience in the light of both evangelical and the wider British discourse (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000, p.103). Bartkowski (2007) found a similar merging of narratives taking place among evangelical men in the US with regard to familial relationships.

The life story of an individual is not played out in a vacuum, but rather is "...continuously embedded in and connected to the historical narratives of the communities to which humans belong" (Cho, 2021, p.3). It is this contextual element which provides individuals with the discourse needed to interpret experiences and feelings in the construction of identity (Bartkowski, 2007; Giddens, 1991). The self, then, is socially constructed in line with the narratives espoused by the groups in which it participates, enabling us to interpret our experiences and the preferences, inclinations and attitudes that we find within ourselves (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000, p.92).

### 8.2.1 The Evangelical Narrative

For most participants in this study, the evangelical narrative represents their primary socialisation (Berger & Luckmann, 1991/1966): that interpretation of reality regarded

as 'normal' due to the discourse of parents and their immediate social circle. Figure 8.2 shows how the influences identified in *Becoming: The Journey into Mission* (Chapter 5) contribute to the formation of the evangelical narrative in the socialisation of the individual:

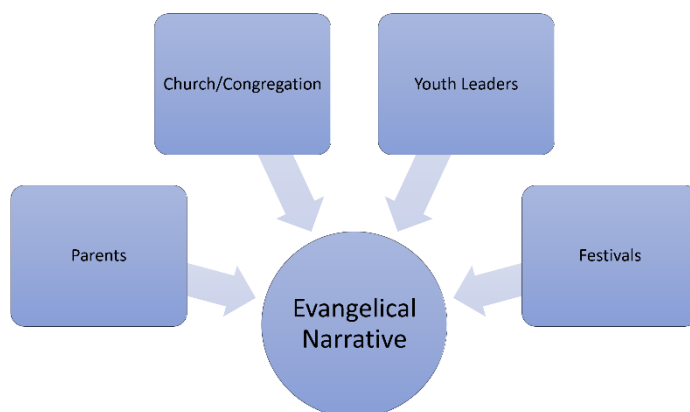


Figure 8.2

This underscores the significance of parental faith in the formation of the evangelical narrative insofar as parents determine their children's exposure to other sources of discourse such as attendance at local congregations, youth groups and festivals.

This evangelical narrative begins with belief in an all-powerful yet benevolent deity who created all things. In line with Bebbington's Quadrilateral (1993/1989, p.3), to which I refer in *The Religion of British Millennials* (Chapter 2), humanity is understood to have rebelled against God, who provided a means of salvation through Christ's death on the cross. This salvation is individually appropriated through faith and personal conversion, leading to changed behaviour in line with standards set out in the Bible, believed to be the divinely inspired word of God. While evangelicals may differ on the details – such as the balance between creationism and evolution or the interpretation of particular Bible verses – these foundational beliefs form the plausibility structures of the evangelical narrative.

Among participants in this study, only two grew up without exposure to this evangelical narrative. Ainsley's childhood was non-religious, meaning that he came to evangelicalism as a secondary socialisation. Although Philip experienced as religious conversion his decision to become evangelical, his Catholic upbringing formed a primary socialisation which would have shared with evangelicalism elements of both the practice and the understanding of faith. Similarly, as a child Diane rejected her

parent's evangelical faith before returning in adolescence. This shows the strength of the primary socialisation for individuals who choose to return after experimenting with living in accordance with a different narrative. Of course, there are also many who permanently move away from the evangelical narrative of their parents, as I show in *The Religion of British Millennials* (Chapter 2), including siblings and friends of participants. Participants in this study emphasised the chosen nature of their faith commitment, whether they had remained faithful to the narrative inherited from parents, had rejected it for a time and then returned, or were simply less committed for a period during adolescence. The strength of the secular narrative during their childhood and youth was such that to become or to remain committed to a life of faith required continual individual choice, itself a fundamental aspect of the secular narrative of contemporary British society (Taylor, 2018/1991, p.37).

### 8.2.2 *Secular Narrative*

As I have shown, the primary socialisation of most of my participants was into the evangelical narrative; yet their secondary socialisation into the secular narrative also

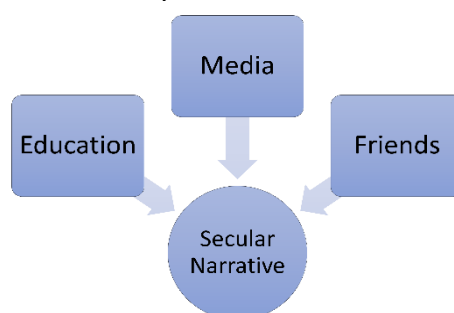


Figure 8.3

began at an early age, through the discourse of school and social relationships as well as that communicated through children's television and other media. This is shown in Figure 8.3.

This secondary socialisation therefore occurred early enough to contribute to the plausibility structures by which individuals come to perceive what is 'normal' (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p.175). Where the narratives into which socialisation occurs conflict, individuals must make a choice. Yet for evangelical Millennials in post-Christian Britain, many aspects of the secular narrative can be readily appropriated without the need for either narrative to be rejected in its entirety. As well as the emphasis on individual choice already mentioned, these include elements such as equality and the pursuit of personal fulfilment. What differs is the foundation of the two narratives: where

evangelical discourse claims divine provenance, secular discourse derives from human sources.

### 8.3 Theocentric Authenticity

Faced with these two narratives, Millennial evangelical Christians navigate a path which is personally coherent by merging aspects of the narratives. This study has shown that the Millennial value of authenticity is highly salient for Christian missionaries, where authenticity is understood as living in accordance with one's true self. Participants seek to integrate their faith into all aspects of their life, not simply at the level of following the rules of a religion, but rather a sense of finding and living out their true identity, an identity which they understand as originating in God and which they define in terms of their relationship to God. I have therefore termed this intersection of contemporary evangelical and secular narratives *theocentric authenticity*, as shown in Figure 8.1 above. It is *authenticity* because these people seek to align their behaviours and lifestyle choices to their perception of individual identity and it is *theocentric* because this identity is understood to be defined by God.

The theocentricity of an individual may be plotted on a continuum from egocentric to theocentric, as shown in Figure 8.4.



Figure 8.4

In using the term egocentric, I do not imply selfishness as is often the case in popular usage. Rather, I contrast egocentricity with theocentricity, suggesting an understanding of the world and of one's own life which has as its point of departure the individual self. All participants in this study are highly theocentric in orientation, with their life choices determined by belief in a personal God.

The theocentricity to which I refer here is different in kind from that of premodern times. Where once religion was central to the structure of society as a whole, now individuals choose to place God at the centre of their self-construction. In the past it was understood that you are who you are and where you are because God has ordained it thus; today personal choice is the norm, with "what do you want to be when you grow up?" a constant refrain throughout childhood and adolescence, as I suggest in *Generations and the Millennial Generation* (Chapter 1). For young people who attend Christian youth groups, camps and conferences, "God has a plan for your

life” is equally familiar language (Thomas, 2018). I am therefore using theocentricity to describe the centrality of God for the individual rather than for society as a whole. Where their nonreligious peers would look within to discover their true self (Giddens, 1991, p.78), evangelical Millennials, when they search inside themselves, perceive the voice of God telling them who they are. Hindmarsh (2005, p.344) describes this as “an alternative version of Enlightenment individuality” by which evangelical believers find personal meaning in Scripture and in the tenets of their faith.

### 8.3.1 *Authentic identity as individual journey*

It is this individualistic element which underpins the contemporary understanding of authenticity as an expression of the self. As shown in *Becoming: The Journey into Mission* (Chapter 5), participants in this study did not embark on a career in Christian mission from a sense of duty to save lost souls, but rather because it was the next step in their personal journey of living religion. One of the reasons for reticence in using the ‘missionary’ label is that participants do not view themselves as different from other Christians who are following their own journeys of faith. As I show in *Being: The Identity of a Missionary* (Chapter 6), the multiple identities across an individual’s life – be they related to role or to life-stage – are integrated by the narrative of the faith journey to create a unified narrative identity (Popp-Baier, 2021; Cho, 2021), with the result that each role is experienced as an authentic expression of the inner self, even where an external observer may perceive a change in direction. With my interviews taking place during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of participants were engaged in the process of considering how a sudden and unexpected relocation fitted into their life’s trajectory. Some had previously experienced an unanticipated change of plan – due to physical or mental illness or the refusal of a visa, for example – and were able to frame this as another step in the authentic individual journey of faith. In the context of the interview, participants select which experiences to include and which to discard in the telling of their personal narrative (Hindmarsh, 2005, p.3), describing them through the lens of subsequent self-reflection (Roof, 1999, p.173). These moments become the building blocks of identity construction; even significant changes of direction or unexpected bumps in the road become part of one cohesive journey.

Each participant's telling of their own life's story therefore becomes a constructing of narrative identity: a cohesive story drawn together from the highs and lows, successes, failures and frustrations of the individual's experience (Cho, 2021; Bloom *et al.*, 2021). It is through an individual journey of self-exploration and self-expression that the narrative identity is defined. Yet while identity is constructed by the individual concerned, it is nevertheless also "...negotiated socially in the context of the other" (Hindmarsh, 2005, p.9). Participants share how parents, pastors, youth leaders, friends, colleagues and partners have contributed to an ongoing process of the creation of "me."

A similar emphasis on authentic self-expression is evident in participants' accounts of how they came to faith. While most had grown up with Christian parents and as such could not offer an account of dramatic change in behaviour or beliefs, they nevertheless sought to emphasise a personal encounter with the divine and an awareness of sin leading to a personal commitment, often at an identifiable moment in time. In highlighting the personal nature of their faith, participants seek to underline that it is chosen rather than inherited, thereby affirming the authenticity of their faith commitment. Hindmarsh (2005) provides an in-depth history of the development of the *Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, demonstrating changes in emphasis over time and across different groups, with the usual personal conversion story being a dualistic pattern describing a past life, followed by an encounter with God resulting in joy and changed behaviour. Similarly, Klaver *et al.* (2017, p.244) demonstrate how Christian conversion stories featured in a TV series produced by the Dutch Evangelical Broadcasting Company (EO) changed from a "...dualistic scheme of a miserable life without God and a meaningful life with God..." in the 1980s to a focus in the 2000s on "...a gradual process of authentic faith experiences." They go on to show that a more recent iteration of the show frames individual narratives as life stories rather than transformation stories, allowing the person concerned to show vulnerability and weakness, even failure, in order that the narrative be accepted by viewers as authentic (2017, p.245). Commitment to the authenticity ethic (Taylor, 2018/1991) has therefore led to a change in the content and emphasis of the conversion narrative. A number of participants in my study were similarly honest regarding times when their faith was challenged in terms of beliefs or lifestyle. Elaine, for example, told me that "Even though I was publicly saying I was a Christian, attending church on a Sunday.... But not,

just not honouring God in the way I led my life in all aspects.” Ian described facing a theological challenge when at university, while Chloe related how a long-term boyfriend in the process of abandoning his faith led her to re-assess her own commitment and ultimately to choose to follow her faith fully at the expense of the relationship. Others described mental health challenges which either they or close relatives faced or times when their prayers appeared to go unanswered. Participants’ life stories therefore lacked the dualistic narrative of early evangelicalism, emphasising instead the ups and downs of a journey of faith.

### 8.3.2 *Inclusion*

The desire to be authentic through being true to oneself leads to greater levels of acceptance of difference among Millennials, who believe that everyone should be encouraged to express their true identity. Tolerance and inclusion are therefore facets of authenticity. For evangelical Christians, this has contributed to a decline in denominationalism, with many identifying as “just Christian” and placing preferences regarding worship style, practicalities such as location, or friendships over doctrine in their choice of congregation. Many participants in this study work in non-denominational organisations and have attended congregations from a variety of denominations, as well as events such as Spring Harvest, Keswick or Soul Survivor which I describe in *The Religion of British Millennials* (Chapter 2). They measure the authenticity of another’s faith on the basis of lifestyle rather than propositional belief. With regard to mission specifically, the sense that individuals are equally to be valued regardless of worldview leads to less emphasis on sin and repentance and a move toward Christian mission as an invitation to an individual faith journey which is personally fulfilling.

### 8.3.3 *Personal Wellbeing*

In *Being: The Identity of a Missionary* (Chapter 6) I identified an emphasis on personal wellbeing and mental health, which led participants both to make changes and define boundaries in order to protect their mental health and also to talk openly about this. This reflects once again the understanding of authenticity as living out the true self, where all aspects of that self are accepted even when they do not conform to traditional ideals.

#### 8.3.4 Behaving

In *Doing: The Work of Mission* (Chapter 7), I demonstrate how the salience of authenticity causes Millennials to align behaviour with belief. For many Millennials brought up with an evangelical narrative, this has meant abandoning both religious belief and associated practices, as I show in *The Religion of British Millennials* (Chapter 2). Some reject religious lifestyle and behaviours because they no longer believe; others drift away from belief as they are drawn into unrelated behaviours. As I have shown, those who remain – or who later become – committed to the evangelical faith do so through a conscious decision, often facing opposition from peers. This decision involves considering both propositional belief and behaviour because the two are viewed as intertwined. While Elaine described renouncing behaviours deemed incompatible with her faith because of the personal dissonance this caused her, others chose not to experiment with behaviours outside of the lifestyle norms which formed part of their evangelical primary socialisation.

As I discuss further below, it is not simply through behaviours ordinarily associated with Christianity that Millennials seek authentically to embody their faith. They also expect and follow personal instructions they perceive to be divinely inspired. Thus authentic faith is expressed through both generalised and specific behaviours. It is possible that this could lead to inner conflict, where an individual may sense a personal leading to lifestyle behaviours which differ from the beliefs and standards of the Christian community more widely. In this study, however, such dissonance was only expressed with regard to aspects of ministry, such as the role of women, the understanding of church within a particular context, or obedience to leadership regarding the timing or location of one's mission assignment.

### 8.4 The Theocentric Authenticity Scale

Taking into account the facets of authenticity shown in this research, I posit a scale (Figure 8.5) in which theocentric authenticity is expressed by intersecting the continuum between egocentricity and theocentricity (Figure 8.4 above) with a continuum from authenticity to inauthenticity, where inauthenticity is perceived as a failure to be true to oneself or hypocrisy. Theocentric authenticity is represented by quadrant B on the scale, where behaviours are in accord with theological beliefs.

Individuals whose behaviours align with their nonreligious beliefs are shown in quadrant A, secular authenticity.

Those whose actions do not align with the beliefs they affirm may be accused – or may accuse themselves – of hypocrisy. If authenticity can be said to have acquired moral status (Taylor, 2018/1991), then hypocrisy is regarded as immoral. This is frequently

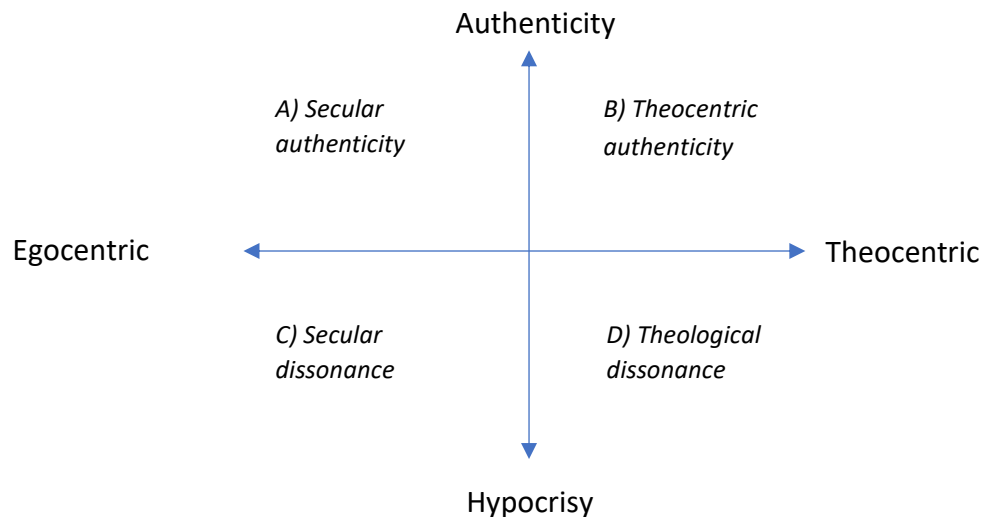


Figure 8.5

heard in British society and media with reference to Christianity, particularly when leaders are found to have transgressed. Quadrants C and D therefore represent a position of dissonance, where the individual's behaviours are not in accord with their beliefs. I surmise that those at the egocentric end of the scale, who were not included in my present research, experience secular dissonance: a discomfort with behaviours which do not fully express their nonreligious beliefs about the world or about themselves. For those at the theocentric end of the scale, the dissonance is theological, occurring when beliefs about God are not lived out fully.

On the other hand, in *Being: The Identity of a Missionary* (Chapter 6), I note that inauthenticity may also be interpreted as conformity (Taylor, 2018/1991), where behaviours arising from evangelicalism are combined with an earlier cultural emphasis such as duty. Such conformity is viewed as inauthentic because it is externally imposed rather than discovered through self-exploration. Millennial Christians frame their own authenticity in terms of their refusal to conform to the dominant secular narrative as well as the extent to which their actions align with their beliefs.

Moving from the general to the personal in terms of theocentric orientation and its corresponding authentic behaviours, Anne says of her decision to go overseas:

“I think the challenge was, you know, if I say I worship God with everything that I am, that means that actually if God calls me somewhere else, I need to do that. Otherwise when I get up and sing a song on Sunday morning... then I’m really hypocritical.”

Anne’s statement demonstrates that authenticity in faith is not defined simply in terms of behaviours ordinarily associated with Christianity, but also as obedience to a personal sense of vocation within the context of the individual’s faith journey.

Authenticity for the Millennial means aligning one’s behaviours with one’s beliefs regarding both God or reality and one’s own self. There are therefore two levels at which dissonance may result from a misalignment of behaviour with belief among those whose orientation is theocentric. Firstly, there are the moral standards set out in the Bible and through the discourse of those who interpret it. It is a failure to live up to such standards which so often leads to accusations of hypocrisy. Secondly, the evangelical emphasis on a personal faith coupled with the encouragement of secular discourse to be true to yourself causes Millennial evangelicals to measure the authenticity of their own faith in terms of their obedience to how they believe God to be leading them individually. I discuss below how this desire to align behaviour with belief leads to mission when a personal calling is sensed as part of the individual faith journey.

## 8.5 Vocation: from authenticity to mission

Theocentric authenticity, then, describes those Christians whose lived religion merges the evangelical narrative with the contemporary secular narrative’s emphasis on authenticity, as shown in Figure 8.1 above. The salience of theocentric authenticity is evident in the calling accounts of my participants, who seek to construct an identity grounded in who or what they understand that God intends them to be. Decisions around areas as diverse as what to study at university or how to spend their holidays are then taken in line with that understanding, giving authentic expression to their perceived identity. Although I am using *theocentric authenticity* to understand the worldview of the Millennial missionaries who took part in this research, it is by no means limited to missionaries. Indeed, one of the reasons for participants’ unease with the missionary label was their belief that they were no different from their evangelical peers, who live their own faith journeys in different contexts.

Those who follow a personal calling within their theocentric authenticity orientation are represented in Figure 8.5 by the letter A. This group includes but is not limited to missionaries such as those who took part in this research. Evangelical Christians may also sense a calling to ministry or leadership at home or to a secular profession, which they follow out of their theocentric authenticity. This is reflected in Hopkins et al. (2015) who found that although British Millennial Christians approached a short-term mission experience as a means to discover and explore their own divine calling, their chosen careers were not usually in international missions.

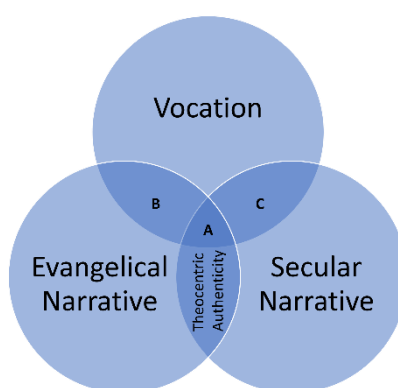


Figure 8.6

Those represented by the letter B have a strong sense of divine calling, however they are motivated by duty or obedience, or by the spiritual needs of others, rather than by authenticity.

C represents individuals from a nonreligious perspective who experience a sense of vocation, which may lead to their becoming strongly committed to a cause such as environmentalism or championing the rights of a particular minority group, or to following a profession such as nursing or teaching.

For participants in my research, there are both internal and external means through which vocation is perceived, as I show in *Becoming: The Journey into Mission* (Chapter 5), both of which are firmly grounded in a belief that there is a transcendent God who guides individuals. Internally, there is a growing sense or feeling that one should be doing or becoming certain things. Philip, for example, says of his wife and himself that the “desire for mission” was “in our hearts.” This is akin to the inner search for identity in the Millennial generation more generally, however my participants attribute the source of such inclinations to God. Externally, God was also said to have spoken to participants either directly through their hearing a voice or having unexpected

thoughts, or indirectly through preaching, prophecy or encouragement delivered by other trusted believers.

Individuals process and interpret their experiences in accordance with the language made available to them (Giddens, 1991, p.23) through the discourse they have encountered. In the present study, for example, a sudden or growing interest in a particular location may be interpreted as a divine calling to mission because this is the language used for similar experiences in the discourse of sermons, written texts, group discussion, etc. As a young person seeks understanding of these early inclinations in discussion with Christian parents and leaders, the language of mission is offered as a framework for interpreting feelings and planning the next steps (Howell, 2012, p.130). The influence of Christian leaders is important here: by affirming a young person's sense of calling, they are confirming to that individual its divine provenance. Similar experiences may be interpreted by those outside of the evangelical community otherwise as *wanderlust*, a desire for adventure, or a humanistic wish to help others, for example.

What sets missionaries apart is their vocation to relocate with the aim of sharing their Christian faith, whether directly or by supporting and enabling the work of others. Whilst participants were keen to emphasise that they valued highly the callings of those involved in missional activities back home, there are also carefully-worded hints of criticism directed toward those who embark on mission only to withdraw because of struggles with the living conditions or separation from home. Perhaps these people had misconstrued their calling from the outset or perhaps they were simply unable to live it out in full; either way, their change of plan causes others to question their authenticity.

Making sacrifices for the sake of one's religion is perceived as evidence of authenticity and therefore respected. Mission is seen by believers and non-believers alike as *the real deal* – evidence of a lifestyle in keeping with a chosen set of beliefs (Giddens, 1991, p.82). I have shown that the salience of authenticity among Millennials is such that some research participants found their nonreligious friends to be supportive (in Section 7.2.4), particularly where their decision to enter missions was framed as following a dream or being true to their beliefs.

## 8.6 Mission Narrative

In this section, I turn to consider the understandings of mission expressed by participants in this research. As the means by which the evangelical message is shared, mission is central to the evangelical narrative. Salvation is understood to be obtained through an individual's profession of belief, with participants who grew up in Christian homes emphasising the personal nature of their faith, as I show above. This is also central to their mission motivation and is used as justification for mission to countries traditionally viewed as Christian: missionaries offer individuals the opportunity to make a personal faith decision. Evangelicalism's emphasis on experiential and voluntary faith developed in tandem with modernism's discourse of individualism. This is in contrast to the discourse around Christian mission that young Britons hear in the media and in education, which paints the missionary as colonialist, set on exploiting the vulnerable (e.g. Wikipedia has a page entitled "Christianity and Colonialism"), as I discuss in *Contextualising Christian Foreign Missions* (Chapter 3).

As part of my research, I interviewed four non-Millennial missionaries (according to my bracket of birth-years 1980-1999) for comparative purposes. They were Rachel (b.1959), Susan (b.1966), Jennifer (b.1971) and Chris (b.1978). Their stories of calling to mission bear remarkable similarities to the accounts of my Millennial participants, demonstrating an evangelical narrative culture around mission which spans generations. Despite the weight of colonial baggage, biographies of early missionaries remain popular among evangelicals, added to and built upon by more recent missionary accounts. Common throughout these accounts is a personal call from God to go to a distant place and live in challenging conditions in order to share the Christian message. The missionary narrative, then, includes the elements of transcendent calling, geographical distance and suffering. Some of my participants wrestled with appropriating the 'missionary' label because they considered that either they were not suffering enough (because their living conditions were comfortable) or that they were not so very far from the UK, whether geographically or culturally. This underlines the strength of the missionary narrative in that people who do not feel that they fully identify with all aspects of the narrative can find themselves doubting their status as missionaries.

Missionaries are honoured in evangelical thinking, which can have the effect of drawing young people towards a missionary career whilst simultaneously making it appear unattainable. As I show in *Being: The Identity of a Missionary* (Chapter 6), one reason given for rejecting the 'missionary' label is the hero image often attached to missionaries. Missionaries are respected by other Christians because of the authenticity of life choices which so clearly line up with their beliefs; but the missionaries themselves recognise a similar authenticity among peers whose callings may not be so extreme, understanding themselves as individuals on a journey with God in which their particular calling to another nation is no more heroic than another Christian who obeys their own calling to stay at home.

The hero image of the missionary also engenders respect in part because of the widely accepted idea that mission involves suffering. In interviews I carried out, several participants described difficult situations such as illness or adversity which they interpreted as a validation of their missionary calling, in that these challenges seemed to them contrived in order to prevent the mission. Others told of the challenging living conditions they faced, or the emotional difficulty of being separated from family and friends. That suffering is perceived to be a significant element of the evangelical mission narrative is underlined by Howell (2012) in his study of short-term missions (STM), in which he shows that STM-ers often cite privations experienced as evidence that their trips are indeed genuine mission. For participants in my research who live and work in wealthy nations, on the other hand, this aspect of the mission narrative can cause a feeling that they must justify constantly their missionary status to those who support them.

The high status of suffering appears to contradict Savage *et al.*'s (2011) 'Happy Midi-Narrative' discussed in *Generations and the Millennial Generation* (Chapter 1), which suggests that Millennials value present enjoyment and fulfilment. Yet suffering is not lauded by participants; rather privations and separations are regarded matter-of-factly as secondary to the personal fulfilment found in following their divine calling. Where suffering in the form of isolation or over-work has caused participants to lose that sense of fulfilment in the present, they have sought to put measures in place to regain it. This differs from earlier generations who may have chosen to continue in such suffering, believing it to be a necessary part of the divine call, as evidenced by my

interview with Jennifer (b.1971), who described many challenges during both her own and her parents' mission work. Thus Millennial missionaries accept a level of suffering where this is understood as necessary to achieve the personal fulfilment obtained through following their divine calling; they are, however, self-reflective and will seek to change circumstances or direction where these endanger their sense of fulfilment. I suggest, then, that Millennial missionaries are able to maintain their sense of present fulfilment in the face of suffering or challenges because these are understood to be secondary to a personal vocation embedded within the evangelical meta-narrative.

While transcendent calling, sharing the Christian message, suffering and distance appear to have remained constant within the missionary narrative, what has changed is the breadth of activity now included under the term 'mission' (Bosch, 1991). As I described in *Contextualising Christian Foreign Missions* (Chapter 3), early evangelical missions were about preaching, with Bible translation and education soon added so as to enable local people to access the Christian Scriptures. Medical work quickly became a significant aspect of mission, both in order to demonstrate the care of the Christian God and also because missionaries were moved to help people. These two motivations could also be applied to the later expansion of mission to include social action such as providing clean water, supporting refugees, etc. More recently, Business as Mission (BAM) has developed with the aim of raising living standards and economic independence through ethical enterprise, thereby promoting the Christian faith. Alongside all of this has grown up a range of support services – from administration to aviation – which are often viewed as mission in their own right insofar as their ultimate goal is to spread the Christian message. At the same time, a recognition of the decline of Christianity in those countries traditionally associated with missionary sending has led to the understanding that mission occurs wherever this message is proclaimed to those of another or no faith.

The broadening of the mission discourse to include any activity in any location which, due to its aim of sharing the gospel message, forms part of the *missio Dei* (Wright, 2006), such as local evangelistic efforts, charitable activities in the local community, or Creation Care (environmental activism), appears to have so far impacted mission leadership and academia more than everyday evangelical Christians. There can be a disconnect between discourse and beliefs actually held, as language and its

interpretation change. I demonstrate this in *Being: The Identity of a Missionary* (Chapter 6), showing the ambivalence Grace feels towards the word *missionary*. Whilst accepting theologically that *mission* must refer to the full breadth of activities undertaken to advance the Christian gospel, she feels that no adequate alternative has yet been put forward to replace missionary in carrying the sense of leaving one's home country to engage in such activities. This raises an interesting question with regard to the missionary's sense of authenticity. I suggest that participants view their occasional appropriation of a term with which they disagree as pragmatic rather than inauthentic. Thus a concerted effort on the part of missiologists to make the term more inclusive has yet to become mainstream. Even those participants most reticent to use 'missionary' as self-identification nevertheless find themselves accepting its use in certain contexts, because their lives fit the narrative understood by many Christians. Of the participants in my research, those who had received formal missionary training were more likely to espouse a broader understanding of mission, as well as an awareness of post-colonial issues abroad. This leads to the interesting paradox that many Christians in local congregations understand mission to be something which occurs 'over there', while the mission practitioners living 'over there' consider the evangelistic efforts of local churches and believers every bit as much 'mission', suggesting that the mission discourse of formal missionary training differs from that of many local churches or popular Christian literature.

If the mission discourse an individual has imbibed through family and church community lacks certain elements, he or she will struggle to interpret these issues and may even overlook them (Howell, 2012, p.188). For some participants in my study, observations regarding historical power relationships came after years of mission experience and were at first difficult to process. Others who initially went into mission with no formal missionary training but later returned to study, were able to re-frame their experiences of cultural misunderstandings and frustrations when they encountered a formal mission discourse. One of these, Anne, expressed a level of embarrassment at some of the language she had used on Facebook when first living in CE Europe. Missionary training, then, serves to provide a discursive framework for interpreting encounters with colonialism, poverty and power relationships. This

enables an individual to move from theological dissonance, whereby experience does not align with theological understanding, to a position of theocentric authenticity.

## 8.7 Conclusions

The Millennial missionaries who took part in this project negotiate a personal journey of faith between the evangelical and secular grand narratives with which they were raised. I have termed this theocentric authenticity because they understand God to be the primary source of their identity and calling, while the secular interpretation of authenticity as being true to oneself leads them to view the life of faith as an individual journey in which behaving matters more than propositional belief. Thus Millennials seek to make life choices which reflect the narratives to which they hold, constructing an identity which is both internally coherent and reflective of external discourse. For most Millennials this entails an inner search: being true to oneself. For Millennial missionaries, however, the search is theocentric: discovering who God has made them to be.

## CHAPTER 9      Conclusions and Recommendations

In this final chapter, I draw together the lessons learned through this thesis and consider their implications both for the study of religion and for the practice of Christian mission. As my starting point, I take the research questions set out at the beginning of this thesis:

- RQ 1    What motivates Millennial Christians to become missionaries?
- RQ 2    How do they negotiate differing narratives in order to explore their own personal identity?
- RQ 3    How is this negotiation worked out in their professional and personal lives?
- RQ 4    To what extent do Millennial missionaries reflect the characteristics and values usually associated with their generation and/or those of previous generations of missionaries?

I address these questions under the headings *Motivation and Mission, Identity, Theocentric Authenticity* and *Generations*, summarising the findings discussed in the preceding chapters. I also include suggestions as to how my conclusions may inform the future practice of mission as well as offering recommendations for further study into issues raised in this thesis.

### 9.1 Motivation and Mission

My aim in this thesis has been to gain understanding of a subgroup within a subgroup of British Millennials: those evangelical Christians who choose to become missionaries. As such, this study contributes to the sociological understanding of the lived religion of Millennial Christians in Britain. In RQ1, I asked what motivates Millennial Christians to become missionaries. I have shown in this thesis that today's Christian follows his or her own inclinations insofar as he or she understands these to be initiated or confirmed by God: an authentic faith is measured in terms of following both the tenets of faith shared by the community and one's own understanding of the individual leading of God. Thus faith is perceived and practised as a personal journey of obedience to God. In *Becoming: The Journey into Mission* (Chapter 5) I set out the motivating factors contributing to individuals' decisions to become missionaries; ultimately, however, all of these were framed as part of the individual journey of faith.

I have shown that Millennial missionaries interpret their mission involvement as an authentic outworking of their Christian faith. They are motivated by the ‘transcendent summons,’ perceived through their own emotions, as well as through circumstances, sermons, dreams, and occasionally an apparently external voice. That they understand such inclinations as a call from God to mission is due to the theocentricity of their worldview, underscored by their socialisation into an evangelical Christian narrative, as I discuss in Chapter 8.

#### *9.1.1 Transmission of Faith*

In this thesis I have shown that the majority of Millennial missionaries were brought up by parents who themselves were practising Christians. This contributes to sociological understanding of the transmission of faith. While larger quantitative studies could provide further understanding of the relationship to missionary calling of parental faith, this qualitative investigation offers greater depth of insight into how such transmission takes place. One aspect of the influence of parents is, then, the primary socialisation into the Christian narrative which takes place in the home, with participants noting the seriousness and authenticity of their parents’ faith. However, beyond the home, parental selection of local congregational involvement is also significant: participants describe growing up in congregations with a strong missionary discourse.

I have also shown that Millennial missionaries follow the wider trend toward a more open relationship with parents, with many adult Millennials continuing to consult with parents regarding significant decisions or falling back on the parental home or finances when necessary. There are practical implications for missionary organisations in the strength of the Millennial relationship with parents. Parents should have an opportunity for involvement in the application and training processes: understanding where their offspring are going and what they are doing may make parents more supportive in the long-run, meaning that the prioritisation of communications with and care for the parents of missionaries could prolong the service of Millennial missionaries. Similarly, it is to be expected that the parenting style of Millennials themselves will further the trend toward democratisation and mutual involvement in the family; as the children of the first Millennials reach adulthood, Millennial parents

will be key to transmitting the missionary narrative to the next generation. There is a great deal of scope for future research around this topic.

***Practical Recommendations:***

- Church and mission leaders should support parents to create an environment in which mission forms part of children's plausibility structures. This means that children should hear about international mission in its various manifestations and have opportunities to meet people involved in Christian mission.
- Mission organisations should consider how they involve parents of missionaries throughout recruitment, training and service. This could include information packs, peer support groups, or having a named contact in the UK office, for example. An expected level of parental involvement should be discussed from the outset to avoid misunderstandings later, such as those around frequency of communications, which I discuss in 9.2.3 below.
- Participant Catherine mentioned that her parents had recently become missionaries themselves, following their retirement. There may be potential for sending multi-generational missionary families: children, parents and grandparents.

***Research Recommendations:***

- What are the trends in Millennial parenting styles?
- How do Millennial Christian parents negotiate the apparently contradictory priorities of faith transmission and individual choice in raising their own children?
- A quantitative study into the roots of British missionary faith: do most have Christian parents as in my present research, or have they been converted from another or no religion? Does this have any relation to organisational affiliation or role in mission?
- What resources exist to enable Christian parents to transmit a missionary narrative to their offspring?
- In Chapter 6 I ask whether transnational marriages are more common among missionaries than in the general population.

### 9.1.2 *Church Involvement*

Those who came to faith later, independently of their parents, nevertheless shared the exposure to missionary discourse at both local congregations and mass events. The fact that international mission formed part of participants' plausibility structures meant that they interpreted personal interests and inclinations as a divine call to mission. Yet Ruth's (b.1980) comment that the decline of the evening service has led to fewer opportunities for missionaries to share their experiences in local congregations (Chapter 5) hints at a more recent stifling of the missionary discourse in some churches.

#### ***Practical Recommendations:***

- Church and youth leaders should consider how often and in what capacities mission is discussed. Where traditional mission-focussed Sunday services have become less common, as Ruth suggests, leaders should consider how the mission narrative is passed on to children and young people in their context.

#### ***Research Recommendations:***

- Research into the prominence of missionary discourse in local congregations would make a useful contribution to the study of Christian mission and its transmission to the next generation.

### 9.1.3 *Explaining the Decline in Missionary Numbers*

Regarding the decline in candidates coming forward to begin a career in Christian mission, my research only considered those who had gone, not those who had ultimately chosen not to, although this would certainly be a useful exercise. My participants' narratives hinted at some misgivings that they or their friends and family had faced and at hindrances they had encountered, yet on the whole the stories they presented were positive and similar to those of older participants. Therefore, despite the challenges organisations face in missionary recruitment, there continue to be young people experiencing what they interpret as a call to international Christian mission. My impression is that the most obvious reason for the fall in the number of British missionaries is simply the decline in church attendance, which I describe in *The Religion of British Millennials* (Chapter 2): the pool from which missionaries are drawn has shrunk.

Financial considerations must also play a role, with many Generation X and Boomer missionaries able to purchase property in the UK before embarking on their mission activity, providing a percentage of their financial support through rental income whilst overseas, as well as a degree of financial security on their return to the UK. For Generations Y and Z this would be highly unusual. Similarly, Britain's Millennials were the first to pay for university education, meaning that many in Generations Y and Z have embarked upon their working lives with a significant debt burden.

Lastly, the issue of colonialism cannot be overlooked in considering missionary recruitment in Britain. This is reflected in the emphasis participants place on following a personal calling into mission as part of their own journey of faith, which I contrast in *Becoming: The Journey into Mission* (Chapter 5) with an attitude of the missionary as one who carries salvation to the "heathen". The Millennial understanding of mission as the outworking of personal journey of faith therefore supports and is supported by the 'mission from everywhere to everywhere' thesis (Nazir-Ali, 2009) which I discuss in *Contextualising Christian Foreign Missions* (Chapter 3). This thesis notes a theological underpinning of the equality of all believers and calls for an end to the Western domination of Christian mission. Perhaps the decrease in the number of Western missionaries is therefore to be celebrated even by mission enthusiasts, insofar as this goes hand in hand with the growth in non-Western missions.

#### ***Practical Recommendations:***

- For most of my participants the journey into mission was complex and involved the support of a variety of friends and leaders at different times. I therefore recommend that leaders do not shy away from supporting an individual's missionary call, but rather signpost to organisations, training and experiences that may encourage the individual.
- Mission training which offers an openness about the colonial past coupled with a clear understanding of what mission means today will help Millennials to relate to the concept.

#### ***Research Recommendations:***

- As I have noted, it is challenging to design research which captures the motivations of individuals who did not choose a career in international mission despite an early interest or sense of calling. However, some insight could be

gained through talking to those returning from short-term mission experiences. Similarly, a longitudinal study of individuals who express an interest in mission – perhaps through attending an introductory short course – may reveal both how many go on to become missionaries and what happens to those who do not.

- In this project, I struggled to recruit participants who were unaffiliated with a mission organisation. Research into the prevalence of such ‘lone ranger’ missionaries, their longevity, background and beliefs would be very interesting, particularly as it relates to living out the authentic faith journey.
- Regarding the decline in church attendance in the UK, I suggest in Section 2.1.5 that it would be useful to carry out research into church attendance with clearer ethnic categories than merely ‘black’ and ‘white,’ as these mask centuries of immigration. It would be intriguing to explore the extent to which attendance or non-attendance correlates to whether an individual themselves, their parents or their grandparents were born in the UK.

#### **9.1.4 Short-term Mission**

As I discuss in *Becoming: The Journey into Mission* (Chapter 5), some mission organisations and churches run a short-term programme as part of their recruitment efforts: hoping that some of those involved will later decide to go long-term. The majority of short-term mission (STM) experiences offer participants a taste of life in another country through involvement in social projects or evangelistic efforts (Hopkins *et al.*, 2015). However, my research shows that very few long-term missionaries cite a short-term experience among their primary motivators. On the contrary, most who took part in a short-term mission trip did so because of a *prior* sense of a long-term missionary vocation.

#### **Practical Recommendations:**

- Those planning and leading STM would do well to consider how their programmes facilitate and support an individual’s exploration of calling and identity, particularly where a call to mission already exists. This could include an element of coaching or mentoring, helping the individual to process their experiences and sense of calling.

- In view of the above discussion of mission ‘from everywhere to everywhere,’ short-term missions could be framed as an exchange of experience and ideas, with the exploration of calling and development of faith of both those who go and those who host as equal aims. Thus STM would see Christians of different nations learning from and ministering to one another (Howell, 2012), overcoming the power imbalance identified by Hopkins *et al.* (2015).

#### ***Research Recommendations:***

- Who takes part in short-term missions from the UK, in terms of age, ethnicity, socio-economic background, gender?
- How many British congregations organise their own short-term missions and what training do they offer?
- Are there short-term missions into the UK and what is their nature?

## **9.2 Identity**

It is through the personal journey of faith that participants in my research explore their own identity. Today’s Christians find the transcendent in the personal, with God guiding the individual to become what they were created to be. In RQ2 I ask how Millennial missionaries negotiate the differing narratives encountered in childhood in order to explore their own personal identity. In this section I discuss, therefore, how Millennial missionaries understand themselves in the light of both an evangelical and a secular narrative, as set out in Chapter 8.

### ***9.2.1 “Just Christian”***

As I show in *Being: The Identity of a Missionary* (Chapter 6), the primary identity of Millennial missionaries is “just Christian.” They are not strongly aligned to a specific denomination or group, understanding their faith as a personal journey in fellowship with others who share a similar journey. Millennials are therefore less interested in the name over the door of a church than in how it makes them feel; they may not know the doctrinal distinctives of the congregation to which they belong. Millennial belief in equality and inclusion has brought about a greater acceptance of Christians whose worship style or doctrine may be different, with Millennial believers translating within the boundaries of evangelical non-negotiables the relativism of the wider British discourse. I have also shown that the influence of mass events such as Soul Survivor, as well as the availability online of Christian worship and teaching, has fostered a dilution

of denominationalism, with similar trends in worship style and thought found in a wide range of churches. This thesis therefore contributes to the sociological understanding of denominationalism's decline in Britain (Guest *et al.*, 2013, p.37; Bengtson, 2013, p.49).

***Practical Recommendations:***

- Church and mission leaders should consider whether doctrinal distinctives are discussed or merely assumed, and how important this is to them.
- What are the boundaries of 'bounded relativism' which are acceptable in a given church or organisation?

***Research Recommendations:***

- Further research is needed to demonstrate the extent to which believers in a variety of churches share the same stance on a range of doctrines or, conversely, the range of beliefs held within a single large congregation.

***9.2.2 Defining Missionary***

In Chapter 8 I argue that the concept of Christian mission encompasses a personal sense of transcendent calling, cultural or geographical distance and suffering with the goal of spreading Christian belief. Many of my participants – particularly those who have undergone formal mission training – would espouse a broader understanding of mission in which distance and suffering are no longer essential, or at least re-defined. Nevertheless, their ambivalence towards the term 'missionary' underlines the strength of the traditional evangelical mission narrative in the wider evangelical community. Participants' discomfort with appropriating the missionary label also arose from the colonial connotations with which it is associated outside of the evangelical community.

***Research Recommendations:***

- How do evangelical Christians in local churches understand the term 'mission'?
- How is Christian mission portrayed in contemporary British media?
- Is faith a motivating factor for those involved in non-religious international projects such as aid, social justice, environmental campaigns, etc.?

***9.2.3 Mental Health***

Millennial missionaries own their mental health; they are self-reflective and able to make changes which will support their mental wellbeing. Requests for working

conditions conducive to better mental wellbeing may bring Millennial missionaries into conflict with older colleagues who were brought up to endure difficulties without talking about them. However, it may also lead to greater resilience in the long term. As I show in *Being: The Identity of a Missionary* (Chapter 6), the normalisation of discourse regarding mental health challenges and the availability of related vocabulary arose from the willingness of some Generation X parents and leaders to make their own struggles known, whether in the home, in mission and the church or in the wider culture.

Relationships of different kinds are highly salient for Millennial missionaries. While well able to continue close relationships online, a lack of meaningful face-to-face relationships can be keenly felt, as related by participants in this research. That is to say, distance does not necessarily impact on the significance of relationships with parents, friends or church leaders (for example). Nevertheless, loneliness will ensue when there are no mutually fulfilling friendships available to the missionary in their location. For some in this study, their work colleagues are also their social network. When successful this can be a positive experience, yet it can also place increased expectations and strain on a limited number of relationships.

***Practical Recommendations:***

- Mission leaders should consider their staff's ability to build and maintain healthy relationships both within and beyond the organisation.
- The maintenance of relationships with family and friends back home has changed with the increased ease of both communications and international travel. New missionaries who are used to speaking to their parents every day may find a sudden complete cessation of contact too difficult. In situations where technology and security allow, many younger missionaries will find regular contact with family or leaders back home helpful. At the same time, they should be encouraged to consider whether such contact is preventing them from fully engaging with local communities. While the balance will look different for each individual or team, it is an issue which should be openly discussed from the outset in order to avoid unnecessary distress or resentment.

- Expectations regarding working and living conditions must be discussed openly from the outset.

#### **Research Recommendations:**

- Twenty-five years ago a global study into missionary attrition galvanised the mission community into improving the wholistic support of missionaries (Taylor, 1997); research into the impact of such improvements on the longevity and effectiveness of missionaries would now be useful.

### **9.3 Theocentric Authenticity**

Much of the literature regarding religion in the UK focusses on society at large, with the decline of church attendance and the increase in choice as key themes (e.g. Davie, 2015; Bruce, 2002; Brown, 2009). In this research, I set out instead to study those for whom believing *and* belonging are not enough: those for whom faith has a significant impact on behaviour also. In RQ3 I asked how the identity of research participants is worked out in their personal and professional lives. As I have shown, these Millennial Christian missionaries see their relocation to another country and culture as part of their individual journey of faith, taking decisions in line with the identity they believe God has given them. This alignment of faith and activity, I have argued, may be viewed in terms of the Millennial value of authenticity.

I call this *theocentric authenticity*, in contrast with a self-determining egocentric authenticity, which taken to the extreme described by Taylor (2018/1991, p.68), ultimately lacks meaning because it is not bounded by “horizons of significance.” In *Being: The Identity of a Missionary* (Chapter 6) I note that Taylor frames authenticity in opposition to conformity, while in *Theocentric Authenticity: The Millennial Missionary Identity* (Chapter 8) I find that my participants regard hypocrisy as authenticity’s antithesis. Both of these underline the Millennial interpretation of authenticity as being true to oneself: an individualistic inward search for identity which is then acted upon. Religious belief unaccompanied by action is hypocrisy; religious performance without belief is conformity.

Authenticity, then, necessitates action. In the theocentric authenticity paradigm, belief cannot be a profession of doctrinal assent alone: it must also be embodied (Olson *et al.*, 2013), as I discuss in *Doing: The Work of Mission* (Chapter 7). Likewise, belonging involves the alignment of both belief and behaviour to the accepted norms of the

community; this, however, is viewed as an expression of the individual journey of faith rather than conformity to externally imposed standards. Therefore to believing and belonging is added behaving.

As I note in *Doing: The Work of Mission* (Chapter 7), this authentic lifestyle requires that public identity align with private. The expectation of the secularisation thesis, which I note in Section 2.1.3, that religion would withdraw to the private sphere (Bruce, 2002, p.20), is therefore redefined. Millennial Christians understand themselves to be a religious minority in contemporary Britain, yet rather than confine faith to the private spheres of home and church, they embody it in their everyday lives (Olson *et al.*, 2013). Participants in this study did not voice any desire for Christianity to be returned to its former position of power in public realms such as politics or education; rather they expressed a concern that they themselves and their fellow believers might demonstrate consistency between behaviour and belief.

To be considered authentic, faith must be performative, but the detail of how this is worked out differs from one individual to the next. Millennial missionaries measure their own and their peers' authenticity not by *what* they do but by their individual journey of obedience to how they perceive God to be leading. There is, therefore, no judgment from participants of those Christians whose path does not lead to mission, because they are seen as embodying their own faith in obedience to a different call. In *Becoming: The Journey into Mission* (Chapter 5) I set out the ways in which participants describe perceiving divine guidance, in relation to both their missionary vocation and also specific decisions along the way. It is their theocentric orientation which leads participants to interpret circumstances, dreams or passions as divinely initiated; yet most of these means would similarly be employed by nonreligious individuals in their own exploration of self. For religious and nonreligious alike, the process of interpretation is dialectic: carried out in conversation with trusted others and employing the language of the discourses to which one is exposed.

#### ***Practical Recommendations:***

- Christian leaders should support individuals to move from dissonance to authenticity in their embodiment of beliefs and personal sense of vocation. This means journeying with people as they consider how to bring their behaviours into line with their beliefs, but also as they re-examine those beliefs. It also

means helping individuals to explore what a sense of calling might look like in practice.

- In this project two participants, Diane and Anne, had begun their international mission work independently: Diane had since joined a mission organisation while Anne was exploring relationship with an organisation. As individuals and congregations increasingly form their own relationships with ministries overseas, mission organisations should consider their flexibility in 'adopting' an existing missionary who already has an assignment and some support but lacks the expertise, structures and community an organisation can offer.

***Research Recommendations:***

- Future sociological research could address potential areas of dissonance, where obedience to the norms of Christian behaviour come into conflict with an individual's perception of divine guidance. To what extent do Millennial (and other) believers follow God's personal leading, as perceived through their own thoughts and emotions, over church discourse? Is this related to the strength of belonging, whereby leaders and fellow believers may reinforce discourse in opposition to individualistic interpretations?
- Future studies could explore the extent to which the *theocentric authenticity* framework can be applied to the lived religion of British Millennial adherents of other faiths.
- My data suggests that a link exists between the authenticity paradigm and religious fundamentalisms, as believing and belonging cannot be isolated from behaving. Further exploration of this would offer a useful contribution to the sociological understanding of religious fundamentalism.
- To what extent do evangelicals consider themselves a minority group in contemporary British society and how does this impact on the theology, ecclesiology and practice of the church?
- I suggest here that British Millennial evangelicals want their faith to be public, but as an embodiment of individual faith rather than in the traditional sense of institutional religion. How do adherents of different religions understand public and private faith? How does this vary across generations and across national cultures?

## 9.4 Generations

I turn now to RQ4 and consider the extent to which Millennial missionaries differ from those of preceding generations or from their generation as a whole. My data displays strong continuity between Millennial and older participants, particularly with regard to their experiences of calling. Nevertheless, aspects of their self-understanding reveal the influence of the wider discourse.

### 9.4.1 *Millennial Trends*

I summarise here some of the trends identified in this thesis and employ findings from my data to comment on areas commonly associated with the Millennial generation in literature and in popular discourse.

#### 9.4.1.1 *Commitment*

My research has not shown any substantial difference in levels of commitment or long-term thinking between Millennials and previous generations. For some participants in this study, the call to mission led to a lengthy process of training, gaining experience and discussion with church leaders and mission organisations. Subsequent changes in role or location were usually initiated by organisational leadership, particularly where participants were members of large mission organisations. Further, some who themselves envisaged their own commitment to the mission as long-term described an organisational policy of regular two-year commitments, preventing them from planning further ahead. Two participants who initially went into mission independently had since sought to join mission organisations, citing a need for team and for input from leaders both personally and spiritually. In a sense, this is a formalisation of their initial tentative steps into mission, which suggests that the lack of commitment so often attributed to Millennials may be age-related rather than generational.

On the other hand, the primary commitment expressed by individuals is to “follow Jesus,” as I discuss in *Doing: The Work of Mission* (Chapter 7) above. They are committed to their own personal journey of faith in the first instance. Should they sense, through the various means outlined above, a different direction for themselves than that proposed by mission leaders, they face a challenge. For instance, one participant was, at the time of interview, considering a move from one region of the world to another. Another felt unsupported by her local congregation in the UK and was thinking about returning to the UK and spending a year or two becoming involved

with a different church community in order to then return to mission with their support. As I discuss in *Doing: The Work of Mission* (Chapter 7), two participants in particular nevertheless related occasions when they had obeyed the decisions of leaders over their own inclinations, with one coming to appreciate the leaders' wisdom after the passage of time.

These examples also illustrate the value Millennials place on relationships. It is through relationship with parents and other family members, church leaders, colleagues and Christian friends that participants explore questions of identity and purpose. My research also shows examples of Millennials struggling with their distance from some of these key people and sometimes prioritising a relationship over their own plans. This would suggest that Millennial commitment is to individuals with whom one is in relationship rather than to an organisation. For mission organisations, this means that Millennial missionaries are more likely to remain if they build strong relationship with leaders, colleagues and local people, whilst at the same time maintaining existing relationships with family and friends.

#### *9.4.1.2 Denominational Decline*

Linked to this sense of commitment, in the first instance to the personal faith journey and secondly to relationship, is the dilution of denominationalism which I discuss in the section *Just Christian* (9.2.1) above, as well as in *Being: The Identity of a Missionary* (Chapter 6). Millennial missionaries are committed to their own relationship with God, but may attend and work with churches of a variety of denominations or none.

#### *9.4.1.3 Leadership and Team*

In *Generations and the Millennial Generation* (Chapter 1) I discuss the idea that Millennials were raised to "have a voice" and therefore expect to contribute to decision-making at every level. The value they place on authenticity means that they are happy to follow leaders whose lives they see as being in accord with their beliefs; this requires a level of openness and personal relationship. As Millennials themselves move into positions of leadership, the expectation that their ideas be heard will attract the accusation of arrogance less often, while their own leadership style is likely to be more inclusive.

As I show in *Doing: The Work of Mission* (Chapter 7), team-working is valued by participants, who believe it to be fundamentally positive even when the reality proves

challenging. When asked about working in teams, participants talked more about differences between national cultures and personality types than between generations, suggesting that these continue to be more significant areas of preparation and training for missionary teams.

#### *9.4.1.4 Entitlement and Expectations*

Millennials are often characterised as entitled, with high expectations regarding the way they are treated and perceived by others. While I did not find any direct evidence of this in my data, there were behaviours which could be construed by others as such. For example, the expectation discussed above that one's voice be heard, or measures put in place to protect one's mental wellbeing, could be interpreted as self-importance. Interestingly, older participants did not articulate this response: more common was a ruefulness that the experiences of their own young adulthood had been different.

One participant described a change in expectations with regard to living standards which she had observed in recent arrivals to her mission location; however, this was in evidence among recent recruits of all ages including "empty-nesters,"<sup>16</sup> suggesting a period rather than a generation effect.

#### *9.4.1.5 Equality*

As I discuss in *Generations and the Millennial Generation* (Chapter 1), the discourse of equal rights and tolerance was prevalent during the childhood and youth of Millennials, normalising for them the acceptance of difference. This has contributed to the dilution of denominational differences, with Millennials at ease with the tension of firmly believing one thing whilst allowing that others believe something contradictory, as I show in *The Religion of British Millennials* (Chapter 2). There is a sense in which Christian missionaries have long been at the forefront of the move towards greater tolerance, their personal encounters with cultural difference leading them to weigh up cultural as against Biblical standards, as I discuss in *Contextualising Christian Foreign Missions* (Chapter 3). The challenge for mission organisations, as for churches, is to define which behaviours are non-negotiable in their understanding of the Christian message and to ensure that new recruits understand and are in agreement with these.

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<sup>16</sup> Empty-nesters are those whose children have grown up and left the parental home.

For the missionaries who took part in this research, there is a core message of Christianity which is to be passed on to others. Yet their motivation for so doing arises more from a desire for equal access to a faith which has been personally helpful, than from propositional belief.

#### *9.4.1.6 Self-awareness*

Millennials are more self-aware and self-reflective than previous generations, having been taught as children to consider their own emotional responses. In this study participants discussed freely areas such as mental health or how encountering a different culture led them to uncover deep-seated prejudice. The salience of authenticity for Millennials also means that they are more likely to talk openly about areas of struggle or weakness, while the use of psychological terminology in public discourse has equipped them with the vocabulary to do so.

#### ***Practical Recommendations***

- As Millennials are more likely to commit to personal relationships than to organisations, mission agencies should facilitate the building of strong relationships with specific leaders who act as mentors.
- If a change of location is necessary for operational reasons, efforts should be made to enable the continuation of key relationships.
- Team expectations should be discussed from the outset, particularly where working teams are also the missionary's social circle and spiritual family.
- This study identified the prevalence of cross-cultural marriage among missionaries. Mission organisations should consider how this impacts practical areas such as furlough arrangements or travel budgets.

#### ***Research Recommendations***

- As Millennials grow older, their leadership and managerial styles would be a fruitful area for research. Do they maintain the priority of allowing every voice to be heard once in a position to have the loudest voice?
- In Section 2.3 I recommend further research into what motivates Millennials now, as they approach middle-age. Is there still evidence of the "happy mid-narrative" proposed by Savage et al. (2005)?

- Quantitative studies into areas demonstrating the longevity of Millennial commitment would be fascinating: this might include marriage and other long-term relationships, membership of campaign groups or political parties, or years spent in a particular job or career or with a specific employer.
- It is imperative that researchers consider period and age effects when studying generational change.

#### 9.4.2 COVID-19

My research was impacted in several ways by a significant period effect in the shape of the COVID-19 pandemic. Firstly, it was impossible for me to visit mission training schools and colleges or large-scale Christian conferences in order to recruit participants. Secondly, while I had always intended to carry out the majority of interviews using VoIP technology, in practice all of my interviews took place online, as I discuss in *Methodology* (Chapter 4). At the same time, lockdowns meant that the use of video calling was expanding rapidly, so that even those who previously might have been uncomfortable in such a conversation were now relaxed and familiar talking through a screen. Thirdly, participants were unable to plan for the future as it was impossible to say what might happen in the novel context we all found ourselves in. This impacted on the data through which I had hoped to test the suggestion that Millennials have a short-term outlook and eschew commitment. Fourthly, a few were continuing to work remotely from their passport countries or had handed work over to local colleagues. This raises the question of the need for foreign mission workers. As the memory of COVID restrictions fades, research into the pandemic's impact on Christian mission is necessary.

The COVID-19 pandemic is an excellent example of how period effects can impact each generation differently. Just as the events and trends outlined in *Generations and the Millennial Generation* (Chapter 1) set the parameters for Millennials' interpretation of reality, so the pandemic and its related restrictions will have lasting repercussions for those who were children at the time. Thus a period effect experienced at a particular age becomes a generation effect.

#### ***Practical recommendations:***

- Mission leaders should consider what was done differently during the pandemic, and whether any of the enforced changes proved positive.

### ***Research recommendations:***

- Research into the impact on Christian mission of COVID restrictions is necessary. Some tentative conclusions have been offered (Bendor-Samuel, 2020; Rievan, 2023), but further empirical research should be carried out to establish any lasting impact on areas such as:
  - Did foreign missionaries return after COVID exile?
  - How many roles are now being carried out remotely?
  - Has more control of projects been handed over to local people?
  - In what ways has the pandemic impacted the transmission of both faith and a mission narrative to those who were children at the time?

### ***9.4.3 Generationalism***

Finally, I began this thesis with a discussion of generational theory (Chapter 1) and I would like to close by offering some thoughts on the usefulness of generational categories. As stated in *Generations and the Millennial Generation* (Chapter 1), I see these as being on a continuum, with overlap between one generation and the next rather than an abrupt shift. Boundaries set to define generations are arbitrary: there is no particular reason why, for example, those born in the 1960s and 1970s (roughly coinciding with the usual definition of Generation X) should be any more unitary than if we were to take those born in the 1970s and 1980s as one generation. Changes in thinking and behaviour are influenced not simply by the events which occur during a generation's early years (as set out in Chapter 1), but also by the tools with which individuals are equipped to interpret these. It is therefore through their control of discourse that one generation's fears and desires form the plausibility structures of the next. Of course, it takes time for these to become embedded in the narrative of a given society or group, with the result that narrative itself is constantly and subtly changing. Thus the study of generations is in fact the study of societal trends: what differs from one generation to the next is that any given change is experienced as such by one cohort but as an established norm by the next. Such changes are therefore best studied by considering birth cohorts at some distance from one another, suggesting that clearer results of generational difference will be obtained by comparing those born in 1975 to those born in 1995, for example, rather than taking entire 15- or 20-year birth cohorts. In order to determine whether a given change is truly generational rather than age- or period-related, this would need to be repeated longitudinally. This

is in line with the Pew Research Center's recent (Parker, 2023) analysis of its own methodological approach to the study of generational change.

In this thesis I have set out to describe a subgroup of the Millennial generation at a particular point in time, when they were between 20 and 40 years of age. This means that their responses may include age-related elements: it is possible that in twenty years' time the same group of people would reflect differently upon their lives and experiences. As I mention in *Generations and the Millennial Generation* (Chapter 1), I consider it important to study Millennials now, as adults, in order to establish which traits often listed in early literature regarding Millennials were in fact age- rather than generation-related.

While I have been working on this thesis, members of the next generation have embarked on their own missionary careers. As was the case for Millennials, there is now an enthusiasm for defining "Gen Z" and even "Gen Alpha," with predictions made regarding the impact of their entry into Christian mission specifically or the workplace more generally. I caution against an overly deterministic approach to the study of generations, reminding future researchers that generational lines have been laid arbitrarily and are "fuzzy at the edges" (Howe, 2000, p.41).

## 9.5 Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, I summarise below the responses offered in this thesis to the research questions with which I began.

### *RQ 1 What motivates Millennial Christians to become missionaries?*

Millennial missionaries regard their calling to international mission as a step in their personal journey of faith, determined by a series of motivating factors which they interpret through an evangelical narrative.

### *RQ 2 How do they negotiate differing narratives in order to explore their own personal identity?*

Participants in this study share the wider Millennial desire to discover the authentic self, merging this with a theocentric worldview: a position I have described as theocentric authenticity. Their primary self-identification is as "just Christian," confirming the salience of their faith while simultaneously expressing the inclusivity of their generation.

*RQ 3 How is this negotiation worked out in their professional and personal lives?*

Millennial missionaries view faith as authentic when belief is reflected and expressed in behaviour, meaning that they take decisions based on how they believe God to be leading them individually.

*RQ 4 To what extent do Millennial missionaries reflect the characteristics and values usually associated with their generation and/or those of previous generations of missionaries.*

There is a great deal of continuity between Boomer, Gen X and Millennial participants in this study, particularly with regard to the salience of personal faith and their experience of calling. Millennials, however, also express elements of contemporary British culture.

This thesis contributes to the sociological understanding of religion in contemporary Britain. I have demonstrated that, in spite of falls in church attendance and the growth of nonreligion, there are still British young adults who perceive and follow a divine call to international Christian mission. I have shown how the lived religion of British Millennial missionaries emphasises relationship over doctrine, with personal identity worked out through a journey of faith in relationship with God and with other believers, among whom parents are often significant. The minority status of practising Christians in Britain coupled with a bounded relativism lead to a focus on what unites rather than what divides, while the availability through internet and through large-scale Christian events of a particular style and discourse is causing a dilution of denominationalism. I have further demonstrated that those who continue to both believe and belong also value behaviour as an expression of authentic faith, proposing *theocentric authenticity* as a framework for understanding the intersection of the evangelical Christian narrative with the wider Millennial search for the authentic self.

## Glossary

|                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>African Independent Churches (AIC)</b>          | Churches in Africa which were started by Africans rather than by foreign missionaries.                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Alpha Course</b>                                | A course which introduces the basics of Christianity.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Assemblies of God Business as Mission (BAM)</b> | A pentecostal denomination with over 500 congregations in the UK. The practice of starting a business in an area with Christian mission as its goal, both through economic provision and through the demonstration of Christian ethics.                                                                |
| <b>Baptist Missionary Society (BMS)</b>            | Denominational mission sending organisation of the Baptist church.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>CE Europe</b>                                   | Central and Eastern Europe.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Charismatic</b>                                 | Christians or churches who believe in and practise the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit as listed in 1 Corinthians 12:7-10.                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Church Mission Society (CMS)</b>                | Denominational mission organisation of the Church of England.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Comibam</b>                                     | Umbrella grouping of Iberoamerican mission organisations, born out of a Congress held in 1987.                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Ecclesiology</b>                                | The study of the church.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Elim</b>                                        | A pentecostal denomination with over 550 congregations in the UK.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Emerging Church Movement (ECM)</b>              | Not an actual movement, but small groups of Christians who are disillusioned with traditional church and so form small informal groupings.                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Empty-nesters</b>                               | Older adults whose children have grown up and left home.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Evangelical(ism)</b>                            | Christians who emphasise Jesus' death on the cross as the means of salvation, which is to be individually appropriated by free choice; they also place a high value on the Bible as God's Word.                                                                                                        |
| <b>Faith Based Organisation (FBO)</b>              | A development organisation whose ethos and practice arise out of religious beliefs.                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Field / mission field</b>                       | The location where a missionary works.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Furlough</b>                                    | A period spent by a missionary back in their home country in order to report back to organisations, churches and individual supporters and to raise further financial and spiritual support.                                                                                                           |
| <b>Global Connections</b>                          | An umbrella group of evangelical churches and organisations in the UK.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Glossolalia</b>                                 | Also called "speaking in tongues" one of the manifestations of the Holy Spirit given at Pentecost (The Bible, Acts 2) and practised by Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians.                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Helicopter parents</b>                          | Parents who are constantly near their children, watching over them.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Hillsong</b>                                    | Originally the name of the worship music produced by an Assemblies of God congregation in Sydney, Australia; the music became so famous globally that the congregation changed its name to Hillsong Church and began to start other churches around the world under the same name.                     |
| <b>House church</b>                                | Term often used for small independent charismatic churches which began in Britain in the 1970s, some of which began in private living rooms. This became known as the British House Church Movement and spawned a number of church networks. In this thesis I also refer to these as 'neocharismatic.' |
| <b>Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB)</b>                 | Anglican church in West London where the Alpha Course began; has begun a network of new congregations around the UK.                                                                                                                                                                                   |

|                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Inculturation</b>                           | The interpretation and adaptation of Christian theology and practice through the lens of a new culture.                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Latchkey kids</b>                           | Children who carry a key and let themselves into their homes because parents are working.                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>London Missionary Society (LMS)</b>         | An early inter-denominational missionary organisation.                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Member care</b>                             | The ongoing personal, spiritual and professional oversight offered by mission organisations towards their personnel.                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Micro church</b>                            | A contemporary iteration of the house-church idea, emphasising close relationships and local community outreach.                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Mission</b>                                 | Any activity aimed at disseminating the Christian message.                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Missional</b>                               | People or churches who aim to spread the Christian message through their everyday lives.                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Neocharismatic</b>                          | Charismatic individuals or churches not linked to a traditional denomination.                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Operation Mobilization (OM)</b>             | An international non-denominational mission organisation founded in 1957 with the aim of involving young people in mission.                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Pentecostal</b>                             | Individuals or churches emphasising the work of the Holy Spirit, particularly speaking in tongues as evidence of baptism in the Spirit.                                                                                                               |
| <b>Perspectives Course</b>                     | A course which aims to give Christians a global perspective by introducing them to aspects of mission history and mission theology.                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Proselytism</b>                             | Activities aimed at converting people from one religion to another.                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG)</b> | A mega-church founded in Lagos, Nigeria in 1952 which has become a global denomination, with over 800 congregations in the UK.                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Reverse mission</b>                         | Former recipients of missionaries (often former colonies) sending missionaries to post-Christian countries (often former colonial powers).                                                                                                            |
| <b>Sending (church / agency)</b>               | Following the example of the Antioch church in Acts 13 which sent Paul and Barnabas, most evangelicals believe that missionaries should be sent as representatives of local churches, with professional mission organisations acting as facilitators. |
| <b>Support</b>                                 | Many missionaries are funded through voluntary donations from churches and friends. They are also supported spiritually through prayer and practically and emotionally in many different ways.                                                        |
| <b>Tent-making</b>                             | In the Bible, the Apostle Paul sometimes funds his missionary journeys by making tents (Acts 18:3).                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Wycliffe Bible Translators</b>              | Named after English reformer and Bible translator John Wycliffe, this mission organisation was founded in 1953 with the specific goal of translating the Bible into every language so that people can read it for themselves.                         |
| <b>YWAM</b>                                    | An international non-denominational mission which runs residential training for young people in locations around the world.                                                                                                                           |

*References to Biblical texts are set out in the format: Book Chapter number: Verse number.*

## List of Abbreviations

|             |                                                      |
|-------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>AIC</i>  | <i>African Initiated Churches</i>                    |
| <i>AIM</i>  | <i>Africa Inland Mission</i>                         |
| <i>BMS</i>  | <i>Baptist Missionary Society</i>                    |
| <i>BSA</i>  | <i>British Social Attitudes Survey</i>               |
| <i>BWB</i>  | <i>Believing without Belonging</i>                   |
| <i>CIM</i>  | <i>China Inland Mission (now OMF)</i>                |
| <i>CMS</i>  | <i>Church Mission Society</i>                        |
| <i>EAUK</i> | <i>Evangelical Alliance of the United Kingdom</i>    |
| <i>ECM</i>  | <i>Emerging Church Movement</i>                      |
| <i>FBO</i>  | <i>Faith-based Organisation</i>                      |
| <i>HTB</i>  | <i>Holy Trinity Brompton</i>                         |
| <i>LMS</i>  | <i>London Missionary Society</i>                     |
| <i>MTD</i>  | <i>Moralistic Therapeutic Deism</i>                  |
| <i>NGO</i>  | <i>Non-governmental Organisation</i>                 |
| <i>OM</i>   | <i>Operation Mobilization</i>                        |
| <i>OMF</i>  | <i>Overseas Missionary Fellowship (formerly CIM)</i> |
| <i>STM</i>  | <i>Short-term Mission</i>                            |
| <i>VoIP</i> | <i>Voice Over Internet Protocol</i>                  |
| <i>YWAM</i> | <i>Youth With a Mission</i>                          |

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## Appendix 1 Introducing the Millennial Participants

| Pseudonym                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Birth Year | Gender | Relationship Status | Church Affiliation          | Region of Service | Nature of Work         |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|--------|---------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| <b>John</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | 1982       | M      | Married             | Neocharismatic              | W Europe          | Church                 |
| <i>John grew up Methodist while his European wife is from a Conservative Baptist background. He joined a neocharismatic church network as a student. They have two children. They tried to start a church but have ended up gathering people who are interested in faith but not church in the traditional sense.</i> |            |        |                     |                             |                   |                        |
| <b>Catherine</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 1992       | F      | Single              | Evang. Nondenominational    | S Africa          | Bible teaching & comms |
| <i>Catherine works with a large mission organisation in Africa, having spent a gap year with a different organisation in a different part of Africa, and an internship with a UK church.</i>                                                                                                                          |            |        |                     |                             |                   |                        |
| <b>Lucy</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | 1985       | F      | Single              | Nondenominational           | E Africa          | Bible Translation      |
| <i>After her initial 2 year experience with a large organisation in Africa, Lucy returned to the UK to connect with churches and supporters before making the decision to commit to mission long-term.</i>                                                                                                            |            |        |                     |                             |                   |                        |
| <b>Ruth</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | 1980       | F      | Married             | Pentecostal                 | Africa / Europe   | Training / Mentoring   |
| <i>Born to missionary parents, Ruth and her husband completed their missions training in Africa before working at the same training school. After 7 years in Africa, they are now based in the UK while supporting churches and leaders in Europe.</i>                                                                |            |        |                     |                             |                   |                        |
| <b>Ian</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | 1980s      | M      | Single              | Conservative Evangelical    | undisclosed       | Education              |
| <i>Due to security concerns, Ian could not share a lot about where he is and what he does.</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |            |        |                     |                             |                   |                        |
| <b>Philip</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | 1984       | M      | Married             | Neocharismatic              | N America         | Church                 |
| <i>Brought up Catholic, Philip made a faith commitment as a young adult and joined a neocharismatic network of churches.</i>                                                                                                                                                                                          |            |        |                     |                             |                   |                        |
| <b>Sarah</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | 1990       | F      | Married             | Anglican & Baptist          | E Africa          | Bible Translation      |
| <i>Sarah grew up in a Christian home and attended a Catholic school. She felt God change her career plans whilst applying for a university place, so took a gap year before going into missions.</i>                                                                                                                  |            |        |                     |                             |                   |                        |
| <b>Ainsley</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | 1986       | M      | Married             | Neocharismatic              | N Europe          | Church                 |
| <i>Ainsley became a Christian as a young adult and saw mission as part of the package. He wanted to be involved in church-planting and was open to going anywhere with that aim.</i>                                                                                                                                  |            |        |                     |                             |                   |                        |
| <b>Elaine</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | 1983       | F      | Married             | Christian Nondenominational | Australasia       | Support services       |
| <i>Elaine came from a home where one parent was a Christian and the other was not. She went into mission after leaving the Armed Forces as a means both to revive her own faith and to use skills gained.</i>                                                                                                         |            |        |                     |                             |                   |                        |
| <b>Anne</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | 1980       | F      | Single              | Baptist                     | CE Europe         | Church                 |
| <i>Anne grew up in a Christian home. After attending Bible college, she worked as musical director in a large church. She was then invited to spend a year with a church in Eastern Europe and ended up staying long term.</i>                                                                                        |            |        |                     |                             |                   |                        |
| <b>Grace</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | 1980       | F      | Single              | Independent Evangelical     | E Africa          | Training               |
| <i>Having grown up in a church with a strong mission focus, Grace began wondering as a teenager whether she should go herself. She spent a gap-year in Africa, which she felt confirmed her calling.</i>                                                                                                              |            |        |                     |                             |                   |                        |

| Pseudonym                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Birth Year | Gender | Relationship Status | Church Affiliation          | Region of Service | Nature of Work    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|--------|---------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Chloe</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 1981       | F      | Single              | Christian Nondenominational | Africa            | Bible Translation |
| <i>Chloe grew up in a Christian family but her faith went through a period of challenge as an early adult. Following a relationship with someone who had lost faith, she realised her own faith's importance to her and started thinking about going overseas.</i>                                                          |            |        |                     |                             |                   |                   |
| <b>Diane</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 1983       | F      | Single              | Neocharismatic              | E Asia            | Education         |
| <i>Diane went to church as a young child, but stopped around the age of 8 when her parents separated. She suffered from depression as a teenager, which she says was miraculously healed when she came back to faith through the Alpha Course at the age of 17.</i>                                                         |            |        |                     |                             |                   |                   |
| <b>Claire</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 1987       | F      | Single              | Anglican                    | E Asia & UK       | Student outreach  |
| <i>Claire grew up going to church, but it was as a student that she was motivated by Scripture to become involved in outreach, at first in the UK and then overseas.</i>                                                                                                                                                    |            |        |                     |                             |                   |                   |
| <b>Jackie</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 1980       | F      | Single              | Evangelical (independent)   | E Asia            | Personnel         |
| <i>Having grown up in a Christian home, Jackie spent a gap-year on a discipleship programme which involved ministry experience and began then to think about international missions. She went to university, spent some time working with international students, and then went to Bible college before moving to Asia.</i> |            |        |                     |                             |                   |                   |
| <b>Megan</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 1988       | F      | Single              | Evangelical                 | CE Europe         | Church            |
| <i>Megan grew up in a Christian home. An injury in her 20s led to her being unable to progress on her chosen career path. During a holiday to a country in CE Europe, she sensed a divine calling to work there.</i>                                                                                                        |            |        |                     |                             |                   |                   |
| <b>Karen</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 1980s      | F      | Single              | Christian Nondenominational | Africa            | Medical           |
| <i>Growing up in a Christian family, Karen's interest in overseas mission began at a young age. She trained as a nurse and then midwife in order to work abroad.</i>                                                                                                                                                        |            |        |                     |                             |                   |                   |

Table 0.1 Millennial Participants

## Appendix 2      Interview Schedule

- What is your faith history? How did you come to faith? How has your faith been challenged?
- How did you come to be doing what you are doing? (vocation)
- Who have been your models in faith?
- Tell me about where you live. Religion? Poverty?
- What is the main focus of your work? (e.g. Social projects vs. evangelism / conversion)
- Do you consider yourself a “missionary?” What does the term mean to you?
- How have you found living in a different culture? (How is Britishness viewed?)
- How do you take major decisions (location, role)? (e.g. Who do you consult?)
- How are you supported? (financial, prayer, practical – organisation, personal, etc.)
- What is your experience of working in team? (relating to older generations and each other)
- Do you have a plan for the future? How long do you intend to stay?
- Do you have / would you like to have a family? How do you feel about bringing up children abroad?
- How (and how much) do you use social media?

## Appendix 3 Ethics Approval for the Study



9 January 2020

Dear Ms Alison Allen

Your application 1346 -Millennials in Mission has been reviewed. After careful consideration, ethical approval has been granted - Congratulations!

Should you make any changes to your project that impact on your ethics application, please submit an application for amendment.

Yours sincerely,

Research Ethics Administrator

on behalf of the Kingston University Research Ethics Committee

## Appendix 4      Participant Biographical Information Form



Kingston University London  
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences  
Penrhyn Road  
Kingston Upon Thames  
KT1 2EE

### Participant Biographical Information

**Title of Study:** An Exploration of British Millennials' Involvement in International Christian Missions.

**Researcher:** Alison Allen, PhD Candidate (k1534786@kingston.ac.uk)

**Supervisors:** Dr Sylvia Collins-Mayo (s.collins-mayo@kingston.ac.uk) & Dr Sonya Sharma (sonya.sharma@kingston.ac.uk)

**Institution:** Kingston University, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

This information is confidential and is provided on a voluntary basis: you may withhold any or all of this information. Both this data and that provided during interview will be used and stored under a pseudonym and every effort will be made to protect participants' identities including disguising any locations mentioned during interview. Please do not write your name on this page.

YEAR OF BIRTH:

GENDER:

ETHNICITY:

RELATIONSHIP STATUS:

CHURCH AFFILIATION:

MISSION ORGANISATION (if applicable):

REGION OF SERVICE (e.g. East Asia, Latin America, etc.):

LENGTH OF SERVICE:

**PSEUDONYM:**

## Appendix 5 Participant Information Sheet



Kingston University London  
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences  
Penrhyn Road  
Kingston Upon Thames  
KT1 2EE

### Participant Information Sheet

**Title of Study:** An Exploration of British Millennials' Involvement in International Chrstn Mssns.

**Researcher:** Alison Allen, PhD Candidate (k1534786@kingston.ac.uk)

**Supervisors:** Dr Sylvia Collins-Mayo (s.collins-mayo@kingston.ac.uk)  
Dr Sonya Sharma (sonya.sharma@kingston.ac.uk)

**Institution:** Kingston University, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

#### Aims of Research

The above-named study sets out to explore British Millennials' (born approx. 1980-1999) experience of and involvement in international Chrstn Mssns. The research will look at such areas as personal faith, motivations for Mssn, Mssn involvement, family and work relationships, global awareness and cross-cultural adaptation. This study is doctoral research which is not funded by any organisation.

#### Role and Rights of Participants

Participation in the study is entirely voluntary. Should you choose to take part, this will involve an interview lasting approximately 1-2 hours which will be audio recorded. Participants are free to ask questions, raise concerns or leave the study at any point if they so choose. Participants will be invited to comment on the results of the study before the thesis is submitted.

The anonymity of participants will be protected throughout the study and in the dissemination of the thesis. Choosing to take part or not will have no impact on an individual's relationship to their Mssn organization.

Should you also write a blog which may be useful to the research, you will have a choice as to how interview data is identified. You may either opt to give me permission to use the name attached to your blog for data gained from interview, or you may request that the blog and interview data are treated as coming from two separate sources thereby maintaining full anonymity for interview data.

#### Risks and Benefits of Participation

It is not anticipated that the project will put participants at any risk and care will be taken to minimize any potential risks. Pseudonyms will be used in any published results of the study to prevent the disclosure of any given participant's views, experiences or location. There is a small risk that participation in this study may cause participants to

recall traumatic or unpleasant experiences. Should this occur, the researcher will recommend that the participant speak to the Member Care department of his/her organisation (where relevant) or seek help from an independent organisation.

Participation in this study will contribute to scholarship on the Millennial generation and religion, and on Mssnary practice and experience. Participants may find it personally beneficial to talk about their experiences and feelings.

### **Storage and Use of Data**

Interviews will be audio recorded then transcribed. Personal information such as email addresses and Skype names will at no point be linked to the data and will be erased from the Researcher's personal computer and any University computers on completion of the thesis. The University will store transcripts and recordings together with the participant's basic biographical information under a pseudonym for the use of future researchers.

### **Oversight**

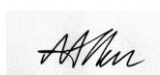
The research has received a favourable ethical opinion from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Business and Social Sciences at Kingston University London.

If you wish to complain about any aspect of how you have been treated in this research, please contact Professor Jill Schofield who is the Dean of the Faculty of Business and Social Sciences at Kingston University London. Professor Schofield's contact details are as follows: Dean's Office, Faculty of Business and Social Sciences, Kingston University London, Penrhyn Road, Kingston upon Thames KT1 2EE. Email: [j.schofield@kingston.ac.uk](mailto:j.schofield@kingston.ac.uk) Tel: 020 8417 9000 ext. 65229.

### **Queries**

Any further questions regarding the research should be addressed to the Researcher, Alison Allen, at [k1534786@kingston.ac.uk](mailto:k1534786@kingston.ac.uk).

**Researcher Signature:**



**Date:** 27<sup>th</sup> January 2020

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NB. No direct quotations from The Bible have been used. Bible References are given in the format: Book Name Chapter Number : Verse Number