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Contact: Kelly Hughes (312) 280-8126
kelly@dechanthughes.com

New Book Shows Next Generation Finds Church *unChristian*
Most Young Adults See Christians as Anti-Gay, Too Political, and Hypocritical, Says New Study

A generation of young Americans is rejecting a Christianity they perceive to be antihomosexual, too political, and hypocritical, according to a new study from the Barna Group. The findings, presented in a new book, reveal what Christianity looks like to people ages 16-29 outside the church. *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity...and Why It Matters* by David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons (Baker Books, \$17.99, October 2007) is a portrait of a faith and its followers perceived to be anything but Christlike.

The research included a series of interviews with those known as Busters (born 1965-1983) and Mosaics (born 1984-2002). They overwhelmingly hold negative perceptions of Christianity, including that Christians are:

- Antihomosexual:** Christians show contempt for gays and lesbians - “hating the sin *and* the sinner” as one respondent put it;
- Too political:** Christians are primarily motivated by a right-wing political agenda;
- Hypocritical:** Christians live lives that don’t match their stated beliefs;
- Insincere:** Christians are concerned only with collecting converts;
- Sheltered:** Christians are anti-intellectual, boring, and out of touch with reality.

These negative impressions have implications for a range of issues, from sex to politics. A majority of young adults view the involvement of conservative Christians in politics as a major problem. Homosexuality, on the other hand, is not a problem at all in their view. Attitudes about sexuality have shifted, with a wide majority of Mosaics and Busters accepting homosexuality, cohabitation, and premarital sex as legitimate choices. Even among young churchgoers, fewer than one-third believe that “homosexual lifestyles” are a problem.

In fact, Mosaic and Buster churchgoers share many of the same negative perceptions that their peers hold about their faith. Many reject using the word “Christian” to describe themselves and disassociate themselves from anything that uses the label.

The study’s implications for the church are staggering, the authors admit: a huge chunk of a new generation wants nothing to do with Christianity. The title of the book reflects their most common reaction: they think Christians are no longer what Jesus had in mind. Most troubling is that that perception of an *unChristian* faith is based in reality.

“Christians are known for what they stand against,” says Kinnaman, president of the Barna Group. “We are famous for what we oppose, rather than who we are for.”

“To outsiders, Christianity is more a brand than a faith,” says Gabe Lyons, who commissioned the study for the Fermi Project, a collective of church leaders driving forward a new way of being Christian in today’s culture. “It is a bad brand in the minds of tens of millions of people. It has come to represent hypocrisy, judgmentalism, anti-intellectualism, and bigotry. It’s easy to see why the next generation wants nothing to do with it.”

Kinnaman and Lyons offer practical ideas of how the church can be effective in a sophisticated, pluralistic society. They solicited the participation of over two dozen Christian leaders who are helping reshape the church’s image, including Rick Warren, Jim Wallis, Brian McLaren, Kevin Kelly (*Wired* magazine) and Jeff Johnson (BET producer). They offer their assessment of the problems and their thoughts about how Christians should respond.

The goal is not to become more popular, the authors say. Rather, the task is “simply for Christians to lead lives that reflect the message of Jesus, which over time naturally creates a more positive perception.”

unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks of Christianity...and Why It Matters

by David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons

Baker Books

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