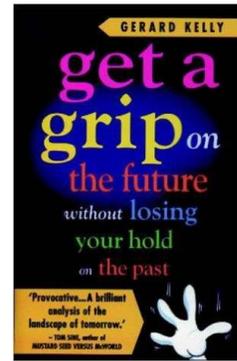


# Gerard Kelly: Get a grip on the future without losing your hold on the past

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Excellent, mindboggling introduction to where culture is going – sketch of a hi tech future and its implications. Plethora of references and quotes. Easy to read, too.

## **Introduction**

Spaghetti junction – we are caught up in the knots of a culture junction. Faith matters. Change demands a response. Fear is natural.

## **I. ROOT CHANGE; AN AGE OF SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION**

### **1. No small change**

'Excellence in schools' government paper 1997: 'at all levels society is undergoing massive economic, technological, social and political changes that challenge traditional values, beliefs and institutional arrangements.' 24

Peter Drucker: 'every few hundred years in W history there occurs a sharp transformation... Within a few short decades, society rearranges itself – its worldview; its basic values; its social and political structure; its arts; its key institutions. Fifty years later, there is a new world. And the people born then cannot even imagine the world in which their grandparents lived and into which their own parents were born. We are currently living through just such a transformation'. 25

The Tofflers in 60s sensed a paradox in the way technological change was affecting W society. It was supposed to be delivering an upbeat future of labour saving devices and consumer comforts, but instead it seemed to be producing an acceleration in the pace of life. Change is getting faster, and it is getting faster faster. And it is wider, geographically, socially, culturally. Socially – witness outpouring of public emotion in wake of death of Diana. These changes add up to a kind of cultural Millenopause\*, a 'change of life' producing a wide range of signs and symptoms and varying degrees of trauma.

### **2. Homo sapien**

*Our kids may be younger than us but they are also newer. They are the latest model of human being and are equipped with a whole lot of new features* – D Rushkoff

Generation X – b 1960-79. Label invented by Canadian novelist Douglas Copeland. For GenX, the world is not user friendly, the world is not simple, the world has no rules. They disregard rather than distrust authority. It's not that they don't care, it's that they don't listen to packaged programming any more. Difference between Boomer generation and Gen X marks a schism in cultural history; changes far deeper than just the 'generation gap'. G Cray: *Western culture is undergoing a fundamental shift. It is both a shift in the shape and organisation of society and the way people find their identity within it, and in the paradigm or world-view by which people make sense of society and make their decisions.* 43

Gen X are the key to understanding, and perhaps healing, the pain of the Western church. They are the icebreakers of the new world, the post-evangelicals.

Generation after them are the Millennials, b 80-99.

### **3. Seven seas of why**

*There is no lighthouse keeper. There is no lighthouse. There is no dry land. There are only people living on rafts made from their own imaginations. And there is the sea.* JD Crossan. This what the world now like; the new generations are different because a different world carries them; they are seaborne, and the assumptions of the landlocked no longer hold the power to inspire. They are already famous for their capacity to engage with the surface level of culture but move on before getting deep; in a flooded world, deep is dangerous. Preserving life means staying on the surface. Anathema to land dwellers, who put down roots.

The young are equipped for the environment they will meet; but they need help to read the maps they hold. The wisdom of the past without a vision of the future is irrelevant, but a vision of the future ignorant of the lessons of the past is irresponsible.

## II. ROOT CAUSES: THE 5 POSTS OF GENERATION X AND BEYOND

5 key changes make up the core of the culture junction.

### 5. *New tools, new rules – post-industrial technology*

*In acquiring new productive forces men change their mode of production; and in changing their mode of production, in changing the way of earning their living, they change all their social relations. The hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill, society with the industrial capitalist.* Marx.

Computer has replaced mechanism with information as the genetic code of our economy and culture.

GenX and beyond will be post-industrial in sense that:

- Technology drives change – influences economics, world of work, and thus lifestyle
- Role of machinery in shaping of society has been superseded
- Information processing replaces it
- Will shape not just economic activities but a whole range of social and cultural structures

Patterns of employment: knowledge workers replace machine workers. Digital technology is transforming society. Handy: we live in an 'age of unreason', where small breakthroughs have dramatic effects. One of the fastest revolutions in human history. Next – cyber optic fibrespace. Fibre optics will make information transmission instant, limitless, free. Result will be creation of cyberspace, a global Interopolis, a republic of information.

Next – ubiquitous computing, with microchips everywhere, in fridges (logs onto web with shopping list), ink (text printed into book format and refreshed from net), loos (analyse what lands in them and raise health concerns), contact lenses (that receive email)

### 5. *High-cyber diet*

*It is not only our material environment that is transformed by our machinery. We take our technology into the deepest recesses of our souls. Our view of reality, our structures of meaning, our sense of identity – all are touched and transformed by the technologies which we have allowed to mediate between ourselves and our world.* David Lochhead. 78

Key changes:

- The triumph of hyperchoice\*: what the industrial society has aspired to in terms of consumer choice, digital technology is at last able to deliver. 'I still haven't found what I'm looking for' is the mantra of the age. Will apply to churches too. Competition is now normative. The experience of buying has now become more important than the product bought, leading to the 'experiential consumer'; same true in leisure, relationships, religion. Loyalty is earned, not given. Everything is personalised.
- Asynchronous lifestyles and timestyles\*: industrial society was dependent on spatial and temporal synchronism. Digital technology is undoing this. Social interaction no longer requires geographical proximity or synchronous timing. 24/7 is the new norm. You are unlikely to live next door to someone who lives according to the same time style as you do. Means the end of Sunday mornings as the test of commitment, end of the one size fits all ministry.
- Migration from suburbia to cyberia: cyberia is the world inhabited by users of the internet. It is a real place, and people live there.

### 6. *Gutenberg and chips: post-literate communications*

Books to Internet like buckets to taps. Role of printed text is superseded; new cultural, educational, popular forms will emerge via digital technology, changing ways people learn, communicate. Post-literacy is fast replacing print as the dominant communications ethos: shift from word to image, transition from text to hypertext (non-linear thinking), and combination of word image and sound as multi-media information are key factors.

Characteristics of a post-literate age will be:

- Expansion of storage (encyclopaedias already more sold on CD than paper) and communications opportunities
- Speed and transience – info is disposable, because printed so easily; the authority of print is gone. *Print was designed to convey fact – solid, stable fact. Print could hold a proposition, freeze it so that it could be studied, dissected, verified. The electronic media were designed to convey news, information that moved so quickly that by the time it could be confirmed or denied, it was no longer news.* (D Lochhead)
- Multiplicity and diversity: the electronic media render words tactile, open to being grasped by the senses as much as by the intellect. The way we absorb information changes; with digital technology and interactive cable our behaviour is totally different from the past in the way we read text and images, the way we experience visual language.
- Interaction and response: internet provides the possibility of living not in an information age but in an interactive one in which the new media are simply devices through which we communicate with others.

Books are being transformed rather than displaced, released from their tedious duty as conveyor of information to become an object of pleasure [doubt that books will be jettisoned as conveyors of information]. Oral traditions will be re-evaluated; they were lost when print came to dominate our culture, as first lamented by Plato\* in Phaedrus. New social roles will arise, eg

information filter (ie researcher); education will be about learning to learn, acquiring new kinds of thinking quite different to the sedentary skills of reading and writing; moral issues will arise, because this is about people and communities, not just technology, and if we don't tackle them we will again see the tail of technology wagging the dog of society.

### **7. Screenagers\* in love: living with post-literate communication**

The Word became flesh, and the church has turned the flesh back into words – Tom Wright.

A screenager is a member of a new generation so impacted by the transition to post-literacy that image has already taken precedence over word. This will impact the way they communicate, the way they learn, the way they relate to the Bible. All key to church life. Hard for Protestantism, which can be described as 'the spirituality of print' (Lochhead). *We will need to rediscover the power of God's word outside of the power of text. This will demand that the Church recognise and embrace other forms of expression – not so much alternative truths as alternative means by which truth is accessed and understood.* 117 Recovering the power of story. 'Narrative evangelism' – the telling of God's story and its impact on our stories. Much of the Bible was story before it was anything else. Perhaps we need to give up thinking of it as book and regard it as tradition (Brueggemann, *The Bible makes sense*, 1997).

Recovering the language of community. Truth is not a product but an encounter. Screenage hunger for experience goes beyond the occasional intense feelings aroused by corporate worship; it is the longing for God day by day.

### **8. This is my truth, tell me yours – the postmodern world view**

Modernity – 1789-1989 (French revolution to Berlin wall) – Thomas Olden. Modernists (enlightenment) believed that science would answer all questions. Walsh and Middleton compared process of building of modernity to the building of a Babel-like tower. Foundation was reason; floor 1 was science; on it was built an increasing faith in the products of science (machines); a 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of technology. Floor 3 was wealth, economic progress, made by harnessing the machines. So: reason, science, technology, prosperity. They believed that by scientific investigation of the world, men would be able to acquire the technological power necessary to control nature and bring about the ultimate human goal: increased economic consumption and affluence, with resulting peace, fulfilment and security. The impact: *we have sold our young the wrong dream* (Tom Sine). What went wrong: reality stepped in – slavery, 2 world wars, communism, Nazism, nuclear bombs. People began to question the belief that the pursuit of reason, technology and science would make for a better world. That's postmodernity. Its characteristics:

- Pluralism replaces superiority of any single idea/creed
- Ambiguity replaces certainty and ambivalence replaces faith
- Coherent systems of meaning are replaced by fragmented mosaic patterns

If enthronement of reason in 1789 was the central act of modernity's birth, then the shift to postmodernity will raise questions about the place of reason in our lives. Postmodernity allows for existence of realities science cannot measure – the spiritual, the eternal, the ineffable, the numinous. Linear thinking gives way to juxtaposition. It rejects the progress myth in favour of pessimism. It replaces creed with community; networks hold people together, not beliefs. It rejects commitment in favour of choice and change; but this works against community and undermines the whole concept of self – life is about travelling not arriving, but experience, like bread, goes quickly stale.

### **9. Re-imagining the church: living with the postmodern world view**

*If Christianity cannot be inculturated successfully within the post-modern context, there will be no Western church.* Cray.

*How will you reach this post-modern generation – a generation that cannot conceive of objective truth, cannot follow your linear arguments, cannot tolerate anything (including evangelism) that smacks of religious intolerance?* KevinFord. 147

We need to hear the multiple stories of postmodernity, and see the Christian metanarrative as the means by which God is able to indwell and transform each. So becoming a Christian does not mean stepping out of our own local story into God's global epic; it means allowing God to walk with us in our story. He comes both in affirmation and in judgement of every culture, but he comes incarnate, in humility.

Reason vs intuition. Traditional apologetics relies on person realising their own belief structure does not square with reality. But this no longer works with Gen X – they want ambiguity, intuitive scope, emotional resonance. We need a reunification of the intellectual truth vs emotional experience camps.

Postmodernists realise technology isn't going to solve existential angst, but accept it may well provide better ways of escaping from it. They expect technology to be used to explore the experiential, the emotional and the intuitive.

In postmodernity, pain and brokenness rather than success will connect with others. Christians are beginning to see they need to re-emphasize relational community; Jimmy Long, *Generating hope*, IVP 1997. Friends are increasingly more important than

family. Process and journey are important, so no sudden conversions; diversity is important, and there are lots of churches out there.

'Postmodern are not looking for a set of propositions to assent to, they are looking for a place to live. If Christianity is to work for them, it must become their home, the place of security from which the world is explored and understood.'

### **10. The power of globfrag – the post-imperial world order**

'Jihad vs McWorld'. We are seeing globalisation and fragmentation at the same time. So mission can't be done with imperial values, and we must speak to generations which are swept up in globalisation, torn apart by fragmentation, and struggling for identity.

McDonalds – now in 94 countries on 5 continents, with 18000 restaurants.

Young people have more in common with their global peers than with the former generations of their own home cultures. In the church we still assume time to be continuous and space discontinuous, but it's the other way round.

### **11. Picking up the pieces – living in the post-imperial world**

Need to abandon Euro-centric theology. Jap Koyami: *God walks 'slowly' because he is love.. Love has its speed. It is an inner speed. It is a spiritual speed. It is a different kind of speed from the technological speed to which we are accustomed... It goes on in the depth of our life, whether we notice or not, whether we are currently hit by storm or not, at three miles an hour. It is the speed we walk and therefore it is the speed the love of God walks.*

Monocultural leadership produces blindness in a multicultural society. Youth culture – most young people share a sense of lostness; alienation is its fruit and advertainment the power that drives it. The glittering appeal of global culture draws the young away from any sense of tribal or family rootedness, but offers nothing of substance in its place. Aimed at stimulating the needs of the marketplace, at locating dissatisfaction and driving it home, advertainment is designed to disappoint. 177 The need for love is the one need that our culture most stimulates and least meets.

Gap between rich and poor, empowered and powerless. 1993 World Bank report: 10 children per 10,000 births dies before 5 in Ireland; 183 in sub-Saharan Africa; almost 1/3 in some African countries. Problem accentuated by tv – starving Albanians watch cat food served on silver trays on Italian commercial tv.

Decline of nuclear family. Insecurity of broken homes, yet children expected to achieve more.

Many young people are more drawn to physical service than to evangelism.

Gen X need emotional and spiritual support, being aware of own vulnerabilities; egalitarian view of leadership; experiential, with longing for deeper spirituality often unmet in traditional models; assumed to lack commitment but in fact capable of deep friendships and commitments.

### **12. Gods R Us – post-Christian spirituality**

Primary influence on popular spirituality is no longer orthodox Christianity. New emphasis on spirituality will shape the way individuals choose and express a faith, but will also impact the ways in which popular culture perceives and judges the Christian church. We have no idea how to do mission in the post-Christian west, 193. and yet young people are spiritually open as no other generation in living memory has been – Drane (*What is the New Age saying to the church*).

Impact of science – research in quantum physics and related fields has undermined confidence in the materialist/empirical worldview. Science has opened the door to the possibility of faith. Opportunity to repair damage of the split between science and religion in C17th. Sheldrake, Capra.

New Age. Began with Jung and Teilhard de Chardin.

But despite new spiritual openness, the church is generally seen as an integral part of the modernity this generation is rejecting. More; in many ways the emerging culture's exploration of spirituality is a reaction against traditional Christianity as it has been experienced in the West. New influences:

- Hinduism,
- Buddhism,
- ecology (environmental issues have spilled over into spirituality and become an issue of faith)
- primacy of personal experience. People have to *feel* it.
- necessity of a practical spirituality – it has to *work*. Propositional truth is no longer enough; and anyway often it has become the muttering of spiritual wallpaper. Seekers visiting a church need to be offered something to try out, not something to observe.

### **13. Karma-geddon: living with post-Christian spirituality**

Genuine spiritual searching – but how do we communicate the riches of our spiritual heritage to a generation not interested in being in communication with what churches do? The post-Christian spiritualities of the transitional generations threaten

many strongly held views of the C20th church – but many of the themes of those spiritualities are present in the church's history too.

We must remind ourselves that unless a grain of wheat dies, there is no harvest; and the C20th church must die. It has within it the genetic riches necessary for a bumper crop. By 2020 Gen X and beyond will constitute the entire working population of the western world. everyone under 60 who might or might not join your church at that date will be shaped by the Genx?Millennial experience. To consider how we might adapt isn't to think about youth work, it's to weigh up the very future of the church.

#### Alternative worship

There are groups responding, eg Late Late service in Glasgow, Grace in London, (NOS in Sheffield) – often highly technological, they create visual and participative worship, which creates and discovers new Christian rituals and which recaptures something of the ecological commitment inherent in the biblical narrative. They are a measure of the w church's potential for rebirth.

#### Rediscovery of Celtic faith

Love of nature, art, poetry, story as the primary means of learning, respect for role/ministry of women, rejection of boundary between sacred and secular, place for both personal and communal devotion, emphasis on experience of intimacy with God.

#### Inculturation theology

If church has been incarnated so deeply in the modern 'story', so it surely can be incarnated into other, premodern, cultures, and surely we can benefit from bits of that.

#### Post-charismatics

They embrace the emotional dimension of faith, using dance music and video technology and creating a worship experience built round the dynamic experience of the presence of God. Intuitive, creative, holistic, relational, they reject notion of church as institution and work instead through cells and small congregations, deeply committed to peer relationships and 24/7 spirituality. Russ Oliver and Interface events in S England.

## 111. ROOT GROWTH: RESOURCES FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF CHANGE

### ***14. Pillar to post***

We may feel out of control, but God doesn't. Do:

- investigate social change
- make space for personal change
- prioritise the young
- accept what you find
- champion hinge leaders (people with attachments in both cultures)
- take the plunge

Western church at beginning of new millennium has the choice to change or to die – Mike Riddell, *Threshold of the future*, SPCK 1998.

### ***15. Tsar wars – new models of leadership***

Controlling leadership, leadership forged in the certainties of modernity, fitted to the assembly-line routines of industrialism and built on the linear and literate thought processes of print technology, are alien to the young. Church needs to reform its understanding of leadership. Need for leaders to

1. Look, listen, learn
2. Inspire the imaginations of those you lead. *Christ came as a liberator. Christ understood that we as humans were for ever held to the ground by the pull of gravity – our ordinariness, our mediocrity – and it was through his example that he gave our imaginations the freedom to rise and fly* – Nick Cave.
3. Empower, don't dominate – servant leadership
4. Trust those you appoint, including their vision; delegate, be committed more to their success than to yours
5. Be more feminine; women are better at today's relational style of leadership.

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