

## BOOK REVIEW

### **Forged:** **Young Adults and the Renewal of the Church** by Austin Wofford Franklin, TN: Seedbed Publishing, 2022, 188 pages

*Forged: Young Adults and the Renewal of the Church* by Austin Wofford is an excellent source of insight regarding church ministry and leadership, particularly as it relates to the younger generations of Millennials and Generation Z in the church. Wofford recognizes the gap of disconnection and discontentment that exists between the church and these younger generations. Indeed, it is a gap that has been created through years of neglect from primarily the Baby Boomer generation. This neglect has had a profound impact on the church and has left many Millennials and Generation Z members hopeless, helpless, and relationally bankrupt. Therefore, Wofford offers real hope to the church and its members by underscoring the necessity of relationships that are solid and real, along with renewal that is possible and necessary. He views relationships as an element of human existence that “has been and always will be, at the core of human thriving” (34).

#### **Assessment**

Wofford’s premise is fundamentally optimistic. He maintains that “if we can wield the power of intimate community, then renewal could be right around the corner” (xviii). This idea of nurturing an intimate community is pervasive, as Wofford explains, emphasizes, and utilizes this concept throughout the book. He believes in the power of community as it relates to the church and, ultimately, the church in the world. It is a concept that he believes can eradicate the entire dynamic of disconnection and discontentment among the Millennial and Z generations. He openly suggests that “Interdependent Christian communities are thriving Christian communities. Christ is never more present than when we meet each other’s needs. Forged families serve each other and look out for one another’s needs” (59). Perhaps one of the greatest strengths of *Forged* is Wofford’s belief that change and renewal are attainable realities that only need to be understood and embraced. And perhaps this strength lies in the hands of every church member, no matter what age or status.

Furthermore, while *Forged* offers the reader hopeful and optimistic insights, it also tends to delve deeply into the dark caverns of isolation and despair, mindsets which may leave

a younger reader feeling ill-equipped to face life's journeys and battles. Such mindsets may be viewed as weaknesses in the book, as it gets very dark before the light begins to set in. For example, Wofford states, "The current cultural narrative reinforces the social trends that compel people into isolation. Emerging adults are sold a vision of life that requires them to live alone" (9). According to this statement, loneliness is the fault of one's environment and the social trends someone allows to lead, guide, and direct their life. Even though this statement is seemingly dark and discouraging, the reality of contemporary American culture is all too clear. It is one of darkness. It is one of isolation and despair. It does not take into consideration the necessity of healthy spiritual relationships. Indeed, the culture of individualism ignores the real need and purpose of good, solid, healthy relationships. This reality is even more pronounced in our (post)modern era.

## Critical Discussion

The church is forged to be a community of light-bearers. Those within the body of Christ are to bear the light of Christ before a fallen world that is entrenched in darkness (Matt. 5:14-16). Far too often, churches allow the norms of culture and the mandates of society to establish and dictate their purpose, focus, and practices. However, the true supremacy of Christ in the church must be unmistakable and should, therefore, become what defines and drives the church. Wofford underscores this idea by pointing to the influence of Westernized society, writing, "We are forced to find our identity in external things and in what we accomplish for ourselves. For example, the money we make, the brands we buy, the clothes we wear, etc. are all ways that we form our identity" (90).

*Forged* advocates reflecting Christ and overshadowing the influence of the world by promoting a lifestyle of complete surrender to Christ. In Jesus' day, a Jew who did not reject their family lifestyle could not follow Jesus. If a Jew converted and stayed in their family unit, they would be held captive to their old identity and lifestyle, with no real opportunity to follow Jesus (90). Therefore, *Forged* encourages a response of total commitment to the will, wisdom, and Word of Christ. Indeed, the book promotes the underlying truth that the only way real renewal in the church will be accomplished is if more and more people from every generation inside the church surrender to the complete and total lordship of Christ.

## Contribution to the Intersection of Sociology and Christianity

*Forged* contributes to the intersection of sociology and Christianity by encouraging and empowering the Millennial and Z generations to become more active in changing the dynamics of disconnection and discontentment. More specifically, the book encourages change primarily in the areas of identity and community. For instance, many young adults are building emotional

walls that are, in turn, creating emotional barriers. These walls isolate them from other and older generations that seek to engage with them somehow. Wofford insists that “the wall of identity blocks people from the church and one another” (4), and therefore these walls must be broken down so that freedom can ensue. Young adults must know who they are in Christ and seek to operate and function in such knowledge.

*Forged* also insists that church leaders take an active role in leading these generations towards renewal and freedom. Wofford believes that leaders must “empathize with today’s emerging adults” (5), as leaders who empathize will also inspire. Indeed, their empathy will inspire the Millennial and Z generations to tear down their social and emotional walls and seek Christ together with others. The hope is that by doing so, a real Christian community will emerge, grow, and prosper as Jesus intended.

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