

Webber's *Younger Evangelicals* is one of the most significant pieces I've read in a long time. It made me a negligent parent for a couple days because I kept slipping away from my kids to read another chapter...and another...and another. It was like I was reading an autobiography...mine!

Without putting people in boxes nor coming off as one with an axe to grind, Webber looks at evangelicalism over the last century and explores three movements within the Evangelical Church—Traditional Evangelicals, Pragmatic Evangelicals, and Younger Evangelicals. Webber's book couples good narrative with helpful charts that make some meaningful comparisons between these three movements.

Webber raises a number of shifts that have occurred in these movements of evangelicalism, including a shift from an ahistorical attitude to a deep appreciation for what the People of God have been about throughout the ages. The shift theologically has moved from an emphasis upon propositional truth to a story-oriented theology. As for apologetics, the shift is occurring from an emphasis upon rational argument to an appreciation for truth verified through community.

As for me, I grew up in a strong strand of Traditionalism. Our hallmarks were separatism, inerrancy, and avoiding the slippery slope of liberalism. Meanwhile, pragmatic boomers were reacting against a church culture that was largely becoming irrelevant to most of the rest of culture. I found some freedom in the relevance of the seeker churches that were emerging during my adolescence and college years. But somehow I still felt this burning desire for something that connected to the church of the past, with a relevance to what was occurring in the world around me.

Life as a "younger evangelical" can be a lonely road at times. When I was a grad student at Michigan State, my friends there gave me warm acceptance when I expressed great disdain for some prominent vice of evangelicalism—either our unthinking boasting of truth, our extreme rationality that ignores mystery, or our acceptance of the American market way. However, as soon as I challenged some of the ills and inconsistencies of relativism and tolerance, my grad school friends gave me cold stares or passionate tirades, accusing me of being an evangelical bigot.

Meanwhile, my peers in the evangelical community have often felt no more accepting. My unwillingness to write off postmodernism as the greatest threat to the Gospel brings me accusations of being a relativist who simply wants to let people "feel good" and a person with a faulty hermeneutic. I've been told postmodernism is "much ado about nothing". I'm a passionate theologian who longs to live out my theology in relevant wineskins for the contexts where I find myself.

Webber says postmoderns don't want to be handed a plate of relativism. He writes, "Today, young people come to church because 'it stands for something.' But the gospel it stands for is presented as 'story,' not a noncontradictory, rationally defended, logically consistent fact apprehended by cognitive acquiescence" (page 49).

I urge you to put Webber's book on your "must-read" list. It's a provocative and challenging book that challenges the way we practice church in the 21st Century. I've included several samplings from the book below, though the charts don't have nearly as much meaning apart from the narrative Webber provides with them in the book. Order the book!

Check out a few samplings...

Characteristics of the Younger Evangelical (Webber, page 54)

1. Grew up in a postmodern world
2. Marked by a post 9/11 era
3. Have recovered the biblical understanding of human nature
4. Are aware of a new context for ministry
5. Differ with the pragmatist approach to ministry
6. Minister in a new paradigm of thought
7. Stand for the absolutes of the Christian faith in a new way
8. Recognize the road to the future runs through the past
9. Committed to the plight of the poor, especially in urban centers
10. Willing to live by the rules
11. Facility with technology
12. Highly visual
13. Communicate through stories
14. Grasp the power of imagination
15. Advocate the resurgence of the arts
16. Appreciate the power of performative symbol
17. Long for community
18. Committed to multicultural communities of faith
19. Committed to intergenerational ministry
20. Attracted to absolutes
21. Ready to commit
22. Search for shared wisdom
23. Demand authenticity
24. Realize the unity between thought and action

Approach to Theology (Webber, page 92)

	Traditional Evangelicals	Pragmatic Evangelicals	Younger Evangelicals
Approach	Systematic	Christianity 101	Ancient-Future
Theologian	Carl F.H. Henry	Gilbert Bilezikian	Stanley J. Grenz
Creation	7 days or 7 lengthy periods of time	Mystery	Creation and Science brought together in interactive view
Hermeneutics	Grammatical Historical Reformed	Internal Consistency	Typological Communal What does it say to us?
Biblical Theology	Dispensational Reformed	Internal Consistency	Covenantal Metanarrative
Historical Theology	Post-Reformational history is valuable	Not a helpful discipline	An essential feature of theological thinking
Eschatology	Premillennial	Not a matter of great import	As essential feature of cosmic salvation
Salvation	Concentrate on the individual	Individual in community	Cosmic Salvation God saves individuals and the created order
Sin	Depravity	Brokenness	Rebellion
Redemption	Sacrificial Substitutional	Sacrificial Substitutional	Recovery of <i>Christus Victor</i> . By His sacrifice, Christ won a victory over the powers of evil and left an example for us to follow.
Sacraments	Ordinances	Ordinances	Return to more sacramental understanding

Approach to Leadership (Webber, page 153)

	Traditional Evangelicals	Pragmatic Evangelicals	Younger Evangelicals
The Origin of Leadership	Ordination	Vision	Calling
Management of Ministry	Board of Elders or Deacons	One person with the gift of leadership	Team ministry Consensus
Power Base	Congregation or representation of congregation	Founder Leader	Rejection of power. Affirmation of ecclesial servanthood
Model	Hierarchical Top Down	Hierarchical Top Down	A circle of equals
Driving Force	Denominational power base	High-energy leader	A community of committed relationships
The Place of Diversity	Diversity generally rejected	Leadership diffused among staff members	Leadership diffused among members
The Right to Lead	Denominational or congregational appointment	Inherent within the person or position	Recognition of God's calling

Approach to Spiritual Formation (Webber, page 185)

	Traditional Evangelicals	Pragmatic Evangelicals	Younger Evangelicals
Prayer	Petition	Relationship with God	Union with God
Scripture	Read Bible in one year	Daily Bible reading	<i>Lectio Divina</i>
Church	Doing Church	Innovative Church	Being Church
Witness	Four Spiritual Laws	Friendship witness	Communal Witness
Goal	Sanctification	Getting one's life together. Meaning	Discipleship
Setting for Spiritual Growth	Local Church	Retreat Centers	Monasteries practice of the Christian year. Labyrinth. All of Life.
Rules	Do's and don'ts establish uniformity and abstinence	Freedom from cultural restrictions. All things in moderation.	Primary rule to become an authentic human being. The freedom to be real.
Sacramental Understanding of Life	Rejected	Rejected	Affirmed Seek to understand and live out through symbol and practice

Approach to Worship (Webber, page 201)

	Traditional Evangelicals	Pragmatic Evangelicals	Younger Evangelicals
Style	Traditional Program	Contemporary Presentation	Liturgical Ancient/Future Contemporary
Content	Thematic	Topical	Triune
Structure	Threefold: sing, preach, invite.	Twofold: music set and preaching.	Fourfold: narrative of gathering, hearing the Word, Communion, dismissal
Participation	Primarily congregational singing	Singing of choruses	Highly interactive
Arts	Banners	Arts as illustration. Drama	Art as embodiment Environmental arts
Seating	Rows	Theatre Seats	Relational configuration
Space	Traditional turn-of-the-century buildings	Theatres or theatre-type spaces	Homes Warehouses Churches Modified Cathedrals
Christian Year	Seldom Followed	Almost never followed	Frequently followed
Symbols	Stained glass Pulpit and Table Baptist font or pool	No symbols	Strong use of symbols Icons in many churches
Eucharist	Quarterly or Monthly	Quarterly, monthly, or sporadic	Weekly in many churches
Technology	Overhead Projector in some churches	Widespread use of PowerPoint, video, etc.	Restore authentic symbols PowerPoint generally used for icon projection
Instruments	Organ and Brass	Bands	Eclectic use of instruments
Music	Traditional Hymns	Contemporary Choruses	Eclectic use including ancient forms of singing
Preaching	Didactic	Therapeutic	Narrative with an emphasis on obedience and Christian living. Interactive
Scripture Readings	At least one Scripture Reading	Very little Scripture reading, often none	One to three Scripture readings
Intercessory Prayer	Weekly	Seldom	Weekly and usually engaging the people in participatory prayer
Choir	Traditional Choirs Presentational	No choir Worship leader teams	Singing serves the text Strong emphasis on congregation leadership