

“Teaching the Uniqueness of Christ in an Increasingly Polarized World”

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Introduction

In the last few decades there has been a Western cultural shift concerning the uniqueness of Christ. Teaching at Wheaton College Graduate School (Wheaton, IL) for the past 20 years, I (Robert, a baby boomer) have witnessed a sea change in the attitudes of the first-year students coming to campus who are predominately from evangelical families, churches, and schools. When I started teaching at the College in 1998, the incoming student questionnaire showed a majority of students believing that Jesus was the only way to obtain salvation from the one, true, and living God. Now the bulk of arriving millennials see the Lord Jesus as only one way to God; and that God should be "fair" in treating all people with justice and compassion; and that he would never send anyone to eternal damnation simply because they had never heard of his Son. In addition, I (Luisa, a millennial) have taught and worked with millennials for over fourteen years at George Fox University (Newberg, OR), Gonzaga University (Spokane, WA), Whitworth University (Spokane, WA), Westmont College (Santa Barbara, CA), and Wheaton College (Wheaton, IL), and have experienced an intensifying of the same trend that my father Robert has mentioned.

How do you present the belief that Jesus is the only way of salvation to your millennial ministry class? By using narrative reflection and focus group conversation, this essay will explore how to facilitate discussion and critical thinking among millennials in our global tertiary context regarding the uniqueness of the Lord Jesus. In this process, we (Luisa and Robert) will use andragogic methods that allow students to embrace a positive and trusting learning environment. Meanwhile, we will present an orthodox biblical apologetic that will give space to the Holy Spirit to guide students towards the Son of God who came to take away the sin of our world; a ransom for all languages and cultures. In broader terms, the procedure will assist tertiary instructors in what the teaching of mission and ministry should look like in an increasingly complex public arena; and how they can negotiate contemporary global landscapes with faithful Christian witness in their teaching, including models of dialogue and engagement.

After presenting the purpose of the study together with the guiding question, definitions of key terms, and the teaching challenge, the essay summarizes the three common approaches and four evangelical views of the problem of teaching the uniqueness of Christ. The chapter then deals with an analysis of the written reflections and focus group treatment of the participants, observing and interpreting the findings, and applying the results towards teaching implications. The study is of vital importance. If we are training future Christian leaders who do not have a clear understanding of the centrality of

Christ, then what will be the gospel motivation, method, and message that they are taking to their field of ministry? Moreover, what are the future prospects of the Christian church and its global missionary endeavors?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the investigation is to understand the interplay between the universality of God's love and the particularity of salvation via the narratives of peer graduate students, and how to communicate that relationship to Christian millennials in their spiritual journey. This enquiry is crucial to the Church since one of the most disputed questions facing our contemporary world is the query of whether Jesus is the only way for salvation. Amongst millennials there is a growing trend of interpreting Scripture through a post-modern lens of religious pluralism and universality, rather than through an orthodox lens that values the doctrines of the Christian church that have been embraced for over two thousand years, such as the preeminence of Christ.

Considering the desire for tolerance in our society, how do we teach mission and ministry in our Christian colleges and seminaries in a manner that is faithful to the biblical worldview, and at the same time remain culturally pertinent and respectful of all backgrounds? To facilitate the purpose of the study, we presented a guiding question to a graduate cohort: as a Christian millennial, how would you lead a discussion with your evangelical peers regarding the perspective of the uniqueness of Christ? We then collected the narrative data from twelve graduate students during a one-week period using the question to obtain individual written reflections before conducting a focus group dialogue on the subject. Before deliberating and evaluating the findings, it is important to consider the definition of the key research terms, evangelical and millennial, as well as the teaching challenge before us.

Definition of Evangelical

Who are evangelicals? The British church historian, David W. Bebbington, gives four characteristics of evangelicals. First, conversion: the belief that lives need to be changed; second, activism: the expression of the gospel in effort, especially evangelism and missionary work; third, biblicism: giving special importance to the Bible; and lastly, crucicentrism: Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross is central.¹ Furthermore, John R.W. Stott identifies three theological constraints of evangelicals: the Gospel comes from God and not human ingenuity; the Gospel is Christological, biblical, historical, theological,

1 David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 2-17. Bebbington argues in his quadrilateral that evangelicalism began because of the Enlightenment.

apostolic, and personal; and the Gospel is effective because God himself revealed it.² Together these criteria offer guidelines for determining practices that we can identify as evangelical.

Definition of Millennial

First coining the term in their book *Generations*, historians Neil Howe and William Strauss described the generation born between 1980 and the early 2000s as millennials.³ Making up over a quarter of the population in the United States, the 2015 U.S. Census Report noted that the millennial generation, with 83.1 million people, now outnumber their parent's boomer generation (born between 1946 to 1964) of 75.4 million. Millennials are more diverse than any U.S. generation prior, with 44.2 percent identifying as part of a racial minority group, or ethnicity. They are the most educated generation, with 63 percent having attended or planning to attend college.⁴ In the workplace and in society, millennials are collaborative, accepting the rules and authority laid before them, while also choosing professions that bring a sense of meaning and purpose. A key distinguisher of the millennial generation is the emergence and use of technology. The impact of technology on this generation is already visible in its effect on popular culture, education, the workplace, and even mundane human interactions from dating to texting, Instagram, or gaming culture.

In the United States, millennials, ranging in age from seventeen to thirty-six, are a highly optimistic generation. More liberal than previous generations, millennials in the U.S. align more with the democratic party and socialist ideals than other generations, maintaining a strong concern for issues of justice and social responsibility. Much research remains to be conducted on the demographics of millennials globally, therefore, for the purposes of this study, we will use the above definition and generalized characteristics to describe millennials. Throughout the remainder of the chapter, we will employ these definitions of the expressions, evangelical and millennial.

2 John R.W. Stott, *Evangelical Truth: A Personal Plea to Unity, Integrity, and Faithfulness* (Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library, 2013), 1-18.

3 Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069* (New York: William Morrow, 1991). The authors explore the millennial generation in greater detail in their later book, Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York: Vintage, Random House, 2000).

4 "Millennials Outnumber Baby Boomers and Are Far More Diverse, Census Bureau Reports," *United States Census Bureau*, 2015, Retrieved January 6, 2018 from: <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2015/cb15-113.html>

The Teaching Challenge

Similar to the challenge of defining terms, there is a parallel complexity regarding how we approach teaching the unique role of Christ to millennials. We will demonstrate this by quoting several millennial student responses from a book review assignment that involved this topic. Although not connected to the study participants directly, we believe this data will help explain the shift in thinking regarding the centrality of Christ in the salvation story. The following remarks are from a “Perspectives in Global Outreach” mission course I (Robert) taught at Wheaton College over the last ten years. These millennial students in this course have had no association with the research cohort.

In a book review of Bruce Olson’s *For this Cross I will Kill You*,⁵ an undergraduate comments, “One of the chapters deals with the exclusive nature of Christianity. We (Christians), are right and going to heaven, and they (everyone else) are wrong and going to hell. I have a hard time rationalizing God condemning the billions of faithful followers of other religions around the world simply because they do not know that Christ died for their sins. This is a seemingly absurd act of God.” Another student supports these comments by continuing, “Devout people of other religions do not need to know Christ to be saved because that thought is not something they can discern from their position. I think that it is possible that not all practicing members of other religions will go to hell.”

The quotation from the next evangelical millennial draws on the character of Emeth in C.S. Lewis’ *The Last Battle* to whom Aslan (Lord Jesus) says, “You have been worshipping me all along; you just never knew it was me.” The undergraduate concludes from the lips of Aslan, “Pagans too can gain salvation. There is only one God: meaning that Muslims, American Indians, and African tribes all worship God. I think if God sees that they have followed the truth as much as they could know (such as Aslan saw in Emeth), then God may extend his grace to them even if they have not seen the saving works of Christ.”

Our last student summarizes the view of the majority of millennials in this review exercise regarding the saving work of Jesus. She contends,

The fairness of God would require that they [‘devoted non-Christians’], deep down, have some inkling of truth. How could they be judged for what they had no way of knowing? At death, would it be fair for them to immediately be judged for not having believed in Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior? I don’t think so! I believe that God is fair, and so,

5 Bruce Olson, *For This Cross I Will Kill You* (Carol Stream, IL: Creation House, 1973). Charisma House changed the title of the book to *Bruchko* in 1978.

I feel that whatever happens must somehow make it possible for people to simply make a choice between God's will and their own.

Over the past twenty years, the stalwart beliefs of millennial evangelical students at Wheaton College has dramatically shifted. I (Robert) believe that there are a number of internal causes that add to the external influencers of culture and post-modern worldview. Besides being immersed in a culture of tolerance posturing towards religious pluralism, there is also an internal Christian movement away from biblical inerrancy. This internal Christian movement is one of the major contributors towards millennials' theological change of belief.

Biblical literacy has plummeted among Christian millennials in the last twenty years.⁶ Bible professors at Wheaton College openly declare that incoming first year students have an appreciation of a few isolated scriptures in the New Testament, yet have little understanding as to how they are connected; and little to no awareness of any of the stories of the Old Testament. One of the prime reasons for this burgeoning dilemma is the practice of the Christian church to separate the Scriptures into ethical, moral, and theological bits and pieces; and then extract them from their original contexts to feed personal or cultural biases. This situation is so pervasive in Christianity that most readers of the Bible have little chance of grasping the overarching grand story.

This trend has escalated since the Reformation when the 1560 Geneva Bible divided the Protestant bible into chapters, verses, and study notes. With the history of a segmented biblical tradition, it is unsurprising that Christian young adults struggle with scriptural knowledge. Lacking a clear understanding of the bible, or life and ministry experience, young adults may easily default to society's metanarrative instead. Consequently, emerging adult Christians, who are in their late teens through to the early thirties, often have a small view of God, whose character mimics the fairness of our culture's tolerant-inspired message, rather than a Spirit-inspired illumination of God's person and attributes revealed in Scripture. In the following section, we will briefly examine three common approaches and four evangelical views of the argument, prior to analyzing the composition of the group and revealing the class' insights.

6 Glenn R. Paauw, *Saving the Bible From Ourselves: Learning to Read & Live the Bible Well* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2016), 12-17.

Three Common Approaches and Four Evangelical Views

What is the destiny of the unevangelized? The answer to this question creates a tension between two truths: the universality of God's love (John 3:16; 1 Timothy 2:4), and the particularity of salvation (John 3:18; Acts 4:12). From this tension, there arise two problem questions: what is the relationship of the two truths, and what happens to those who never hear about Jesus? The three common approaches to this set of questions are: exclusivism, where a person knows Jesus, and they know they know him; inclusivism, whereby an individual may know Jesus, yet not know that they know him; and pluralism, where a person does not know Jesus, and does not know that they do not know him.

In addition to the perception of these three common approaches, evangelical Christians can hold one of four views regarding the destiny of the unevangelized: restrictivists believe that there is no other name; universal opportunists claim that God does all he can do; postmortem evangelists argue that there is hope beyond the grave; and inclusivists contend that God is not without a witness.⁷

One week before starting the research, the class read and commented on two essays related to the subject: Lesslie Newbigin's "The Gospel and the Religions" and Charles E. Van Engen's "The Uniqueness of Christ in Mission Theology," both found in *Landmark Essays in Mission and World Christianity*.⁸ A student commented on Newbigin's article, "This chapter was very theological and interesting to read and digest. As someone who tends to fall on the inclusivism side of salvation, I appreciated how the author thoughtfully considered other ways of looking at interpreting Scripture and evangelism." Continuing, she contends with Van Engen's treatment, yet states, "The author does confirm one thing that we should all agree on—Christ is Lord, and there is only one God." Finally, a North American woman ponders, "I find it very odd that Newbigin is arguing against the exclusivist view that all who do not accept Christ are lost. I think the Bible is pretty clear about the fact that Jesus is the only way to God; the only way to eternal life." Thus, before the research began, the group had familiarity with some of the approaches and evangelical views concerning the question of the destiny of the unevangelized.

Composition of the Group

The students had enrolled in the course "Biblical Theology of Mission" in the M.A. (Intercultural Studies) program at Wheaton College Graduate

7 Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy, *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 197-213.

8 Robert L. Gallagher and Paul Hertig, eds., *Landmark Essays in Mission and World Christianity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009).

School in Chicagoland, and were composed of nine women and three men from seven nations (China [2 students], Indonesia [1], Japan [1], Philippines [1], South Korea [1], Taiwan [1], and the United States [5]). All the graduate students were millennial evangelicals with cross-cultural experience. Eight of the twelve members of the class had worked in China. At times, there was more Mandarin spoken during class breaks than English, not only from the two Chinese men, but also from several Caucasians who were fluent in the language.

The ministry among Chinese-speaking people varied from children's ministry in underground churches to leading Bible studies and youth camps, and teaching English as a second language. Other countries of missionary activity and the respective tasks conducted as mission were medical-dental assistance in Honduras; conducting business ventures and English classes in Indonesia; facilitating worship in churches from 50 to 4,000 people in Los Angeles; teaching Chinese and English in Myanmar; children and youth ministry and instructing English to refugees in South Korea; working as a radio broadcaster and caring for hearing-impaired children in Taiwan; and teaching at a girls' junior high and high school in Tokyo.

The class's future ministry desires ranged from three students planning to teach English in China and/or Taiwan; working in a Chinese family church; starting a children's ministry, and medical outreach in the western region of China; ministering with the Chinese diaspora in the United States; teaching English in a restricted-access country; conducting ESL classes in Chicago's Chinatown; running an intensive English program in Texas; founding a house-of-prayer ministry in the Los Angeles suburbs; working with university students and starting business enterprises in Indonesia; and teaching at a girls' junior high and high school in Japan.

The group's ministry call is exemplified in the following prayerful desires to: "practice biblical theology on the mission field and in the market place;" "be bold and open enough to commit myself to the Lord Christ;" "use the Bible to teach about God's love for different cultures;" "appreciate the privilege of being in God's service;" "serve God, and put him first above all things;" "know our God deeper and through a broader horizon;" "learn theological principles, and how to apply them in real life;" "be wise in what I have learned in my own life, being open to new ideas and perspectives, and in discernment regarding where God is leading me;" and "grow in Christ, and find effective ways of doing mission that I can bring to my ministry context."

In this study, the research group was composed of millennials sharing the values and attitude of their peers, as well as themselves. We (Luisa and Robert) embedded the distinctiveness of the essay's exploration and included elements

that considered the barriers of presenting Christ, together with the methods and approaches of discussing Christ with other millennials. As an Indonesian teacher contended in the focus discussion, “I need to present Jesus in a way that makes sense to this generation.”

We have based our research on the limited insights of a representative sample of evangelical millennial graduate students to gain initial perceptions of how to communicate Christ to millennials. The participants in this study were graduate students who chose the field of cross-cultural mission and ministry careers. Therefore, their motivation to participate in ministry may be led by a stronger understanding than an average evangelical millennial student of the preeminence of Christ and an evangelical theology that takes Christ’s exhortation to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20) to heart. A comparative may be drawn between this graduate group and the undergraduate responses from the students in the “Perspectives in Global Outreach” mission course over the past ten years. The graduate students participating in this study are not necessarily typical students at Wheaton, as many already have ministry experience abroad, and have committed to a life of ministry on behalf of Christ and his kingdom.

An additional limitation of this study is the international composition of the participants involved. Since this study includes seven students from East Asia and five from the United States, we are faced with the dilemma of how to interpret and generalize the findings. The theological, religious and philosophical worldview of the global participant group has the potential to be diverse. Yet, the international makeup of the group did not hinder this study, as many students were in alignment despite cultural backgrounds. In an increasingly global education context, the international makeup of this graduate class is more of a norm than an anomaly. Although showing signs of flattening, in the 2016-17 school year, the U.S. hosted over a million students, with an increase of three percent from the prior year.⁹ A benefit of the international makeup of the participants may make this study valuable not only for a North American higher education context which often includes international students, but also for a global teaching context.

The short essay responses of the twelve graduate student participants allowed us to view a broad cross-section of experiences from diverse ministry and educational backgrounds with a more limited representation provided by the focus group. We recognize that the analysis of the research will perhaps

9 “IIE Releases Open Doors 2017,” *IIE, The Power of International Education*, Retrieved data Jan. 12, 2018: <https://www.iie.org/Why-IIE/Announcements/2017-11-13-Open-Doors-Data>

have limited relevance beyond Wheaton College. Yet, we believe that the findings may provide principles of teaching on the topic of the uniqueness of Christ that could be helpful to the global Christian community.

Insights of the Group

The findings of the international group described in the previous segment, both in written essay and open sharing, revealed three supplementary insights: the values of millennials, perceptions of millennials, and barriers of presenting Christ. We will now share these results before elaborating on the methodology of teaching about Christ, and ways of enabling discussion of the Savior such as philosophical, comparative, and theological approaches.

Values of Millennials

The values of millennials that the group identified as important were: building trust through vulnerability, being authentic or true to oneself, sharing authentic struggles, serving locally and thus being effective globally, justice and compassion questions, care for everyone, and the view that relationships matter. Accordingly, as one of the Asian women explained in her consideration, the values of millennials should influence how people present Christ to them. She states,

This is Jesus, who loves everybody; who works in his community, yet brings a global effect; who fights for justice; who is for the marginalized as he comes to the world of sinners; he is also the One who wants to connect with this generation to help them with their struggles and sin. Bringing these topics and presenting related questions will be useful for teaching.

A male Caucasian provides further understanding of the values of millennials.

Having the ability to reach and teach a millennial is something that is very hard to do. One thing that I find millennials hold to high value is trust. Trust involves vulnerability and authenticity. What I mean by that is you must be vulnerable with them about yourself. If we are constantly preaching to them about sin and forgiveness, then as a teacher, you must have a testimony to show that in your life. With vulnerability comes discussion and openness. You will find that more and more millennials will feel more comfortable and safe sharing when you set a precedent. Secondly, authenticity involves being true to yourself. There is nothing more off-putting to a millennial than trying to be someone you are not. Millennials value uniqueness, and they want to see truth through you. If

they sense you are trying to be someone you are not, then they will lose that trust. Trust is the foundation of connecting with a millennial.

Perceptions of Millennials

The graduate class not only assessed the values of millennials, but also reviewed the millennials' perception towards presenting Christ as the only path of salvation. The group believed that millennials would skeptically consider such an attempt as arrogant and narrow-minded since, as many post-moderns, they do not consider truth to be absolute, and would even challenge the term "millennial" as being legitimate. One of the Chinese students brought together philosophical and theological considerations in observing his contemporaries. He notes,

One of my major mission fields is young adults in China. I think the millennials in China are quite critical, and in the meantime, they work very hard. They want to live a good life. So, I think one of the things that I can ask the class to do is to ask them to think about what is a good life. I am sure they have many good ideas. The next thing I would do is to see if they have any preconceptions about religions. I am sure many of them do. Because as far as I am concerned, some of them would look at religions when they have difficulties. Then I would like to ask them to talk about their perspective on religions to me, and try to connect these to the mighty power of Christ.

Barriers of Presenting Christ

In considering the barriers of presenting the uniqueness of Christ, the twelve students listed the following as negative millennial reactions that would serve as obstacles: reaction to conservatism, inclusivity leaning towards moral relativism, rules of religious legalism, and church hypocrisy that leads to an inauthentic lifestyle. The class observed that they had grown up with an increasing exposure to globalism, and various cultural and religious influences, and thus had to "wrestle with the uniqueness of Christ." Relativism had made it difficult to accept anything as uniquely true for fear of limiting alternate expressions of truth through the religions and cultural practices of others.

In the focus sharing, a student instructor explains her understanding of possible hindrances to teaching about Christ.

The format of the class should be approachable. When I teach, it is important to let them [millennials] know that I deal with real struggles too; being authentic when presenting myself helps my audience to know that I'm approachable. My personal journey of deciding that I need Christ for my salvation, accepting him as my Savior, and walking with him in ups and downs through the journey of my faith, are all important aspects to be open about.

Methodology of Teaching

Within the student focus group discussion concerning teaching methodology about Christ, seven women (Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and the United States) and four men (China and the United States) spoke of different means such as class discussions (open class [8 students] and small groups [4]), case studies (3), testimonies (2), individual reflection (2), readings (2), lecture (2), role-plays (1), simulations (1), videos (1), visual aids (1), and technology such as blog, live streaming, online forum, and Instagram (1). Students in the study primarily focused on relational teaching methodology, highlighting the millennial value on relationships.

Hence, conversations, both in open or group sessions, far outweighed any other teaching technique. Along these lines, a Chinese man in the focus dialogue suggested to connect personal experience with the message of the class by beginning with the teacher "telling their story about how they came to Christ. And then let the students discuss with a partner their experiences of knowing God and becoming a Christian." Supporting this teaching method, an Indonesian woman shared in the group, "With open discussions about Jesus, answer them based on the Bible, showing that Jesus connects to all humankind, showing [that] the need for salvation is real, [and] they [millennials] have a bigger purpose to impact the world. [These] are all themes I would like to have in my class."

Then followed in frequency, case studies ("from real everyday life of the young generation seeking the hope of salvation in Jesus") and testimonials ("bringing in millennials to ask him or her to share with the class"), which similarly provide occasions for sharing real struggles, talking about justice and compassion themes, and caring for everyone in the group. Relationships matter. A student suggested that in a more relational setting, "questions will arise to lead people to Jesus as the only way of salvation: Who is Jesus? What is his view of justice? What kind of love does he offer? What impact does he bring to humanity? Why does humankind need salvation? Why do I need salvation? How does Jesus help me through my individual struggles?"

Surprisingly, for a media astute age-bracket, technology played a lesser role as the vehicle of instruction, even though one student commented, “The millennial generation uses online and social media as a parameter to decide if something matters.” Videos, visual aids, blogs, Facebook, live streaming, online forums, Instagram, and Twitter were low or non-existent on the list, as were interactive prospects such as role-plays, simulations, and projects to share online. Of note, the format of communicating truth that teachers use in the majority of classrooms was equally low on the list: the lecture. This is an interesting point. Certain mediums of teaching, such as a lecture, do not necessarily provide openings for personal conversation that promote deeper relationships, or inspire trust through vulnerability and authenticity. According to the students in this study, the participatory modes are of greater value in teaching than less personal and interactive activities.

Approaches of Discussion

In the previous section, the twelve millennial participants in the study brought valuable exposure to the methodology of teaching. Moreover, they also shared multiple styles to approach the discussion of Christ as the only way to salvation. In the next part of the chapter, we will unfold the musings and conversation of the philosophical, comparative, and theological tactics of the group.

Philosophical Approach

Three female students (Japan, Taiwan, and the United States) and one male student (the United States) highlighted the need for a philosophical understanding of the teaching challenge. The male student reflected,

This discussion needs a prior discussion on truth and epistemology. Is there truth, and is it possible to know it? This would look different for Christians and non-Christians. I would take Christians to Jesus’ well-known statements that he is the truth, which those who do what he says build on a solid foundation, that to know him is eternal life. With non-Christians, I would start with the discussion of truth and ask the question: If what Jesus says is true, then what does that mean for us? In both cases, I would ask the Holy Spirit to give me the words to say, and the ears to listen (to him and them).

The Taiwanese woman struggled with the question of the final state of the non-Christian after death asking, “What happens to the non-Christian after death? I want to ask God so many questions such as what happened to the Gentiles after their death who were killed by Joshua. They didn’t even have a chance to listen to the gospel, and they were killed by the people of God.”

The Japanese student pondered the same question. "We are bound to become judges of that which God only knows. Many Christians like to argue. We like to prove our justice. Thus, we are often tempted to ask, 'What happens to the non-Christian after death?' However, only God has the answer. We have to draw a line between us and God." These colleagues confessed that they often found themselves looking at people and their actions, and thinking whether they will make it to heaven. They concluded that as Christians they needed not to judge others, whether or not God had saved them, but instead they needed to view everyone as equal in God's eyes.

The final student drew upon her apologetic training by maintaining, "I would use C.S. Lewis' famous 'liar, lunatic, Lord' argument—Jesus himself claimed to be God (which is backed by Scripture). If he is not who he said he was, then he is either a liar (and therefore not God, or someone whom we should follow), or a crazy person (again, therefore he wouldn't be God). Based on Scripture, the most reasonable explanation we have is that Jesus is God."

Comparative Approach

Five women and two men within the class (China [2 male students], Indonesia [1], Japan [1], South Korea [1], and the United States [2]) responded with a comparative-religion approach to the question prompt. The typical attitude towards this approach of the focus group is illustrated in a statement by a student from the United States.

I would compare Jesus to other religions to see how unique Christianity is compared to other religions. Jesus and world religions: cover the main religions, and how one finds salvation. Compare the teachings of Jesus versus the main leaders of the other religions. Reiterate that there is no other way to salvation than Jesus.

Continuing this line of argument, the Filipino female student declared within the focus group,

All humans, both Christians and non-Christians, are sinners. Only God's grace can forgive sins. Every person's faith, regardless of religion, reflects God's grace. As Christians, we should welcome all the signs of the grace of God at work in the lives of those who don't acknowledge Jesus as Lord. Christians should open a dialogue, and share stories about Jesus with other faiths, and cooperate with them in all projects that are in-line with a Christian's understanding of God's purposes.

Lastly, within the focus group, there was a repetition of the importance of cooperating with people of all faiths and ideologies, especially in projects, which are consistent with the purposes of God. Instead of focusing on the doctrinal differences, Christians could agree with people of other religions concerning the struggles for justice and freedom, even though the Christian's ultimate goal is different in many issues.

Theological Approach

By far the greater number of students used the theological approach: seven women (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and the United States) and two men (China and the United States). They cited several scriptures to inform millennials of Jesus in both the Old and New Testament: Deuteronomy 6:4; Mark 12:29; Luke 6-9; John 2:23-3:21; 14:6 (2 students); 17:2-3; Acts 4:12; and Romans 10:9; as well as general references to the prediction of Jesus in the First Testament compared to the promised fulfillment in the Second Testament (3); the Gospels (3); Romans (2); and the Book of Acts (1). The student who encouraged the reading of John 2:23-3:21 followed with eight discussion questions. For example, how does Jesus respond to Nicodemus (3:3)? What does it mean to be born again? And, according to this passage, is Jesus the only way to God, or are there other ways?

The focus group reiterated the importance of the biblical truths about Christ, relationship with God, and an understanding that culture should influence the way Christians present the Gospel for the unreached millennial to understand. This view combats the ethnocentricity of Western Christianity since it demands that we learn from every culture. In particular, one student noted that Acts and Romans “addresses the meeting of the Gospel with culture by showing the distinction between the two.” In this light, the Japanese woman comments on her cultural context,

I understand why many Japanese people think that Christianity is not their religion. For them, a religion is a trademark of who they are. I think that for many Japanese people, what they most fear are their ancestors. They want to be faithful to their ancestors. In this society, we often say, ‘Don’t make your ancestors upset.’ I believe [that] the truth, Christ’s love, and eternal hope can reach out to the Japanese people’s heart. However, at the same time, we need to understand the cultural context, and have the wisdom to share this good news.

She concludes that telling the truth—the story of the Bible—is the most powerful and ultimate message Christians can share with every one of every nation. Nothing can separate us from Christ’s love. Moreover, it is only this love that is authentic to every people group.

A North American woman expanded her theological views in her written answer by supposing that if she were to teach on the uniqueness of Christ she would begin by explaining about the Lord Jesus in the First Testament using verses that prelude to Christ's coming; and in so doing, emphasize the need of a Savior, and that God planned Jesus' coming to this world. Next, the masters' student would refer to Christ in the Second Testament by declaring the seven "I am" statements of Jesus in the Gospel of John, the death and resurrection of the Lord from the synoptic Gospels, and Paul's Gospel message in Romans.

Generally, the focus group said yes to God's grace and activity in the lives of non-Christians, agreeing that God plants "Easter eggs" (his witness) in different cultures that can be redeemed to reveal more of him. Separating salvation, however, from an explicit confession of Jesus as Lord was a genuine concern among many of the students. They appreciated the warning against trying to judge on earth who will go to heaven, and would not presume to give final pronouncement of anyone's eternal destiny. Yet, they believed that Christians should hold to the standard given in Scripture that if a person openly declares that Jesus is Lord and believes in their heart that God raised him from the dead, then God will save them.

Teaching Implications

We accomplished our research aim to understand and communicate the centrality and love of Christ to millennials by conducting a study, consisting of a focus group with twelve graduate male and female students, and an analysis of participants' written narratives. In the prior sections, we discussed the values and perceptions of millennials and possible barriers of presenting Christ. We also shared how participants would approach teaching about Christ, and the ways of enabling discussion about Christ such as philosophical, comparative, and theological approaches.

The main findings of this study reveal that in teaching millennials, the approach of faculty should be highly relational. Faculty, students, and those ministering with millennials should take an authentic and vulnerable approach, sharing personally, including, as a student instructor noted, the "ups and downs [of] the journey of [your] faith." In a culture that is saturated with inauthentic Facebook feeds, and image-conscious celebrities famous for being famous, there is real power in being vulnerable with each other. By highlighting spiritual struggles, and a need for Christ, faculty should approach the conversation humbly, and with an attitude that comes alongside the student. Once relationships have been built and trust has been established in a classroom setting, teachers may approach a discussion about Jesus as the only

way of salvation through various means. Individual discussions with students about the centrality of Christ should be led through building relationships, asking questions, and sharing of personal encounters with Christ.

In teaching pedagogy, there has been much discussion about creating safe and effective spaces for students in the classroom. Marcia Baxter Magdola lists four categories that promote inclusive classrooms: viewing students as capable participants with valuable experiences, providing students with reflective and analytical experiences leading to critical thinking, creating a community-learning atmosphere that inspires open dialogue, and encouraging students towards deeper levels of thinking.¹⁰ In the desire to create safe spaces in the classroom, we also need to challenge students to have difficult conversations, and encourage them to grow. Assignments should enhance complex thinking skills, addressing multiple perspectives and empathetic abilities.¹¹

In the classroom setting, three discussion approaches were highlighted: philosophical, comparative, and theological. The philosophical approach was not noted for being overwhelmingly convincing to millennials, while the comparative approach was deemed more helpful. Considering the intercultural makeup of the participant group, a comparative approach may be helpful in cross-cultural settings, or with student populations that are more diverse. Overwhelmingly, participants highlighted the inspiration of the theological approach. Considering that millennials often enter college as biblically illiterate, the affirmation of the theological approach by the student participants was a surprise. Through the reading and exploration of Scripture, however, Christ is readily revealed as the only way to salvation. The role of the Holy Spirit also serves as a teacher and guide in this learning process. Training students to think critically about how to engage in Scripture and how to dialogue with people of different beliefs is vital to the health of the church.

As our society and church is increasingly at odds with itself and the world, we need to train our students in how to approach relationships with convicted civility.¹² This view is not promoting relativism, yet holds the tension of having

10 Marcia B. Baxter Magolda "Teaching to promote holistic learning and development." In Marcia B. Baxter Magolda (Ed). "Linking student development, learning, and teaching," *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 82 (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2000), 88-98.

11 David Schoem, Sylvia Hurtado, Todd Sevig, Mark Chesler, & Stephen H. Sumida, "Intergroup dialogue: Democracy at work in theory and practice." In David Schoem and Sylvia Hurtado (Eds.), *Intergroup dialogue: Deliberative democracy in school, college, community, and workplace* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2001), 1-21.

12 For further information regarding convicted civility, read: Richard Mouw, *Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010).

real convictions, such as the exclusivity of salvation through Christ alone, with the respect offered towards other religions, beliefs, and ideas. In the classroom, teachers might also employ a dialogic approach. True dialogue provides room for open conversations, and allows for something new to be created. It is not an approach that tells people what to think, but instead teaches individuals how to explore and think critically, using theology, scripture, and logic. In this increasingly complex public arena, teachers might also direct students to look at the values that motivate them to do ministry and mission work. Millennial values of justice, compassion, and care for all, might be explored in alignment with Scripture, and God's own compassion and love of the poor and marginalized.

Conclusion

At Wheaton College, along with many evangelical liberal-arts campuses, we are faced with the task of teaching a population of students where many individuals are no longer convinced of the inerrancy of Scripture, or the central figure of Christ as the only means of salvation and eternal life. Our post-modern culture of tolerance and relativism has certainly influenced the church, and how many approach the topic of the exclusivity of Christ. Through relationship building, however, creating safe spaces in the classroom, and approaching difficult conversations with convicted civility, faculty can set the stage for open theological conversations about the role of Christ in Scripture.

In our churches and in places of learning, we must continue to engage students in the word of God, raising questions, and building students who are critical thinkers, able to adapt and teach others about the centrality of Christ. This question will continue to be of vital importance to the church, as the generation immediately following millennials, generation Z, or igen, will bring unique perspectives to the classroom, and the students we are now training will teach this new generation. It is our hope and our belief that with thoughtful dialogue and biblical exploration, students will continue to acknowledge and know Christ as Savior and Lord, to the glory of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

