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# **Desire and Longing in Conversion Process**

By  
Borbála Veronika Mikola

A Dissertation Submitted to  
the Faculty of Covenant Theological Seminary  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Ministry.

Saint Louis, Missouri

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Dr. Mark Ryan  
Faculty Advisor

---

Dr. Tasha Chapman  
Second Reader

---

Dr. Michael Goheen  
Third Reader

---

Dr. Joel Hathaway  
Director of DMin Program

---

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to explore how Hungarian Millennial new converts to Christianity connect longing to their conversion process. There is an essential need for the church to understand relevant and winsome ways to communicate the gospel in the Hungarian culture. The ministry of the church is situated within a society that is secular, materialistic, individualistic, and skeptical of religion and the transcendent. To engage the next generation well, the church needs to understand their needs.

This study utilized a qualitative design using semi-structured interviews with six native Hungarian Millennials who recently had converted to Christianity and had no previous Christian background. The assumption of this study was that new converts to Christianity have been motivated in different ways in their conversion process and learned important principles about what makes a Hungarian Millennial interested in exploring Christianity.

The literature review focused on three areas to help to understand this issue: human capacity of desire, longing, and love; the human desire and longing in the Bible; and the culture of Millennials in Hungary.

This study concluded that there was a unique gap in availability of religion teaching among Millennials when they were young. Their approach to Christianity is influenced by the post-communist heritage which ridicules religiosity, has materialistic worldview, and creates a unique post-communist individualism. Challenges for the Hungarian church in trying to reach Millennials with the gospel include Millennial prejudices, Buddhist romanticism, and a “God yes, church no” attitude. The Millennials can be engaged by a gospel response to their needs stemming from egocentrism and

meaninglessness, hollow values, disruption and lack of emotional self-regulation, and happiness-seeking.

To address these Millennial needs, discipleship should focus on the changing of affections. This study identified seven major implications for outreach: connect to people's desires, engage Millennials' unique needs pre-evangelistically, communicate meaningfully within their culture, ask good questions concerning their needs and listen well, present a bigger gospel than individual salvation with stories, respond to their assumptions about the church, and teaching about suffering in light of the hope of the God's redemptive story.

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## **Abbreviations**

RCH	The Reformed Church of Hungary (Magyarországi Református Egyház)
CRC	Church Revision Committee (Egyházi Jövőkép Bizottság)
ÁVO	The State Security Department (Államvédelmi Osztály)
ÁVH	State Security Office (Államvédelmi Hivatal)
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

What are relevant and winsome ways to communicate the gospel to Millennials and younger generations in the Hungarian culture? This question is of great concern for the Hungarian church. It is also crucial for the thriving of young adults both inside and outside the church, for the future of Hungarian society, and ultimately, for the sake of God's Kingdom.

I have been taking a lot of time to think about these questions! The changes are so tremendous in new generations that we can only muddle through and very slowly try out new things. This is not about methodology but a much deeper issue. We need a new theological approach.<sup>1</sup>

This was the instant answer from the Hungarian National Team Leader of Campus Crusade when he was asked about difficulties and changing tendencies they have experienced among high school and college students in Hungary.

### **Historical Background: Churches and Communism**

To understand the situation of the church in modern Hungary, one needs to go back to a time characterized by coercion and fear. Before the communist-socialist era (1949-1989), churches had the monopoly on value creation, education, teaching, ethical guidance, and general religious issues.<sup>2</sup> From this time to the end of the communism, there were only three denominations in Hungary, which will be referred to as “the church” in this chapter: Roman Catholic, Reformed, and Lutheran. In an agreement

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<sup>1</sup> László Baczynski, interview by author, Budapest, August 20, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Fazakas Sándor, *Új egyház felé?*, Dissertationes Theologicae 4 (Debrecen, 2000), 118.

between the State and the church in 1948, the Reformed Church of Hungary (RCH) received twenty years from the communist regime to disorganize slowly. The church as an institution was to have ceased by 1968.<sup>3</sup>

### *The Situation of the RCH under Communism*

The RCH first started to decline with the leadership changes under communism. From 1949, the State made the RCH choose leaders who were willing to cooperate in serving the ‘new world order’.<sup>4</sup> Communism meant that the totalitarian state controlled the church through the high-level leaders. Pastors who were reluctant or unwilling to serve the Party were terminated from ministry by forced resignation or show trial at best. Many were imprisoned and even tortured. The terror was real. The State Security Department (Államvédelmi Osztály, ÁVO), which later was renamed State Security Office (Államvédelmi Hivatal ÁVH), functioned as a political *gendarmerie*, and could act anywhere and anytime against those whom they regarded reactionaries: church members were reactionaries simply because they were attending church.<sup>5</sup> The State Security executed their tasks with selective cruelty.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Erzsébet Horváth, “A Református Iskolák Államosítása” (Habil diss., Debreceni Református Hittudományi Egyetem, 2010), 167, <https://docplayer.hu/68958656-A-reformatus-iskolak-allamositasa-habilitacios-ertekezes-egyhaztortenelembol-keszitetten-dr-horvath-erzsebet.html>.

<sup>4</sup> István Bogárdi Szabó, *Egyházvezetés és teológia a Magyarországi Református Egyházban 1948 és 1989 között*, Societas et Ecclesia 3 (Debrecen: Dózsa Nyomda, 1995), 25.

<sup>5</sup> Horváth, “Református Iskolák,” 15.

<sup>6</sup> Szilveszter Füsti-Molnár, *Ecclesia Sine Macula et Ruga: Donatist Factors Among the Ecclesiological Challenges for the Reformed Church of Hungary Especially After 1989/90* (Sárospatak: Sárospatak Reformed Theological Academy, 2008), 150, <http://real.mtak.hu/105739/>.

The withering of the RCH was also facilitated when the Party rendered church activities impossible and strove to punish church attendance. The country-wide and international State Security spy system, which used informants who reported regularly about their observations, was very effective. It was built into the churches as well. If there was insufficient information about a monitored person, the informants needed to “make friends” with them.<sup>7</sup> The system consciously built distrust into every area of life.

Pastors, churchgoers, and their children had a mark on their documentation that denounced them as reactionaries. They were prohibited from holding leadership positions or seeking higher education post high school. Religious gatherings and church retreats were qualified as anti-state reactions; only Sunday morning services in the church remained permissible.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, believers came together secretly in their homes for Bible reading and praying.

The intentions of the Communist Regime turned toward the physical means of the church. Following the “land reform” in 1948, the churches lost their lands without compensation.<sup>9</sup> The para-church associations were also eliminated, and their properties were taken away.<sup>10</sup>

Along with church and association properties, the “land reform” targeted the educational buildings as well. Religious education had formerly been regarded as one of

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<sup>7</sup> Füst-Molnár, 151.

<sup>8</sup> Horváth, “Református Iskolák,” 166; Füst-Molnár, *Ecclesia Sine Macula et Ruga*, 165.

<sup>9</sup> Horváth, “Református Iskolák,” 11–12.

<sup>10</sup> Fazakas, *Új egyház*, 86. (Associations as Bethánia Egylet, Református Evangélisták Közössége, Református Gyülekezeti Evangélizáció Baráti Társasága under the aegis of Hungarian Reformed Missional Association.)

the most important tasks of the church.<sup>11</sup> Church-owned educational institutions were nationalized: 3076 Roman Catholic and 1075 Reformed schools from preschools to universities. The church could not sustain itself, and this generated dependence on the state.<sup>12</sup>

The missional work and autonomy of local churches were pruned; beginning in the 1950s, the churches became implements of political goals. Former Bible schools and Sunday schools became the new avenues to propagate the curriculum of religious eradication. This was called “mission” and “catechesis”. The gospel proclamation among Jews, the primary group of non-Christians in Hungary, and mission abroad also stopped.<sup>13</sup>

Once Christian education and mission was removed from public life, the new communist era prioritized the spreading of an atheistic worldview and transformation of Christian society. Education became one of the main avenues where the communist ideology and comprehensive psychological terror were employed, from elementary schools to university level. The goal was to dissolve all religious convictions.<sup>14</sup>

As a result of communist takeover, the role and the scope of church operation in Hungary was egregiously reduced. The changes undermined the spiritual and moral

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<sup>11</sup> Füsti-Molnár, *Ecclesia Sine Macula et Ruga*, 144.

<sup>12</sup> Füsti-Molnár, 144.

<sup>13</sup> Fazakas, 96-99.

<sup>14</sup> Füsti-Molnár, *Ecclesia Sine Macula et Ruga*, 151–52.

prestige of the RCH.<sup>15</sup> The historical churches became marginalized and lost their revered status in society.

### *Theological Responses to Communism*

There was a quiet Christian revival after World War II in the RCH. The economic hardship and nearness of death during the War led many people to ask questions about God and his goodness. The para-church associations were the main instruments of pietistic evangelism, but their work affected the churches as well. For a short period of time, before the changes of the 1950s, mission and evangelism became the central activity of churches. They had proclamation weeks, family visitations, church services at home, and gatherings for newly converted Christians.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Theology of the “Servant Church”**

From the rise of communism in the 1950s on, freedom rapidly vanished for everyone, as well as for the churches, and evangelism vanished with it. The new situation evoked theological response. The characteristic theological utterances in the RCH marked out four distinguishable periods under the next forty years. The four periods, chronologically, are confrontation, marginalization, dialogue, and employment.<sup>17</sup> As the names of the periods imply, after initial resistance (confrontation) local congregations were suppressed (marginalization). The marginalization was so successful that the church

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<sup>15</sup> Fazakas, *Új egyház*, 113–15.

<sup>16</sup> Fazakas, 84–85.

<sup>17</sup> Bogárdi Szabó, *Egyházvezetés és teológia*, 22.

was no longer a powerful opponent (dialogue) and later, the state used the church for implementing its goals (employment).

The leadership changes of the 1950s brought church alignment with communist politics. The church and its theological work were not autonomous anymore. In 1958, new theological orientation was declared in the official theological periodical of the RCH when communism became the benchmark instead of the Christ event.<sup>18</sup> Bishop Albert Bereczky presented “The Theology of the Narrow Way”, which regarded the regime of communism as God’s liberating act of mercy.<sup>19</sup>

### **Era of Confrontation, Marginalization, and Dialogue**

The relationship between the church and the world became reversed. The self-identity of the church was no longer connected to its task to teach, to be the ever-growing mystical communion of the Head in the world, to manifest Christ’s grace in the sacraments, or to proclaim God’s message and the gospel. In the new model, the church became passive and subordinate to the world, a “servant church” (*szolgáló egyház*).<sup>20</sup> The aspect of serving, the mercy ministry, was not only emphasized but became the exclusive and total model for the church during the communist era.<sup>21</sup> Although there were many

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<sup>18</sup> Bogárdi Szabó, 27–28.

<sup>19</sup> Füsti-Molnár, *Ecclesia Sine Macula et Ruga*, 155.

<sup>20</sup> Bogárdi Szabó, *Egyházvezetés és teológia*, 29–52.

<sup>21</sup> Bogárdi Szabó, 90.



who expressed theological critique from the very beginning, the servant church idea remained the official theology of the Reformed Church of Hungary until the 1970s.<sup>22</sup>

The direction and the content of the gospel also changed. From the point of view of a servant church, the church should not proclaim the gospel outward to the world but rather inward. This doctrine distinguished two parts of the church. The *confessional church* was those who were “converted to Christ and the neighbor,” namely to communism. The other part, still needing conversion was the *folk church*.<sup>23</sup> The content of the “gospel” was the hope of communism which was proclaimed by the church as well.

At the time of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the underground yet growing resistance in the church critiqued the church leaders. In their Statement of Faith, they confessed that the church sinned when the leaders affirmed the former social order as God’s way. The collaborative leadership was ousted. However, after eighteen days of freedom from communism, the Soviet military intervened and suppressed the revolution and the fight for freedom. The communist dictatorship was reestablished, as well as the regime supporting church leadership. Most of the local congregations developed double lives: a public one for the church authorities and one for their personal spiritual lives.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Bogárdi Szabó, 119–21.

<sup>23</sup> Bogárdi Szabó, 162.

<sup>24</sup> Füst-Molnár, *Ecclesia Sine Macula et Ruga*, 161–63.

## **The Employment of the Church**

More than twenty years of ideological propaganda proved consequential. It was no longer necessary to keep strict political pressure on the church because its position was already weakened enough. The official church journals and scholarly periodicals were no longer censored.

By the 1970s, forced collectivism, the process of industrialization, and urbanization had exerted critical effect on society signified by a rise in family dissolution, corruption, crime, alcoholism, and suicide. The state decided to use the church to address these issues. The church took on mercy ministry outreach to addicts, physically handicapped and disabled people, and the Romani people.<sup>25</sup>

### *The Effect of Communism on the Church*

Opinions on Christianity in society and the purpose of mission in church had radically changed by the end of the Communist regime.

The systemic spread of an atheistic-materialist worldview ridiculed and suppressed religious convictions. The church became marginalized institutionally with “salami tactics”,<sup>26</sup> its influence was minimized, and its prophetic voice disappeared from society for decades. The collaboration of the church leadership with the State destroyed any established spiritual and moral prestige. Generations grew up prioritizing materialistic values and without the Christian gospel message. A majority now believe

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<sup>25</sup> Füsti-Molnár, 167.

<sup>26</sup> “salami tactics” – an expression for a divide and conquer process used to overcome opposition. Commonly believed that the term comes from Mátyás Rákosi, Stalinist dictator of Hungary in the late 1940s to describe the successful actions of the Communist Party in gaining complete power.

that there is no need for religion. A modern Hungarian evaluation of churches in society ranges from having cultural value to being parasites. Culturally, the brainwashing of communism had deep effects because most of Hungarian society remained without competitive cultural knowledge when the propaganda was removed with the change of political system.<sup>27</sup>

The Countrywide Reformed Mission Association (Országos Református Missziói Munkaközösség) was founded in 1948 to organize and help mission and make evangelism the essential task in local churches, in dioceses, and in educational circles. It was a major concern that mission pervade the whole church. However, by the end of the forty years of communism this focus became utterly suppressed.<sup>28</sup> As a consequence of secularization, the church was filled with apathy. The ill-working immune system of the church paralyzed all the well-intended efforts.

The future generations of pastors were separated in their training from the context of the academic world. There was no possibility to reach beyond the church's own walls, to do outreach, or even to teach the Gospel within the walls since there were informants. The church responded to communism with a survival attitude.<sup>29</sup>

Forty years of alignment with the oppressive regime caused the church to lose its identity and its rich heritage of Christology and ecclesiology. God was not seen as Lord, as Kyrios, and the reality that Christ is the head of his church was sacrificed to emphasize

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<sup>27</sup> Füsti-Molnár, *Ecclesia Sine Macula et Ruga*, 182.

<sup>28</sup> Fazakas, *Új egyház*, 100–102.

<sup>29</sup> Füsti-Molnár, *Ecclesia Sine Macula et Ruga*, 165–69; Füsti-Molnár, 210.

service to the world. The lack of facing secularization for decades erased any chance at theological preparedness when the regime fell.<sup>30</sup>

### *The Churches After the Fall of Communism*

Freedom and religious plurality followed the fall of communism, and people's interest turned toward religion. After forty years of suppression, the Hungarian churches – namely the three only existent denominations at that time: the Roman Catholic, the Reformed and the Lutheran – found themselves autonomous again.

The Hungarian Parliament legislated the Act of Freedom of Conscience and the Law of Religious Freedom in 1990, which separated the functioning of the State and the churches. The preamble of the Act of Freedom of Conscience recognized the special importance of the churches' roles in maintaining values and building communities in the society, in culture, in education, in public health care, and in cultivating the national self-consciousness.<sup>31</sup> This Act made it possible to found new religious communities in the country. Religious indifference and receptiveness for the transcendent were both present. Many new religions swept into the country, including Mormonism, Hare Krishna, Jehovah's Witness, and paganism with various forms of occult, black magic, and other superstitions. Christian revival also occurred in the Reformed Church of Hungary.<sup>32</sup> This revival did not have enough power to penetrate fully and reorganize the church in its

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<sup>30</sup> Füsti-Molnár, *Ecclesia Sine Macula et Ruga*, 169–70; Bogárdi Szabó, *Egyházvezetés és teológia*, 157–58.

<sup>31</sup> “A Lelkiismereti És Vallásszabadságról, Valamint Az Egyházakról,” Pub. L. No. IV., Magyar Köztársaság Hivatalos Lapja, Magyar Közlöny 12 (1990), <https://mkogy.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=99000004.TV>.

<sup>32</sup> Füsti-Molnár, *Ecclesia Sine Macula et Ruga*, 188.

practice and leadership, but it still had a significant impact.<sup>33</sup> After about ten years of openness and curiosity post-Communism, people largely became indifferent toward religion again.

### **Present Situation of Hungarian Christianity**

The result of the 2001 national census in Hungary, after the decade of openness to the West, showed 5.5 million Catholics (95% Roman and 5% Greek), 1.6 million Reformed, and 0.3 million Lutherans, out of a total population of 10.2 million. The Catholic, Reformed, and Lutheran denominations are the three historical Christian denominations in the country. There were very few other churches in the country in 2001. The next national census was held in 2011. It showed that all three historical Christian denominations in Hungary experienced a 30% decrease. Members of other Christian denominations totaled 0.1 million. The number of non-religious people increased from 1.5 to 1.8 million. One third of those identifying as non-religious have Reformed backgrounds in the generations before communism.<sup>34</sup> The number of those who did not answer about their religious convictions more than doubled from the previous census, such that the non-religious and non-reporting accounted for nearly half the country's population.<sup>35</sup> Many Christians would consider this data to be a significant warning to the churches.

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<sup>33</sup> Füst-Molnár, 256.

<sup>34</sup> I. Gábor Kovács, „Népegyház”– „Hitvalló egyház”, *misszió és hitvallásos iskola*, Societas et Ecclesia 7 (Budapest: Kalonda Bt., 2012), 11.

<sup>35</sup> “Központi Statisztikai Hivatal (Hungarian Central Bureau for Statistics) Census Result - Religion,” accessed August 19, 2021, [https://www.ksh.hu/nepszamlalas/tablak\\_vallas](https://www.ksh.hu/nepszamlalas/tablak_vallas).

## Failure of Mission in a Post-Communist Culture

When the end of communism came to the country, Hungarian Christianity faced the challenge of finding identity and voice in a secular, post-communist society. The number of those who declared themselves to belong to the Reformed tradition at the census was over a million, which indicated denominational identity rather than active membership. This shows possible sympathy for the RCH, but the mission even among these people identifying with the religion but not attending church has not proved to be successful since the political system changed.<sup>36</sup>

László Kósa, a Reformed presbyter and historian at a prestigious university in Budapest, named some reasons for the failure of mission in his article. He pointed out the misplaced strategy of the church, the alienating language and concepts for the majority, and the moral crises in almost every area of church life—crises in church leadership, finances, juridical systems, and church leaders' and members' personal lives.<sup>37</sup>

The church had not faced the past and reckoned with its responsibility and failures. Therefore, the fall of communism dawned on a church characterized by a missing self-identity and on a church lacking rigorous theology to make sense of its present and future purpose. The church continued the accustomed reflex of survival which led to spontaneous priorities and a lack of deliberate long-range planning.<sup>38</sup>

The lack of missional concept can be illustrated by the absence of theological publishing on mission up to today. Scholarly periodicals (*Confessio*, *Theologiai Szemle*,

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<sup>36</sup> Füsti-Molnár, *Ecclesia Sine Macula et Ruga*, 224–25.

<sup>37</sup> László Kósa, “Kilencszáz Szó Rólunk, Reformátusokról,” *Reformátusok Lapja* 44 (2000): 9.

<sup>38</sup> Füsti-Molnár, *Ecclesia Sine Macula et Ruga*, 246.

Studia, Sárospataki Füzetek, Református Szemle) are typically connected to the seminaries, which published more than two thousand articles in the last ten years. Topics of evangelism and mission are discussed in less than in ten articles, and the theme of understanding the present culture comes up in less than thirty articles. No Hungarian-authored books have been published on either topic.

## **A Systemic Attempt of Response in the Reformed Church of Hungary**

The warning signs of crises for Christianity started an initiative under the wing of the Reformed Church of Hungary between 2011 and 2014: the Church Revision Committee (CRC, Egyházi Jövőkép Bizottság). According to the Synodic Church Decree its purpose was to construct a recommendation for the church identifying theological directions for the church's future ministry based on theological study.<sup>39</sup> The vision statement provides insight into how the CRC described the present society and how they understood the task of the church.

Our main objective in the upcoming decades is that the Reformed Church in Hungary shall proclaim and demonstrate God's love, justice and grace in the changing Hungarian society struggling against secularization, individualism, and social tension. Therefore, our Church would like to be an ever renewing community through the service of its devoted, creative members and pastors (men and women) living out the Christian spirituality, an accepting community serving in unity and in ecumenical cooperation with other denominations.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Church Revision Committee, "Egyházi Jövőkép Bizottság," 2014, [https://reformatus.hu/english/documents-reports/?fbclid=IwAR07f7-aRVUC0Wqwkj2xL1xY\\_RkQIMysywiDQVcruuquEX8bFuvLJh6yK\\_k](https://reformatus.hu/english/documents-reports/?fbclid=IwAR07f7-aRVUC0Wqwkj2xL1xY_RkQIMysywiDQVcruuquEX8bFuvLJh6yK_k).

<sup>40</sup> Church Revision Committee, "Progress Report of the Church Revision Committee," 2014, [https://reformatus.hu/english/documents-reports/?fbclid=IwAR07f7-aRVUC0Wqwkj2xL1xY\\_RkQIMysywiDQVcruuquEX8bFuvLJh6yK\\_k](https://reformatus.hu/english/documents-reports/?fbclid=IwAR07f7-aRVUC0Wqwkj2xL1xY_RkQIMysywiDQVcruuquEX8bFuvLJh6yK_k).

The goal the CHC pointed out would have given both internal and external directives to the church: to nourish the followers of Christ as a community and mobilize them in new ways for the common good.

According to CHC, “the problem is not in someone else but in us.” They summed up the situation by listing the church’s threatening dangers. They named the following: alienation inside and outside, lack of love, insecurity in mission, lack of trust toward everyone, lack of solidarity toward each other, and lack of vision in community life. Their recommendation was to rediscover the calling and mission of the church, to create community approach, to proclaim and live the gospel, and to be caring brothers and sisters in local communities.

The CHC also formulated an action plan recommendation, naming nine different areas.<sup>41</sup> These areas included strengthening the missional identity in church communities, in pastoral trainings, in children and youth ministries, in church institutions and schools; providing counseling and training support for church leaders and members; making church members aware and active of the Christian mandate in work; systematic reform for facilitating more honesty, transparency, trust, and responsibility; and systematic reform for supporting church mission and effective operation.<sup>42</sup>

The CHC involved every church in the country with their questionnaire. It seemed that there was an intention to bring real change for the church, and their reports awoke hope and anticipation in those who wanted to do something but felt the need for support.

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<sup>41</sup> “Church Revision Committee: Documents & Reports,” Reformed Church of Hungary, accessed April 3, 2023, [http://reformatus.hu/english/documents-reports/?fbclid=IwAR07f7-aRVUC0Wqwkj2xL1xY\\_RkQIMysywiDQVcruuquEX8bFuvLJh6yK\\_k](http://reformatus.hu/english/documents-reports/?fbclid=IwAR07f7-aRVUC0Wqwkj2xL1xY_RkQIMysywiDQVcruuquEX8bFuvLJh6yK_k).

<sup>42</sup> Church Revision Committee, “Párbeszédben a jövővel - válaszok az egyházat fenyegető veszélyekre,” <http://regi.reformatus.hu/lap/ejb/mutat/8374/>.



Before they could affect the church more, the initiatives of CHC were shut down after a leadership change in the Reformed Church in 2014.

### **Training for Mission at the Seminaries**

There are four Reformed seminaries in Hungary, and there are two Hungarian Reformed seminaries outside the country: one in Slovakia and one in Transylvania. These are the accredited institutions that educate the future generation of pastors and teachers for the Reformed Church of Hungary. Only two seminaries teach missiology for one or two semesters (three credit hours, usually elective), and according to the course descriptions they have a biblical theological and historical focus. The publication dates of the literature they use range between the 1990s and early 2000s.<sup>43</sup> The seminary students gain insight into some missional practices through church ministries in their internship.

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<sup>43</sup> In Debrecen, missiology is taught in two semesters of three and three credits. According to the course description, its content has biblical and historical focus and students learn missiological paradigms – where the latest is from the modern era. They cover the concepts how missiology relates to ecclesiology, to soteriology, to social justice, to liberation theology, to ecumene, and to common priesthood. They spend time with understanding evangelism, enculturation, and contextualization. Béla Gonda, “Református Teológia 10 Féléves Osztatlan Mesterszak Tantárgyleírása 2020 - Missziológia,” June 26, 2020, 86, file:///C:/Users/Mikola%20Borb%C3%A11a/Downloads/tantargyleiras\_-\_teologia-lelkesz\_szak\_2020.pdf.

## **Purpose Statement**

Given this present situation, there is an essential need for the church to understand relevant and winsome ways to communicate the gospel in the Hungarian culture. The ministry of the church is situated within a society that is secular, materialistic, individualistic, and skeptical of religion and the transcendent. To engage the next generation, the church needs to understand their needs.

The purpose of this study was to explore how new Hungarian Millennial believers connect longing to their conversion process. The three main literature areas that help to understand this issue are: human capacity of desire, longing, and love, the human desire and longing in the Bible, and the culture of Millennials in Hungary.

## **Research Questions**

To examine the role longing has in the conversion process, the following research questions guided the qualitative research:

1. How do new Hungarian Millennial believers describe their longings before their conversion process?
2. In what ways do new Hungarian Millennial believers experience longings during their conversion process?
3. In what ways and to what extent do new Hungarian Millennial believers' longings before their conversion process compare to their longings during their conversion process?

## **Significance of the Study**

This study has significance for Christian outreach, the purpose of the church in culture, and the longevity of the church. Pastors and church members can benefit from the literature findings by grappling with a theology of the purpose of humanity and of the

church. This can help them in their spiritual life, in how they read and understand the Bible, and in how they pray. The qualitative findings can equip them with awareness about their own longings and desires, which can help them to fight against temptations and personal idols. Pastors and ministry leaders can prepare sermons and teachings that consider how people are motivated in the current culture. This in turn can lead to healthier, more self-aware, and more self-conscious Christian lives. Pastors and ministry leaders also can use the findings to help in counseling struggling believers.

The findings can be beneficial to the Reformed Church of Hungary to gain theological foundation for evangelism and outreach in the present culture. The church needs church leaders, professors, and trainers to equip new generations so that they can find new ways to do mission and outreach. Pastors and ministry leaders can find assistance in addressing those outside the church in their talks and sermons at funerals, weddings, and Sunday services. Everyday believers can be more equipped to witness about their Christian faith to their non-believer family members, friends, or colleagues.

### **Definition of Terms**

In this study, key terms are defined as follows:

**Biblical story** – The story of the Bible is the biblical story which begins with God’s creation and human rebellion. Through the history of Israel, it arrives at Jesus and continues with the period of the church. The whole story culminates in the coming kingdom of God. Christians believe that this is the true story of the whole world.

**Conversion process** – A process that leads someone to commit to following Christ. The starting point for the conversion process of the participants was defined as the point at which they became aware of their interest in Christianity, or the first meaningful

event in which they intentionally participated in a Christian activity, or a significant encounter with a Christian through whom they became interested in Christianity.

Desire – A feeling of wanting to have something or wishing for something to happen. Desire is the manifestation of love when its object is not present. Desires can be categorized as conscious or unconscious, and they are constituted and shaped by our contexts and culture, and guide our decisions and identity. In this research, desire is studied in a general sense as part of humanity and there is a focus on a particular subcategory of desire, in which its meaning correlates to the realm of transcendent. The transcendent human desire hopes to find ultimate significance, meaning, and goodness in life. In the latter use of the word “desire” the adjective “ultimate” is added to indicate the distinction.

Longing – The feeling of longing is a strong desire. It is a complex and not wholly conscious or explicit desire that remains over a long period of time, aimed at a distant and unknown future. The subject of longing might be unattainable. The researcher uses this word to describe a desire for big concepts, such as a longing for love or a longing for God or heaven.

Reformed – Reformed is a branch of Christianity that is based on the theological principles articulated by the sixteenth century church reformers, primarily John Calvin, Martin Luther, and their successors. The Reformed teachings are expressed in these formulas: Sola Scriptura, Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, Solus Christus, Soli Deo Gloria.

The Reformed Church of Hungary (RCH) – It was founded in 1567, when the Second Helvetic Confession (and later also the Heidelberg Catechism) was adopted as the

official confession of the church. It is part of the broad evangelical Reformed Christianity movement.

Ultimate – By use of the adjectives “ultimate,” “primary,” “core,” or “deepest,” the literature distinguishes between love, longing or desire in the general sense and love, longing and desiring in the transcendent sense. The adjectives are used in the latter sense.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to explore how new Hungarian Millennial believers connect longing to their conversion process.

Three particularly relevant areas of literature were reviewed to provide a foundation for qualitative research. These areas focus on the literature concerning the human capacity of desire, longing, and love, the human desire and longing in the Bible, and the culture of Millennials in Hungary.

#### The Human Capacity of Desire, Longing, and Love

Desire is a characteristic attribute of human existence. Humans are desiring creatures. The difficulty with the term “desire” is that there is no widely shared consensus about its meaning and “no standard inventory of experiences, realities, or relations to which the term refers.”<sup>44</sup> Frequently it used synonymously with other terms like longing, yearning, coveting, wanting, wishing, while these associations between them often have been little studied.<sup>45</sup> Desire implies a set of ideas that can be weak or strong, range from a mild wish to a yearning.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, it is used in various, discrete ways.

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<sup>44</sup> Roland A. Delattre, “Desire,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones, 2nd ed., (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference, 2005), 4:2303, <http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX3424500767/GVRL?sid=bookmark-GVRL&xid=13598f5d>.

<sup>45</sup> David Levinson, James J. Ponzetti, and Peter F. Jorgensen, eds., *Encyclopedia of Human Emotions* (New York, NY: Macmillan Reference USA, 1999), 184.

<sup>46</sup> James F. Childress and John Macquarrie, *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1986), 152–53, [http://archive.org/details/westminsterdicti0000unse\\_w4x0](http://archive.org/details/westminsterdicti0000unse_w4x0).

In this research, the researcher's focus is on a particular subcategory of desire, in which its meaning correlates to the realm of transcendent. Therefore, desire, longing, and love are studied together.

### *Definition and Use of Desire, Longing, and Love*

Desire is viewed as a conscious motivational state<sup>47</sup> and identified as a volitional term with connotations of willing, wanting, and wishing, choice and appetite, inspiration and motivation, and even intention.<sup>48</sup> Frequently, desire is understood as an emotional or affectional term meaning feeling, passion, love, eros (and eroticism), attachment, craving, yearning, greed, or lust. Outside of specific sexual connotation, it is defined as a strong emotions of wanting something<sup>49</sup> or of aspiring to have or to do something.<sup>50</sup> Desire is connected to mental imagery<sup>51</sup> and it is about a state of attachment to something or someone.<sup>52</sup> Desires can be conscious or unconscious, and both influence our decisions, actions, and identity. They are not solely individually created but are “intersubjectively

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<sup>47</sup> Levinson, Ponzetti, and Jorgensen, *Encyclopedia of Human Emotions*, 184.

<sup>48</sup> Delattre, “Desire,” 2003.

<sup>49</sup> “Desire,” accessed August 16, 2022, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/desire>.

<sup>50</sup> “Desire,” accessed August 16, 2022, [https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/desire\\_1](https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/desire_1).

<sup>51</sup> Jackie Andrade, Jon May, and D. K. Kavanagh, “Conscious and Unconscious Processes in Human Desire,” *Psyche* 15, no. 2 (2008): 84.

<sup>52</sup> Lauren Berlant, ed., *Desire/Love* (Brooklyn, NY: Punctum Books, 2012), 6, <https://doi.org/10.21983/P3.0015.1.00>.

constituted and shaped by our social, historical, political, institutional, and economic contexts.”<sup>53</sup>

According to dictionaries, longing is a feeling of wanting something or someone. Cambridge Dictionary<sup>54</sup>, Macmillan<sup>55</sup>, and Merriam and Webster<sup>56</sup> point out that the feeling of longing is a strong desire; Merriam and Webster and Collins<sup>57</sup> add that the subject of longing might be unattainable for the person with the longing. Collins also categorizes it as a sad and unwanted feeling. General synonyms are desire and wish. Some synonyms of longing are connected to bodily needs, such as appetite, hunger, thirst, and itch. Others synonyms emphasize an intensity of feeling, such as burning, urge, drive, craving, and passion. Synonyms of longing may also imply passivity, such as yearning, yen, pining, dreaming, and hankering.

Love is a complex yet fundamental emotion. According to dictionaries, it means to like or to enjoy something or someone very much,<sup>58</sup> to have strong feelings of liking a person, or to be very strongly attached to someone in an emotional and sexual way.<sup>59</sup> It

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<sup>53</sup> Suhanthie Motha and Angel Lin, “‘Non-Coercive Rearrangements’: Theorizing Desire in TESOL,” *TESOL Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (2014): 331, <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.126>.

<sup>54</sup> “Longing,” in *Cambridge Dictionary*, accessed November 28, 2021, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/longing>.

<sup>55</sup> “Longing,” in *Macmillan Dictionary*, accessed November 28, 2021, [https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/longing\\_1](https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/longing_1).

<sup>56</sup> George Merriam and Charles Webster, “Longing,” in *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (Springfield, MA), accessed November 28, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/longing>.

<sup>57</sup> “Longing,” in *Collins English Dictionary*, accessed November 28, 2021, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/longing>.

<sup>58</sup> “Love,” in *Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/love>.

<sup>59</sup> “Love,” in *Macmillan Dictionary*, accessed August 16, 2022, [https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/love\\_1](https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/love_1).



comprises “strong affection, feelings of tenderness, pleasurable sensations in the presence of the love object, and devotion to the well-being of the loved one.”<sup>60</sup> In relational context, psychology describes love as the opposite of isolation, “the embracing dream in which desire is reciprocated.”<sup>61</sup> Psychology specifies three basic components of love: passion like sexual desire, intimacy, and commitment with the intention to maintain the relationship.<sup>62</sup>

### **The Ethical and Psychological Approaches to Desire, Longing, and Love**

The ethical approach explains the connection between desire, longing, and love as the following: “love would manifest as delight, reverence, and adoration, when its object is present, and as desire and quest when its object is not present.”<sup>63</sup> This ethical perspective also promotes reverence and adoration as a significant link to the concept of love, both of which are components of worship.<sup>64</sup>

Desire, longing, and love have an object. The notion is linked to a purposeful striving toward attainment of the object of desire. The ethical approach makes distinction between the object of love when it is present and when it is absent. “Delight, reverence

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<sup>60</sup> Gary R. VandenBos, ed., *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2015), 612.

<sup>61</sup> Berlant, *Desire/Love*, 7.

<sup>62</sup> Andrew M. Colman, *A Dictionary of Psychology*, 4th ed., Oxford Paperback Reference (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015), 431.

<sup>63</sup> Paul A. B. Clarke and Andrew Linzey, eds., *Dictionary of Ethics, Theology and Society* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996), 534–35.

<sup>64</sup> Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 1300; T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, eds., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 856, <https://www.ivpress.com/new-dictionary-of-biblical-theology>.

and adoration” are the manifestation of love when its object is present, and “desire and quest” when its object is not present.<sup>65</sup>

According to the psychological approach, desire has two components: a strong action related component and an anticipated pleasure, promises projected onto the object – both are based on belief. The person should believe that the action will result in success, and if the desired object is obtained it must result in pleasure. Studies separated four overlapping categories as objects of desire: (1) objects that increase control of the individual’s fate, (2) abstract states that often reflect the individual’s principles and values, (3) interpersonal objects and the variety of events and states associated with them, (4) sex.<sup>66</sup>

### **The Religious and Philosophical Approaches to Desire, Longing, and Love**

Desire and longing have negative connotations in some religions and philosophical approaches. Buddhism holds that desire is a principal manifestation of the selfish craving which leads to disappointment, unhappiness, pain, and sorrow.<sup>67</sup> Hinduism regards desire as one of “the threefold gate of Hell that leads to the ruin of the soul”, and Daoism considers freedom from desires essential to the Way.<sup>68</sup> The Eastern religious approaches are generally negative with regard to desire. Sometimes the term is

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<sup>65</sup> Clarke and Linzey, *Dictionary of Ethics, Theology and Society*, 534–35.

<sup>66</sup> Levinson, Ponzetti, and Jorgensen, *Encyclopedia of Human Emotions*, 185.

<sup>67</sup> Luis O. Gómez, “Desire,” in *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, ed. Robert E. Buswell Jr., vol. 1 (New York, NY: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), 214, <http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX3402600122/GVRL?sid=bookmark-GVRL&xid=964a3c89>.

<sup>68</sup> Delattre, “Desire,” 2304–7.

simply equated with sinful sexual lust and is therefore regarded as something humans need to fight against.<sup>69</sup>

The Western concepts are generally more positive on desire. The ideas of theologian John Calvin illustrate that well. As he puts it, there are “irregular desires” or “inordinate desires of the flesh”, that are sinful and are contrasted with “those desires which God implanted so deeply” in human nature “that they cannot be eradicated from it without destroying humanity itself.”<sup>70</sup> Humans are responsible for the kind of desire served. The human heart is “an embattled kingdom ruled either by one kind of desire or by another kind. Our desires are not a given, but a fundamental choice.”<sup>71</sup>

### *Anthropology: The Human Capacity of Desire, Longing, and Love*

Desire, longing, and love refers to a human capacity which is fundamental and gives a background to human personality, decisions, passion, and how people live their lives. It is widely understood that humans are essentially “embodied agents of desire or love.”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Felker B. Jones, “Desire,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2017), <https://search-credoreference-com.search.covenantseminary.edu/content/entry/bpgugxt/desire/0>.

<sup>70</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Tyndale House Publishers, 2008), 470–72. 3.3.2

<sup>71</sup> David Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition Through the Lens of Scripture*, 1st ed. (Phillipsburg, N.J: P & R Publishing, 2003), 145–62.

<sup>72</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 47.

## Desiring is Human

According to the theological approach, desiring is human. Humans are created to be image-bearers of the One who is love (1 John 4:8), and human createdness reflects the Creator's image when humans' core is connected to love. Humans are created to be oriented to the world by the primacy of love. Desires are centrally located in love and people are "primordially and essentially agents of love, which takes the structure of desire and longing."<sup>73</sup>

Desire and longing are not only central to humanity, they are innate. Psychiatrist Curt Thompson points out, from a neuroscientist's point of view, how desire begins at birth. He makes a distinction between desires that come from the human embodied reality and the emotional one. Both are significant and constant throughout human life. The emotional desire begins from childhood with the desire for nurture. It is "mediated both interpersonally and neurobiologically—that is, it is felt, sensed, and acted on in our relationships with others and within our own brains. These early longings form the hard deck upon which others stand as a child matures."<sup>74</sup>

Desire is central, innate, and ceaseless. The human heart is a desire factory, a well that "pumps out desire after desire for a happier future."<sup>75</sup> Desires that are connected with

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<sup>73</sup> Curt Thompson, *The Soul of Desire: Discovering the Neuroscience of Longing, Beauty, and Community* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2021), 10; Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 50.

<sup>74</sup> Curt Thompson, *The Soul of Desire*, 10.

<sup>75</sup> John Piper, *The Purifying Power of Living by Faith in Future Grace* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Press, 1995), 277–78, [http://archive.org/details/isbn\\_9781576733370](http://archive.org/details/isbn_9781576733370).

the transcendent spring from what someone loves above all else. “We are people of desire. We want things. We long for things. It is primal to our nature to yearn.”<sup>76</sup>

### **Ultimate Desire and Identity**

To distinguish everyday, ordinary desires from the deep-seated, all-pervading, all-determining love and desire, the adjectives *ultimate*, *primary*, or *core* will be used, following the literature word use. Every person’s ultimate love defines their central identity.<sup>77</sup> This central identity has two areas: the present conception of the self and the future hoped self. “My core identity involves my deepest desires about who I am and who I long to be.”<sup>78</sup> This deepest desire shapes the human personality.

When someone wrestles with the question of what kind of person they want to be, their reflection will reveal their deepest desires. This core desire appears through the choices, habits, and patterns of life that a person has. There is no choice which is independent from the other ones. They are all connected to the ultimate love, the core desire forming and influencing human identity.<sup>79</sup> The ultimate desire is the one that “shapes and positions and makes sense of our penultimate desires and actions.”<sup>80</sup> This ultimate desire is fundamentally religious; the ultimate love is what a person worships.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Curt Thompson, *The Soul of Desire*, 10.

<sup>77</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 51.

<sup>78</sup> Gregory E. Ganssle, *Our Deepest Desires: How the Christian Story Fulfills Human Aspirations* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 105.

<sup>79</sup> Ganssle, 3–4.

<sup>80</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 51.

<sup>81</sup> Smith, 27.

## The Object of the Ultimate Desire

Many thinkers have attempted to describe the object of this ultimate love, ultimate desire. The most general way they speak about this phenomenon is that the object of ultimate love, ultimate desire is a vision of a way of life. This vision of life can be specified with adjectives like “good life”, or “full and rewarding life,”<sup>82</sup> or “life at proper human potential.”<sup>83</sup> Because the idea is complex, sometimes combinations of expressions are used, like being “healthy, happy, and fulfilled”<sup>84</sup>, or feeling “alive”<sup>85</sup>.

Another expression for the object of ultimate desire is happiness. The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, in his work *Nicomachean Ethics*, presents his theory that the ultimate human desire is happiness.

What is the highest of all goods that action can achieve? As far as the name goes, we may almost say that the great majority of mankind are agreed about this; for both the multitude and persons of refinement speak of it as happiness, and conceive ‘the good life’ or ‘doing well’ to be the same thing as ‘being happy’.<sup>86</sup>

The Greek word eudaimonia (εὐδαιμονία), the condition of ‘good spirit’, is translated to happiness. According to Aristotle, the seeking of happiness is true for every person irrespective of social status because everybody wants to live a life that is good and

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<sup>82</sup> Ganssle, *Our Deepest Desires*, 105.

<sup>83</sup> David John Atkinson et al., eds., *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics & Pastoral Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 881.

<sup>84</sup> C. Cloninger, “What Makes People Healthy, Happy, and Fulfilled in the Face of Current World Challenges?,” *Mens Sana Monographs* 11, no. 1 (January 2013): 16, <https://doi.org/10.4103/0973-1229.109288>.

<sup>85</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions and Enchiridion* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1955), 219, <http://archive.org/details/augustineconfess0000augu.10.20>

<sup>86</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Harris Rachman, Loeb Classical Library [Greek Authors] (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 11. I.iv.2

can be described as happy. To achieve this goal, a human can be described as a rational, acting, happiness-seeking agent.<sup>87</sup>

Recent literature uses happiness to mean subjective well-being.<sup>88</sup>

### *The Source of Happiness*

Naturally, the question arises, “what brings happiness?”. According to Aristotle, happiness is about the perfection of human nature. Happiness is the enrichment of human life by achieving all the goods — health, wealth, knowledge, friends, etc. — through the course of a whole lifetime.

Now we come to happiness, which we all declare to be, and which seems in fact to be, the final good and the most complete thing, and this we maintain to be identical with doing well and living well. Being happy, then, and happiness, consists in living well, and living well is living in accordance with the virtues.<sup>89</sup>

In antiquity and in the Middle Ages, the source for happiness was considered internal, since happiness was reckoned achievable through practicing virtues. Next to the pagan cardinal virtues of antiquity adapted by the medieval Christian tradition (wisdom, fortitude, temperance, and justice) –, the so-called theological virtues (faith, love, and hope) formed the seven cardinal virtues. Virtues were defined as a set of independent traits which, if they were practiced, led to ideally lived human life and proper human potential.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Atkinson et al., *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics & Pastoral Theology*, 881.

<sup>88</sup> John Helliwell, Richard Layard, and Jeffrey Sachs, “World Happiness Report 2017,” *Happiness and Subjective Well-Being*, 2017, 9.

<sup>89</sup> Aristotle, *Magna Moralia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1915), 1184 b 3, <http://archive.org/details/magnamoralia00arisuoft>.

<sup>90</sup> Atkinson et al., *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics & Pastoral Theology*, 881.

The ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus was the representative of the hedonistic, materialistic point of view. Epicurus identified happiness with the life of pleasure and the avoidance of pain and distress.<sup>91</sup> The path to attaining a happy life, eudaimonia, is not about seeking instant gratification but about long-term perspective.

The church father Augustine had a different approach when he defined happiness as seeking God. His key to happiness is relational and specifically lies in a relationship with the Creator who is the source of life and every goodness. In his work, *Confession*, he reveals that seeking happiness is indeed seeking God, and the source of true happiness is rejoicing in God. This makes the soul alive.

How, then, do I seek thee, O Lord? For when I seek thee, my God, I seek a happy life. I will seek thee that my soul may live.<sup>92</sup>

The happy life is this —to rejoice to thee, in thee, and for thee. This it is and there is no other. But those who think there is another follow after other joys, and not the true one.<sup>93</sup>

His ideas became so influential on the Christian church in the following centuries that it is worth close examination.

### *Factors Determining Happiness in the Present Day*

When it comes to happiness, for over a decade now, official research has been measuring happiness internationally. The World Happiness Report is an annual report from 2012 based on the Gallup World Poll. Its central purpose is to survey the science of

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<sup>91</sup> Epicurus, *Epicurus Reader*, trans. Brad Inwood and Lloyd P. Gerson (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1994), Diogenes Laertius 2.88, <https://www.scribd.com/document/461684391/Epicurus-Reader-Epicurus-Inwood-Brad-Gerson-pdf>.

<sup>92</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions and Enchiridion*, 219. 10.20

<sup>93</sup> Augustine of Hippo, 221 10.22.



measuring and understanding subjective well-being. From 2017, the report explores more deeply the social foundations of happiness. The measure of happiness they used is based on the individuals' evaluation of their own life satisfaction, ranging from the best possible life for them to the worst possible life for them. Six key variables contribute to explain the result scores: GDP per capita, healthy life expectancy, social support, social freedom, generosity, and absence of corruption.<sup>94</sup>

When Gallup studied the different factors determining happiness for an adult person, they found that economic situation (income, education, and employment), social situation (have a partner, involved in crime), and personal health (physical and mental) are all partly influenced by childhood development (intellectual, behavioral, and emotional), which in turn depends on family and schooling.<sup>95</sup>

The World Happiness Report uses the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) guidelines for measuring subjective well-being as of 2013. The OECD guidelines were produced under the OECD's Better Life Initiatives which aimed "to measure societies' progress across eleven domains of well-being, ranging from income, jobs, health, skills and housing, through to civic engagement and the environment."<sup>96</sup> Their definition on subjective well-being is "Good mental states, including all of the various evaluations, positive and negative, that people make of their lives and the affective reactions of people to their experiences." They use subjective well-being with a wider range of concepts than just subjective happiness. Their definition of

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<sup>94</sup> Helliwell, Layard, and Sachs, "World Happiness Report 2017," 9.

<sup>95</sup> Helliwell, Layard, and Sachs, 127–28.

<sup>96</sup> "OECD Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-Being," *Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development*, 2013, 5, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264191655-en>.

subjective well-being encompasses three elements: (1) Life evaluation – a reflective assessment on a person’s life or some specific aspect of it. (2) Affect – a person’s feelings or emotional states, typically measured with reference to a particular point in time. (3) Eudaimonia – a sense of meaning and purpose in life, or good psychological functioning.<sup>97</sup>

### *Augustine on Desire, Longing and Love*

The 4<sup>th</sup> century church father Augustine’s ideas on desire and love became guidelines for the Christian church. He would argue that the most fundamental way people relate to the world is love. Love is the basic force that drives all human beings. Jesus’s summary of the Great commandments, love your God and love your neighbor, is the beacon-light of life. In his book, *Teaching Christianity*, he reflects on how the love of God should be put first “indicating that everything else is to converge on it.”<sup>98</sup> God is the only proper object of love of one’s whole heart; other things, though worthy of love, “should be loved only in their relation to God as made by God, loved by God, and ordered to God.”<sup>99</sup>

Augustine sees and evaluates everything from this point of view. Humans are to love God, and thus love is the primal indicator of human quality. “For when there is a question as to whether a man is good, one does not ask what he believes, or what he

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<sup>97</sup> “OECD Guidelines,” 10.

<sup>98</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Teaching Christianity*, ed. John E Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill, Augustinian Heritage Institute (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1996), 116.

<sup>99</sup> Clarke and Linzey, *Dictionary of Ethics, Theology and Society*, 534–35.

hopes, but what he loves.”<sup>100</sup> Idolatry is fixing human love on creatures and creation. It is a misdirected love which values the Creator’s creatures or God’s good gifts above God.<sup>101</sup>

### **Rightly-Ordered Love**

Augustine understands love as a core human capacity which motivates actions. Human life can be described as a story of love and affections. In his teaching on Christianity, Augustine explains that the Church is Jesus’s body and spouse, and how Jesus laid down his life to atone for sins. Christians are the beneficiaries of this sacrifice, and they are on a non-tangible journey. “When we are on the way, it is not a way that lies through space, but through a change of affections.”<sup>102</sup>

A change of affections is a life-long task where the goal is rightly-ordered love. This is the key to living justly that enables the person to “be capable of an objective and impartial evaluation of things.”<sup>103</sup> Holy life is about seeing and evaluating reality well and, namely, to love well.

To love things, that is to say, in the right order, so that you do not love what is not to be loved, or fail to love what is to be loved, or have a greater love for what should be loved less, or an equal love for things that should be loved less or more, or a lesser or greater love for things that should be loved equally.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Augustine of Hippo, “Handbook on Faith, Hope and Love,” accessed January 15, 2022, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1302.htm>. 1.117

<sup>101</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God (De Civitate Dei)*, trans. John Healey, vol. 2 (New York, NY: E.P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1945). 15.22

<sup>102</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Teaching Christianity*. 1.16-17

<sup>103</sup> Augustine of Hippo, 116–19., 1.27.28

<sup>104</sup> Augustine of Hippo, 116–19., 1.27.28

A good person loves the right things and loves them in the right order. Loving means longing for God and his goodness and grace. In his homilies on 1John 3:2-3, Augustine reflects on the promise for God’s children about the future that has not yet appeared. What can a believer do while it has not been fulfilled? His answer summarizes how he sees the main duty of Christian life. “The whole life of the good Christian is a holy longing.”<sup>105</sup> Loving well leads to desiring well.

### **Love and the Virtues**

Augustine also gives Christian definitions of the four antique virtues: temperance, fortitude, justice, and prudence. He connects virtue with the love of God, “As to virtue leading us to a happy life, I hold virtue to be nothing else than perfect love of God.” He then expounds how each virtue reflects a form of love. However, he clarifies that love should have an object. It is not love in general but the love of God that is virtuous.

The object of this love is not anything, but only God, the chief good, the highest wisdom, the perfect harmony. So we may express the definition thus: that temperance is love keeping itself entire and incorrupt for God; fortitude is love bearing everything readily for the sake of God; justice is love serving God only, and therefore ruling well all else, as subject to man; prudence is love making a right distinction between what helps it towards God and what might hinder it.<sup>106</sup>

This understanding of how virtue and love connect reflects the general teaching of the Bible on how one who loves another has fulfilled the royal law.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Later Works*, ed. John Burnaby (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1955), 62.

<sup>106</sup> Augustine of Hippo, “Of the Morals of the Catholic Church,” accessed January 15, 2022, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1401.htm>. 15.25

<sup>107</sup> Rom. 13:8, James 2:8

## Love, Desire, and Prayer

Augustine connected love and desire with prayer. Next to the four antique virtues, he also wrote about the theological virtues. His ideas on the virtue of hope were connected to prayer, because praying means constant love and desire for God. When love grows cold, the heart becomes silent but “the burning of love is the cry of the heart.”

If you do not want to pause in prayer then never pause in your longing.  
Your continuous desire is your continuous prayer. If you cease to desire  
than you will have fallen silent in your prayer.<sup>108</sup>

Augustine’s view on prayer focuses not on human need but on the love of God. God knows the human needs and loves his children; therefore, Augustine thinks, there is no need to focus on praying for needs. Out of his great love, God wants to give good gifts to his children. As such, Augustine argues that prayer ought to aim to prepare the human heart for receiving God’s gifts by having deeper faith, stronger hope, and greater desire. Longing points to humanity’s true home and the delight God has in store for his people.<sup>109</sup>

The more fervent the desire, the more worthy will be its fruits. When the Apostle tells us: Pray without ceasing (1Thess 5:16), he means this: Desire unceasingly that life of happiness which is nothing if not eternal and ask it of him alone who is able to give it.<sup>110</sup>

Loving God in prayer is about trusting him and desiring his goodness by preparing the heart in longing. Augustine deduces logically what God expects from people. Desire and longing have an important role because without them the soul is not

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<sup>108</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff, (Grand Rapids, MI: W.R. Eerdmans, 1956), 8:107.

<sup>109</sup> Childress and Macquarrie, *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, 153.

<sup>110</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1990), <http://archive.org/details/worksofsaintaugu0003augu>. Letter 130

ready to receive. “So by withholding the vision God extends the longing, through longing he makes the soul extend, by extending it he makes room in it. So, brethren, let us long, because we are to be filled.”<sup>111</sup>

The church father declares in his teaching that prayer is also important because the human soul must be purified to achieve the duty of love and to fully to enjoy the truth. Cultivating pure desires and virtuous habits is what takes the believer nearer to God.<sup>112</sup> The perverse desire is the motive behind misusing God’s good gifts, changed by heavenly intervention; therefore, his prayer is: “Set love in order in me.”<sup>113</sup>

That is our life, to be trained by longing; and our training through the holy longing advances in the measure that our longings are severed from the love of this world.<sup>114</sup>

Augustine used love and desire interchangeably. When he expounds on the tenth commandment, you shall not desire, in his letter, he points out that this command relates only to illicit desires. In his explanation, desire and love are connected again. The warning of the commandment is needed because “the mind is, of course, carried by its love.”<sup>115</sup>

Love, affection, desire, and longing are words with which Augustine seeks to express how significant love is for human living. Love is the most fundamental capacity,

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<sup>111</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Later Works*, 292.

<sup>112</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Teaching Christianity*, 110. 1.10.11

<sup>113</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*. 15.22

<sup>114</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Later Works*, 290.

<sup>115</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *The Works of Saint Augustine*, 21. Letter 157

the core of humanity that motivates human life, and the love of God should be put first since everything else is to converge on it.

Augustine's primary directive is this: to love God first, as the main command says. He is suspicious of desires because of the sinful condition of humanity. Until the primary love is directed toward God, desires that originate from the heart are misdirected. Loving well leads to desiring well. Prayer is about setting the heart in order and longing for the good object, God himself.

### *C. S. Lewis on Desire*

The writings and lectures of the Anglican literature professor, author, and apologist C.S. Lewis addressed the theme of human desire and longing several times. His ideas on the topic are timeless, deep, and accessible for non-Christian audiences, which made him one of the best known Christian authors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In Lewis's life, desire had a significant part in his own journey toward God and Christianity. He fundamentally speaks about capitalized *Joy*. In his journey he closely connects joy with desire. He defines joy as distinct from pleasure in general in that "it must have the stab, the pang, the inconsolable longing"<sup>116</sup> and uses the metaphor "the arrows of joy."<sup>117</sup> He was just a child when a sensation of desire surprised him and left a deep longing in him.

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<sup>116</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (London: Harcourt Brace, 1995), 68, [http://archive.org/details/surprisedbyjoysh00lewi\\_0](http://archive.org/details/surprisedbyjoysh00lewi_0).

<sup>117</sup> Lewis, 222.

## Joy, Desire, and Worship

Lewis observes that whenever joy arrives it stays only for a short period of time and leaves desire behind. “All Joy reminds. It is never a possession, always a desire for something longer ago or further away or still ‘about to be.’”<sup>118</sup> Lewis noticed that if he tried “to snare it in his greedy impatience,” he frightened joy away. After his conversion, in his sermon *The Weight of Glory*, Lewis interprets this inclination.

The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not in them, it only came through them, and what came through them was longing. These things—the beauty, the memory of our own past—are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited.<sup>119</sup>

Lewis claims that it is a human temptation to identify joy with the means through which that joy has arrived to them: confusing the means with the end. He understood that desire should be fixed on something else, not on experiencing of the “thrill” of joy, since the thrill of joy “is a by-product.”<sup>120</sup>

The language he uses is religious, as he calls misdirected desires “idols that break the hearts of their worshippers.” Lewis compares the misdirected desire and the genuine desire in other writings. In his book *The Great Divorce*, he uses lust as an example, saying that “lust is a poor, weak, whimpering, whispering thing compared with that

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<sup>118</sup> Lewis, 74.

<sup>119</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 26.

<sup>120</sup> Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 162–63.



richness and energy of desire which will arise when lust has been killed.”<sup>121</sup> When he continues these ideas in the sermon *The Weight of Glory*, he also suggests that the problem with idolatry is not the strength of human desires but just the opposite: to be pleased with less than is meant. Idolatry is not desiring well.

It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.<sup>122</sup>

### **Real Self and Real Friendship**

Lewis is very much concerned with joy because he sees its implications in important areas of life. He links the most profound moments of human life to the presence of joy. Humans are much more their real selves when they are visited by this piercing-natured joy.

Joy was not a deception. Its visitations were rather the moments of the clearest consciousness we had, when we became aware of our fragmentary and phantasmal nature and ached for that impossible reunion which would annihilate us or that self-contradictory waking would reveal, not that we had had, but we *were*, a dream.<sup>123</sup>

Similarly, friendship is fundamentally connected to shared desires. Lewis explains how a person finds a friend in someone else who knows and understands the same desire and longing. He expresses that the nature of this longing is not something people can formulate or describe to those who are not familiar with it.

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<sup>121</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce: A Dream* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 114, <http://archive.org/details/greatdivorcedrea00lewi>.

<sup>122</sup> Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, 26.

<sup>123</sup> Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 214.

Are not lifelong friendships born at the moment when at last you meet another human being who has some inkling (but faint and uncertain even in the best) of that something which you were born desiring, and which, beneath the flux of other desires and in all the momentary silences between the louder passions, night and day, year by year, from childhood to old age, you are looking for, watching for, listening for? You have never had it.<sup>124</sup>

## **Desire and Heaven**

One of Lewis's famous ideas is the argument about how desire points to heaven. When Lewis became a Christian, he looked back and evaluated how his journey was led by joy that functioned as a signpost. He argues that all natural desires seem to have an appropriate object that can satisfy them: food exists for satisfying hunger, water can satisfy the desire for swimming, men feel sexual desires which are satisfied by sex. His argument is that unsatisfied desires point outside this world and this life to another one.

Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. (...) If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world.<sup>125</sup>

The joy he experienced throughout his life became moments in which heaven revealed itself. In a letter he wrote in 1954, Lewis discusses times when he experienced desire for death. Those were not the times when life was difficult and harsh for him but "when there seems to be most of Heaven already here," which manifested itself in joy. He calls these moments the most valuable moments of life. He even goes further in his

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<sup>124</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2000), 150, [http://archive.org/details/problemofpain00lewi\\_0](http://archive.org/details/problemofpain00lewi_0).

<sup>125</sup> C. S. Lewis and Clyde S. Kilby, *A Mind Awake: An Anthology of C. S. Lewis*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969), 21.

understanding and identifies heaven as humanity's deepest desire, which is echoed in every desire people have in this world.

There have been times when I think we do not desire heaven but more often I find myself wondering whether, in our heart of hearts, we have ever desired anything else.<sup>126</sup>

Lewis stresses two things as a consequence of the connection between desire and heaven: one relates to identity and the other to the goal of human life. He thinks that joy is a reminder for human pilgrimage to the true country through life on earth.

All joy (as distinct from mere pleasure, still more amusement) emphasizes our pilgrim status; always reminds, beckons, awakens desire. Our best havings are wantings.<sup>127</sup>

He outlines how occasions when “in this universe we are treated as strangers, longing to be acknowledged, to meet with some response, to bridge some chasm that yawns between us and reality” also awaken desire.<sup>128</sup> The goal of human life can be described from the point of view of the connection between heaven and desire. Lewis believes the only important focus of human life is to have a real, heart-felt desire for heaven. “I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death,” he says.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> C. S. Lewis, “The Business of Heaven: Daily Readings from C. S. Lewis,” Internet Archive, 1984, 318, <https://archive.org/details/businessofheaven00lewi>.

<sup>127</sup> Walter Hooper, ed., *Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis: Narnia, Cambridge and Joy, 1950-1963.*, ebook (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 2009), <https://search.covenantseminary.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&authype=ip&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=3086814>.

<sup>128</sup> Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, 32.

<sup>129</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics*, 1st ed. (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002), 119.

For Lewis, the role joy and desire had in his personal journey to Christ caused him to reflect. He connected the experience of present joy with the desire to have it forever. This desire leads either to idolatry or to worship. If the person identifies the source of joy with the very object through which the joy arrived, desire leads to idolatry and attempts to possess the object. If the person understands the true otherworldly nature of the joy, they are led to worship God and long for heaven. For Lewis, joy, desire, and longing have a religious tone. He connects the goodness people experience on earth with the source of goodness, God.

### *Summary of the Human Capacity of Desire, Longing, and Love*

In this literature area, the capacity of desire, longing, and love were examined. The research approached them from linguistic, ethical, psychological, religious, and philosophical points of view first. Desire is central, innate, and ceaseless for every human. Behind the everyday desires there is an ultimate one which defines and shapes human identity. Questions about the object of this ultimate desire, and how it can be attained, naturally follow. Ethical, hedonistic, and relational answers relate partially to philosophical and theological approaches. Present day research, the World Happiness Research, determines factors of subjective well-being, which show the multilayered nature of the topic.

Finally, two major theological thinkers and their approaches to desire were analyzed. While Augustine made the love of God crucial for the rightly-ordered desire, C. S. Lewis considered joy, a reminder of heaven, as a starting point. Augustine is suspicious of desire. He approaches desire from a human point of view, investigating how the human heart should be changed and ordered toward God. Lewis approaches

desire from a creational point of view. Lewis argues that God uses joy, and consequently desire, to bring people to himself.

## **Human Desire and Longing in the Bible**

To understand how human desire and longing have role in the conversion process of new Hungarian Millennial believers, this area of literature review is examining how the Bible uses and interprets the role in a negative and a positive way of desire and longing.

### *The Use of Human Desire and Longing in the Bible*

The nouns *desire* and *longing* or their verb forms *to desire* and *to long for* are not frequently used in the Bible. However, emotion is a crucial element to humanity. Therefore, the Bible contains many stories where desire is the key motive. The stories show that desire is to be human and is not fundamentally about human sinfulness. Therefore, the emotion of desire is judged good or evil depending on its end goal.

There are several OT Hebrew terms to express the idea of desire. The usual stem is 'wh (אוה). It is a general term with the meaning *incline, desire, long for*. Its subject is usually the soul (נפש), and its object can be food, drink, dwelling place, or the authority and power to rule. It can also express the human action to *lust after* something.<sup>130</sup> The

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<sup>130</sup> BDB, s.v. "אוה."

noun form (תאווה), *desire, wish* can describe a physical appetite and is used both in good (Pss. 10:17, 38:10, Prov. 11:23, 19:22) and evil (Pss. 10:3, 112:10, Prov. 21:25) ways.<sup>131</sup>

Similarly, the verb *hmd* (חמד) *desire, take pleasure in* is used in both ways but more frequently connected to evil motivations to express inordinate, ungoverned, selfish desire. The tenth command, “you shall not covet,” in the Ten Commandments uses this verb (Exod. 20:17, Deut. 5:18). It is also used with idolatrous tendency (Isa. 1:29, 44:9). A few times, it is connected to good motivations (Ps. 19:11, Isa. 53:2). Other words based on this root (חמד, חמדה, חמודה) also express that something is precious; the Arabic connotations are *praise, eulogize, approve of*.<sup>132</sup>

Other verbs like *hšq* (חשק) *be attached to, love, desire*<sup>133</sup> and *hps* (חפץ) *delight, pleasure, desire, longing* express strong longing for an object or person. The Arabic and Aramaic connotations of the later are *attentive to, be mindful of, keep, protect, excited attention*.<sup>134</sup>

The NT expression for desire, longing, craving is *epithymia* (ἐπιθυμία). Its verb is *epithymēō* (ἐπιθυμέω)<sup>135</sup> which denotes a strong emotion as its *thymos* (passion, desire,

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<sup>131</sup> David Hutchinson Edgar, “Desire,” in *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics - Credo Reference*, ed. J. B. Green et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2011), <https://search.covenantseminary.edu/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/bpgsae/desire/0?institutionId=7956>.

<sup>132</sup> BDB, s.v. “חמד.”

<sup>133</sup> BDB, s.v. “חשק.”

<sup>134</sup> BDB, s.v. “חפץ.”

<sup>135</sup> BDAG, s.v. “ἐπιθυμέω.”

anger) derivation indicates.<sup>136</sup> It is a morally-neutral term, used as desire for something good (Matt. 13:17; Luke 16:21; 22:15; Phil. 1:23) and as desire for an inordinate, forbidden object (Rom. 7:7, Gal. 5:24, 2 Pet. 1:4).<sup>137</sup> The desire comes with human existence, but it is unable to resist the power of sin (Rom. 1:24; 6:12). John speaks about desire as worldly and goes against the will of God (1 John 2:16-17).<sup>138</sup>

### *The Role of Desire in Destructiveness*

From the many possible stories of the Bible, the researcher chose three in which desire played a key role that led to destruction or loss of hoped-for outcome. One passage is a story, one is a teaching, and one is a parable.

#### **Changes of Desire's Direction in the Fall**

Desire had a major role in humanity's rebellion against the loving Creator, even amid the perfect and good context of Eden. Genesis 3 describes the process of how human desire, misdirected by the serpent, led to disobedience and corruption.

4 But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree

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<sup>136</sup> Moises Silva, ed., "Ἐπιθυμέω G2121," in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), [https://search-credoreference-com.search.covenantseminary.edu/content/entry/zontae/%E1%BC%90pithym%E1%BD%B3o\\_g2121\\_epithyme\\_to\\_desire\\_strongly\\_want\\_just\\_for\\_%E1%BC%90pithym%E1%BD%B7a\\_g2123\\_epithymia\\_desire\\_just\\_%E1%BC%90pithymit%E1%BD%B5s\\_g2122\\_epithymetes\\_one\\_who\\_longes\\_for\\_desires/0](https://search-credoreference-com.search.covenantseminary.edu/content/entry/zontae/%E1%BC%90pithym%E1%BD%B3o_g2121_epithyme_to_desire_strongly_want_just_for_%E1%BC%90pithym%E1%BD%B7a_g2123_epithymia_desire_just_%E1%BC%90pithymit%E1%BD%B5s_g2122_epithymetes_one_who_longes_for_desires/0).

<sup>137</sup> BDAG, s.v. "ἐπιθυμία."

<sup>138</sup> Edgar, "Desire."

was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.<sup>139</sup>

To achieve its goal, the serpent first set the stage. As the serpent talked to Eve about God and his command, he did not involve God himself into their discussion.<sup>140</sup> He presented God as distanced and he objectified him. Additionally, the serpent presents a distorted view of God's character to Eve. His question, "Did God actually say..." implies that God is mean and selfish, thus he created precariousness in Eve. Eve overzealously corrects the serpent; her answer reflects a now disproportionate view of God's strict attitude regarding the tree.<sup>141</sup> God's character is further attacked by the blatant lie, "You will not surely die", construing God as a liar. The serpent's final stroke is in describing God as a petty oppressor instead of a loving creator: "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened." As one theologian points it out, "the climax is a lie big enough to reinterpret life and dynamic enough to redirect the flow of affection and ambition."<sup>142</sup>

Why was the serpent's attempt successful? He managed to persuade Eve that he knows God's inner thoughts and knows God better than the woman does.<sup>143</sup> Eve needed

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<sup>139</sup> Gen. 3:4-6

<sup>140</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2010), 85, <https://web-s-ebsohost-com.search.covenantseminary.edu/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmx1YmtfXzk0Mjg2NV9fQU41?sid=08717739-5e69-426c-9363-8a4dc4d9e787@redis&vid=0&format=EB&rid=1>.

<sup>141</sup> Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, ed. Donald Wiseman, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 77.

<sup>142</sup> Kidner, 78.

<sup>143</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 193, <https://web-s-ebsohost-com.search.covenantseminary.edu/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmx1YmtfXzEwNTg1NTJfX0FO0?sid=3d3e4c4a-25be-421a-b353-82649465606a@redis&vid=0&format=EK&rid=1>.



to doubt the goodness of God's character, the truthfulness of God's word, and withdraw her commitment. Previously, her heart was not moved by the fruit of the tree, she could look at it freely. But "her heart had declined from faith and from obedience to the word, she corrupted both herself and all her senses."<sup>144</sup> Consequently, she saw differently, she desired differently, and she judged differently.

In verse 6, the text lists three actions that led up to Eve taking the fruit: seeing the fruit, evaluating it as a delight to the eyes, and wanting to be wise. According to the text, now Eve sees the fruit as desirable. The subject of the Hebrew verb *desire*, *hmd* (חמד nif, ונהמדה, *venehmâd*) is not the woman who desires but the tree that is desirable. The tree symbolized a story, a hope that the serpent planted in her heart. The tree was desirable for gaining something good which she thought was missing, namely, to make one wise or to give insight (להשכיל, *lehaskîl*). Eve desires to go beyond the limits of human existence as God had set at creation. She now longs to gain "familiarity with and power over mysteries that lie beyond man."<sup>145</sup> The serpent created dissatisfaction and desire for something the woman and man never missed before. She believed she needed to have that insight or wisdom to be happy. She was so convinced about the goodness of the desired result that she shared the fruit with her husband, too.

Without distorting God's character in the humans' conceptions, and telling a different story about the tree, perhaps the serpent would have never achieved his goal.

The doubt, the transferred belief from God to the serpent, and the change in their love and

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<sup>144</sup> John Calvin, *Genesis*, Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), <https://search.covenantseminary.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&db=nlebk&AN=1140939&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

<sup>145</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis*, 193.

trust toward God seemed to lead to the changed direction of their desires. Previously, they never desired the fruit of that tree but now they do. Their desires now led them to sin, to break their relationship with their Creator, and to suffer the consequences of death.

### **The Role of Desire at Temptation**

The Letter of James describes a theological anthropology of how temptation works. Temptation does not stem from God but from desires inside the human heart, which may lead to sin and death. This impulse of desire is internal and belongs to the person, who is entirely responsible for it.<sup>146</sup>

According to theologian and author Scot McKnight, James has a certain topic in his mind when he speaks of temptation. McKnight thinks James is assuming a situation in the messianic community where the poor are oppressed by the rich, a context that would promote “desire” for revenge and violence.<sup>147</sup> However, many other commentators regard the temptation James refers to as more general.<sup>148</sup>

Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. 14 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. 15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 83–84.

<sup>147</sup> Scot McKnight, *The Letter of James*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 116–17.

<sup>148</sup> Davids, *James*, 83; Chris A. Vlachos, *James*, ed. Murray J. Harris and Andreas J. Köstenberger (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2013), 44; Douglas J. Moo, *James: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Nottingham, UK: IVP Academic, 2009), 99, <https://search.covenantseminary.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&db=nlebk&AN=968020&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

<sup>149</sup> James 1:13-15

The starting point of the temptation is when people's desires lure and entice. James uses a metaphor of hunting and fishing. *Exelkō* (ἐξεκλόμενος)<sup>150</sup> is when the fish is taken out of the water on the fishing line, and *deleazō* (δელεαζόμενος)<sup>151</sup> is when prey is attracted by some bait. James either uses them as sequential terms, first the prey is persuaded from its hiding place and then swayed by the bait,<sup>152</sup> or they are independent metaphors.<sup>153</sup> The first expresses the forceful, dominating power of the desire. The second speaks of the magnetism of the desire.<sup>154</sup>

In verse 15, James changes the imagery depicting desire from a hunter to a seductress.<sup>155</sup> When the human will assents and gives in, the desire is like an adulteress that conceives and gives birth to sin. Then sin, as another living entity, grows as a child of mother desire, and if it is allowed to become full-grown, it gives birth in turn to death.<sup>156</sup> The whole process forms a chain link which starts with the desire and culminates in death.<sup>157</sup> James' derivation connects to the previous sentence, where James

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<sup>150</sup> BDAG, s.v. "ἐξεκλόμενος."

<sup>151</sup> BDAG, s.v. "δελεαζόμενος."

<sup>152</sup> Vlachos, *James*, 45.

<sup>153</sup> Davids, *James*, 84.

<sup>154</sup> J. A. Motyer, *The Message of James* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1985), 24, <https://web-s-ebscohost-com.search.covenantseminary.edu/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmx1YmtfXzc4NzUwNV9fQU41?sid=54e81c26-bced-400e-9cb8-e205806b12e8@redis&vid=0&format=EB&rid=1>.

<sup>155</sup> similarly, Prov 7:21-23, With much seductive speech she persuades him; with her smooth talk she compels him. 22 All at once he follows her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a stag is caught fast 23 till an arrow pierces its liver; as a bird rushes into a snare; he does not know that it will cost him his life.

<sup>156</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *James*, 100.

<sup>157</sup> Vlachos, *James*, 45.

draws a sharp contrast between the patterns trial–steadfastness–life and desire–sin–death (πειρασμός – ύπομονή – ζωή and ἐπιθυμία – ἁμαρτία – θάνατος).<sup>158</sup>

According to James’ theological anthropology, the human desire has a forceful power and magnetism that is responsible for the resulting temptations. Desire tries to drag the human heart towards sin and death. This is an exclusively negative depiction of the work of human desire.

### **The Role of Desire in Lack of Fruitfulness**

In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus connects the emotion of human desire with unfruitfulness, living in rebellion against God. In the third type of soil, the seed was sown among thorns. The seed cannot compete for nutrients and eventually becomes strangled. This third soil represents those who underestimate the value of belonging to God’s kingdom.<sup>159</sup> They treasure other things more than the message about God’s kingdom. Consequently, they remain unfruitful because they are not living in accordance with the will of God.<sup>160</sup>

All three Synoptics mention the explanation of this third soil as “the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word,

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<sup>158</sup> Davids, *James*, 85.

<sup>159</sup> Joel Williams, Andreas J. Köstenberger, and Robert W. Yarbrough, *Mark*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2020), 76, <https://web-s-ebshost-com.search.covenantseminary.edu/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmx1YmtfXzI0NDkwNjFfX0FO0?sid=f4d95b7e-8fd8-424a-8099-8dcb6e23095d@redis&vid=2&format=EK&lpid=navPoint-299&rid=0>.

<sup>160</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins and Harold W. Attridge, *Mark: A Commentary*, Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2007), 252, <http://muse.jhu.edu/book/45976>.

and it proves unfruitful.”<sup>161</sup> Luke<sup>162</sup> adds the “pleasures of life”, while Mark<sup>163</sup> names “the desires for other things” as further explanation of why the seed does not produce fruit in the hearer of the word. The thorns that are overgrowing the ground represent human desires which affect the extent to which hearing God’s word achieves its intended good results in human lives. The thorns compete against the gospel and God’s kingdom purposes.

The parable names the first thorny element as “cares of the world” (αἱ μέριμναι τοῦ αἰῶνος). This age (YLT), this life (NIV, CEV) has needs (CEV), worries (NIV, NASB, MSG), anxieties (YLT) that can overwhelm (MSG) people. God’s word is choked by these thorns in lives that are dominated by the values and standards of the present world.<sup>164</sup>

The second thorny element is “the deceitfulness of riches” (ἡ ἀπάτη τοῦ πλούτου). Although the Greek expression is condensed, some translations see seduction in it: *desire* (CEV) – these people are fooled by the desire to get rich; *love* (GNT) – the love for riches. However, their lives become full of other things: the *love of money* (ERV); or *wanting* (MSG) – and all the things they want to get. The riches are deceiving because they seem to promise fulfilment and happiness but cannot grant it. Life that focuses on acquiring and keeping material possessions focuses on things that are a lethal

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<sup>161</sup> Matt. 13:22

<sup>162</sup> Luke 8:14

<sup>163</sup> Mark 4:19

<sup>164</sup> R. Alan Cole, *Mark*, 2nd ed., Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Nottingham, UK: IVP Academic, 2008), 153, <https://search.covenantseminary.edu/>.

enemy to faith and obedience.<sup>165</sup> This is a desire for security in this world apart from God. Affluence seduces one against loyalty to Jesus and causes unfruitfulness in respect to growing God's kingdom.<sup>166</sup>

The Gospels of Luke and Mark each list an additional description of thorns. Luke adds "the pleasures of life" (καὶ ἡδονῶν τοῦ βίου). Luke's sentence construction concentrates on the people. They listened to God's word and then moved on with their lives while the worries, the riches, and the pleasures of life simply choked the message of God in their heart. The emphasis of the sentence is translated well in the MSG version: "as they go about their lives worrying about tomorrow, making money, and having fun."

The additional element in Mark's gospel is "the desires for other things" (αἱ περὶ τὰ λοιπὰ ἐπιθυμῖαι). Some translations use *want* instead of desire: but their lives become full of other things, and everything else they *want* (ERV), and all the things they *want* to get (MSG). This lifestyle is about constant craving for more and more.<sup>167</sup> The meaning of this part of the parable is that the pleasures of life become an increasing distraction that supersedes their desire for God. The worldly pleasure grows higher than their faith.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> John T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary*, New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 187, <https://search.covenantseminary.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&db=nlebk&AN=558304&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

<sup>166</sup> William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 81; Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 105, <https://search.covenantseminary.edu/>.

<sup>167</sup> Williams, Köstenberger, and Yarbrough, *Mark*, 76.

<sup>168</sup> Beth Kreitzer, *Luke*, vol. 3, Reformation Commentary on Scripture. New Testament (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 173, [https://web-s-ebscohost-com.search.covenantseminary.edu/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmx1YmtfXzc4NzQ4NI9fQU41?sid=b4d4c399-7472-4813-ab2e-e0154ecfbcd@redis&vid=0&lpid=lp\\_liv&format=EB](https://web-s-ebscohost-com.search.covenantseminary.edu/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmx1YmtfXzc4NzQ4NI9fQU41?sid=b4d4c399-7472-4813-ab2e-e0154ecfbcd@redis&vid=0&lpid=lp_liv&format=EB).

Before people have an encounter with God's message, multiple prior choices they already had made. These choices can make their heart hard, or shallow, or overcrowded with cares and pleasures. There is no one who does not have thorns, or competing desires with the message of God.<sup>169</sup> The initial growth only continues when someone reinforces the single-minded devotion again and again and responds with faith and faithfulness.<sup>170</sup> Otherwise, the message gets choked out, and these people become unfruitful.

In this parable, the concerning objects of human desire are cares and worries, riches, the pleasures of life, materialism, and greed. These desires are growing thorns that threaten the seed of God's message. They compete with the value of belonging to God and the furthering of his kingdom.

### *Jesus's Use of Desire In Calling People to the Kingdom of God*

The previous passages from Genesis and James, and the Parable of the Sower showed the distorted functioning of human desire. In the following discussed parables, it can be seen how desire is also key in evangelism according to Jesus. His mission was to call people back to God and to call them into the kingdom of God. Jesus used human desire to motivate people. He created desire for this kingdom and for the goodness of his gift that he brought through his sacrificial death and resurrection.

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<sup>169</sup> Cole, *Mark*, 153.

<sup>170</sup> Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 6th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 236.

## Creating Desire for a Treasure

Jesus used parables to explain the kingdom of God to the crowds. In the parables of the hidden treasure and of the pearl of great value, these costly items are a metaphor for God's kingdom.<sup>171</sup> Both parables explain that the man who found the valuables will sell everything with joy, so that he can buy the field or the pearl. The two parables show two scenarios with similarities and contrasts.

Finding a hidden treasure was a real possibility. It was not uncommon in antiquity to hide money or valuables in the ground. The hidden treasure was not a reward for the man's hard work, but it was a surprise for a peasant who was eventually working on that field. He was not looking for it. The merchant was the opposite, a cunning treasure hunter.<sup>172</sup> Pearls were highly valued in the ancient world, specifically they were an expression of wealth for women. For both characters in the parables, the valuables they found represented everybody's ultimate material dream in that society.<sup>173</sup> The tenant worker could use the treasure to secure future stability while the merchant, who had some assets initially, used this unique opportunity and "impoverished himself to acquire something supremely beautiful and valuable which he could admire and display but could not live off unless he sold it again."<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Mtat. 13:44-46

<sup>172</sup> Craig A. Evans, *Matthew*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 281, <https://search.covenantseminary.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&db=nlebk&AN=527579&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

<sup>173</sup> Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999), 456.

<sup>174</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 285, <https://web-p-ebscohost->



Both parables express that because the kingdom of heaven is so precious, to gain it one should be willing to give up everything else. Although the parable characters sacrifice everything they already owned, there is no obligation or discomfort involved but only joyful delight. To take advantage of the opportunity, they needed to act because one cannot possess the treasure or the pearl without making a major commitment.<sup>175</sup>

Jesus's parables connect the kingdom of God with extreme valuables and with extreme actions. He wanted to awaken curiosity and desire in his listeners. Both short stories stirred the listener's imaginations. They already had the desire to acquire the contemporary ultimate dream: finding treasure or being exceedingly successful at work. Jesus took these ordinary cultural phenomena, the subjects of their desire, and used them for explaining the value of the kingdom he brought and showing the suitable response to this good news. He used existing hope and redirected it, attracting people toward God's kingdom.

### **Jesus's Encounters with Self-Righteous People**

As demonstrated in the parables above, Jesus engaged people's desires as an evangelism tool. In the following two sections, an encounter with a wealthy man and a parable illustrate how Jesus used the image of treasure and joyful celebration to motivate people toward the kingdom of God through their desires.

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<sup>175</sup> Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 458.

### *The Rich Young Man*

When Jesus met the Rich Young Man<sup>176</sup>, their conversation focused on the law, since the law was where that man drew his righteousness. According to the Man's report he had kept the laws from his youth. Jesus challenges him to give his wealth to the poor. Jesus speaks out of love<sup>177</sup>, and his intention was to show the Rich Young Man the way to "have treasure in heaven" (καὶ ἔξεις θησαυρὸν ἐν οὐρανῷ). Mark uses several similar expressions—"inheriting eternal life" (10:17), "having treasure in heaven" (10:21), "entering the kingdom of God" (9:47, 10:23), "to enter into life" (9:45), and being "saved" (10:26)—to speak about the same reality.<sup>178</sup>

What can be greater than the possessions this man already had? He was looking to find the way to eternal life, and, as an answer, Jesus revealed to him the way to eternal life with "richness according to God". This answer, however, also revealed the idol of the man's heart. This man lacked the one necessary thing, "the gift of being free enough from his possessions to follow Jesus' call wholeheartedly." Jesus, awakening desire for God's will, spoke about exchanging treasures: the Man's great earthly possession and treasure in heaven. The man needed to give up his anxieties and passions about his wealth to find heavenly treasures.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Mark 10:17-22

<sup>177</sup> Mark 10:21

<sup>178</sup> Robert H. Stein, *Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 468.

<sup>179</sup> Joel Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, The Anchor Bible (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 727, [https://web-p-ebsohost-com.search.covenantseminary.edu/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmx1YmtfXzMwMjIzNF9fQU41?sid=41554780-1ca3-4134-9ca7-f92a47edee4e@redis&vid=0&format=EB&lpid=lp\\_720&rid=0](https://web-p-ebsohost-com.search.covenantseminary.edu/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmx1YmtfXzMwMjIzNF9fQU41?sid=41554780-1ca3-4134-9ca7-f92a47edee4e@redis&vid=0&format=EB&lpid=lp_720&rid=0).

This rich young man struggled with two issues. The first is the obvious one, the question of wealth which proved to be his idol. However, his deeper problem was that he imagined his way to heaven was through his own merit. And this second issue became decisive. He could have asked for Jesus's help if he had desired the treasure in heaven more than being self-righteous. Thus, the man went away sorrowful, because he could not imagine life giving up his great possession for the heavenly treasure. He received the word with joy but immediately fell away when Jesus requested his whole life. The deceitfulness of his wealth smothered God's word in him just as the thorns strangled the sown seeds.

Jesus himself acknowledged how difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God (v. 23). It is difficult for people to desire God's kingdom more than their present richness. Jesus still invited this man to engage godly desires over his mundane ones.

### *The Parable of the Prodigal Son*

Jesus used this parable to urge the self-righteous Pharisees to repentance. In The Parable of the Prodigal Son, Jesus tried to awake his opponents' desire for something they were missing. Luke's introduction to the chapter makes clear that Jesus addresses all three parables of the chapter to the Pharisees who grumbled because he received sinners and ate with them.<sup>180</sup>

All three parables have similar elements: loss (sheep, coin, sons), seeking, finding, and rejoicing. The ending of the parables is the element Jesus uses to move the

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<sup>180</sup> Luke 15:1-2

listeners' desires in a different direction. The Parable of the Lost Sheep finishes with celebration together with friends after finding the lost sheep, and Jesus adds an explanation of heavenly joy, "Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."<sup>181</sup> When the coin is found and the woman celebrates with her neighbors, the Parable of the Lost Coin ends with the joy of angels, "Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."<sup>182</sup>

The same sequence can be traced in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. The younger son is lost, then he is found after repentance, and then they have joyful celebration.<sup>183</sup> When the responsible and obedient older son arrives (in whom the Pharisees found themselves represented), he is angry and refused to go into the celebration. The father entreats him, contending, "it was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found."<sup>184</sup> His words elevate this joyful celebration to the level of divine necessity.<sup>185</sup>

Jesus masterfully ended all three parables with the same critical motif of joy and celebration. The first two parables reach a conclusion, but the third one is open-ended. Jesus speaks in the first one about the joy of heaven, which probably describes God's joy, then speaks of the angels' joy over even one repentant sinner. Thirdly, the father in the

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<sup>181</sup> Luke 15:7

<sup>182</sup> Luke 15:10

<sup>183</sup> Luke 15:24

<sup>184</sup> Luke 15:32

<sup>185</sup> Green, *Luke*, 360.

parable, who represents God, already celebrates over his son, and the only person who misses out on the joyful celebration is the older brother. It is as though Jesus asks the Pharisees, “Do you really want to miss the fellowship with God and the angels in joyful celebration because of your self-righteousness? Will you keep your anger and miss the joy? Don’t you want to be on God’s side and rejoice?” The open ending invites them to ponder what they really desire more: joy and celebration with God or being alone in their judgment of others.

### **Jesus’s Encounter with Someone Who Had False Beliefs**

Jesus met a Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well with whom having a discussion was unimaginable for Jews. Jesus needed to overcome the barrier of race and gender, the problem of false religion, and the problem of sin even to start a conversation. Even so, this encounter was a divine constraint.<sup>186</sup> This woman was an outcast, and Jesus initiated a discussion with her to speak about a gift of living water.

Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.”<sup>187</sup>

Jesus named two things the woman needed to know. She needed information about a gift that was from God, and about who Jesus was. The gift about which he spoke belongs to another world, another reality where the barriers described above are brought

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<sup>186</sup> Jerram Barrs, *The Heart of Evangelism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 196–200; Jerram Barrs, *Learning Evangelism From Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009), 38–48.

<sup>187</sup> John 4:10

down. It is a gift that must be given to her by the one who is from above.<sup>188</sup> Jesus's intention is to elevate her view.

The subsequent part of their conversation was about clarifying the nature and meaning of that gift Jesus wanted to give her. Water is essential for human life. The expression, living water, literally means clean, fresh flowing water, a stream instead of a cistern. Jesus hints more about its meaning in verse 14, promising that this water he gives quenches thirst forever. Moreover, it “will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” The gospel already spoke about God-given gifts as “given through Moses” which was the law (1:17), and Jesus himself, God's “One and Only Son”.<sup>189</sup> However, here this gift is explained as something different.

Jesus's promise redefines both thirst and water in the context of a deeper reality. The thirst illustrates “the longing of mankind and our thirst for something more fulfilling in life.”<sup>190</sup> The thirst is about being unhappy, lacking inner peace. This thirst is an inner emptiness and anxiety that can spur as a drive and hope for something better. People who set their desire on anything less than the gift Jesus offers that cannot satisfy this deep thirst. This inner emptiness and anxiety can be ignored if there is a good chance to

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<sup>188</sup> Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1997), 155.

<sup>189</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 119.

<sup>190</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *John: That You May Believe*, ESV (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 69, <https://web-s-ebscohost-com.search.covenantseminary.edu/ehost/detail/detail?vid=3&sid=e6d0caa1-98dd-4a1c-98c7-376a98cf76d3%40redis&bdata=JkF1dGhUeXBIPWlwJnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbG12ZSZzY29wZT1zaXRl#AN=1140569&db=nlebk>.

achieve some of the goals and dreams someone has.<sup>191</sup> Jesus invited this woman to recognize the depth of her thirst and find solution for it.

The phrase “living water” brings up the Old Testament passages where Yahweh calls himself “the fountain of living waters”,<sup>192</sup> and where David draws parallel between how the thirsty deer pants for the waters and how he is thirsty for God.<sup>193</sup> In another psalm David praises God because “with you is the fountain of life.”<sup>194</sup> The Old Testament reveals that living water is connected to God.

John himself explains this phrase in a later chapter of the gospel. The living water that flows from within the believer is the Holy Spirit.

Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.<sup>195</sup>

Living water means life-giving water.<sup>196</sup> With the living waters, Jesus refers to the new life he brings, a life connected with the activity of the Spirit.<sup>197</sup> He refers to the teaching of the gospel, to the grace of renewal, and to the power of the Spirit who gives

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<sup>191</sup> Timothy Keller, *Encounters with Jesus: Unexpected Answers to Life’s Biggest Questions* (New York, NY: Riverhead Books, 2013), 27.

<sup>192</sup> Jer. 2:13

<sup>193</sup> Ps. 42:1-2

<sup>194</sup> Ps. 36:9

<sup>195</sup> John 7:38-39

<sup>196</sup> Michaels, *John*, 119.

<sup>197</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995), 240.

the right to be allowed into his family.<sup>198</sup> This water satisfies from the inside with deep soul satisfaction independent of circumstances. This promised water springs up from deeper than the thirst is within,<sup>199</sup> and by a constant watering, it can sustain a heavenly eternity in believers while they live this mortal life.<sup>200</sup> This is not only an eternal, but also a qualitatively different life.

Desire had a major role in this conversation at the well. Jesus spoke about a deep reality which is present in human life. People either are not aware of the thirst or suppress it. Jesus awakened the existential need in this woman by inviting her to recognize the real deepness of her thirst and find a solution for it. Jesus depicted how reality would be different for this woman if she knew the gift of God and knew the person who was talking to her. As he described the characteristics of the gift, he increased her desire for it. Even when she was ready to ask Jesus for that water,<sup>201</sup> she did not fully grasp what Jesus was speaking about. However, her desire for that imagined good water was awakened. It was at this point that Jesus moved on to clarify things more for her.

### *Summary of Human Desire and Longing in the Bible*

Genesis showed that a distorted representation of God's character, a twisted explanation story about the tree of good and evil, and consequently the humans'

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<sup>198</sup> John Calvin, *John*, Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), 59, <https://search.covenantseminary.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&db=nlebk&AN=1140943&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

<sup>199</sup> Keller, *Encounters with Jesus*, 26–27.

<sup>200</sup> Calvin, *John*, 60.

<sup>201</sup> John 4:15



transferred belief and love, changed the direction of human desire. James pointed out that this altered, fallen desire is responsible for temptations and has dominating power and magnetism to entice humans to sin. The Parable of the Sower also illustrated how multiple prior choices preceding the encounter with God's message compete with God's message about his kingdom because choices engage human desires.

When Jesus spoke about the kingdom calling people back to God, he always used expressions and images that awakened and redirected human curiosity and longing. The Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Value showed the preciousness of the kingdom and the delightful willingness for total commitment to it when someone comprehends its value.

Jesus offered this heavenly treasure to the rich young man, but the man's imagination and belief was already committed to his earthly riches. Heavenly treasure was not that appealing to him, so the man went away sorrowful. The Parable of the Prodigal Son, with its open ending, delivered an invitation for the self-righteous listeners. This time the image for awakening their desire was that of being a participant in joyful celebration with God. The Woman at the Well received a similar invitation from Jesus to awake her curiosity and desire. This time it was referred to as a gift. Her story shows that she did not fully grasp the meaning of Jesus's words, but she was ready to ask for what he offered for her. Jesus used ordinary, everyday life elements to explain something deeper, bigger, holy, and invisible.

### **Culture of Millennials in Hungary**

The examination of what literature offers in the area of biblical understanding of human desire and longing is now followed by a consideration of the culture of

Millennials in Hungary. The research examines the characteristics of the generation of Millennials, then religiosity in Hungary with the focus on the Millennial age group, and finally how the present culture of Hungary can be described.

### *The Generation of Millennials in Hungary*

Award-winning authors and consultants on American generational trends, Neil Howe and William Strauss referred to Millennials, in the year 2000, as the set of individuals born in or after the year 1982. This name won an ABC News poll in 1997. Other names in publication at that time included “Generation Y/Gen Y”, “Net Generation”, “Echo Boomers”, “iGeneration”, “Second Baby Boom”, and “Google Generation.”<sup>202</sup>

In 2016, Kolnhofer-Derecskei and Reicher, associate professors at Óbuda University Keleti Faculty of Business and Management, attempted to summarize the literature on Millennials available in Hungarian. According to their research, the definition of Millennials is entirely missing in Hungarian literature. In contrast, their characterization can be found in many articles. For naming the Millennial generation in Hungary, “Generation Y” is typically used.<sup>203</sup>

Two major historical events that are relatively close to each other can be decisive in determining the generational boundary in Hungary: the fall of communism (1989) and the advent of the internet (1994). Péter Róbert, senior research fellow, and Tibor Valuch,

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<sup>202</sup> Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2000), 4.

<sup>203</sup> Kolnhofer-Derecskei Anita and Reicher Regina Zsuzsánna, “GenYus – Y generáció az Y generáció szemével,” 2016, 230.

academic advisor at MTA (Hungarian Academy of Sciences) Centre for Social Sciences, in their article about generational divisions, point out historical changes that were significant in the last century. They specify the period of 1990-1995 as transformational crisis and the period after 1996 as a post-communist era.<sup>204</sup>

Researchers use dates as 1975,<sup>205</sup> 1980,<sup>206</sup> or 1982<sup>207</sup> for the first birth year of the Millennial generation. The latest year of birth for this age group is usually 1995 or 1996, although year 2000<sup>208</sup> also can be found. Those who were born in 1975 or after are the generation to have started high school at age of 14, after communism fell. Regardless of a precisely defined “start” of the generation of Millennials, they can be specified as those whose socialization by communism was negligible and those who grew up in democracy and consumerism.<sup>209</sup>

### **Shared Experiences of Millennials in Hungary**

Several disciplines examine the issue of generations, including sociological, psychological and marketing and business approaches. Meretei, lecturer at Corvinus University of Budapest, in her literature review, summarizes the aspects that are

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<sup>204</sup> Róbert Péter and Valuch Tibor, “Generációk a történelemben és a társadalomban,” *Politikatudományi Szemle* 22, no. 4 (2013): 122.

<sup>205</sup> Bokor Attila, “Létezik-e itthon Y-generáció?,” *Vezetéstudomány - Budapest Management Review* 38, no. 2 (2007): 5, <https://doi.org/10.14267/VEZTUD.2007.02.01>.

<sup>206</sup> Ágnes Szlávicz and György Szretykó, “Az Y generáció munkával kapcsolatos elvárásai és a cégek EEM-rendszereinek új kihívásai,” *Tér-Gazdaság-Ember* 1, no. 1 (2013): 70.

<sup>207</sup> Kolnhofer-Derecskei and Reicher, “GenYus – Y generáció az Y generáció szemével,” 229.

<sup>208</sup> Szlávicz and Szretykó, “TGE,” 70.

<sup>209</sup> Bokor, “Létezik-e itthon Y-generáció?,” 5.

significant for differentiating generations. While there are many different life choices and destinies within a generation, it is the shared experiences, life lessons, and, ultimately, shared values that are the defining aspects that creates the opportunity to connect these destinies.<sup>210</sup>

A major aspect of shared experiences for Millennials is the considerable changes in the socialization environment since the fall of communism. This has brought forth new values and new patterns of functioning. The fall of communism opened borders and brought globalization and changes in education systems and attitudes. New forms and methods of education came through the digital revolution.<sup>211</sup>

David John Seel, cultural renewal entrepreneur and social-impact consultant, in his book *The New Copernicans*, created a significant list of culture-shaping events that took place during the formative years of the Millennial generation in the USA.<sup>212</sup> By adding to it the culture-shaping events peculiar in Hungary, the list shows what events were significant for Hungarian Millennials in their formative years.

- Launch of the IBM personal desktop computer – 1981
- The fragmenting of popular music – 1980s
- Fall of Communism – 1989
- The growing acceptance of hooking up – 1990s, in Hungary 2000s
- Introduction of digital table television – 1990
- Launch of Internet – 1991
- Attack on the World Trade Center – 2001
- Launch of MySpace – 2003, Facebook – 2004, YouTube – 2005, Twitter – 2006, LinkedIn – 2006

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<sup>210</sup> Meretei Barbara, “Generációs különbségek a munkahelyen – szakirodalmi áttekintés,” *Vezetéstudomány / Budapest Management Review* 48, no. 10 (2017): 11–13, <https://doi.org/10.14267/VEZTUD.2017.10.02>; Töröcsik Mária, Szűcs Krisztián, and Kehl Dániel, “Generációs gondolkodás - A Z és az Y generáció életstílus csoportjai,” *Marketing & Menedzsment* 48, no. Különszám2 (2014): 3.

<sup>211</sup> Kolnhofer-Derecskei and Reicher, “GenYus – Y generáció az Y generáció szemével,” 232.

<sup>212</sup> John Seel, *The New Copernicans: Millennials and the Survival of the Church* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2018), 44.

- The first iPhone – 2007
- Wall Street financial collapse – 2007
- Smart phones – 2010s
- NSA and WikiLeaks, global surveillance – 2013
- Social media (Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok) – 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2010s
- Online streaming (Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney+), music streaming (Spotify, Apple Music) – 2010s

All these events were somewhat significant in influencing Hungarian Millennials in their formative years. However, many of them have not had an impact on Hungarian culture generally. They have not brought regulatory, procedural, or approach changes in the way people tend to live daily, but they have become a background aspect of the way people see the world. In addition to the list above, the following list shows other recent and significant incidences that changed the climate of the culture and impacted the way Hungarian Millennials value and feel about daily life.

- Same-sex marriage legalized in some states of USA and Europe – 2015
- Illegal immigration crisis – 2015
- #MeToo movement, sexual harassment, abuse, Harvey Weinstein – 2017
- Brexit – January 2020
- LGBTQ movement – ban on LGBTQ propaganda to children in Hungary – 2021
- Covid-19 – March 2020– 2022
- Ukraine-Russian War – February 2022
- AI, Artificial Intelligence – 2020s

From the above lists, the most significant historical events that have fundamentally shaped the culture for today's Hungarian young people are the fall of communism, and recently the challenges of Covid-19, and the Ukraine-Russian War. In addition to these geopolitical events, the technical innovations of the internet, smart phones, social media, and online streaming are the most influential for Millennial lives. Some major cultural issues today are sexual concerns (hooking up, same-sex marriage, #MeToo movement, LGBTQ) or justice matters (BLM, illegal immigration).

## Values and Characteristics of Millennials

In 2007, an article of the Institute of Management in Budapest asked, “Does the Millennial Generation exist in Hungary?” At that time Millennials were not characterized as markedly different from the previous generation: their value system, goals, and criteria for success were similar.<sup>213</sup> Since then, more research has come out on the topic, showing characteristics of Millennials that separate them from the other generations. These are Hungarian research resources, most of them written with an awareness of international research findings.

This section examines how Millennials relate to the results that Seel mentions in his analysis. The characteristics he observed about “New Copernicans” are mainly present in Hungary too. The researcher had the opportunity to ascertain this by asking Millennials specifically about the characteristics of their age group and the phenomena Seel describes.

### *General Characteristics of Millennials*

The generation of Millennials has high self-confidence and positive self-image, and they see themselves as the key to their success.<sup>214</sup> They re-evaluate, question, and criticize everything, because they only accept “authentic” people and things. Authenticity is one of the highest ideals to them. They are looking for integrity and quickly detect what is “fake, superficial or poser”.<sup>215</sup> They learned to identify artificiality through

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<sup>213</sup> Bokor, “Létezik-e itthon Y-generáció?,” 19.

<sup>214</sup> Meretei, “Generációs különbségek a munkahelyen – szakirodalmi áttekintés,” 16.

<sup>215</sup> Seel, *The New Copernicans*, 146.

“surfing” the excessive media supply where people are forced to be highly selective. They want to show their uniqueness, and appearance is particularly important for this age group.<sup>216</sup>

Another particular characteristic of Millennials is that pleasure and experience is a priority for them. Experience needs to be “unique (even exotic), consequently memorable, photogenic, sharable, and relational.”<sup>217</sup> They prefer smaller communities and clamor for personalized attention.

Annamária Tari, a psychotherapist, psychoanalyst, and recognized professional who works with young people, in her book on Millennials, remarks how they are driven by the search for happiness.<sup>218</sup> This search for happiness brings forth, on one hand, a philosophy of pleasure and a get-rich-quick mentality<sup>219</sup> and, on the other hand, the avoidance of experiencing and processing disappointment and sadness.<sup>220</sup>

Millennials claim that the key to success and progress is “never for a moment to lose sight of your interests.”<sup>221</sup> Literature notes the generation’s self-centeredness, egocentrism,<sup>222</sup> the “I deserve it, I do not have to do anything for it” mentality,<sup>223</sup> and a

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<sup>216</sup> Töröcsik, Szücs, and Kehl, “Generációs gondolkodás - A Z és az Y generáció életstílus csoportjai,” 10.

<sup>217</sup> Seel, *The New Copernicans*, 133–34.

<sup>218</sup> Tari Annamária, *Y generáció* (Budapest: Jaffa Kiadó, 2010), 218.

<sup>219</sup> Töröcsik, Szücs, and Kehl, “Generációs gondolkodás - A Z és az Y generáció életstílus csoportjai,” 7.

<sup>220</sup> Tari, *Y generáció*, 51.

<sup>221</sup> Töröcsik, Szücs, and Kehl, “Generációs gondolkodás - A Z és az Y generáció életstílus csoportjai,” 8.

<sup>222</sup> Tari, *Y generáció*, 219.

<sup>223</sup> Meretei, “Generációs különbségek a munkahelyen – szakirodalmi áttekintés,” 15.

significant increase in the phenomenon of narcissism among them.<sup>224</sup> They have been brought up to be free to express their opinions and to be independent, so they are confident and speak their minds easily.<sup>225</sup>

### *Relationship Related Values and Characteristics of Millennials*

The generation of Millennials stays in school longer, and, as a consequence of the former, they get married later. They are the children of the digital age; they are comfortable with having regular contact in the online space, they live a significant part of their social life online, and they have an extensive network of contacts, making it essential for most of them to be available on several platforms.<sup>226</sup>

Tari points out and Judit Chernóczy-Nagy, business coach and trainer, confirms that Millennials struggle with processing emotions and stimuli.<sup>227</sup> They are characterized by, as Tari calls it, “emotional incontinence.” It is crucial for them to rush through emotional experiences; there is no room for sorrow because life is too short. This makes it difficult for them to mature in their personality, to make mature and weighed decisions, to hold mature opinions, and to mature in their emotions. “Behind a seemingly confident,

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<sup>224</sup> Törőcsik, Szűcs, and Kehl, “Generációs gondolkodás - A Z és az Y generáció életstílus csoportjai,” 7.

<sup>225</sup> Katalin Szabó, Andrea Kelemen, and Péter Miklós Kőmíves, “Az Y Generáció És Az Álláskeresés Megtekintése (Y Generation and the Job Seeking),” *International Journal of Engineering and Management Sciences* 2, no. 4 (2017): 492, <https://ojs.lib.unideb.hu/IJEMS/article/view/4974/4717>.

<sup>226</sup> Kolnhöfer-Derecskei and Reicher, “GenYus – Y generáció az Y generáció szemével,” 234; Szabó, Kelemen, and Kőmíves, “Az Y Generáció És Az Álláskeresés Megtekintése (Y Generation and the Job Seeking),” 492; Törőcsik, Szűcs, and Kehl, “Generációs gondolkodás - A Z és az Y generáció életstílus csoportjai,” 9.

<sup>227</sup> Tari, *Y generáció*, 29–35; Chrenóczy-Nagy Judit, *Ambíció, gyors siker, és ami mögötte van: az Y generáció két arca (In: Felelősség és siker)*, ed. Járó Katalin (Háttér Kiadó, 2013), 161, [https://www.libri.hu/konyv/jaro\\_katalin.felelosseg-es-siker.html](https://www.libri.hu/konyv/jaro_katalin.felelosseg-es-siker.html).



assertive performance, there is an immature depth, full of inner unresolved conflict.”<sup>228</sup>

Social media is where Millennials can perform, with the intention of being validated personally.<sup>229</sup>

For Millennials, community is primarily one's own family. Life and circumstances are difficult, and their general sense of life is uncertainty. Therefore, “they hope to be able to find a safe oasis in a world that they believe will be worse and over which they believe they have little control.”<sup>230</sup>

### *Work Related Values and Characteristics of Millennials*

Millennials are conscious employees. They are aware of their abilities because they tend to gain significant work experience during their studies. They have well-established attitudes towards work and clear expectations of their potential employer.

Several authors emphasize how important the material aspect and self-fulfillment aspect of work are to Millennials.<sup>231</sup> This is echoed in their top life priorities, which are financial success and climbing the corporate ladder. Meanwhile, they generally prefer to work where they can create meaningful value and see the meaning of their work.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Chrenóczy-Nagy, *Ambíció, gyors siker, és ami mögötte van: az Y generáció két arca (In: Felelősség és siker)*, 174.

<sup>229</sup> Seel, *The New Copernicans*, 134.

<sup>230</sup> Bokor, “Létezik-e itthon Y-generáció?,” 20.

<sup>231</sup> Bokor, 9; Kolnhofer-Derecskei and Reicher, “GenYus – Y generáció az Y generáció szemével,” 234; Meretei, “Generációs különbségek a munkahelyen – szakirodalmi áttekintés,” 15; Szlávicz and Szretykó, “TGE,” 72.

<sup>232</sup> Szlávicz and Szretykó, “TGE,” 72; Bokor, “Létezik-e itthon Y-generáció?,” 6; C. Patterson, “Generation Stereotypes - Defining Work Characteristics,” *APA* 36, no. 6 (2005): 55, <https://www.apa.org/monitor/jun05/stereotypes>.

Multi-tasking is normal for them.<sup>233</sup> For them, respect is not based on title or position; all their colleagues must earn their respect.<sup>234</sup>

Success, money, and career are key to their efforts because their goal is to build an existence.<sup>235</sup> Their ambition is due to the more precarious economic environment they live in, compared to their parents.<sup>236</sup> According to Meretei, individuals who display materialistic values are those “who experienced insecurity in their family (divorced parents, illness, poverty), were ostracized by their peers, or experienced a particularly difficult childhood.”<sup>237</sup> In researching Millennial interest in finance and management jobs, words with which they characterized their peers and generation included “determined, tough, and unethically competitive.”<sup>238</sup>

Attila Bokor, honorary associate professor at the Institute of Management, Department of Organizational Behavior, sees this materialistic attitude as dangerous. His concern is the lack of a values-based approach and the uncertainty of centered internal values for Millennials. “Their goals and actions do not come from an ideology or higher value system but from the intention for personal financial prosperity and career success.” During the research, the age group gave the impression that they were highly

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<sup>233</sup> Kolnhofer-Derecskei and Reicher, “GenYus – Y generáció az Y generáció szemével,” 234.

<sup>234</sup> Anita Kolnhofer-Derecskei, Regina Zsuzsanna Reicher, and Ágnes Szeghegyi, “The X and Y Generations’ Characteristics Comparison,” *Acta Polytechnica Hungarica* 14, no. 8 (2017): 123.

<sup>235</sup> Bokor, “Létezik-e itthon Y-generáció?,” 7.

<sup>236</sup> Szabó, Kelemen, and Kőmíves, “Az Y Generáció És Az Álláskeresés Megtekintése (Y Generation and the Job Seeking),” 492.

<sup>237</sup> Meretei, “Generációs különbségek a munkahelyen – szakirodalmi áttekintés,” 15.

<sup>238</sup> Bokor, “Létezik-e itthon Y-generáció?,” 17.

impressionable. “From the outside, you can tell them what they want (success) and what that means. It even comes from outside somehow, to make them to be conscious.”<sup>239</sup>

For Millennials, the world is open. They are the first digital generation who grew up with internet, they are saliently technological savvy, and they learn modern technology innovations quickly. They speak many foreign languages, are open-minded, and are open to opportunities.<sup>240</sup> According to Seel, this openness is not just openness offered by the internet, the ease of travel, and increased opportunities, but a “move from dweller to explorer.”<sup>241</sup> They are continually learning and exploring.

Researchers find that Millennials change jobs frequently, but the reasons can be various. An aspect of it is that they are characterized as “not loyal, curious, receptive to new things.”<sup>242</sup> They are also “generally independent, autonomous, and entrepreneurial.”<sup>243</sup> Job-hopping can also come from how Millennials are generally self-assured and achievement focused; if they do not get what they want, they will move on without any particular emotional attachment or emotional trauma.<sup>244</sup> Another approach points out that they do not want to follow their parents’ working style, and they highly value work-life balance. They want “their work to fit their lifestyle, not adapt their life to

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<sup>239</sup> Bokor, 19–20. “Kívülről meg lehet mondani nekik, hogy mi legyen a vágyuk (siker), és az mit is jelent. Még az is valahogy kívülről érkezik, hogy legyenek tudatosak.”

<sup>240</sup> Kolnhofer-Derecskei, Reicher, and Szeghegyi, “The X and Y Generations’ Characteristics Comparison,” 122.

<sup>241</sup> Seel, *The New Copernicans*, 121.

<sup>242</sup> Kolnhofer-Derecskei and Reicher, “GenYus – Y generáció az Y generáció szemével,” 234.

<sup>243</sup> Szlávicz and Szretykó, “TGE,” 70.

<sup>244</sup> Kolnhofer-Derecskei, Reicher, and Szeghegyi, “The X and Y Generations’ Characteristics Comparison,” 122; Chrenóczy-Nagy, *Ambíció, gyors siker, és ami mögötte van: az Y generáció két arca (In: Felelősség és siker)*, 161.

their work.”<sup>245</sup> Millennials also value diversity and change and, unlike the previous skeptical generation, they are hopeful, which allows them to change jobs more easily.<sup>246</sup>

### *Religiosity in Hungary*

The social science research group of Foundation Századvég, a foundation for showing the values of Hungarian progression and the patterns of European development, had a large sample survey with 53,200 partakers in Hungary in 2017. At same time, there was a survey all over Europe, in about twenty countries. The Hungarian research covered every region and every variety of settlements in the country with at least 1000 participants from each part, in proportion to the county population and ages. The findings represent the whole country well. The research looked to answer how the religious openness varies and in what form people express, or live out, their religiousness. The following section summarizes the general findings and the findings specially observed among the Millennial generation.<sup>247</sup>

#### **Data Survey Summary**

In general, trends point to a loosening of commitment to doctrines and religious institutions. Closely related to this is the increasing prevalence of DIY (do it yourself) religiosity, where the emphasis is on spirituality rather than the embrace of religious

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<sup>245</sup> Szabó, Kelemen, and Kőmíves, “Az Y Generáció És Az Álláskeresés Megtekintése (Y Generation and the Job Seeking),” 493.

<sup>246</sup> Patterson, “Generation Stereotypes - Defining Work Characteristics,” 55.

<sup>247</sup> Gyorgyovich Miklós, ed., *Vallásosság Magyarországon: társadalomtudományi tanulmányok* (Budapest: Századvég Kiadó, 2020).

beliefs. The receptivity to the supernatural is not necessarily institutionalized, and “we can speak of religious individualization rather than disappearance of religion.”<sup>248</sup>

The most significant ideological currents are post-communism and postmodernism in Hungary. In the survey, 27% of respondents declared themselves Christian, which means they believe exclusively in all three Christian beliefs (God, Trinity, resurrection of Jesus) in a way that rejects esoteric theories (horoscope, magic, divination). 15.1% of them only partially accept the Christian teachings. 5.3% do not believe in Christian doctrines at all, accepting instead purely esoteric views. This is about 400,000 people. Those who accept mixed doctrines with patchwork beliefs, make up 27.9%. 24.7% of those surveyed believe in nothing, and their numbers are growing.<sup>249</sup>

Two specific phenomena emerged from the data. In the survey, a third of those who could identify with the teachings of more than one religion also mentioned Buddhism. A kind of “Buddhist romanticism” is clearly discernible in Hungarian society.<sup>250</sup> The “God yes, church no” attitude is also somewhat more typical of the young adult age group, but it can also be said to be an urban-city phenomenon.<sup>251</sup>

### **Survey Categories of Young Adults**

The research used ten indicators to capture religiosity: religious self-identity, God is important to them, church attendance, individual religious practice, past religious

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<sup>248</sup> Gyorgyovich, 184.

<sup>249</sup> Gyorgyovich, 84.

<sup>250</sup> Gyorgyovich, 68.

<sup>251</sup> Gyorgyovich, 213.

experience, religion is comforting, desire to follow the norm (tries to live according to the teaching), trust in their church, financial support, and volunteering.

Apart from two categories, those who were fully committed to the church and those who completely rejected religion, the survey looked more closely at those who were in some way connected to religion. 53.2% of survey participants reported as “malleable religious” marking that they do care about religion but are not fully committed to the institutional church. Based on their responses, ten different clusters were identified and named: wishful religionists, experience seekers, routine seekers, support seekers, church supporters, church avoiders, religion consumers, loneliness seekers, God seekers, and charity seekers.<sup>252</sup>

Four of the ten clusters proved to be particularly characteristic for the young adult generation. These clusters are: religious consumers, church avoiders, God seekers, church supporters. In these clusters the numbers of young adults were higher than any other age group and the percentage shows the proportion from the survey participants.

- “*Religious Consumers*” 12.9% of survey participants – young male adults with high school education, want to have emotional experiences, are connected to church, self-identify as religious, but committed to a brand but not to community and relationships, build identity as being loyal to a particular church that offers a particular experience
- “*Church Avoiders*” 9.5% of survey participants – not high school graduates, low income, young single adults (both genders), in big city, do not care about religion,

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<sup>252</sup> Gyorgyovich, 93–97.

religion is a left-over of human history that is not relevant anymore, keep distance from anything connected to the church institution and practice.

- “*God seekers*” 8.8% of survey participants – young male adults, lower income, lower education (no high school diploma). Seems they want the transcendent experience but do not trust any religious authority or institution to gain it. Do not want to be involved emotionally in institutions or relationships connected to them. Strong distance from religious practice.
- “*Church Supporters*” 7.6% of survey participants – young adult men supporting the church financially but do not mark other categories. This could come from all working people being required by Hungary’s tax system to mark whether or not 1% of tax goes to a church.

In these clusters (totaling 38.8% of the survey participants), young adults are over-represented compared to other Hungarian age groups. They avoid churches as outdated phenomena, want transcendent experiences but not the institution, and support churches with tax percent.

### *Present Hungarian Cultural Challenges*

Füsti-Molnár, professor of systematic theology at Sárospatak Reformed Theological Academy, summarized the present cultural milieu with the following sentence: “Those who are religious in Hungary are culturally isolated according to their Christian norms in the profane culture.”<sup>253</sup> In addition to the previous era of communism that Chapter 1 introduced, three phenomena are significant that give background to this

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<sup>253</sup> Füsti-Molnár, *Ecclesia Sine Macula et Ruga*, 224.

statement: secularism, disruption, and apathy. These phenomena are not local but global issues.

## **Secularism**

In his tome *A Secular Age* in 2007, Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor describes the early twenty-first century West as a secular age. Taylor's major question is "an analytic how" of the conditions of belief, as James K.A. Smith, professor of philosophy at Calvin University, explains. Taylor is interested how people have believed in a given cultural context throughout the centuries. Taylor introduces a new kind of *secular* after the medieval one, which he calls *secular*<sub>1</sub> (temporal, mundane in contrast to sacred), and after *secular*<sub>2</sub> in modernity where secular means areligious. The third sense of secular, *secular*<sub>3</sub>, is about a culture where "faith even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others."<sup>254</sup>

Sociologist Peter Berger introduced the idea of plausibility structure, the cultural contexts that confirms beliefs and meanings. His point is that people can only determine something real or believable if there is a social base for it.<sup>255</sup>

One of the most obvious ways in which secularization has affected the man in the street is as a "crisis of credibility" in religion. Put differently, secularization has resulted in a widespread collapse of the plausibility of traditional religious definitions of reality.<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 2–3.

<sup>255</sup> Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), 45–51, [http://archive.org/details/sacredcanopyelem0000berg\\_m2h4](http://archive.org/details/sacredcanopyelem0000berg_m2h4).

<sup>256</sup> Berger, 126.



Three features of medieval imaginary needed to be removed in order to change the plausibility structure and to make unbelief imaginable. Previously, the natural world was ordered as cosmos, society was grounded in higher reality, and people lived in an “enchanted” world being vulnerable to the influence of forces and spirits.<sup>257</sup> Secularity and exclusive humanism changed this era. People are no longer exposed to powers or spirits that reside in things; rather, they see themselves with machine-like understanding and autonomy. A sense of community, social bond, and the social consensus were replaced by individuality and atomism.<sup>258</sup> The cosmos, which was ordered by God, shifted into a universe that has its own kind of order.<sup>259</sup>

A new task dawned on the society: finding or creating significance and meaning without referring to the transcendent or God. As Seel puts it:

They are secular, meaning, New Copernicans live their lives within an immanent frame: that is, they assume that their lives can be lived successfully within the natural order without any reference to the transcendent or God. The idea of God is not operational part of their day-to-day life assumptions, and it is not a part of their vision for the good life.<sup>260</sup>

In *secular*, beliefs are under cross-pressure of pluralistic views.<sup>261</sup> With the collapse of shared belief system and shared virtues, “we aspire to be noncommittal.”<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 28–30.

<sup>258</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 41–42.

<sup>259</sup> Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular*, 28–35.

<sup>260</sup> Seel, *The New Copernicans*, 112.

<sup>261</sup> Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular*, 62–66.

<sup>262</sup> Alan Noble, *Disruptive Witness: Speaking Truth In a Distracted Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 42.

## **Disruption**

Alan Noble, author and professor, connects living in the *secular*<sup>3</sup> culture with the desire for self-avoidance. The pressure of finding meaning and happiness in the immanent realm and of being authentic is on individuals. Technology makes it possible to avoid and ease this pressure with multi-tasking, notifications, overwhelming information, decision overload, simple emotions, addiction to novelty, “culture of immediacy, snap judgements, optics, and identity formation.” Everything competes for people’s attention and data. Living with cognitive dissonance and contradictions and avoiding deep questions and reflections are natural consequences of this way of life.<sup>263</sup> Psychiatrist and a specialist in the opioid epidemic, Anna Lembke expresses her concerns about how affluence and technology are the new source of dopamine addiction.

We’ve transformed the world from a place of scarcity to a place of overwhelming abundance: drugs, food, news, gambling, shopping, gaming, texting, sexting, Facebooking, Instagramming, YouTubing, tweeting... the increased numbers, variety, and potency of high rewarding stimuli today is staggering. The smartphone is the modern-day hypodermic needle, delivering digital dopamine 24/7 for a wired generation.<sup>264</sup>

Her words draw attention to the danger of technology, the usage of which is a main characteristic of Millennials.

## **Apathy**

A present cultural challenge is that people do not care about God and religion because they do not regard it as important. Kyle Beshears, pastor and author, argues that

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<sup>263</sup> Noble, 18–24.

<sup>264</sup> Anna Lembke, *Dopamine Nation: Finding Balance in the Age of Indulgence* (New York, NY: Dutton, 2021), 1.

apathy needs several conditions to manifest itself. Two areas of life are in focus: belief in God and status of life. When belief in God is contestable by skepticism and diverse because of pluralism, life is comfortable in an affluent economy, and disruption by modern technology is prevalent, apathy arises.<sup>265</sup> This cultural atmosphere causes a lack of reason or motivation to care about God.

The situation is demonstrated by the large-scale survey of Foundation Századvég which revealed how participants reacted hearing the word “religion” in two focus groups. In both groups, “a kind of deflection, a quasi-self-exculpatory mechanism, a confused explanation in some cases and a negative or ridiculing reference to religions, their practitioners or mediators (practically for the priests)” were explicitly characteristic.<sup>266</sup>

### *Summary of Culture of Millennials in Hungary*

The research sought to understand the culture of Millennials in Hungary by exploring the experience and characteristics of the generation of Millennials. The different expressions that are used to name this age group and the various age ranges show the different approaches researchers take to understand the important features of Millennials. The shared experiences that shaped them and the values and characteristics that describe their lives outline this generation’s profile. The second part examined the religiosity in Hungary with a focus on the Millennial age group. The large sample survey provide fresh insights into the religiosity of this generation. Furthermore, the research

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<sup>265</sup> Kyle Beshears, *Apathism: How We Share When They Don’t Care*, electronic resource (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2021), 11–13, <https://search.covenantseminary.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&authy pe=ip&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=2761597>.

<sup>266</sup> Gyorgyovich, *Vallásosság Magyarországon: társadalomtudományi tanulmányok*, 360–62.

sought to answer how the present culture of Hungary can be described in the categories of secularism, disruption, and apathy.

### **Summary of Literature Review**

When asking “what is the role of human desire and longing in the conversion process of Hungarian Millennials?”, there are three primary themes that need to be considered: how desire, longing and love work and relate to each other, what the Bible says about desire and longing, and what kind of culture and characteristics Millennials have in Hungary.

Literature concerning human desire, longing, and love showed how the importance of desire is central, and behind the everyday desires there is an ultimate one which defines and shapes human identity. The object of the ultimate desire varies, but, as Augustine pointed out, loving God is crucial for rightly-ordered desire. The other examined author, C. S. Lewis, considered joy and desire as tools God uses to bring people to himself.

The second literature review section concerned human desire and longing in the Bible. It showed that transferring belief and love away from God changed the direction of human desire. This misdirected desire induces decisions that incline to sin and compete with God’s message. Jesus’s way of calling people to God’s kingdom was using expressions and images that awaken and redirect human curiosity and longing. The story of the Woman at the Well showed that while she did not fully grasp the meaning of Jesus’s words, she was still ready to ask for what he offered to her.

The literature on the culture of Millennials in Hungary pointed out that this generation is the first generation to grow up after the fall of communism and with

ceaseless immediate access to internet in their formative years. Behind Millennial self-confidence and egocentrism they search for happiness. The religious survey revealed how “Buddhist romanticism” and "God yes, church no" attitudes are also somewhat more typical among the young adult age group. They seek God and avoid church. Millennials live in an era where secularism, disruption, and apathy are the air people breathe.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to explore how Hungarian Millennial new converts to Christianity connect longing to their conversion process. The assumption of this study was that new converts to Christianity have been motivated in different ways in their conversion process and learned important principles about what makes a Hungarian Millennial interested in exploring Christianity. To address this purpose, a qualitative study was proposed. The research identified three main areas of focus. These include identifying significant elements of conversion processes, describing motivations, and understanding the role of longing in the conversion process.

To examine these areas more closely, the following research questions guided the qualitative research:

1. How do new Hungarian Millennial believers describe their longings before their conversion process?
2. In what ways do new Hungarian Millennial believers experience longings during their conversion process?
3. In what ways and to what extent do new Hungarian Millennial believers' longings before their conversion process compare to their longings during their conversion process?

### **Design of the Study**

The research design of this study followed a basic qualitative approach. Sharan B. Merriam, in her book *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, describes a general, basic qualitative study where the researcher is “interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds,

and what meaning they attribute to their experiences.”<sup>267</sup> Therefore, this qualitative study could help both the researcher and the readers to understand and learn from the meaning Hungarian Millennial new converts to Christianity have constructed from their experiences.

Merriam identifies four characteristics of qualitative research: “The focus is on process, understanding and meaning; the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; the process is inductive; and the product is richly descriptive.”<sup>268</sup> These characteristics suited the researcher’s goal in understanding the role of longing in conversion process. When the interviewees shared their stories, they chose and interpreted details they thought significant, therefore the research revealed elements and motivations that can advise future evangelistic and outreach ministry.

The researcher executed the data collection and analysis which enabled the researcher to adapt to varying responses and to check with respondents for accuracy during the interviews as data was collected.<sup>269</sup> Because every interviewee’s story was personal and different, therefore the researcher needed to maintain openness and curiosity. The participants’ perspectives led the understanding of the phenomenon, “not the researcher’s.”<sup>270</sup> The inductive process of qualitative inquiry resulted in “richly descriptive” data about personal experience of the conversion process which made

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<sup>267</sup> Sharan B. Merriam and Elizabeth J. Tisdell, *Qualitative Research: A Guide To Design and Implementation*, Fourth edition (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2016), 24.

<sup>268</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, 15.

<sup>269</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, 16.

<sup>270</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, 16.

possible to detect “themes, categories, typologies, concepts, tentative hypotheses, and even theory about a particular aspect of practice.”<sup>271</sup>

This study employed a basic qualitative research design and conducted semi-structured interviews as the primary source of data gathering. Merriam describes semi-structured interview where either the questions are more flexibly worded, or the interviewer uses more and less structured questions. The focus is on the issues the interviewer wants to explore, therefore “neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time.”<sup>272</sup> This qualitative method provided for the discovery of more comprehensive and descriptive data from participant perspectives in the narrow phenomena of how conversion process is connected to longing.

### **Participant Sample Selection**

This research required participants from which the most can be learned about conversion process among native Hungarian Millennials who are “information-rich.” Therefore, purposeful sampling was used which is “based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned.”<sup>273</sup> In this instance, the purposeful study sample was typical reflecting “the average person and instance of the phenomenon of interest.”<sup>274</sup> It consisted of six Millennials who recently had converted to Christianity

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<sup>271</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, 17.

<sup>272</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, 110–11.

<sup>273</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, 96-97.

<sup>274</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, 97.



with no previous Christian background. The sample of these individuals was determined by accessibility and by specific qualifying criteria.

The following criteria were applied. First, the researcher interviewed Hungarians in Hungary because the focus of this research is an understanding of a phenomenon in Hungarian culture. Second, the interviewees were a selection of people from the population of Millennials because this generation – born from early 1980s to the mid-1990s – already entered work life and might be married with children, therefore they experience typical adult life problems. They are generally biblically illiterate: the children of a generation who grew up in communism, too young to have part in the decade of countrywide revival after the fall of communism from 1989, and too old to have the option of choosing religion classes in public elementary school (possible from 2013). Lacking or having only vague biblical concepts from childhood was a criterion because it represents a typical Millennial in Hungary. They are the first generation who grew up with usage and familiarity with internet, smart phones, and social media. Therefore, their social imaginary tends to be open immanent instead of a closed one.<sup>275</sup> Third, the interview participants heard about Christianity first time when they were already in their twenties. By that time, they already had a formed worldview and opinion about religion. This fact brought deeper consideration when they met Christianity. Other criterion was that the interview participants recently converted to Christianity, in the last 6 years, in order to gain recent memories. To minimize variation in theology, which is not the research focus, the sample was drawn from members of Reformed tradition because that is the biggest denomination in Hungary (and others are only a few and small in

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<sup>275</sup> Seel, *The New Copernicans*, 64.

membership) that holds to Reformed theological convictions such as The Heidelberg Catechism and The Second Helvetic Confession. The researcher did not consider other factors connected to the local church through which the participants became Christians such as size, or communication style of worship service.

Participants were purposefully chosen to provide variation in economic status, occupation, position, education, and degree to gain a broader sample, and thus avoid limitations in insights based on these factors. All participants lived in urban settings although they varied in residence (capital, agglomeration, town), corresponding to the interest of the research. They were both males and females. These criteria particularly served to gain data toward best practices considering the research focus.

The final study was conducted through personal interviews with six Millennials. The researcher received contact information from their pastors. The different geographical locations of the interview subjects meant that the researcher traveled to meet them. They were invited to participate via an introductory letter, followed by a personal phone call. All expressed interest and gave written informed consent to participate. In addition, each participant signed a “Research Participant Consent Form” – translated to Hungarian – to respect and to protect the human rights of the participants. The English version is below. The Human Rights Risk Assessment is “no risk” according to Covenant Theological Seminary’s IRB guidelines.

**RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM  
FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS**

I agree to participate in the research which is being conducted by Bori Mikola to explore how converts to Christianity connect longing to their conversion process for the Doctor of Ministry degree program at Covenant Theological Seminary.

I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary. I can withdraw my consent at any time without penalty and have the results of the participation, to the extent that they can be identified as mine, returned to me, removed from the research records, and/or destroyed.

The following points have been explained to me:

- 1) The purpose of the research is to explore how Hungarian Millennial new converts to Christianity connect longing to their conversion process.
- 2) Potential benefits of the research may include identification of motivations and personal reasons for helping future church mission. Though there are no direct benefits for the participants, there may be encouragement from sharing experiences with an attentive listener who is seeking to learn from those experiences.
- 3) The research process will include a single, hour-long, audio recorded interview with eight participants.
- 4) Participants in this research will share their experiences and observations about their conversion process.
- 5) Potential discomforts or stresses: The interview may touch on memories of difficult times that are potentially uncomfortable for the participants.
- 6) Potential risks: Minimal – The participant may be inconvenienced due to the hour length of the interview and will be sharing personal information regarding their background, experiences, and beliefs.
- 7) Any information that I provide will be held in strict confidence. At no time will my name be reported along with my responses. The data gathered for this research is confidential, and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without my prior consent, unless otherwise required by law. Audiotapes or videotapes of interviews will be erased following the completion of the dissertation. By my signature, I am giving informed consent for the use of my responses in this research project.
- 8) Limits of Privacy: I understand that, by law, the researcher cannot keep information confidential if it involves abuse of a child or vulnerable adult, or plans for a person to harm themselves or to hurt someone else.
- 9) The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the study.

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Printed Name and Signature of Researcher

Date

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Printed Name and Signature of Participant

Date

*Please sign both copies of this form. Keep one. Return the other to the researcher. Thank you.*

Research at Covenant Theological Seminary which involves human participants is overseen by the Institutional Review Board. Questions or problems regarding your rights as a participant should be addressed to: Director, Doctor of Ministry; Covenant Theological Seminary; 12330 Conway Road; St. Louis, MO 63141; Phone (314) 434-4044.
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## Data Collection

This study utilized semi-structured interviews for primary data gathering. The open-ended nature of interview questions fosters to explore complex issues and allowed greater flexibility to understand the meaning that the participants assign to their experiences. As Merriam asserts, “This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic.”<sup>276</sup>

The researcher performed two pilot tests of the interview protocol to evaluate the questions for clarity and usefulness in eliciting relevant data.<sup>277</sup> Initial interview protocol categories were derived from the literature but evolved around the explanations and descriptions that emerged from doing constant comparison work during the interviewing process. Coding and categorizing the data while continuing the process of interviewing also allowed for the emergence of new sources of data.<sup>278</sup>

Eight Millennials were interviewed for the period from sixty to ninety minutes each. Two out of the eight interviewees were found in the middle of the interview not to fit the research criterion well, so the data from them was not taken into account. The native language in Hungary is Hungarian. Therefore, the language of the interviews was also Hungarian, as was the transcription and the analysis in order to stay with the emic perspective. The findings were reported in English and direct quotes translated by the researcher. Prior to the interview, the participants received a sampling of protocol

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<sup>276</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 111.

<sup>277</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, 117.

<sup>278</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, 201.

questions and a brief description of the research. To accommodate participant schedules, the researcher traveled and met them at the participants' churches, in offices, and in cafes. This provided both a psychologically safe environment and created as little hardship as possible for the participant.

The researcher audiotaped the interviews with a digital recorder (Sony ICD-UX543). By conducting one to three interviews in a week, the researcher completed the data gathering in the course of three weeks. Directly after each interview, the researcher wrote field notes with descriptive content and reflective components on the interview time annotating behaviors and activities of the participant and the researcher's feelings, initial interpretations, and working ideas.<sup>279</sup>

The interview protocol contained the following questions.

1. Tell me about your family background, your upbringing. What do you think shaped your worldview?
2. Tell me about your life desires before you were first aware that you were interested in exploring issues of faith.

Probes:

- a. What were your life goals that you considered essential, indispensable for a fulfilling life?
  - b. What were you wanting to be in your life the next 10 years?
  - c. What did you imagine that would look like, sound like, what emotions did you connect with that?
  - d. How did you imagine a perfect day?
  - e. What did you think the meaning of life was at the time?
  - f. What would that "good job" (their words) have been like on a typical day--how did you dream about that?
3. What were some things that motivated you to explore Christianity?

Probes:

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<sup>279</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 151.

- a. What was the experience/event that you remember when you became aware of your interest in Christianity?
  - b. What exactly is it that started to attract you?
4. Tell me about some of the activities you did in exploring Christianity?

Probes:

- a. In what ways were other people involved? What did you see in their lives that attracted you?
  - b. What were some things that made you curious?
  - c. Tell me about what you were thinking (feeling) in deciding to go to that...
  - d. What were some expectations for change you had on yourself?
  - e. What were some of your hope/expectations in going to church that day?
  - f. What were some things that motivated you to return to ...? (or to continue discussing or to read further...)
  - g. What were some things that encouraged you to keep exploring?
  - h. What were some of the hopes you had at that point ?
4. When you look back on your conversion process, how would you connect longing to your conversion process?

## **Data Analysis**

The researcher personally transcribed the two first interviews in Hungarian by using computer software to play back the digital recording on a computer and typing out each transcript. The other four interviews were transcribed by online transcription program Alrite.io and checked by the researcher. This study utilized the constant comparison method of routinely analyzing the data throughout the interview process. Simultaneous data collection and analysis contributed to the development of protocol questions and interview technique. Because the data “that have been analyzed while being collected are both parsimonious and illuminating” therefore this method provided for the ongoing revision, clarification, and evaluation of the resultant data categories.<sup>280</sup> When the interviews and observation notes were fully transcribed into computer files,

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<sup>280</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, 196–97.

they were printed out and coded and analyzed inductively and comparatively. The analysis focused on discovering and identifying common themes, patterns, and concepts across the variation of participants, answering the research questions.

### **Researcher Position**

In qualitative research the primary instrument is a human instrument, the researcher. Merriam points out its possible positivity saying, subjectivities such as the researcher's bias, background, and worldview are "the basis of researchers making a distinctive contribution, one that results from the unique configuration of their personal qualities joined to the data they have collected."<sup>281</sup> However, it is important to identify these because they can have an impact on the study, both on collecting and interpreting of the data.

The factors that the researcher came to the study are the follows. Biases are rooted in the researcher's commitment to the authority of the scripture. The researcher's doctrinal conviction is a Reformed, confessing, evangelical one. That was the epistemological framework for the researcher to think about saving faith, conversion stories, and process. The researcher has a predisposition to believing that the coming to believe in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most important event that can be in a person's life which occurs through God's gracious work and relevant human factors and decisions. From God's character comes the belief that every person has different, special, personal story coming to faith because God treats people as person.

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<sup>281</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, 17.

The researcher's personal story is another factor. Growing up in a non-Christian home in Hungary under communism, the researcher experienced conversion to the Christian faith at age fifteen. This was a dramatic, life-changing process of one and a half years. The researcher can name several aspects that were significant in the process which related to longings, such as seeing how Christians' lives reflected freedom, and how they loved each other and were able to laugh. Similarly, the researcher wanted to know that Christianity was true and reliable because she was attracted to the authenticity she saw in Christians' lives. This experience gives the researcher the ability to listen with an insider's knowledge.

### **Study Limitations**

As stated in the previous section, participants interviewed for this study were limited to those Hungarian Millennials who had received the Christian gospel through Reformed tradition in Hungary. Readers who desire to generalize some of the particular aspects of these conclusions on the basis of similarity to their own situation should test those aspects in their particular context. As with all qualitative studies, readers bear the responsibility to determine what can be appropriately applied to their context.

The results of this study may have implications for church life and Christian outreach. Pastors, church members can be more aware how humanity is created, and this can affect their spiritual life how they pray or read their Bible. Pastors and ministry leaders can benefit who wish to explore how to prepare suitable talks and sermons for events where presence of unchurched people is probable like Sunday service, funerals, and weddings. Everyday Christians also may benefit from the findings that can help them



to make their message more relevant when they are witnessing to their non-believer family members or colleges.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Findings**

The purpose of this study was to understand how Hungarian Millennials, who recently converted to Christianity as adults, connect longing to their conversion process. This chapter provides the findings of the six Hungarian Millennial interviews and reports on common themes and relevant insights pertaining to the research questions. In order to address the purpose of this study, the following research questions guided the qualitative research.

1. How do new Hungarian Millennial believers describe their longings before their conversion process?
2. In what ways do new Hungarian Millennial believers experience longings during their conversion process?
3. In what ways and to what extent do new Hungarian Millennial believers' longings before their conversion process compare to their longings during their conversion process?

### **Introductions to Participants and Context**

The researcher selected six Hungarian Millennial believers to participate in this study. All of them became Christians after the age of 20, and none had a Christian background in childhood or teenage years. The participants first heard about the Christian message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ in their twenties. All names and identifiable participant information have been altered to protect identity.

Matthew expressed his lack of Christian background with a description of family member intersections with the church. His story illustrates how little knowledge and experience of Christianity he and all the participants had.

I was not brought up in the faith. My grandfather was proud that he had a church wedding under socialism. This meant nothing more than that they were both baptized, however they never attended church. My mother was also baptized, but I was not, the only one in the family. And then my brother who is five years younger than me, was baptized, and he had a religious education. And I was sitting there like a black sheep. I did not particularly care that I had absolutely no knowledge. All I knew was that there was Jesus and there was God.<sup>282</sup>

Matthew is a 31-year-old software developer. For several years, a childhood friend's mother took him to a Roman Catholic church during two-week vacations together. He could not understand what the priest was saying. He became interested in Christianity through his future wife when he was 25.

Daniel is a 27-year-old engineer. He is the youngest of three siblings, and grew up in a family where his parents only took care of physical needs, not emotional or other needs. He has no memories about Christianity from his childhood. He first heard about Christianity at the age of 20 when he accepted his future wife's invitation to church. He became a Christian aged 23.

Emil is a 40-year-old electrical engineer. His only experience of Christianity, apart from studying literature and history at school, was when, as an elementary student, he once attended a Christmas play run by the local Roman Catholic community. He was 29 when he read a mathematics book that made him curious about God and led him to seek a Christian community. It took him some years until he committed himself to Christ.

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<sup>282</sup> "Engem nem neveltek hitben. A nagyapám büszke volt arra, hogy a szocializmusban volt egyházi esküvője. Ez nem jelentett mást, mint hogy meg voltak keresztelve, azonban soha nem jártak templomba. Anyámat is megkeresztelték, de engem nem. Egyetlanként a családban. Aztán az öcsém, aki öt évvel fiatalabb volt nálam, ő is meg lett keresztelve, és vallásos nevelésben részesült. Én pedig úgy ültem ott, mint egy fekete bárány. Nem különösebben érdekelt, hogy egyáltalán nem tudok semmit. Csak annyit tudtam, hogy van Jézus és van Isten."

Dawn is a 32-year-old psychologist. She was brought up in a family with atheistic parents. Her father believed in materialism, and her mother did not have a consistent worldview but was interested in astrology. Dawn was introduced to Christianity through her future husband when she was 24 years old. Four years later, she decided to be baptized.

Ben is a 25-year-old mechanical engineer. Ben was baptized as an infant because his Roman Catholic grandfather requested it. This grandfather took Ben to church once a year when Ben visited him for a week of summer vacation. He has no specific memories about those church experiences. He was introduced to Christianity through a book in 2021 and has been a Christian since spring 2022.

Larry is a 31-year-old postal administrator. There was only one distant Catholic relative in his family that he knew of, but they rarely met. He visited a church when they went on a class trip to see church buildings from the Arpad period. Larry went to a church service for the first time in his life two years ago because his future wife invited him.

### **Longings Before Their Conversion**

The first research question sought to determine what kind of longings new Hungarian Millennial believers had before their conversion process. During this interview process, the researcher needed to ask a number of questions and probe to encourage good reflection and memory work. The participants struggled to talk about how they thought about life desires. Six themes surfaced in the research from the participants' description of their hopes and desires: desires for a good life, desires related

to identity, desires for direction, desires related to existential issues, desires for avoidance, and lack of desires.

### *Desires for a Good Life*

Participants did not seem to be able to talk about an ideal life for themselves. They spoke only in general terms about their life goals and struggled to name details. For Larry, six follow-up questions were needed to get him to talk about his life hopes or future desires. Instead, he spoke about his worries, problems at home, and problems finding a job. Participants found it difficult to answer the questions "How did you imagine you wanted to live your life? What were your life goals? What was a good life for you?"

Although they needed help to think about their hoped-for life, when they shared ideas eventually, four categories emerged from their responses: material, social, and work-related life desires, and a lack of life goals.

#### **Material Life Desires**

All the participants talked about having material goals in their lives before they became Christians. For young adults in Hungary, housing is generally a major concern when they finish their schooling and start working. Most participants spoke about it as part of their life goals. Emil wanted to have a flat for himself. His motivation was to move away from parents who wanted to influence and control him. Meanwhile he was also wishing to increase his self-confidence by living on his own.

I needed it to boost my confidence that I can really support myself, I can take care of myself, because my parents were telling me otherwise, so they didn't really help me in that process.<sup>283</sup>

Larry called his dreams a fairy tale when he talked about having his “own house, [be in] a couple, and then live happily ever after.” When he was dreaming about his own future house, he wanted to be far enough away from his mum that she could not walk over in slippers. He wanted to get away from his mother, but not that far. To have his own flat meant independence and self-sufficiency for him.

Matthew and his wife and four children lived in a very tiny cottage. He spoke of material goals only in the context of securing a future for his children that would allow them to develop to their best potential.

Ben also talked about a house, but he imagined a big house. He described his desire as the typical desire of everyone. Like “everyone,” he wanted to be rich, to drive a sports car and live in a big house. He was like his friends to whom quick gratification was everything.

They thought, wow, that's great, if you have money for beer, cigarettes, whatever every day! But they didn't see what was going to happen in three years, five years. I was exactly like that. I just wanted to be rich, have a lot of money, a big house and not have to work.<sup>284</sup>

Ben wanted to be so rich that he never had to work, and he would not be subjected to any obligation. Instead, he would be free to play games, play sports, spend time on social media, watch movies and shows, and spend time with his friends.

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<sup>283</sup> “Azért kellett, hogy növelje az önbizalmamat, hogy tényleg el tudom látni magamat, tudok gondoskodni magamról, mert ennek az ellenkezőjét hangoztatták a szülők, szóval nem igazán segítettek ebben a folyamatban.”

<sup>284</sup> “Azt gondolták, hú, nagyon jó, mert minden nap van pénzem sörre, cigire, akármire! De hogy nem látták három év múlva, öt év múlva mi lesz. Pontosan én is ilyen voltam. Csak legyek gazdag, sok pénzem legyen, nagy házam, és ne kelljen dolgoznom.”

Daniel claimed that he had no long-term goals in life; he just followed his instincts. He wanted things in his life that brought quick gratification like drugs and alcohol use.

### **Social Life Desires**

The participants talked about hopes and dreams that were related to the social sphere of human relationships. Their responses focused on two areas: family and friends. Other relationships did not seem to them to be significant factors for having a good life.

#### *Family*

While participants talked about family-related hopes and dreams, three themes unfolded: the “American dream,” their motivation, and their fear.

#### **American dream**

All the participants talked about wanting a lifetime partner and children. The “American dream” was Matthew’s expression. It meant family, peaceful life, a dog, and life with the right partner. Instead of “right”, Larry’s adjective was “loving” for the partner he was seeking. He used the expression “fairy tale” for finding this loving partner “and then living happily ever after.” Emil described his life goals only in generalities: have a job, get married and have a family.

#### **Motivation**

It was Matthew who explained his motive for having a family, as he was very fond of children. He loved playing with them, playing catch and wrestling. He even revealed a deeper motivation for this goal which was to have someone who was the object of his love.

I really wanted to have a wife and children that I could take care of. Caring was an important thing for me, to have someone to be the object of my love.<sup>285</sup>

Dawn revealed why she connected major significance to the relationship that brings forth a family. For her, romantic love was a goal because “it can transcend everyday difficulties.”

Another motivation the researcher heard was that the participants wanted to experience something they did not have as a child. Matthew was driven by defiance so that, even though he did not know his father, his children could experience having a father. Larry was looking for a spouse, someone who can help fill the void of not being loved at home.

I wanted a loving companion to help me with this thing—what should I call it—lack of love, which I didn't get much of at home. I didn't make a distinction between love of a parent or a partner, but to have someone to love me.<sup>286</sup>

### **Fear**

Certain participants implied fear when they speculated about their desired spouse or family. Larry and Dawn observed that romantic love can run out. Therefore, Larry's hope was that they would be together for a long time: “not a lifetime, because it is rare that the first relationship is the last, but for a long time.” Dawn had no answer for this problem. She knew she would not be in love forever, others might be, but she was not that type.

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<sup>285</sup> “Én tényleg akartam, hogy legyen feleségem és gyerekeim, akikről tudok gondoskodni. A gondoskodás nekem fontos dolog volt, hogy legyen valaki, aki a szeretetem tárgya.”

<sup>286</sup> “Szerető társat szerettem volna, aki segít ebben a dologban, hogy minek is nevezzem, szeretethiány, amit otthon nemigen kaptam meg. Nem annyira választottam külön a szeretetet, hogy szülői vagy párkapcsolati, hanem hogy valaki szeressen.”



Matthew had a deliberate plan to be a parent when he was still young so that he could grow up with his children. However, his motivation was mixed with fear. As a Judo coach working with very young children, he saw older parents lacking flexibility on their part. They concocted an existence for their child and put their child in a sterile environment. Matthew wanted to avoid this at all costs.

### *Friends*

A few of the participants talked about the desire to have friends. They also spoke about the challenges of how they struggled to build friendships. Emil's example shows this well. He described his difficulties that "in every class I had at the university I was with different people, so it was difficult to build friendships, even though I felt the need to. I felt it would be good."<sup>287</sup> Emil hoped to make friends and wanted those friendships to last as long as possible.

### **Work-Related Desires**

All participants mostly talked about their ideas and hopes for work as a part of their dreams for "a good life." Work was a main focus of their discussion of life desires. Some had an early aspiration of what they wanted to become, while others were guided by circumstances and people. Four themes, listed here in the emic wording, could be detected from their narratives: in my blood, joy factor, gives meaning to life, and sounds good.

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<sup>287</sup> "Minden órán más emberekkel voltam, így nehéz volt barátságokat kiépítenem, pedig az igényét éreztem. Éreztem, hogy ez jó lenne."

### *In My Blood*

Several participants declared that their work-related hopes had a basis in their talents and previous school performance. While Ben struggled to name his life goals in other aspects, he knew he wanted to pursue a career in engineering. Even as a child, it was “in his blood” that if something was broken, he would take it apart to see how it worked. He felt this profession suited his personality and interest. Daniel and Emil mentioned how they were good at mathematics and physics and won academic competitions. This naturally led them to imagine themselves in mathematics and physics and to pursue a profession which fitted their giftedness in these fields.

Dawn shared how her family had a history of psychiatric problems, which led her to be interested in mental health. When she thought about her future profession, she wanted to become a psychologist from an early age.

### *Enjoy It*

More participants expressed joy-related hopes when they were dreaming about their future profession. Matthew was good with people and was advised to be a social worker. He expressed, that although it was true, that was not enough motivation to stay in that profession: “It bothered the hell out of me that I was sent to work with people, because I am good at it. I might be good at it; I just did not enjoy it.”<sup>288</sup> When he retrained as a software developer, he hoped he would enjoy it.

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<sup>288</sup> “Engem baromira zavart, hogy engem elküldtek emberekkel foglalkozni, merthogy én jó vagyok abban. Lehet, hogy jó vagyok, csak nem élveztem.”

Larry, when he was authoring his thesis, really enjoyed his topic, and he felt the thesis was well done. Before this experience he felt lost and had no plans or hopes to pursue. Enjoying his topic in the final paper was a turning point that helped him to be able to imagine himself doing similar work. In his technical career, Emil was attracted by the fact that he could create. He could use his knowledge and make it work. He knew this would always bring him joy.

### *Gives Meaning to Life*

In retrospect, some participants talked about their desires and hopes connected to their future profession in a way that pointed far beyond the work itself.

For Emil, work was much more than work. For him, work was about creating “something perfect” to the extent of his abilities and creating “something good and beautiful.” Dawn was inspired at home in her childhood that the purpose of life is to find a job she loves very much. When she revealed her work-related desires before her conversion, she hoped – to use her expression – “a fitting job would give meaning to my life.” For Larry, to choose a career meant to “find my path, my purpose.” Work was an escape: “I was hoping to work as a network operator for a major IT company, and that would take my mind off things at home for a little.”<sup>289</sup>

### *It Sounds Good*

The researcher heard participants also talking about financial considerations and outside approval related to their future profession. In some cases, they held a viewpoint

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<sup>289</sup> “Azt reméltem, hogy hálózati üzemeltetőként tudok majd dolgozni egy komolyabb informatikai cégnél, és ez egy kicsit eltereli a figyelmemet az otthoni dolgokról.”

that the future job should be financially rewarding. For example, Daniel wanted to become an electrical engineer because “it would sound good” to introduce himself to others as one.

### **Lack of Life Goals**

Some participants felt they should have had an idea, a plan for life, something to pursue, but they did not have one they were able to name. Larry illustrated: “Well, I imagined what it would be like [to have a dream about life], but maybe I could never really surrender to my dreams.”<sup>290</sup> He explained that he was lacking life goals because he rarely dared to dream freely about his life and, even when he did, he was not able to do anything for his dreams. “So, I had dreams, but I could never really realize them or start on the path towards them. The door has practically closed on the things I wanted to do.”<sup>291</sup>

Lacking life goals increased participants’ suggestibility, by their own report. For Daniel, it “didn’t take much to get me to buy into someone’s advice that made a bit of sense. I probably wouldn’t have been able to answer or select these myself.”<sup>292</sup> Ben was driven not by his own purposes. He lived aimlessly and “went from right to left.”

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<sup>290</sup> “Hát elképzelttem, milyen lenne [ha lenne álmom], de talán sose tudtam volna igazán átadni magam az álmoknak.”

<sup>291</sup> “Tehát voltak álmok, de igazán megvalósítani, vagy elindulni az álmok felé vezető úton sose tudtam. Gyakorlatilag le is zárult [a lehetőségem annak kapcsán], amiket én szerettem volna.”

<sup>292</sup> “Nem sok kellett ahhoz, hogy valakinek az iránymutatására rákapjak, ami egy kicsit is értelmes volt. Valószínűleg ezeket nem tudtam volna magamnak megválaszolni vagy kiválasztani.”

## *Desires Related to Identity*

As the participants talked about their future hopes, some revealed reasons and hidden motives that were related to their self-identity. The researcher heard two distinct themes: opinion and rules of others (“I don't like to be pigeonholed”) and self-esteem.

### **Don't Like to Be Pigeonholed**

Ben made his personal mission to always push the limit or to break the rules. It became his character. After a while that was what drove him, so that he could do whatever he wanted.

We were careful not to go too far over the limit. There were a lot of things that we shouldn't have done, but we went all the way and always pushed the limit.<sup>293</sup>

Matthew also did not want to be led by other's opinion and rules. He expressed the difference between himself and other people saying “I am a freer spirit. I don't like to be pigeonholed.”<sup>294</sup> Religious customs he experienced seemed contrived to him. He could imagine that some people enjoy being “quasi-controlled”, but that was not for him. He did not want to live that way.

Daniel was the opposite of Matthew. He was looking for people's approval to strengthen his self-identity, and he thought choosing a good career could bring the respect he longed for.

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<sup>293</sup> “Figyeltünk azért, hogy nagyon a határon ne menjünk túl. Sok olyan dolog volt, amit nem kellett volna megcsinálni, de mi végigmentünk, és hajtottuk a határt.”

<sup>294</sup> “Én szabadabb lélek vagyok. Nem szeretem, hogyha beskatulyáznak.”

## Self-esteem

Dawn felt a strong aversion to thinking inconsistently. She did not want to be like what she saw around her, especially her mother. Dawn did want to grapple with life's big questions and find a consistent worldview.

[Seeing my mother's life and worldview] I said to myself, I thought it's a bit of a cop-out, that I'm going to pick up everything I like. I'm making something up and I'm not trying to be consistent in the sense that if I think that this is the way it is, then what follows from that and what doesn't follow.<sup>295</sup>

The inconsistent thinking, inconsistent behavior, and inconsistent worldview was despicable to her and she did not want to be that way.

### *Desires Related to Direction*

Some participants expressed how they wished to have guidance in their lives. Daniel was “clueless” by himself and was led by enjoying the moment and by the advice of others. He even called himself foolish for that. He felt it was scary to make decisions, and he “needed someone's guidance because I wouldn't have done it on my own.” Larry also experienced uncertainty about what to do next. There were certain times in his life when he thought he was going in the right direction because he experienced joy and success, but it turned out to be a dead end. This theme kept coming up in his narrative: how he was searching for “his path” and his “place in life”.

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<sup>295</sup> “Mondtam, hogy én azt egy kicsit olyan megúszós dolognak tartom, hogy így mindenholnan kicsípem, ami tetszik. Valamit így összezélek, és nem próbálok így konzisztens lenni abban, hogy most akkor én, ha azt gondolom, hogy ez így van, akkor abból mi következik, mi nem következik.”

## *Desires Related to Existential Issues*

As participants spoke about their life stories, they revealed deep motivations that accompanied them for longer periods. The researcher elicited two main themes from the participants' narratives that were related to existential issues: existential desires and existential questions.

### **Existential Desires**

In terms of existential desires, participants expressed three areas: a desire for meaning (that snatches you out of your everyday life), a desire for order (my fractured worldview must be reordered), and a desire for stability (not everything is always going to be stable).

#### *That Snatches You Out of Your Everyday Life*

The participants revealed a desire for a life to be more than what is visible. Some could only speak of it in general terms, as an elusive inner feeling: looking for their place in life or having an intangible existential longing for life to change for the better. Emil is an example of this. He was totally immersed in science, feeling that nothing else mattered. "I was living in a world of my own"<sup>296</sup> he said, until, as a university student, he was suddenly struck by the realization that "something was missing in my life."<sup>297</sup> At the time, he attributed this lack to the lack of relationships in his life.

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<sup>296</sup> "Elvoltam a magam világában."

<sup>297</sup> "Rájöttem, hogy itt azért valami hiányzik az életemből."

Dawn was much more consciously searching for existential meaning. She turned to romantic relationships first, seeing it as an opportunity, because it went beyond her everyday difficulties.

The relationship I was in was very difficult and bad, but still it was a way out. So, romantic love became my first choice that snatches you out of your everyday life.<sup>298</sup>

Along with romantic relationships she looked at work to give her meaning in life. She spoke about how she was raised to believe that. When she started working, she realized that although she enjoyed her work, she did not always feel like doing it, and that it did not make her life meaningful.

I was prepared for this to happen: today is Monday, Tuesday tomorrow, then Sunday in a week's time, and then a lot of it, and then we'll die. I hoped it would make more sense in itself, but it's actually just a lot of days in a row. It's just an illusion.<sup>299</sup>

She hoped for and longed for work to give meaning to her existence and to transcend life.

### *My Fractured Worldview Must Be Reordered*

Some participants, when they reflected on their situation in the past, remarked how they desired to have their thinking and worldview to be whole. Daniel went abroad on a scholarship to a Muslim country for a semester and there he was "infinitely stimulated." He had never encountered anything like it before; he had never thought

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<sup>298</sup> "A kapcsolat, amelyben voltam, nagyon nehéz és rossz volt, de mégis kiút volt. A szerelem lett így az első választásom, ami kiszakít a mindennapokból."

<sup>299</sup> "Arra készültem, hogy az lesz, hogy most hétfő van, holnap kedd, utána egy hét múlva vasárnap, és ebből lesz nagyon sok, és utána meghalunk. Én arra készültem, hogy ez így önmagában értelmesebb lesz, de igazából csak nagyon-nagyon sok nap, ami egymást követi. Ez csak egy illúzió."



about other cultures, traditions, or worldviews. For the first time in his life, he had to adapt to a foreign education system and meet a diverse group of people. This experience “fractured” his worldview and evoked discomfort.

An image appeared in front of me that my person was like a closed conglomerate, and that it was shattered and needed to be rearranged. I had to somehow reintegrate all that I had experienced. My fractured worldview must be reordered.<sup>300</sup>

Daniel realized his need and a desire for a new system to order his thinking.

While Daniel went through a challenge that generated a desire for finding a worldview that could integrate his experience, Dawn reflected on this topic at a very young age. As Dawn observed her father and mother’s lives, her response was a desire for consistency and for a worldview that was coherent.

Emil also showed another angle of desire from a working worldview. He spoke about the burden of the daily environmental stimuli that made him uptight and impulsive and hindered him being able to “reflect on his life in peace.” “I wanted to think more realistically or calmly about what to do next,” he said.<sup>301</sup>

### *Everything Will Not Be So Stable*

A third type of existential desires surfaced from the participants’ narratives, connected to the precariousness of life. For Daniel, a seemingly small event provoked his anxiety and the desire for stability. His family moved to another place after 20 years

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<sup>300</sup> “Megjelent előttem egy kép, hogy a személyem olyan volt, mint egy zárt halmaz, és hogy ez meghasadt, és ezt újra kell rendezni. Azt a sok mindent, ami ér engem valahogyan újonnan kell integrálnom saját magamban. A szétfeszített világképemet újra kell építeni.”

<sup>301</sup> “Reálisabban vagy nyugodtabban akartam átgondolkodni, hogy hogy legyen tovább.”

living in the same house. It "rang an alarm bell"<sup>302</sup> in him, as he put it, because he realized that not everything would be as stable as it had been.

## **Existential Questions**

As the participants looked back on their life journeys and major milestones and as they tried to articulate their motivations, hopes, and aspirations, they often reported that they had been preoccupied with life's big questions. They had questions about God (Is there a God?), the nature of man (Is there any point to...?), and the way the world works.

### *Is There a God?*

This question was asked out of different motivations. For Emil, it was an intellectual question. He wanted to grasp the fulness of reality. He regarded it as one of life's greatest questions, and one that is not easy to answer. He was determined to take the time to find out the answer even if he had to wait a long time for it.

Suffering was another motive for asking this question. Ben struggled with believing the existence of God because of the pain and evil he read in the news.

For a very long time I thought there was no God because I felt that life was not right. I was very concerned with world politics, reading the news. There's so much bad stuff going on in the world, it's actually possible that the big bang just happened and here we are in the middle of nowhere.<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> "megkongatott egy vészharangot"

<sup>303</sup> "Azért gondoltam nagyon sokáig úgy, hogy nincs Isten, mert úgy éreztem, hogy nincs az élet rendben. Sokat foglalkoztam világpolitikával, híroldalak olvasásával. Annyi rossz történik a világban, tulajdonképpen lehetséges, hogy csak úgy történt az ősrobbanás, és itt vagyunk a semmi közepén."

In Ben's thinking, God's existence was opposed to the evolutionary origin story: God versus randomness and meaninglessness. Witnessing suffering in the news made Ben wonder how there could be a God behind such a pain-filled world.

### *Is There Any Point to...?*

When participants expressed this question, it was born out of deep pain. It was triggered by disappointment and loss of hope. For Dawn, it was a question about romantic relationships. While she was pulled apart by the options of staying in relationship or breaking up with her boyfriend, she came across a deeper question: Is there any point to getting married?

Ben finally achieved the peace he desired, and no one was bothering him. Everything was settled to the best of his imagination, yet he was confronted with how meaningless it was. Instead of becoming content, he became disappointed, realizing the pointlessness of life: "That's it? Is this life? Do I have to while away another 40-60 years in this?"<sup>304</sup>

### *How Far Can Nature Be Understood?*

Respondents also had questions about the way the world works, and they were looking for answers. The order found in nature and universe is thought-provoking. Emil wanted to decipher where this order came from and why it is in the world at all. He

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<sup>304</sup> "Ennyi? Ez az élet? Ebben kell még lehúzni 40-60 évet?"

wondered, “what is the limit of comprehensibility, how far can the world be understood?”<sup>305</sup>

Another participant, Dawn, tried to understand the connection between ethical behavior and its consequences. She observed that life “basically is not all linear; if you do right, everything will not be good nor things get better.”<sup>306</sup>

Another area of questioning how the world works revolved around what is permanent and lasting or what is transient; on what can life can be built? Dawn reflected on her relationship with her boyfriend and that brought up disturbing concerns about how love is not a reliable basis for life.

It's a bit of a naive approach. When you love, [how can you know] what you have now is something permanent or something fleeting? What happens when it goes away, if you have built on it so much? I think it's quite hard to face that it's not such an everlasting thing.<sup>307</sup>

Similar questions came up again when a participant asked about the basis for making any major decisions. “What are you basing your decision on anyway? What do you base it on, what do you benchmark it against?”

While the question about the limit of comprehensibility was born out of curiosity to explore nature and order, the questions about ethical behavior and its consequences, about what is lasting and transient, and about the basis for decisions came from questioning how man should live.

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<sup>305</sup> “Mi a megérthetőség határa, meddig érthető meg a világ?”

<sup>306</sup> “Alapvetően nem minden így lineáris, hogyha jól csinálod, minden jó lesz, meg a dolgok egyre jobbak.”

<sup>307</sup> “Ez egy kicsit naív megközelítés, a szerelem, hogy ez most akkor egy ilyen állandó dolog, vagy egy múlandó. Mi történik, ha elmúlik, ha erre nagyon sokat építesz. Szerintem elég nehéz szembesülni vele, hogy ez nem egy ilyen örökké tartó dolog.”

## *Desires For Avoidance*

Two main areas emerged from participants' accounts when they were talking about avoiding something. On the one hand, they articulated something they wished to avoid in terms of their human relationships, their work, or their thinking. The other area was religion. Participants expressed their desire to avoid religion for various reasons.

### **Desires For Avoidance That Comes from Humanity**

Two themes emerged from the participants' report that speak about how they tried to avoid something that came from their humanity, namely relationships and work.

#### *Avoiding Relationships Because of Present Difficulties*

More participants shared how they tried to avoid human relationships because of present difficulties. Emil wished to be alone, far from others and his parents. His reason for desiring to be alone with regard to his mates was ethical: he found the loose life his mates led repugnant and disturbing; therefore, it was his goal to avoid them. With his parents, the reason for his avoidance was that he felt they did not let him grow up. They controlled him at home, and this pushed him away from them.

#### *Avoiding Relationships Because of Past Wounds*

Daniel was afraid to bind himself to anyone because he had been wounded in the past. He received no affirmative feedback growing up when he tried to connect to his parents, and this made him withdraw and wish to avoid connection or friendship.

I learnt most of all, don't depend on anyone, manage your own life. Be as self-sufficient as possible in every sense. Both in my physical needs and my emotional needs.<sup>308</sup>

As he expressed, his motivation was to be safe, not to get hurt again.

To avoid people, Ben's reason was his lacking social skills. Initially he felt awkward because he did not know how to start a conversation and how to connect. This made him think it was better not to meet people at all. He would cry in the dormitory. For him, it seemed better not to see anybody at all. This desire was so strong that sometimes he dreamed of becoming a truck driver who would be on the road for weeks by himself.

### **Desires For Avoidance from the Area of Religion**

Several participants shared their aversion to religion. When asked how he experienced longing in the conversion process, Matthew formulated the answer, "at first, the encounter with religion was not an attraction, but a repulsion. I was pushed far away from the whole thing."<sup>309</sup> The participants described three themes: being annoyed by Christian faith expressions (leave me alone), Christians are strange (they are nuts), and emotional-cognitive reasons (there is too much trouble in the world).

#### *Leave Me Alone*

Participants emphasized how they were not interested in Christianity at first because they were annoyed by Christian behavior and the way they expressed their faith.

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<sup>308</sup> "Megtanultam, leginkább, ne függ senkitől, oldd meg magad az életedet. Minél inkább legyek önellátó minden értelemben. A fizikai szükségletem és az érzelmi szükségletemben egyaránt."

<sup>309</sup> "Először maga a találkozás a vallással nem vonzás volt, hanem pont eltaszítás. Jó messzire lettem lökve ettől az egésztől."

They felt nervous and estranged when they thought about going to church. For Daniel, this was mostly due to lack of knowledge, but for the others it was largely due to bad first impressions.

Matthew was teenager when he went to a Roman Catholic church service on a Sunday. His takeaway was how strange and unnatural an experience he had.

I was squirming at church. The priest muttered which I could not understand. Now, this is too much for me, I thought, I don't want this. Somehow it all seemed so forced to me. I was annoyed beyond measure by this artificiality. It was so repulsive, just repulsive.<sup>310</sup>

He reacted with intense emotions, feeling forced. When he reflected on his experience, he was able to name how dogmatism and the ritualistic approach bothered him.

I had the feeling as I was sitting there, and people were standing up and sitting down and praying on command, and I don't know what. I couldn't get in the mood. I didn't feel like I was being overlooked, but I felt like an outsider. Then it dawned on me that what bothered me most was this dogmatism and this excessive ritualistic attitude: repent on command.<sup>311</sup>

This experience made him resistant against church and religion. When his family decided to go to church, he refused to join.

I was in my own world. I didn't mind them going to church, I just wanted them to leave me alone.<sup>312</sup>

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<sup>310</sup> “Feszengtem a templomban. A pap mormogott valamit, amit nem értettem. Na, nekem ez túl sok, gondoltam, én ezt nem szeretném. Valahogy az egész olyan erőltetett volt számomra. Engem mérhetetlenül bosszantott ez a mesterkéeltség. Olyan taszító volt, egyszerűen taszító.”

<sup>311</sup> “Az volt az érzésem, hogy ott ülök, és az emberek fölállnak meg leülnek, meg parancsszóra imádkoznak, meg mit tudom én. Nem tudtam hangulatban kerülni. Nem éreztem, hogy kinéznek, de kívülállónak éreztem magam. Aztán az fogalmazódott meg bennem, hogy leginkább ez a dogmatikusság zavart, meg ez a túlzott rituális hozzáállás: parancsra tessék bűnbánni.”

<sup>312</sup> “Megvoltam a saját világomban. Nem zavart, hogy ők mennek templomba, csak hogy engem hagyjanak békén.”

Similarly, Ben was distanced from church based on a bad experience with going to church. In his case, it was actually his mother's experience. When his mother was young, she had to go to church because her father forced her. She experienced it as trauma and shuts down when religion comes up. She passed on this attitude to her son who said, "I used to think that I don't need it at all."

### *They Are Nuts*

Participants also listed preconceptions they or their society hold regarding Christians and Christianity. The general view was that to be a believer is "such an awkward thing, such a lame thing, or such a dumb thing to do."<sup>313</sup> Daniel never desired to be among Christians. When he was with Christians, it brought out how he thought about them.

I found myself in the company of people who were believers, and I had the preconception that there must be something wrong with them. There's a common perception that if you need spirituality, you're crazy or nuts or whatever.<sup>314</sup>

Religiosity is viewed as weakness or a mental issue. Dawn's psychological approach was similarly critical of religion. She regarded it as an escape from reality to self-deception.

Religion is only a status maintenance function, a system justifier. It's there so that if something is wrong, I don't try to change it, but rather to put a

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<sup>313</sup> "Ez ilyen gáz dolog, vagy egy ilyen béna dolog, vagy butítás."

<sup>314</sup> "Olyan emberek társaságába kerültem, akiről az volt a prekoncepcióm, hogy hívő emberek, szóval biztosan valami bajuk van. Az van a köztudatban, hogy ha valakinek szüksége van spiritualításra, akkor az őrült, vagy félnótás, vagy akármicsoda."



nice story around it. It's just self-deception, most people do it out of habit, and it doesn't really work.<sup>315</sup>

She had revulsion against Christianity not only based on her psychological viewpoint but also based on how she perceived it as alienating because of Christianity's connection with cultural and political values which were not her own values.

If I had been looking for a religion on my own, Christianity would have been one of the last options because I had so many prejudices. Some people in the political and cultural sphere think it's very much their own, and I think that alienates a lot of people.<sup>316</sup>

Finding Christians and Christianity itself as dangerous, lame, self-deceiving, or lifeless pushes people away from it. When politics is intrinsically linked to religion, or a certain set of cultural values is associated with Christianity, some people also become alienated.

### *There Is Too Much Trouble in the World*

The researcher twice heard theological reasons why some participants did not have any desire to explore Christianity. Suffering is a theme that made Ben think. For a very long time he thought there was no God because he felt his life was not right. Dealing a lot with world politics, he realized that so many bad things were happening in the world. His conclusion was that it was “possible that everything was just happening, and we were in the middle of nowhere.” Dawn held a similar opinion.

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<sup>315</sup> “A vallás csak státuszfenntartó funkció, rendszerigazoló. Arra való, hogy ha valami rossz dolog van, akkor ne törekedjek változtatni rajta, hanem inkább egy szép sztorit keríték köré. Ez csak önbecsapás, a legtöbb ember szokásból csinálja, és nem is hat igazán.”

<sup>316</sup> “Ha magamtól kerestem volna vallást, ez a keresztyénség lett volna az egyik utolsó opció, mert annyira sok előítéletem volt. A politika és kulturális szférában valakik nagyon a magukénak gondolják, és ez szerintem sok embert elidegenít.”

## *Lack of Desires*

When the researcher was looking for desire traits in the interviewees' account, lack of desire was another area that was identified. While negative emotions played a role in desires for avoidance, the previous category, the lack of desires was more about how participants felt distanced and unconcern. Talking about desires, they declared how they lacked any desire in relation to religion. They used three types of justification: lack of need, lack of interest, and lack of emotional involvement.

### **Lack of Need**

Participants parsed the reasons why they thought they did not have need for religion. One participant viewed need for church neutrally. Seeing others to go to church, even his grandfather, Ben wondered why people would do such an activity, but he saw no need why he should do it himself. Another participant's lack of perceived need was based on a presupposition that Christians must have had some difficulty, therefore they turned to God. Daniel had not perceived such a thing in his own life "in that way, I didn't think I needed that [Christianity]."<sup>317</sup>

### **Lack of Interest**

Lack of interest was detected behind lack of desire. This reason is related to the previous one, lack of need. Daniel did not see any need for religion, therefore when he first interacted with Christianity, he was not interested at first.

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<sup>317</sup> "Ilyen formán nem gondoltam, hogy erre szükségem van."

## **Lack of Emotional Involvement**

Participants talked about people whom they saw going to church. They assumed that these people had good reason to do that. For Larry, this assumption was an emotional motivation: they might enjoy being there because they felt good.

They had good reason to go to church. I don't know what the reason was, but if they felt good or if they felt like it, then go. I never felt motivated that I should go.<sup>318</sup>

Emil assumed their reason was that the habit, the tradition was attractive to them. He explained he missed that in his childhood therefore it was unknown to him.

If I had been taken to church as a child, I would have kept it up in my adult life, too.<sup>319</sup>

Since they did not have the emotional attachment to church experience, they expressed lack of desire to have connection to religion.

### *Summary of Longings Before Their Conversion*

Six themes surfaced in the research from the participants' descriptions of their hopes and desires, when the researcher sought to determine what kind of longings new Hungarian Millennial believers had before their conversion process. These themes were: desires for a good life, desires related to identity, desires for direction, desires related to existential issues, desires for avoidance, and a lack of desires.

Interviewees talked about their desires for a good life before their conversion process. They had material, social, and work-related life desires, and a lack of life goals.

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<sup>318</sup> "Jó okuk van templomba járni. Én nem tudom, mi az az ok, de hogyha jól érzik magukat, vagy ha úgy érzik, akkor menjenek. Én sosem éreztem indíttatást, hogy nekem mennem kellene."

<sup>319</sup> "Ha gyerekként elvittek volna templomba, akkor felnőttként is megtartottam volna ezt."

The main dream was for most of them was a house or a flat that represented independence, self-sufficiency, freedom, and a secure future. They generally wanted a family with the hope of love, transcending everyday life, or giving to their families something they had missed in their childhood. In some cases, these relational hopes were overshadowed by the fear of losing love or becoming too old before experiencing love. Participants had desires that were connected to their work life. In some cases, their desires were about pursuing a career because they felt interested in it, they were talented at the job, they thought they would enjoy their future profession, they thought they would be proud of the career, or they sought to find the meaning of life at work. A few interviewees expressed pain related to how they struggled to articulate goals for their lives. Another significant area was desires related to identity. Longings for freedom, for approval from people, and for self-esteem emerged from their accounts.

Finding their path or place in life and wishing for guidance were the themes of desires for direction. Existential desires surfaced: hoping to escape from monotony of life, finding meaning, or longing for life to change for the better. As Daniel expressed, healing from “fractured personality and worldview” or finding security in this always-changing world were also issues about which participants confessed. Existential questions motivated participants to search for answers. Questions about God’s existence, seeking reasons for living, and hoping to understand the world in a way that brings the sense of security were their interests before their conversion processes.

More interviewees expressed desires for avoidance because of feeling distanced and unconcerned. Some were avoiding relationships out of present difficulties or out of past wounds. Christian faith-expressions felt annoying for them, Christians seemed to be

strange and weird, and there also was an emotional-cognitive reason for avoidance as the brokenness of this world made God seem unattractive.

The final category was when respondents expressed their lack of desires. They did not think they needed Christianity since there was no significant problem in their lives. They were not interested in it at all, reasoning that they had no positive, attracting experience with Christianity.

In the following section, the “longing connected to their conversion process” will be considered in the experiences of the participants.

### **Longings Connected to Their Conversion Process**

The second research question sought to determine in what ways new Hungarian Millennial believers experiencing longings during their conversion process. Participants used several expression where longing and desire could be detected. They talked about their interest, liking, enjoying, or desiring something, being attracted or motivated to do something.

Four themes surfaced in the research as the participants described their longings during the conversion process: attraction to order and truth, attraction to Christianity, attraction to church life, and an attraction that there must be something more.

#### *Attraction to Order and Truth*

Interviewees declared that a key element of their conversion process was the attraction to order or truth. These features proved to be connected to creation. In some cases, this was the area that prompted the interest in transcendence or Christianity.

## Attraction to Order

Some interviewees expressed that they were touched by the beauty of the order. This was particularly the case for those with an engineering background who deal with mathematics and physics as a profession. The knowledge that can be gained through scientific investigation of the world is beautiful in its own way. Emil was captivated by the simplicity of the laws of physics, how they are very simple, since they can be written down in a formula. Yet these simple laws have given rise to a very complex world. This led him to ask where all this order came from.<sup>320</sup>

Ben also spoke about how he was captivated by the beauty of the orderliness in physical world. He had experience when he was working on the surface design of metals. He realized that while we cannot create two identical surfaces, no matter how hard we try, the world is governed by precise and constant rules.

The language we engineers use is basically mathematics. It is a way of describing the world that follows a set of rules. We know when plants have to sprout. You have a nice order to everything. In fact, the whole universe can be described very precisely. There are proportions.<sup>321</sup>

In both cases, seeing the beauty of order led them thinking about God's existence.

Matthew explained that he was drawn to go to church, to fellowship. One of the points he made was that there he had heard about how people should live their lives properly. "Not just live as you want, but in order." His words implied an order in the

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<sup>320</sup> "Ha a fizika törvényeit nézzük, akkor nagyon egyszerűek, hiszen egy-egy képletben le lehet írni őket. Ezekből az egyszerű törvényekből mégis egy nagyon bonyolult világ keletkezett. A fizikus modelleket állít fel, hogy hogyan működik a világ, de arra kérdésre, hogy miért van rend, miért működnek kiszámíthatóan a dolgok, arra egyszerűen nincs válaszuk nekik se."

<sup>321</sup> "Az a nyelv, amit mi gépészek alapvetően beszélünk a matematika. Ezzel úgy lehet leírni a világot, hogy valamely szabályrendszer követ. Megvan, hogy a növényeknek mikor kell kikelni. Megvan mindennek a szép rendje. Igazából az egész univerzumot nagyon pontosan meg lehet határozni. Vannak arányok."

world that he wanted to conform to, so he wanted to hear as much about it as possible. “It was good to be able to place yourself in the world.”

### **Attraction to Truth**

The majority of participants mentioned truth as a factor that motivated them. Ben derived this desire from his nature, that he “had to get to the bottom of how it is.” Daniel reported about the same motivation, saying “I’m a truth-seeker, I want to understand things at as elementary a level as possible. It’s often what drives me, what inspires me.”<sup>322</sup> He added, his inquiry was why there is such a thing as Christianity because he found strange the phenomenon that people were practicing religion.

I think I was motivated by the fact that there seemed to be some truth behind it that was worth exploring.<sup>323</sup>

While trying to discover the truth, he was attuned to finding contradictions, logical inconsistencies. He wrestled honestly with the Christian teachings, and he was more and more motivated throughout the learning process.

It wasn't that after one or two thought experiments I short-circuited the idea that so-and-so wasn't true. But rather, one by one, the knowledge and insights came that yes, there is something here. Then I didn't encounter any contradictions, and that's what drove me on. The system was consistent, the Calvinist belief system, the Reformed way of thinking.<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>322</sup> “Különösnek tartottam a jelenséget, hogy ezt az emberek gyakorolják, meg van ilyen, hogy keresztyénység, és akkor ennek valami végett kell lennie. Ezt az okot szerettem volna megérteni. Ez jellemez engem, én ilyen igazságpárti vagyok, szeretném a dolgokat minél elemibb szinten megérteni. Sokszor ez hajt, lelkesít.”

<sup>323</sup> “Szerintem az motivált, hogy úgy tűnt, emögött létezik valami igazság, amit érdemes kutatni.”

<sup>324</sup> “Az motivált, hogy úgy tűnt, létezik valami igazság, amit érdemes kutatni. Nem az történt, hogy egy-két gondolati próbálkozás után rövidre zártam a gondolatot, hogy ezért meg ezért nem igaz. Hanem egyre-másra jöttek azok az ismeretek meg belátások, hogy igen, itt van valami. Akkor nem találok ellentmondásokkal, és ez vitt tovább. Konzisztens volt a rendszer, a Kálvin-féle hitrendszer, a református gondolkodás.”

While he was interested in truth, it manifested itself as a thinking system in Christianity. This system demonstrated itself to be consistent, which was a key for Daniel.

Dawn, although convinced early on about the truth of Christianity, also felt she needed “to get to the bottom of it.” However, her motivation was to be able to protect her conviction about the truth because she remembered previously how critical she was regarding religion.

Another practical angle was Matthew’s motivation for seeking the truth. He concluded that truth and future reality relate to each other.

You don't know what the future will bring, but those who build on truth, build on rock, have a more stable vision for the future.<sup>325</sup>

Matthew believed that truth could help stabilize his inner self, and help face the unknown and precarious future.

### *Attracted to Christianity*

When they got in touch with authentic Christians among their friends or in church, participants revealed how they became attracted to Christianity. Two major themes were detected: Christian worldview and Christian personality and lifestyle.

#### **Attraction to Christian Worldview**

More participants commented how they became aware they were attracted to Christian worldview. At first, the worldview did not matter. They had friends with whom

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<sup>325</sup> “Nem tudhatod, mit hoz a jövő, de akik az igazságra, a sziklára építenek, azoknak stabilabb jövőképük van.”



they enjoyed spending time. They reported that after a while, they noticed their own values which they cherished, and what they saw in the lives of these friends coincided and turned out that these friends happened to be Christians. This made these participants analyze the occurrence. Dawn reflected on a guy she was attracted to:

Somehow I knew he was a Christian. What if I'm not interested in Christianity because he is one, but if I'm interested in him because it's part of his life, which is what I'm attracted to anyway.<sup>326</sup>

Her question was, what if she is interested in Christianity, and that is why she wants to be with that guy. It was also a key moment for Emil when he realized that all the friends he had enjoyed spending time with in his life were in fact Christians. Although they discussed not faith but things in life, their shared opinions brought them closer together.

When we were talking about the world, public life, politics, morality or whatever, we were on the same page (swinging on the same string). That's what attracted me most.<sup>327</sup>

Somehow these friends' whole worldview, their outlook, was "more in line with" Emil's thinking, and they were all Christians.<sup>328</sup>

Once the interviewees understood that they were attracted to these other persons' value system, they made a comparison with their own. It made them understand that,

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<sup>326</sup> "Valahogy tudtam, hogy ő keresztyén. És ott volt az első pont, amikor elengedtem magamban a pszichológust, hogy mi van, ha nem azért érdekel a keresztyénség, mert ő az, hanem hogyha azért érdekel ő, mert ez is az életének része, ami engem egyébként vonz."

<sup>327</sup> "Amikor a világról, a közéletéről, a politikáról, erkölcsről vagy ilyesmiről beszélgettünk, akkor egy húron pendültünk. Ez vonzott leginkább."

<sup>328</sup> "Ahogy visszagondoltam, kik azok az emberek, akik közelebb álltak hozzám, akikkel tök jól el tudok beszélgetni. Rájöttem, hogy ezek mind keresztyének voltak. Nem a hitről beszélgettünk, de valahogy az egész világképük, szemléletük jobban passzolt az enyémhez, azt vettem észre."

although they see the world in similar ways, their own values have no real basis. For Dawn, it came out in thinking about relationships.

There was a gentleness to it, which I combined with Christianity. And also his attitude to relationships was very similar to mine, only mine, I felt, didn't have any worldview roots, it was hanging in the air.<sup>329</sup>

Emil understood that although he thought the same, “came from a different path to the things” and this conclusion was more natural for a believer out of their worldview.

### **Attraction to Christian Personality or Lifestyle**

When participants commented on the person through whom they had encountered Christianity, several talked about what had really captured them about the other person. There were cases where, in general, the whole personality of those people was gripping: “somehow I felt that he had a different vibe than other people,” or “I thought they were decent people, and I would have liked to be friends with them.”

Daniel was shocked when he learnt enough about his Christian friend to see her personality. He used strong expressions to give back how he felt surprised.

Something dawned on me. What was very decisive was that I felt what a beautiful soul she was, and for some reason I had the thought that she was too good for the world.<sup>330</sup>

While Daniel and others were impressed by Christian personality, they also talked about character traits that were attractive to them. For Dawn, it manifested itself in a frame of romantic relationship.

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<sup>329</sup> “Volt benne szelídség, amit összekapcsoltam a keresztyénséggel. A kapcsolatokhoz való hozzáállás nagyon hasonló volt az enyémhez, csak az enyémnek, úgy éreztem, nem volt valami világnézeti gyökere, hanem csak úgy.”

<sup>330</sup> “Valamit megsejtettem. Ami nagyon meghatározó volt, hogy úgy éreztem, milyen szép lélek, és valamiért az a gondolat támadt bennem, hogy túl jó ő a világnak.”

Somehow I felt that if he was a Christian, whatever is going to happen [in their relationship], he was going to be open and honest and that he was going to make a commitment.<sup>331</sup>

Honesty, openness, and commitment she mentioned as characteristics and she linked it to Christian values.

Emil found Christian characteristics attractive as they manifested themselves in social interactions, in relationships with people. He shared a story how Christian friends expressed gratitude for help in studies and how it impressed him. Christian morality and Christian way of interacting with others was something he wanted to have.

I felt comfortable with Christian people. What struck me about them was their moral worldview. On the other hand, the way they related to other people. How thoughtful they were. These are the Christian good qualities I could list that I really saw in these people that are there so cumulatively. It filtered down to me that I would like to be like that.<sup>332</sup>

The positive life example and behavior of Christians was an attractive phenomenon for Emil.

### *Attraction to Church Life*

Eventually, participants came into contact with a church in their conversion process. They talked about attractions and desires that worship service, sermon, and Christian community had inspired in them.

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<sup>331</sup> “Valahogy azt éreztem, hogy ha ő keresztyén, bármi is lesz, nyílt lesz meg őszinte, meg hogy elköteleződés céllal ismerkedik. Valahogy azt éreztem, hogy ven egy másféle kisugárzása, mint másoknak.”

<sup>332</sup> “Én keresztyén emberek között jól éreztem magam. Ami megfogott bennük, az az erkölcsi világkép. Másrészt, ahogy a többi emberhez viszonyultak. Hogy figyelmesek voltak. Ezek a keresztyén jó tulajdonságokat tudnám sorolni, amit tényleg láttam ezekben az emberekben, hogy ott van úgy halmozottan. Az szűrődött le bennem, hogy én is szeretnék olyan lenni.”

## Desires Connected to Worship Service

Some participants found the worship service strange, but others liked it and were motivated to go back. One of the reasons for liking it was that it was a good support for managing life. Daniel struggled to spend his time well and he found going to church can give a good rhythm to life. He assessed it as a healthy habit and a good framework for living.<sup>333</sup>

Larry shared about his church experience in long. He remembered how he arrived and as he entered, he felt he was “finding his place.” It was a hiding place for him from the “darkness” of outside.

When I entered, it was as if I had slipped into another world. I left the darkness outside behind, so to speak. When the door closed behind me, it stayed outside. And what happens inside is what really matters. And what's negative in life doesn't matter so much.<sup>334</sup>

For Larry, church service broke the power of the difficulties of everyday life and provided a safe place and a meaningful activity.

## Desires Connected to Sermons

All participants talked about how sermons affected them. They pointed out three ways that were significant for them: cognitively (The quality of thinking that I was led

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<sup>333</sup> “Valahogy tetszett. Szép szokásnak találtam, hogy menjünk vasárnap templomba. Akkoriban szükségem is volt ilyen keretre a szabadidőm eltöltéséhez, és ez egy keret volt. Egy olyan rendszert biztosított, ami egy egészségesnek tűnő viselkedés, és azért akkor úgy mentem.”

<sup>334</sup> “Amikor beléptem a templomba, már ott éreztem, furcsán fogalmazva, hogy megérkeztem, hogy könnyen lehet, hogy a helyemet találtam meg visszagondolva. Amikor beléptem, mintha egy másik világba csöppentem volna. Úgymond a kinti sötétséget a hátam mögött hagytam. Amikor becsukódott mögöttem az ajtó, akkor az kint maradt. És ami bent történni fog az, ami igazán számít. És ami negatívum ért az életben, az már nem lényeges annyira.”

into was attractive), affectively (I was touched by the sermon), and spiritually (Revealing them, virtually exposing you).

*The Quality of Thinking That I Was Led into Was Attractive*

Participants experienced cognitive stimulation listening to sermons. Many of the expressed how unexpected and even attractive was listening to Christian ideas presented in preaching because of the useful information for life and the high standard of thinking. They appreciated the sermons because that gave them ideas to “chew on,” and they “got a lot out of them.” Emil interpreted why he kept going back to services. He was surprised by the teaching feature and how it was practical help to live everyday life.

After that I went on Sundays because I was interested in preaching. I was surprised that the sermons had a teaching character and were clearly articulated. It's a knowledge of life.<sup>335</sup>

Daniel found attractive the quality of thinking. He admitted that although he did not fully understand the content of the sermon, as he did not have the necessary knowledge, it was still meaningful and somehow desirable.

Otherwise, I really liked the services. The sermons, which themselves were confusing at first because there were parts I didn't understand, made sense. It was talking about things I didn't understand in a way that made sense, not crazy. The quality of thinking that I was led into was attractive. You can think about such things and in such qualities, and I hadn't heard them before. It was definitely attractive.<sup>336</sup>

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<sup>335</sup> “Utána vasárnaponként jártam, mert érdekelt az igehirdetés. Meglepett, hogy a prédikációnak tanítás jellege van, és érthetően fogalmaznak. Ez az életről szóló ismeretanyag.”

<sup>336</sup> “Egyébként az istentiszteleteket nagyon szerettem. A prédikáció, ami önmagában zavaros volt az elején, mert voltak részek, amiket nem értettem, értelmesnek tündek. Úgy volt szó olyasmiről, amit nem értettem, hogy értelmesnek tűnt, nem örültségnek. Az a minőségű gondolkozás, amibe bevezettek, vonzó volt. Ilyenekről is lehet gondolkodni és ilyen minőségben, és ezeket nem hallottam korábban. Ez vonzó volt mindenképpen.”

For Daniel, religion itself and preaching focused on important areas of life he never thought before. He found it worth exploring. As Matthew expressed, “they have such good things to say.”

### *I Was Touched by the Sermon*

Some participants emphasized how sermons had an effective impact on them. They used expressions to describe how it was for them to listen to a sermon saying, “it was touching,” “it was all well and good,” “I really, really liked it,” “a feeling flooded through me, and it was pretty good,”<sup>337</sup> “I could easily have gone on listening, and I would go back next time because otherwise it was good.”

Larry commented that what really got to him was that he felt like he was known.

It was interesting, or rather it was like he saw inside me, and it was touching. That is what happened on my first church visit, even though he didn't know me. How did he know what I was like, what my life was like?<sup>338</sup>

He wanted to gather new feelings and experiences, to see what a worship service would do to him next time, what would be seen in him.

While being known made a deep impact on Larry, others talked about how they could connect their life to the heard content of the sermon and that had emotional effect on them. Emil enjoyed understanding as Hungarian language was used in preaching in a way that made ideas accessible for him.

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<sup>337</sup> “Átjárt az érzés, és tök jó volt.”

<sup>338</sup> “Érdekes volt, illetve olyan volt, mintha belém látott volna, és megható volt. Első élményként is ez volt, pedig nem is ismer engem. Honnan tudja, mi van velem, hogy milyen életem volt?”

For others, recognizing themselves in the biblical characters' situation was what affected them emotionally. "A strong expression, but as if they were really about my life," as Larry worded. Matthew became very excited and eager. The sermon that was relatable to him created a home feeling. He wanted to have more of that.

It was really cool. I listened to the stories and was blown away by how relatable they are here in my life today. And I'll tell you, it was really cool. [I wanted] more of that. It was so natural for me.<sup>339</sup>

He understood that people thought the same things two thousand years ago, they had similar problems, and their stories helped to place himself in this world better.

Dawn also had an affective reaction because she recognized herself through the preaching. The pastor explained her motives about which she herself was unaware, and described her life experience in an area that was most important to her and where she was stuck. She was touched by this mirror effect.

I really, really liked the sermon. I recognized myself very personally. [The preacher] opened from the very direction that was my first question.<sup>340</sup>

Dawn became intrigued, motivated and she listened to "an infinite number of sermons" from that pastor.

### *I Got Answers to My Unasked Questions*

More participants reported that they received answers through sermons. Some questions they had been looking for answers to for a long time. Emil discovered several phenomena in his twenties that he became aware of but he could not explain. They were

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<sup>339</sup> "Tök jó volt. Hallgattam a történeteket és átjárt, hogy mennyire vonatkozathatóak itt a mai életemben. És mondom, tök jó volt. Akartam még ilyet sokat. Annyira természetes volt számomra."

<sup>340</sup> "Nagyon-nagyon tetszett a prédikáció. Nagyon magamra ismertem. Nagyon abból az irányból nyitott, ami nekem az első kérdésem volt."

white spots in his thinking. When he listened to sermons, he felt, “things started to fall into place.” For him it was “an experience of success.”

Also came up questions in sermons the participants had not thought of before. Sitting through the church service, Larry’s experience was as if someone found out his unasked questions again and again.

I was confronted with questions, but somehow I always got answers in the sermon. Even for the unasked questions, because he [God] knew what I wanted to ask.<sup>341</sup>

These questions and answers awoke interest and gave the conclusion that “these issues go beyond me,” as Daniel stated.

*Revealing them, virtually exposing you*

Sermons had a spiritual effect on participants that drew them back to experience it again. Some talked about how their faith was growing by the church services. Emil put it this way, “I always left on Sundays with something to think about, something to chew on afterwards. It contributed a lot to the formation of my faith.”<sup>342</sup>

Larry’s spiritual experience was connected to gaining awareness about his sins through the sermons. He felt somehow the sermon was as if the pastor was talking about his life, his sins, that everyone is guilty.

And he pointed out my sins. And he made me realize that I have them too. It was moving. It was an incredible feeling. I felt that by revealing them,

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<sup>341</sup> “Jöttek szembe kérdések, de valahogy mindig választ is kaptam rájuk. A fel nem tett kérésekre is, mert hogy ő tudja, mit akartam kérdezni.”

<sup>342</sup> “Vasárnaponként mindig úgy jöttem el, hogy na most van min gondolkodni, tovább rágni utána. Nagyon sokat hozzátett a hitem formálódásához, kialakulásához.”



by virtually exposing me, I was also reassured that by Jesus dying on the cross, He had forgiven my sins, I was no exception.<sup>343</sup>

He reported that it was like God was reaching into his soul, and he laid it out in front of him, saying, “here's your soul, look, you've sinned at these points.”<sup>344</sup> He himself were surprised that this was not unpleasant for him, but attractive. It led to a self-knowledge in listening to the services that was unknown to him before.

### **Desires Connected to Christian Fellowship**

Not everyone was immediately impressed by the Christian community. Some interviewees found “at first a bit strange” that people talked to them, opened up to them, but “it slowly dissolved.” Emil was very astonished at how much he had enjoyed himself.

I could not imagine that there is such a thing as staying there [after a service]. I have not seen that anywhere else. It was a conscious decision on my part to want to be a part of that.<sup>345</sup>

Three themes of desires connected to Christian fellowship surfaced from the interviews: a loving environment, pithy human relationships, we grow together.

#### *A Loving Environment*

Christian community received high praise from more participants. When they explained the “loving environment,” they emphasized their experience of honest interest in their lives, of curiosity about their person, of being cared for. They also mentioned

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<sup>343</sup> “És rávilágított a bűneimre. Erre rádöbbsentett, hogy nekem is vannak. Megrendítő volt. Hihetetlen érzés. Azt éreztem, hogy azzal, hogy felfedi őket, kvázi lebuktat, meg is nyugtatott, hogy azzal, hogy Jézus meghalt a kereszten, megbocsátotta az én bűneimet is, én nem vagyok kivétel.”

<sup>344</sup> “Így az ember lelkébe nyúlni, kiteríteni elé, hogy itt a lelked, nézd meg, ezeken a pontokon vétkeztél.”

<sup>345</sup> “El sem tudtam képzelni, hogy van ilyen, hogy ott maradnak istentisztelet után. Nem láttam ilyet máshol. Tudatos döntés volt, hogy része akarok lenni ennek.”

thoughtfulness, acceptance, and openness. More of them spoke about experiencing welcome when Christians initiated conversations with them. Larry summarized this way:

We've never met, but I felt they were expressing that it's good to have you here, it's good to see you. The love was in the air and it got me. I hadn't even been inside the church yet, I could already feel that it was a welcoming, accepting community.<sup>346</sup>

### *Weighty Human Relationships*

More participants expressed what made Christian community attractive for them. Ben summed up by saying that “very weighty human relationships” have been formed. The marks were various. The most general wording was that “I had a good time among them.”<sup>347</sup> Another explanation was how their person mattered: “It was a good feeling that he knew who I was right away.”<sup>348</sup>

Interviewees pointed out how conversations that took place when they gathered made a deep impact on them. Matthew enjoyed that people were “not just hanging around” but each member of their small group was eager to discuss important questions: “For me it was important not to just be, but to do something useful. These discussions were empowering.”<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>346</sup> “Sose találkoztunk, de azt éreztem, azt fejezik ki, hogy jó hogy itt vagy, örülünk, hogy látunk. A szeretet ott volt a levegőben, és megfogott. Még bent sem voltam a gyülekezetben, már azt éreztem, hogy ez egy befogadó, elfogadó közösség.”

<sup>347</sup> “Jól éreztem magam közöttük.”

<sup>348</sup> “Jó érzés volt, hogy rögtön tudta, ki vagyok.”

<sup>349</sup> “Nekem fontos volt, hogy ne csak úgy legyünk, hanem csináljunk valami hasznosat. Erősítő jellegűek voltak a beszélgetések.”

### *We Grow Together*

Another area that attracted participants was the “experience of togetherness.” “Live it together”, “grow together”, or “being part of a community” were the words they used to express it.

### *Attraction That There Must Be Something More*

Participants talked about events that had stopped them, made them think, or they had experienced something they could not attribute to anything other than transcendent. In some cases, it was nothing more than a sense that something more must exist, but in other times they called him God. Four distinctive areas emerged from their account: a sense of greater power, a God-experience, “I felt I had to do it,” and “I need it.”

### **A Sense of Greater Power**

In Ben's case, the results of his research made him realize that there must be someone who is not visible. The result of the experiment was a revelation to him.

I had to realize that we had done the same thing in the same machine, with exactly the same procedure, and the results were completely different. And then it was like the light went on.<sup>350</sup>

It is humanly impossible, to the best of our knowledge, to repeat the same thing, while the universe has an amazing, predictable, repeating order – there must be someone out there beyond the Big Bang, according to him.

Another interviewee gained fair amount information about Christianity from listening sermons and reading books, when she went for a walk as part of her normal

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<sup>350</sup> “Rá kellett döbbenjek, hogy pontosan ugyanazzal az eljárással, ugyanabban a gépben, ugyanazt megcsináltuk, és teljesen különböző eredmény jött ki. És akkor mintha felkapcsolták volna a lámpát.”

daily routine. In the meantime, she got to thinking, and then something changed. Dawn reported, when she “started to feel that I think there is a God. I was walking and thinking, and I felt that I was not alone.”<sup>351</sup>

This sense of presence was something that Matthew also pointed out. He described it as a token of security. They were having a child soon, when he felt that someone was watching: “We were very safe, we were in good hands. I felt that before our baby was born, not long before.”<sup>352</sup>

Another area was the Christian community where participants recognized some kind of hidden power in work. “There was a sense of a force that held it all together, that made it work,”<sup>353</sup> according to Matthew. Emil compared his experience with other communities and was astonished by the results.

So many different people, whether by age or profession. There really are all kinds of people. And yet this common thing, the Christian faith, can bring people together in a way that no other community can. It was a great testimony to me that God exists and works.<sup>354</sup>

This realization led him to seek more Christian fellowship and to want to know more about God.

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<sup>351</sup> “Igazából egy napra emlékszem, amikor elkezdtem érezni, hogy szerintem van Isten. Sétálgattam, gondolkodtam és azt éreztem, hogy nem vagyok egyedül.”

<sup>352</sup> “Éreztem, hogy valaki figyel, nagyon biztonságban vagyunk, jó kezekben vagyunk. Ezt akkor éreztem, mielőtt megszületett a gyerekünk, nem sokkal előtte.”

<sup>353</sup> “Érezhető volt valami erő, ami összefogja az egészet, ami működteti.”

<sup>354</sup> “Annyira különböző emberek, akár korosztály vagy foglalkozás szerint. Tényleg mindenféle ember előfordul. De mégis ez a közös dolog, a keresztyén hit, az úgy össze tud kapcsolni embereket, mint sehol semmilyen másik közösségben nincs ilyen összetartó erő. Ez egy nagy bizonyosság volt nekem, hogy Isten létezik és működik.”

## A God-experience

Participants reported about unusual events that they attributed to the work of God. They regarded these events personally significant since they were drawn closer to Christianity. They talked about them as something they would like to relive.

They commented on “little things” that can be easily dismissed and taken as coincidences. However, they were convinced that these were personal gifts from God to them. “There are millions of stories like that, and it's great, I love to see these things. Everyday trifles.” As Larry added, “[God] arranged them [details of an event] in this way.” This experience has been described as an ongoing conversation with God, not through words, but rather through events, circumstances, arrangements, and small details through which God has been showing his care and kindness.

Participants spoke about answered prayers. Matthew shared an event with significant details which was important for him. It started with an imagined scene of an accident and his reaction was a prayer. He discussed how he experienced “unearthly peace” as an answer for his prayer.

I came home from work tired. It was cold, I was sitting on the bus, and I thought, what if the bus falls apart under me and I die, what will happen to me? And then I remembered Jesus: thank you Jesus, that you are really here for me. I was overwhelmed with an incredible warmth. It was like an unearthly peace, or I don't know. There are very few moments when you feel that.<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> “Jöttem haza munkából fáradtan. Hideg volt, ültem a buszon, és eszembe jutott, hogy mi lesz ha a busz szétesik alattam, és én meghalok, akkor mi lesz velem? És akkor eszembe jutott Jézus: köszönöm, Jézus, hogy itt vagy nekem. Elöntött valami elképesztő melegség. Olyan földöntúli béke volt, vagy nem tudom. Nagyon kevés pillanatban érzi ezt az ember.”

Participants also experienced God's presence through the revelation of knowledge of personal secrets, and the parallel communication of forgiveness and acceptance. This was accompanied by the feeling of "being arrived."

### **I Felt I Had to Do It**

Respondents talked about situations where they felt an inner urge to do something. They explained that it was so strong that they were driven by it, and it was impossible to resist. They felt this urge about going to church, going among Christians: "I felt I had to go." They experienced it as a motivation or invitation from God: "I felt him calling me," and they connected to prayers: "I had to pray."

Matthew looked back and remarked on how he was attracted, driven by desire: "I couldn't help but go because when there is a pull, because I'm interested, because I'm curious, because I need to know about it, because it's spiritual bread, I can't not go."

### **I Need It**

Some participants used specific metaphors to summarize how they experienced their situation when they understood they needed what Christ could give them. These metaphors captured their desires in an expressive way.

Matthew expressed his personal need saying: "I was an empty vessel." A reading experience led Ben to see how much he needed the hope that there existed a solution for his condition. The book showed a man whose life is falling apart and how he finds solution in Christ. "I wanted to walk the same path as the protagonist of the book," he said.

Another phrase the researcher heard was: “I needed a rescuer.” This was a conclusion of seeing his best efforts causing more trouble for Ben. “ I was unable to get out of this situation by myself. When I followed my own solution, I went even deeper. I needed a rescuer.”

### *Summary of Longings Connected to Their Conversion Process*

The second research question sought to determine in what ways new Hungarian Millennial believers experienced longings during their conversion process. Four themes surfaced in the research, as the participants described their longings during the conversion process: attraction to order and truth, attraction to Christianity, attraction to church life, and an attraction to the idea that there must be something more.

Participants were delighted by the beauty of the physical world’s orderliness. They expressed how unlikely it seemed for a very complex world to come from these simple laws. The orderliness and the beauty of precision moved them to seek reasons behind these phenomena. The idea of having an order for human life, as well as the physical world, was something people also mentioned as attractive. Participants discussed how they were able to observe the thinking system of Christianity and find it consistent. It reflected reality, which in turn roused their interest.

The Christian worldview and Christians themselves were remarked upon when participants talked about what they found attractive during their conversion process. The thinking and value system of Christians had real basis compared to the participants’ worldview, and they found those values important in their own lives. Participants also answered that character, authenticity, positive life example, and general behavior of Christians were appealing to them.

When the participants took the first step toward God and went to church, they reported positive experiences about the worship service. It was a different world for them. Many of the interviewees pointed out how the sermons affected them in a good way. The cognitive benefits, the useful information for life, and the high standards of thinking were emphasized. Others explained the positive emotions of excitement and eagerness that they had while they were listening to relatable preaching. Answers for unasked questions and the ability to be known, understood, and forgiven made a deep impact on them. The values of Christian fellowship were commented on; they meet acceptance, openness, welcome, and genuine care. The depth of fellowship was attractive for them.

In their conversion process, interviewees reported how they sensed a greater power which was powerful but also caring. They experienced God's work in their personal lives: personal gifts, answered prayers, and God's presence. They remarked on occasions when they were compelled that they needed to pray or go to church, and they felt their inside emptiness and desired to be filled.

The beauty and order of nature, closely observed Christian lives, church service and sermons, Christian fellowship, and experiencing God's work were the main areas participants mentioned where their interest, curiosity, propensity, desires, and longings were awakened.

### **Comparison Their Longings Before Their Conversion to Longings During Their Conversion Process**

The third research question addressed the ways and extent in which new Hungarian Millennial believers' longings before their conversion process compared to



their longings during their conversion process. Three areas emerged from the participants' accounts: desires in the same direction, changes in previous desires, and unaware and unspoken thoughts.

### *Desires in the Same Direction*

As participants told their stories of how they had experienced coming closer to God, in some cases they saw a connection between their longings prior to their interest in Christianity and what happened during their conversion process. They had previous desire, interest, curiosity, delight, and/or motivation in an area that had a role in their conversion process. Participants revealed their ongoing desire in five areas: fundamental thinking pattern, ethical resemblance, cultural resemblance, searching for meaning in relationships, and out of need.

#### **Fundamental Thinking Pattern**

Several participants talked about things that fundamentally shaped their thinking and how this played a role in their conversion process. These fundamental thinking patterns were: searching for the truth, scientific language, and desire for a consistent worldview.

#### *Searching For the Truth*

Searching for the truth was a strong desire for some of the participants before and during the conversion process. Understanding how reality works was a natural and central question for them. For Daniel, understanding the truth was important from

childhood, and he recognized that it also drew him to Christianity. He expressed this fact speaking about the early stage of his conversion process, but it is clear that his search for truth was reflected also in the further details of the process. Fundamentally, his search for truth characterized and guided his studies in engineering in his university years. He desired to understand things at an elementary level. He expressed that this search for truth “drove him” and “inspired him.” The same curiosity was activated when he reflected on the existence of Christians and their practices. They seemed strange to him but still made him curious. The existence of Christians was a phenomenon he wanted to understand: why they are present at all and why they do what they do. This curiosity made him visit church programs.

Furthermore, although Daniel did not make the connection himself, his seeking of the truth was also evident in his listening to sermons. He tested what he heard and found that what was said seemed to make sense; he even appreciated the quality of thought in the sermons. It was important, in his truth-seeking, that as he received more and more knowledge and insights he did not encounter any contradictions, but was convinced that the Christian thinking system was consistent. This brought him to the conclusion that “there is something [transcendent] here.” The eagerness for truth led him to be curious first, then act and go to church, to listen carefully to sermons, and then to understand the consistency of the Christian thinking.

### *Scientific Language*

Ben enjoyed the mathematical, logical, and descriptive language that had a role in his conversion process. He was self-described “cozy with the language of science.” First, he realized what he saw in natural laws and proportions was a precision that he could not,

to the best of his knowledge, create in his work. Emil also enjoyed understanding the world through his engineering profession. The complexity of the world, but the simplicity of the physical principles that governed it, amazed him. With both participants, their scientific interest and wonder led them to think about and then understand the necessity of the existence of God. This realization launched their search for Christianity. Emil's love for the scientific approach led him to choose a church where the pastor also had an engineering degree, saying "we are kindred spirits."<sup>356</sup> The whole process to Christianity "was in accordance with my former being."<sup>357</sup>

#### *Desire For a Consistent Worldview*

In Dawn's account, desire for a consistent worldview both before and during the conversion process appeared as dominant topic. Seeing her parents' example, Dawn formed the conviction that she wanted a consistent worldview for herself. When she became intrigued and curious about the values of a Christian man she knew, this desire still guided her. Therefore, she felt she needed to find the answers to her questions on her own, without being influenced by others.

I wanted to do it alone, simply because what if we don't end up getting married? I felt I had to stop basing it on the fact that he was a Christian, because that wouldn't make any sense anyway. Anyway, it half slowed the process down that I was so strict about it.

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<sup>356</sup> „Rokonlelkek vagyunk.”

<sup>357</sup> „Összhangban volt a korábbi lényemmel.”

I approached some friends of mine to seek out another Christian community first [not his], just because I thought I could think more independently about it there.<sup>358</sup>

Her desire for consistency was directing her throughout her whole conversion process. Because she imagined that her faith should be constructed individually without the influence of others, it took her longer to come to faith than her friends who started seeking Christianity at the same time.

### **Ethical Resemblance**

More interviewees expressed how natural it was for them, or even how attractive, to connect with Christians because of the familiarity of their value system. Emil is a good example. He was naturally drawn to Christians (without knowing their identity as Christians) just by thinking about their ethical convictions and life style. “I found easy to connect to them and to have meaningful conversations with them.” Throughout his youth, he tried to avoid noisy, lazy, licentious people, but he enjoyed the company of people who studied hard and had goals for their professional and private life. Their attitude and their philosophy fit him. When he felt alone and wanted to connect and have friends, he reflected on his old friendships from high school and university. He realized that all of his previous friends were somehow Christians although religion was never a topic among them. After this realization, he decided to seek out Christians. “Where Christians likely

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<sup>358</sup> „Egyedül akartam csinálni, egyszerűen csak az miatt, mert mi van, ha végül nem házasodunk össze? Azt éreztem, muszáj, hogy ne arra az alapra helyezzem, hogy ő keresztyén, mert annak úgy sincs semmi értelme. Egyébként ez félig lassította a folyamatot, hogy nagyon ilyen szigorúan álltam hozzá. Néhány ismerősömhöz csapódtam, hogy én akkor egy másik keresztyén közösségben keresgéljek először, csak amiatt, hogy így ott szerintem jobban tudok önállóan gondolkodni erről.”

can be found, I need to go there.” That is how he started to attend church with the desire to be a member there, among those people.

### **Cultural Resemblance**

Another interviewee talked about how interest in a certain cultural area had importance in her conversion process. Dawn shared how she and her friends had their club life and loved music of their sub-culture. She felt Christianity was distant from her because of the general impression about Christianity in Hungary, namely that Christians should be conservative politically. This was not her world; therefore, she avoided the Christian institutions. “Probably, if I had been looking on my own, [Christianity] might have been one of the last options, simply because I had so many prejudices.”<sup>359</sup> The fact that she met someone with a similar political approach, music taste, club life, and value system as hers, and he was still a genuine Christian, made her curious.

Well, I felt that he had somehow a different kind of aura. But because of the fact that he moves in such a similar cultural environment and plays music, I felt that he was not so far away from me.<sup>360</sup>

This cultural connection also helped her to pursue Christianity seriously.

### **Searching for Meaningful Relationships**

There were occasions where participants identified their desire for a meaningful relationship before the conversion process and how it had importance in their coming to

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<sup>359</sup> „Valószínűleg, ha magamtól kerestem volna, akkor lehet, hogy ez lett volna az egyik utolsó opció, egyszerűen csak amiatt, mert annyira sok volt az előítéletem.”

<sup>360</sup> „Nos, úgy éreztem, hogy valahogy van egy ilyen másfajta kisugárzása. De mivel hasonló kulturális közegben mozog és zenél, úgy éreztem, hogy nem is áll tőlem olyan távol.”

faith. For Dawn, a desire to escape the drabness of everyday life led her to seek romantic love before her conversion. The desire for a loving relationship also played a part in her conversion process. It led her to have an interest in a Christian man. “I immediately thought he was very trustworthy and open, which was pretty unusual based on my previous relationship.” In their relationship, she understood that his gentleness, honesty, and integrity were connected to Christian values.

That was the first point when I let go of the psychologist in myself [the preconceptions about Christianity] about what if I'm not interested in Christianity because he is? What if I am interested in him because it's part of his life?<sup>361</sup>

This motivated her to start her search for God. Although, she confessed, “I think my motivations were mixed.” In hindsight, she understood that her deep desire for finding a romantic relationship was already a manifestation of seeking God, even if it was not conscious on her part at that time.

### **Out of Need**

Some participants sensed their deep need in certain areas of life before they were interested in Christianity. Larry is a good example. He desired to find a loving wife to fill the void of love and care in childhood because of his broken family. When he went to church for the first time, the sermon was shocking for him in a good way. “Where does [God] get this information? How did he know?” To be known and still accepted and welcomed by God made him weep. From this first experience, he wanted to know who this God was and how it could be that God knew him so well. Experiencing love grasped

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<sup>361</sup> „Ott volt az első pont, amikor elengedtem magamban a pszichológust (az előítéleteket a keresztyénséggel szemben), hogy mi van, hogyha nem azért érdekel a keresztyénség, mert ő az. Mi van, ha azért érdekel ő, mert ez is az életének része?”

him deeply. Also, Christian community gave him a similar impression of welcome and acceptance.

### *Changes in Previous Desires*

Analysis of the interviews showed that in some areas participants' longings prior to their conversion process changed during the conversion process. They had had previous desires, interests, curiosity, delights, and motivations in life concerns, which had role in their conversion process. Three areas where a change in desire can be detected, based on the participants' accounts, include change in prejudice, change in desire in regarding identity, and change in desire in regarding relationships.

#### **Change in Prejudice**

The most typical area of change in desire was the desire to distance oneself from Christianity because of prejudice. This is transformed into curiosity and a desire to be closer to Christians. Daniel's prejudice against Christians was that it takes hardship to get to God. He believed Christians "have trouble" and they are "crazy or half-witted people" who need help. His desire for avoidance changed during his conversion process into desiring to be among Christians.

In his case, the change came when he had the chance to raise his concerns to Christians. He was surprised by the response he received, as he was lovingly, without being offended, disproved. The other thing that disproved his preconceptions was "the love-filled environment" he encountered. Strangers were genuinely interested in him and curious about his opinions. He experienced this as caring. He experienced something

from strangers that he had not experienced even in his family. He came to the conclusion that “there was something there.”

### **Change of Desire in Regarding to Identity**

Some interviewees experienced change in how they thought of themselves before their conversion process and during it. This brought change in their desires, too. Daniel first did not feel the need for Christianity in his life. Then, his lack of desire changed when he found that attending church was a healthy habit he needed. Daniel described how he wanted instant gratification, and his life was driven by the impulses of the moment before his conversion process. He sensed this as brokenness sometimes, but he generally regarded himself as not that needy. He believed Christians were too weak and had big problems that caused them to come to God. Since this need was not true for him, according to his self-assessment, he kept his distance.

During his conversion process he became motivated to attend church, finding it “useful,” “healthy,” and “something that gives a system, a framework for your life.” When he articulated this, he did not feel humiliated by his need. He conceded that he needed an example for living a healthy life, and church gave a good rhythm for that. This habit was valuable for him even though the liturgy was strange, and he did not understand much of the sermon.

### **Change of Desire in Regarding to Relationships**

Before their conversion process, more interviewees shared their desire to avoid people because of disliked behavior or out of self-protection. These people ranged from close relatives, to only loose connections, or even unknown strangers. In Ben’s case, his



desire turned from hoping to avoid people completely into approaching them of his own accord during his conversion process.

Ben did everything he could to achieve the desire that constantly haunted his life, namely to be at peace and just to be alone. He dreamt about even becoming a truck driver so he would not have to meet people for long weeks. During his conversion process, he reported how he felt God was calling him to go to a Christian service. The first time, he struggled from anxiety through the entire walk going to church and needed to stop several times. His childhood desire of being alone turned to wanting to go among people without compulsion.

He shared how this change came. He had the opportunity to pursue being alone during Covid time, but it ended with an unexpected result; he began to feel anxiety about meeting people. Unable to change this by his own efforts, and even getting worse, he realized that he needed a savior. During his conversion process, two occurrences became attractive to him. He experienced that he only had to take small steps, and he received great help and support from God. He was attracted by this treatment of God, and it was a great gift when he succeeded. In the church community, his anxiety slowly eased and meaningful relationships developed. The interesting conversations, the fact he mattered as a person, and the welcomed when he went made church a heart-warming and attractive experience for him.

In Daniel's case, he refrained from relationships and developed an attitude of being self-sufficient in every way. During his conversion process, to his own surprise, he began to long for being around Christians. Daniel experienced as a child and teenager that it was not safe to bond with people. His conversion process started when he met a

Christian girl who, he felt, was “a beautiful soul” and “too good for this world,” and he desired to protect her for it. He could attribute this thought to no one other than God. Since he had never thought of such a thing before, he astonished himself. “This idea did not come from my own mind. It was a God-ordained thought and plan.”

### *Unaware and Unspoken Thoughts*

In some cases, it was during the process of conversion that the participants discovered certain desires and questions of which they had not previously been aware or had not expressed. In fact, these desires arose because the participants experienced something good, and, from then on, they began to desire to repeat the good thing. The existence of these desires was there before, hidden as the person was not aware of them or did not consider them important enough to act on. Two major areas showed these hidden and later apparent desires: unspoken questions and finding my place in life.

### **Unspoken Questions**

Several participants spoke about their experiences with listening to sermons and receiving answers to their unspoken questions. They already had those questions but they had not pursued them to find answers just carried them around unanswered. As Matthew said, when he finally went to church after avoiding it for ages: “How much I learned about myself! I could have kept listening for any length of time.” For him, the church experience was unpleasant in his youth. It gave him an impression of “being forced, overly ritualistic, artificial and commanding.” It evoked resistance and a desire for freedom in him, and, from that day on, he wanted to avoid church at any cost. Since the girl who later became his wife was involved in Christianity, it became important for him

to learn about it. One of the desires Larry, Dawn, and Emil experienced during their conversion process was the desire to receive answers for their questions.

### **Finding My Place In Life**

Another area was the unspoken thoughts and desires before the conversion process, such as when participants reported: “I've found the place I've been looking for a long time,”<sup>362</sup> as Emil expressed. Larry summarized his experience listening to sermons: “The biblical characters were also looking for their place, and I recognized myself in them.”<sup>363</sup> Matthew emphasized the same experience of how sermons helped him to locate himself, adding, “I was struck by how relatable they are in my life today. I'm telling you, that was pretty rad! More like this!”<sup>364</sup>

### *Summary of Comparison Their Longings Before Their Conversion to Longings During Their Conversion Process*

The third research question sought to compare how new Hungarian Millennial believers experienced longings before and during their conversion process. This question allowed the researcher to look at the bigger picture and the correlation between those longings. Data showed three themes: desires in the same direction, changes in previous desires, and unaware and unspoken thoughts.

The first theme was the desires in the same direction. Participants had previous desire, interest, curiosity, delight, motivation in an area that had a role in their conversion

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<sup>362</sup> „Megtaláltam a helyemet, amit régóta keresek.”

<sup>363</sup> ”A bibliai szereplők is keresték a helyüket, és magamra ismertem bennük.”

<sup>364</sup> „Átjárt az, hogy mennyire vonatkoztathatók ezek a mai életemben. Mondom, ez tök jó volt! Ilyet még!”

process. They revealed ongoing desires in five areas: fundamental thinking pattern, ethical resemblance, cultural resemblance, searching for meaning in relationships, and out of need.

Searching for the truth, scientific language, or a desire for a consistent worldview were fundamental thinking patterns that played a role in interviewees' conversion process. They had built their lives and understanding of the world on these foundations: having a desire for truth, logic, and consistency. They also used these to discover Christianity. Similarly, participants had ethical and cultural patterns according to which they lived their lives already before being interested in Christianity. Finding Christians with the same ethical and cultural mindset was key to their conversion process since it was attractive to them. There was an occasion where searching for a meaningful relationship was something that led a participant to being interested in Christianity. In this case, her search for a romantic relationship was already infused with the search for God, but she was not yet aware of it.

Finally, a deep desire for love and acceptance out of being needy led a participant before and during his conversion process in his decisions. These data were about desires which were ongoing ones. These desires pointed to the same direction.

Another theme was those desires or attractions of which orientations had somehow changed. Participants' had previous desire, interest, curiosity, delight, motivation in an area where occurred a change and the desire was pointing to the opposite direction then before. These areas were: change in prejudice, change in desire in regarding identity, and change in desire in regarding relationships. Prejudice caused desire for avoiding anything that was connected with Christianity. This area needed to be

changed so that participants could be interested or even desire to seek for God or go to church. The second area where changed could be detected in desires from the participants' account was when people understood that their neediness was deeper than they thought before. When acknowledging the need was not difficult, then was the interviewee open to Christianity. The third occurrence was the area of change in desire in regarding relationships. More participants avoided relationships generally or personal connections. They experienced change in their desire during their conversion process.

Thirdly, comparing participants' desire before and during their conversion process they expressed certain desires and questions of which they had not previously been aware or had not expressed. Two major areas showed this hidden and later apparent desire: the unspoken questions and unspoken thoughts: finding my place in life. Listening to sermons people experienced understanding that was connected to their long time present but maybe silent questions and desires to find their place in life.

## **Summary of Findings**

This chapter examined how Hungarian Millennials connect longing to their conversion process. The research examined this question from three angles: desires before their conversion process, desires during their conversion process, and comparing the desires before and during their conversion process.

Six themes surfaced in the research from the participants' description of their hopes and desires they had before their conversion process. Participants talked about their desires for a good life in material, social, and work-related areas. Their desires related to identity showed longing for freedom, for approval from people, and for self-esteem. Desires for direction and guidance was the third theme. Desires related to existential

issues like hoping to escape from prosaism of life, finding meaning, longing for life to change for the better, healing from fractured personality and worldview, or finding security in this always changing world was the fourth theme with existential questions about God's existence, seeking for reasons for living, and hoping to understand the world in a way that brings the sense of security. More interviewees expressed their desires for avoidance regarding relationships, Christianity, or God. The sixth theme was lacking any desire for Christianity.

The second research question sought to determine in what ways new Hungarian Millennial believers experiencing longings during their conversion process. Four themes surfaced in the research as the participants described their longings during the conversion process: attraction to order and truth, attraction to Christianity (Christian worldview and Christians), attraction to church life (worship service, sermons, Christian fellowship), and an attraction that there must be something more. The beauty and order of nature, closely observed Christian lives, church service and sermons, Christian fellowship, and experiencing God's work were the main areas participants mentioned where their interest, curiosity, desires, and longings were awakened.

The third research question sought to compare how new Hungarian Millennial believers experienced longings before and during their conversion process. This question allowed to look at the bigger picture and the correlation between those longings. Data showed that fundamental thinking pattern (truth, logic, and consistency), ethical and cultural resemblance, searching for meaning in relationships, and out of need were the areas that revealed ongoing desires. Another theme was when participants' had desire before the conversion process that needed to change so that they could pursue

Christianity. These areas were: change in prejudice, change in desire in regarding identity, and change in desire in regarding relationships. Thirdly, participants expressed certain desires and questions of which they had not previously been aware or had not expressed: unspoken questions and thoughts for finding their place in life.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore how new Hungarian Millennial believers connect longing to their conversion process. In chapter two, the review of literature shed insight on this issue in exploring previous studies on human capacity of desire, longing, and love; human desire and longing in the Bible; and the culture of Millennials in Hungary. Chapter four provides details analyzed interview data from six Millennials who recently converted to Christianity.

The following research questions guided the research.

1. How do new Hungarian Millennial believers describe their longings before their conversion process?
2. In what ways do new Hungarian Millennial believers experience longings during their conversion process?
3. In what ways and to what extent do new Hungarian Millennial believers' longings before their conversion process compare to their longings during their conversion process?

### Summary of the Study and Findings

The first literature area reviewed was the human capacity of desire, longing, and love. The lexical study provided some helpful parameters of usage of the words. Love, worship, desire, and longing are terms used for interconnected human emotions: “Love would manifest as delight, reverence, and adoration, when its object is present, and as desire and quest when its object is not present.”<sup>365</sup> Desire is a central, neurobiologically innate, and ceaseless human capacity. Behind the everyday, penultimate desires there is

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<sup>365</sup> Clarke and Linzey, *Dictionary of Ethics, Theology and Society*, 534–35.



an ultimate one which defines and shapes human identity. Authors call it ultimate love or ultimate desire. The object of ultimate love is named with several expressions but the most general is good life or happiness. Throughout history several answers have been generated for the question of what it takes for people to attain the good life or happiness. Ethical, hedonistic, and relational answers show some possibilities for attainment from philosophy and theology. Present day research, the World Happiness Research determines factors of subjective well-being, which shows the multilayers of the topic.

Finally, two major theological thinkers were analyzed for how they approached desire. While Augustine made the love of God crucial for the rightly-ordered desire, C. S. Lewis considered joy which is a reminder for heaven as a starting point. Augustine is suspicious of desire. He approaches desire from a human point of view, how the human heart needs to be changed and ordered toward God. Lewis approaches desire from God's point of view and from creation. Lewis argues that God uses joy, and consequently desire, to bring people to himself.

The second literature area concerns human desire and longing in the Bible. The review showed that humans transferred their belief, trust, and love away from God in the story of fall into sin, which changed the direction of human desire. This misdirected desire induces decisions that incline to sin and compete with God's message. The New Testament author James pointed out that this altered, fallen desire is responsible for temptations and has dominating power and magnetism to entice humans to sin. Jesus' Parable of the Sower also illustrated how multiple prior choices preceding the encounter with God's message compete with God's message about his kingdom because choices engage human desires. Jesus often calls people towards God's kingdom by using

expressions and images that awaken and redirect human curiosity and longing. For example, Jesus' teaching about the treasure, pearl, joy, and drink that quenches thirst forever. The story of the Woman at the Well showed that while she did not fully grasp the meaning of Jesus's words, she was still ready to ask for what he offered for her. Jesus used ordinary, everyday life elements to explain something deeper, bigger, holy, and invisible; something that could satisfy the deepest human longings.

The literature area on the culture of Millennials in Hungary pointed out that this generation is the first generation to grow up completely after the end of communism and to have ceaseless, immediate access to internet in their formative years. Behind their self-confidence and egocentrism, this generation searches for happiness. They lack life directing values apart from pursuing material gains. The second part of the literature area examined the religiosity in Hungary, with a focus on the Millennial age group. The religious survey revealed how "Buddhist romanticism" and "God yes, church no" attitude is typical among the young adult age group. They seek for experiences with God but avoid church. Millennials live in an era where secularism, disruption, and apathy dominate the general cultural atmosphere.

The interviews with six Millennials who recently converted to Christianity revealed common themes and relevant insights pertaining to the research questions. The three areas of focus included how Hungarian Millennials connect longing to their conversion process, what their desires were before and during their conversion process, and how their desires before and during their conversion process compared.

Before their conversion process, Hungarian Millennials revealed their desires for a good life with material, social, and work-related gains. They spoke about longing for

freedom, approval from people, and self-esteem. Their hope was to find their path, or their place in life, and they wished for guidance in this pursuit. Their existential desires concerned escaping from dull, ordinary, predictable life. Instead, they wanted to find meaning for life, to change life for the better somehow, to heal from feeling disintegrated personally, and to gain security in a rapidly changing world. Existential questions and challenges motivated them to find answers for questions about God's existence, about reasons for living, and about how the world works. More interviewees expressed their desires for avoiding relationships out of present difficulties of the person, or out of past wounds. This included, avoiding Christianity since Christian faith-expressions felt annoying for them. Christians seemed weird, and the painful things of the world made God unattractive. Hungarian Millennials felt that they lacked religious desires. Before their conversion process, they did not think they needed Christianity since there was no significant problem in their lives. They were not interested in it at all, reasoning that they had no positive, attracting experience with Christianity.

However, this changed during their conversion process. They reported that their interest, curiosity, propensity, desires, and longings were awakened. This change started with their experiences of noticing the beauty and order of nature, closely observing Christian lives, attending church services and sermons, experiencing welcome in Christian fellowships, and naming life changes as God's work.

Millennial participants described that, during their conversion process, they were delighted in the beauty of the orderliness of the physical world, in the idea of having an order for human life, and in finding logical consistency of the Christian worldview. They found several things appealing in getting to know Christians: the reasoning and value

system of Christians, the logic of Christian theology; the Christians' character, authenticity, positive life choices, and behaviors. The participants listed cognitive benefits from sermons, saying the sermons provided useful information for life and a high standard of thinking. They also named affective benefits from participating in church activities with Christians. These benefits included: positive emotions, excitement, eagerness because of relatable preaching, satisfaction with answers for unasked questions, and feeling known, understood, and forgiven. In Christian fellowship they meet acceptance, openness, welcome, and genuine care. They reported being attracted to the depth of relational connection among Christians. During their conversion process, the participants sensed a greater power, stating that they experienced God's work in their personal lives, attributing good things as coming from God, answered prayers, and God's presence. They remarked on occasions when their inside emptiness and desires were filled.

The third research question sought to compare how newly converted Hungarian Millennial Christians experienced longings before and during their conversion process. The first finding of comparison shows that many of the participants' previous longings stayed the same during their process. These same desires motivated them to pursue experiences with Christianity. For example, they were motivated to continue seeking for truth, for the use of scientific reasoning in explaining reality, for a consistent worldview, for a solid basis for the moral values they already held, and for shared enjoyment of a particular music subculture.

Another finding concerned the change in participants' longings during the conversion process. Participants described changes in their prejudices against Christianity

and Christians, changes in their personal identity, and changes in their desire to build relationships.

A final finding of comparison was a change in longing concerning some hidden and only later apparent desires. In attending church, some participants realized the sermons were answering significant, previously unconscious questions they had. Other participants experienced a new way of having life purpose and belonging; ones that they had not previously realized how much they deeply desired.

## **Discussion of Findings**

In this section, the literature and interview research are compared in order to identify relevant and winsome ways to communicate the gospel in the Hungarian culture among Millennials.

### *Millennials and the Unique Gap of No Religious Teaching*

The focus of this research was Hungarian Millennials who recently had converted to Christianity and who had no previous Christian background. This generation had unique gap in religious teaching and exposure. They were born in the early 1980s to the mid-1990s, and are the children of a generation that also lacked religious education and that grew up in communist-materialist atheism, where religion was ridiculed. Therefore, Millennials rarely come from Christian homes. They were too young to experience the countrywide revival that followed the fall of communism in 1989 (the oldest of the generation were 14-15 years old when the revival quieted), and were too old to have the option of choosing religion classes in public elementary school (possible from 2013, when they were already older than 18). Lacking or having only vague biblical concepts

from childhood was a criterion of the research because it represents a typical Millennial in general population in Hungary.

This generation may represent the current reality of the Hungarian population, because not only do they have no religious background but the Millennials are the first generation that grew up using and being familiar with internet, smartphones, and social media. Therefore, their social imaginary tends to be open immanent instead of a closed one.<sup>366</sup> They were already in professional work, possibly married with children, experiencing typical challenges of adult life, and had an established worldview when they encountered Christianity in a meaningful way.

### *Post-Communist Heritage*

It is a Hungarian peculiarity that for forty years, due to the Iron Curtain, Western influences did not prevail in the culture. The Eastern Bloc was a completely closed world with a Soviet-style system. These peculiarities have an impact on today's post-communist culture. I would like to highlight three areas of impact: ridiculed religiosity, materialism, and individualism.

#### **Ridiculed Religiosity**

Marxism taught that religion was a weakness, a superfluous remnant of a superstitious past, and that being a grown up meant to get rid of any religious belief. The communist regime systematically educated people in the atheistic-materialist worldview: in speeches at national celebrations, and in training sessions at schools and at work

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<sup>366</sup> Seel, *The New Copernicans*, 64.

places. These training courses were regular and compulsory, and were strictly supervised by the state. Part of the propaganda was to ridicule and suppress religious convictions. Even today the influence of the era can be seen.

The Millennials talked about their strong sense of prejudice against Christianity. Christianity was the last alternative to consider when they became interested in religion. They stated that the typical church alienates people with its political and cultural expressions. From outside knowledge of the church or Christianity they regarded Christians as “crazy or half-witted people.”

Specific individuals and experiences of Christian community convinced them to change their prejudices. With the individual relationships, their connections started in everyday life circumstances. at school, at work, at entertainment events. Their existing interests brought them together with a Christian person, and their conversation started around those topics of common interest. These relationships built a unique trust because the conversations were not heated or laden with uncomfortable religious topics. The participants described that they could be casual, relaxed and genuinely themselves with these new Christian friends. Having everyday conversations with believers and building a friendship were the stepstones for the participants towards Christ.

The other major experience that changed the participants’ prejudices was that they found Christian community thought-provoking and fascinating. The specifics that drew them in were of a love-filled environment and the community member’s genuine interests and curiosity about them, mere stranger. These experiences were very unexpected. They experiencing being valued as a person by the Christian communities in ways they had not experienced, even in their own families. This brought the conclusion, as Jesus predicted,

that people will see that “there is something there.” Sometimes it helps to dissolve antipathy toward religion when non-believers realize that religion is a universal, human endeavor when it concerns love and being loved. Even the “nones” have a subject of their ultimate love and long to be loved more fully.

## **Materialism**

Materialism is a heritage from communism and is still the dominant ideology in Hungary today. It is amplified by unpredictability of a world of fast change, the uncertainty of personal circumstances, the sense of relative poverty compared to other countries, and a culture of complaining. Although the communist era ended three decades ago, cultural values and practices remain the same in many ways. Communism trained people in a habit of breaking rules creatively in order to make a living, which strengthened materialism. Under communism, people had “black work” on weekends, spending considerable time trying to figure out how to get more money, for buying, for example, clothes for their children. Necessity forced people to constantly think about making a living.

In the interviews, participants talked about their financial goals before becoming Christians. When they explained the motivation behind their goals, they talked about more than the material goal itself. Their rationale connected to their emotional-spiritual needs. The possession of tangible goods was linked their desires for independence, freedom to do what they wanted without limits, security, and/or self-esteem through self-sufficiency.

Materialism in the culture is strong not only because of historical communism but also because of recent consumerism. The interviews analysis provides insight for how to



engage Millennials with the gospel through their materialism. One can link the possibility of unmet spiritual needs driving their material desires and discuss how material goods do not ultimately satisfy human longings.

### **Post-Communist and Western European Individualism**

Because of communist isolation, the reasoning and beliefs of Millennials in Hungary are more influenced by post-communism than the typical individualism of Western Europe. Under communism there was a cultural emphasis on community. The education system also fostered community values, which are still present today. Typically, students learn all subjects together in the same group for years, and the teachers move between each group's classroom rather than the students changing rooms at break times. The communist idea was to have a focus on community, although in practice everyone sought their own well-being, even by immoral means: it has to be good for me, no one else matters. This tendency for strong and occasionally unethical self-interest is present among Millennials, as the literature and the interviews show.

The cultural default to self-interest and immoral means of gain also showed up in a lack of data that one would have expected to see. While many participants talked about valuing ethical living before their conversion and about being attracted to the honest, safe, and reliable character of their Christian friends; they did not talk about a desire for forgiveness from God or for a relationship with God. The interviewees seemed motivated to live ethically due to the confessed debauchery of their lifestyles and the unpleasant manifestations of alcohol-related behaviors. Their desires for ethical living seem to have remained within the immanent framework, again a data point that fits the post-

communist, materialistic culture and worldview. They did not express guilt or responsibility to a higher power.

My teaching experience at a university shows that young adults can relate to the concept of guilt but only through their experiences of feeling burdensome, depressed or overwhelmed by grey, negative thoughts. Since there is no concept of sin and guilt, their reaction is that they just move past it, or try to learn from it. Neither the concept of sin nor the possibility and significance of a personal relationship with God came to the surface during the interviews. This is an area where the church definitely needs to find a way to articulate the message of the gospel in a way that is meaningful to young adults.

### *Church Challenges*

Forty years of communism had a significant impact on the church in Hungary. The activity of the communist regime caused moral crisis in the whole organization of the church, and it lost its respected position in the society. The official church journals and public discourse presented under communism distorted theological views, and the church leadership positioned the church as a servant of the government system. These, among other things, led to an identity crisis of the church. The decades of repression taught the church to respond to communism with a survivalist attitude. This attitude continued after the end of the communistic rule. Generations have grown up putting material values first and without the Christian gospel message, thinking there is no need for religion, and many have become apathetic. The general social assessment of churches ranges from the culturally valuable to the parasitic.

The large survey of the social science research group Foundation Századvég showed how religiosity has changed in Hungary in the past two decades. A relevant

finding is that the numbers claim to be “nones,” of no religion, are growing. Three specific phenomena also emerged from the data: prejudice, a “Buddhist romanticism,” and the “God yes, church no” attitude. The interview data of this research also supports these results.

## **Prejudice**

In Hungary, there are significant prejudices against Christianity. Those who turn to God are lame and weak; Christians are hypocritical and judgmental; the Christian church is too close to politics; the church is morally questionable in its leaders’ lives, in its leadership style, and in its local finances; and Christians use language and concepts that are alienating to most people. The cultural bias is immense.

The four recommendations of the Church Revision Committee from 2014 are still relevant today: to rediscover the mission of the church, to create community, to proclaim and live the gospel, and to be caring brothers and sisters in the local context. The report calls for “making church members aware and active of the Christian mandate in work; systematic reform for facilitating more honesty, transparency, trust, and responsibility; and systematic reform for supporting church mission and effective operation.”<sup>367</sup> The Millennial interviewees confirmed the report’s emphases. They described the importance of a church’s loving environment to gathering others, the signs of caring for each other in the gathering, a genuine interest and welcome from strangers. These things greatly helped change their prejudices against religion and Christianity.

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<sup>367</sup> Church Revision Committee, “Párbeszédben a jövővel - válaszok az egyházat fenyegető veszélyekre.”

My experience also shows that it is necessary for those outside the church to be able to see real Christians up close, to observe them in daily life. In many cases, if they see that the person is “normal,” they are encouraged to ask questions or to have a conversation. Discussing religion is almost taboo in Hungary, but if trust can be built, people are very interested. They find the new friendship with a practicing Christian special and interesting. When they dare to ask their questions, the Christians must be wise and not reply with a sermon or a religious lecture. No one wants to be the subject of another’s project. But, an honest, humble conversation on a personal level, with interest and respect for what the other thinks moves past the wall of prejudices and assumptions.

### **Buddhist romanticism**

The literature is confirmed by the interview data on the trend that Buddhism is a popular choice when looking for religion. An interviewee argued that Christianity was too close, too familiar and politically burdened in Hungary; while Buddhism seemed exotic. In much of Hungarian Christianity, where physical health is valued, yoga has become a health practice, and reincarnation is considered a positive vision of life after death. However, the original teaching of Buddhism is about escaping physical reality and reincarnation is meant to be a punishment, not a subject for hope. In Hungarian Buddhism, it seems reincarnation is really a desire for eternal life without God.

### **"God yes, church no"**

The "God yes, church no" attitude common among Millennials means that people believe in God but they do not want involvement with the institution of the church. They do not wish to participate in organized, common religious activities. The result of the

survey of Századvég Foundation demonstrated that this attitude is present in Hungary. The survey results labeled 53.2% of survey participants as “malleable religious;” care about religion but are not fully committed to the institutional church. Among them, the young adults were the most represented generation in four categories. These were “religious consumers,” “church avoiders,” “church supporters,” and “God seekers.”

The survey result named those who take part in organized, common religious activities but limit their connection to church to personal consumption “religious consumers.” They are experience-centered church shoppers, who focus only on their own spiritual needs when they go to church. They want to receive and do not want to invest in church activities or relationships.

Three other groups of young adults were described by the survey findings. One group was called “church avoiders.” These people believed in God but found church unattractive because it lacked relevance. The “church supporters” were those young adults whose connection to church was mainly administrative. They donated 1% of their taxes to a church, an easy option provided by the state. The final group was named the “God seekers.” They wanted the transcendent experience of religion but did not trust any religious authority or institution to provide it. These young adults were unlikely to go to church.

According to the literature, the "God yes, church no" attitude believe that church fellowship is not necessary for spiritual life. This kind of individualistic spirituality is becoming increasingly fashionable in the West, though it is not yet prevalent among Hungarian Millennials. While people who seek spiritual life activities without a church may be growing number, the interview participants pointed to other reasons that they

avoided church. Communist propaganda about religion had made the idea of religiosity difficult and shameful. This thinking, shaped the parents of the Millennials. Because Millennials did not grow up with religious traditions, they do not think about them.

Another reason the participants avoided church was that they believed God was a wishful projection of weak, needy people. For some, God's existence was merely a theoretical issue, a cognitive problem, not a personal relationship question. Some participants believed in God but stayed away from church because of past bad experiences, or because they thought the church was hypocritical, judgmental, rigid, old-fashioned, or anachronist. The challenge for the church is to respond all these reasons in a winsome way and to give a gospel response to these issues: the theory that God is a projection, deism, and the wounds inflicted by religion or church.

### *Gospel Responses for Millennial Needs*

Some of the key descriptions and values of Millennials include professional success, authenticity, self-confidence, positive self-image, uniqueness, appearance, superficiality and emotional immaturity, digital savvy, habitual multitasking, validation on social media, photogenic experiences, smaller communities, and personalized attention from others. In the following explores the connection between the gospel and the Millennial needs under four themes: egocentrism and meaninglessness; hollow values; disruption and lack of emotional self-regulation, and happiness-seeking.

## **Egocentrism and Meaninglessness**

The literature warned that the Millennial generation is largely self-centered and egocentric,<sup>368</sup> and has a significant increase in the personality disorder of narcissism.<sup>369</sup> This generation tends to believe that the key to success and progress is “never for a moment to lose sight of your interests.”<sup>370</sup> The sign of self-centeredness was also evident in the interview data. For many, the main life goal was to reach a level of freedom where they could do what they wanted. This typically meant playing computer games and drinking alcohol or even taking drugs. Surprisingly, many participants expressed their struggle to build friendships or even to be motivated to do so. They also talked about their experience with anxiety, addiction, and depression. And these were educated, well-situated Millennials.

When the interviewees talked about their difficulties with friendship, we cannot ignore the impact of Covid, but there is another principle at play. Two conflicting desires are at tension here: the cultural core value of freedom and independence and the desire for connection and relationship. When the desire for freedom is stronger, over time it distances people from others. However, when the feeling of loneliness is strong, the value of freedom is reassessed. In the face of loneliness is, the previously craved things become meaningless. Many times ego-centrism seemed to end with loneliness and consequently meaninglessness.

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<sup>368</sup> Tari, *Y generáció*, 219.

<sup>369</sup> Törőcsik, Szűcs, and Kehl, “Generációs gondolkodás - A Z és az Y generáció életstílus csoportjai,” 7.

<sup>370</sup> Törőcsik, Szűcs, and Kehl, 8.

The message of Christ has always challenged the egocentric human heart. Self-denial is not an easy doctrine to teach, but in light of the above statements, self-denial is actually good news for Millennials. It is necessary for meaningful relationships, so we need to show how self-denial helps relationships. In many cases, Christianity seems to have lost the idea of virtues from its message, although these virtues are necessary for meaningful living.

### **Hollow Values**

A striking finding came from the Bokor research on the work habits of Hungarian Millennials in finance and management jobs: “Their goals and actions do not come from an ideology or higher value system but from the intention for personal financial prosperity and career success.”<sup>371</sup> The desire for money and success shapes their behavior into being “determined, tough, and unethically competitive.”<sup>372</sup> Not surprisingly, material success was one of the major themes in the interviews, too. Perhaps this is in part due to the fact that it was the easiest to name and imagine when they were thinking about the future. However, it is worth considering the possibility that young people in other occupations may also tend to lack an ideology or higher value system to guide their goals and behavior. Therefore, material goods are the only life goal they can name. Using Augustine’s terminology, money is the object of their ultimate love, and it is the means to comfort, security, or maybe to photogenic experiences that supposed to provide meaning to life.

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<sup>371</sup> Bokor, “Létezik-e itthon Y-generáció?,” 19–20.

<sup>372</sup> Bokor, 17.



If Millennial financial and career goals override other considerations and values, then ethical questions follow. Most of the interviewees said that it was the Christian moral lifestyle that had captured their imagination. Some of them already held those ethical convictions and tried to live by them, but could not give a basis for them. Consequently, they were guided in their worldview by a conflictual set of values: the pursuit of material gain versus ethical considerations like honesty.

Bokor voiced a strong warning for the health of society, expressing his main concern that this age group seems to be very impressionable. Although the Bokor research was taken among Millennial economists, in some aspects the interviewees of this study expressed similar traits. Making decisions was perceived as “scary” in itself and was based on feelings, their mood, the opinions of others, or circumstances. They talked about being impressionable, waiting for someone to tell them what to do. These participants also struggled to name life goals; they seemed tossed back and forth by circumstances. Major life decisions were made based on “sounds good” or “people sent me.” Those interviewees were the exceptions who had actual life goals and not just general ideas without real intention. The other side of this theme is how participants wished to have guidance in their lives, to “find their place” and “find their path.”

The Millennials’ general sense of life is uncertainty, and their belief about the world that it “will be worse and over which they believe they have little control.”<sup>373</sup> According to the researched factors which determine happiness for an adult, economic situation and social freedom are important. These are two areas where Hungarian Millennials feel hindered. To gain more control over life, they seek material and career

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<sup>373</sup> Bokor, 20.

goals. However, this means that materialism is the most common worldview among young people. It is the legacy of communism, but also the spirit of capitalism. This hedonistic, materialistic point of view does not prepare one for dealing with, or making sense out of challenge or suffering. It only motivates for a life of pleasure and an avoidance of pain and distress.

### **Disruption and Lack of Emotional Self-regulation**

We are part of a culture of immediacy where optics are important. Everything competes for people's attention, and in the overwhelming information noise people are making snap judgements. Multitasking is normal and the fast-paced life allows no time for processing emotions and stimuli. This makes it difficult for Millennials to mature in their personality and have mature, considered decisions, opinions, and emotions. On the surface they seem to be confident and assertive, but inside they struggle with an immaturity full of unresolved conflict. The self-rewarding use of apps creates a dopamine cycle in the brain in attempt to cover up the deeper needs.

The church has much to offer in this cultural moment. With a release from the quick dopamine addiction and individuality, one can participate in the slow formation of discipleship and maturity. This growing process brings real and deep joy and contentment.

## Happiness-seeking

Millennials are driven by the search for happiness. This search for happiness brings forth, on one hand, a philosophy of pleasure and a get-rich-quick mentality<sup>374</sup> and, on the other hand, the avoidance of experiencing and processing disappointment and sadness.<sup>375</sup> The definition of World Happiness Report for subjective well-being encompasses three elements: life evaluation – a reflective assessment on a person’s life or some specific aspect of it; affect – a person’s feelings or emotional states, typically measured with reference to a particular point in time; and eudaimonia – a sense of meaning and purpose in life, or good psychological functioning.<sup>376</sup>

The literature tried to capture the concept of happiness in different terms. In each case, the wording is something that stirs the imagination and generates desire. Together, these terms attempt to cover the whole phenomenon of happiness but only pronounced nuances or emphases make distinctions between them. The literature uses expressions like good life or full and rewarding life, which align with the first of the three categories above (life evaluation). Some expressions try to capture a state of mind or a feeling of well-being which complies with the second category above (affect – a person’s feelings or emotional states): feeling alive, being healthy, happy, and fulfilled. The interview answers had similar categories and terms: feeling happy (instant gratification), being loved, being free, feeling harmony, and feeling security. The literature expression of “life at proper human potential” fits into the third category the most (eudaimonia – a sense of

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<sup>374</sup> Töröcsik, Szűcs, and Kehl, “Generációs gondolkodás - A Z és az Y generáció életstílus csoportjai,” 7.

<sup>375</sup> Tari, *Y generáció*, 51.

<sup>376</sup> “OECD Guidelines,” 10.

meaning and purpose in life, or good psychological functioning), and this aspect was also expressed by a participant describing the desire to have something that transcends life.

Happiness is a desire that moves all people and that involves other desires. When our aspiration is to present the gospel as good news, then talking about how to attain happiness is a good opportunity. The gospel affirms certain desires, like delighting in God's goodness in physical beauty, in good food, and in other provisions for us. We long for the goodness of what God created us for. When Jesus built on existing desires he spoke of the kingdom of God by superseding the earthly desires; Jesus pointing beyond the immanent framework. Connecting God with received goodness and daily desires leads to the transcendent experience of more of God's good provision and grace. In these ways, the church can help people to have rightly ordered love.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

In light of the findings described above, the Hungarian church is well advised to leave behind the accustomed reflex of survival, which is a heritage from the past. There is a need for repentance and a different self-definition. The church needs to define its essence on a theological basis and to set up its boundaries. Since the church's theological loss happened in the area of Christology and ecclesiology by emphasizing the servant church theology, the identity need to be restored in both areas. The current, limited understanding of the church's identity makes the fuller calling of the church for mission difficult.

By rediscovering its identity, the church has a two-way task. Inside, it needs to have meaningful and worshipful church services and to build loving, caring Christian communities where trust is present. Outside its building, the church needs to find avenues

to step out and be an engaging and redemptive presence among those who would otherwise never come in.

### *Discipleship for Changed Affections*

Hungarian Reformed Christianity has the good tradition of confirmation class, where the basic teachings of Christianity are taught in a systematic way for Christian young people and new church members. This tradition gives a good foundation for them to know what they believe. However, in many cases the teaching objectives of a confirmation class remain modernist, simply imparting religious information. As Augustine said, in our pursuit of godliness must go through a change of affections.<sup>377</sup> How should we reshape the content and the methods of offered programs in a church in the light of this study's findings? How can the church intentionally promote not only cognitive knowledge but other aspects of human religiosity among its members? People need more than lecturing in sermons and in Bible studies.

Participants pointed out that both the quality of reasoning and the useful information for how to live were very attractive elements of sermons. Next to the cognitive benefits they talked about eagerness and excitement when their unasked questions were answered and the sermon was relatable for them. They felt known and understood. With regard to the preaching in Sunday worship, it is necessary to have sermons that are God-centered and not man-centered. The major Christian motivation is God's glory. Seeking God's glory and enjoy him is the rightly ordered love which sermons need to proclaim in a way that delights people's heart and awakes their desires.

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<sup>377</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Teaching Christianity*. 1.16-17

To capture imaginations and motivate people towards Jesus, the church needs to engage people with God's greatness and goodness and the beauty of trusting God, the comforting challenge of following Jesus, and the hope for life fulfillment in Christ. Another significant sermon challenge is in sermons that they should design them for transformation of the listeners. The purpose of the sermon shall be nothing less than to answer people's deepest questions, to help them to respond well to God's provisions, and to bring gospel to bear on daily life towards transformation in Jesus. These aspects can lead to worshipful and meaningful church services of mission.

Participants talked about the attractiveness of Christian fellowship because there they experienced genuine welcome, care, and interest. Building a loving, caring Christian community where trust is present is part of the Christian calling. When the teaching objective is a change of affections for the sake of Christian community, then motivating, modelling, and mentoring are some ways that need to be integrated intentionally and organizationally into the life of the church. Discipleship should take account of the fallen nature of human desire, which is subjected to the magnetism of sin. The task of discipleship is to motivate change by awakening and redirecting desire towards Jesus and away from sin. Since Christian community is the work of the Spirit, therefore prayer is also a key element of fellowship. Prayer draws people into the experience of the presence of God's greater power. Answered prayers motivate and attract the non-believers in the gathering.

### *Implications for Reaching-out*

The church needs to find avenues to step out from the protecting walls of church buildings and go among those who would otherwise never come in. There are seven

major implications for outreach from the research: connect to people's desires, engage Millennials pre-evangelistically, communicate meaningfully within the culture, ask good questions and listen well, present a bigger gospel with stories, respond to different assumptions about the church, and teaching about suffering.

### **Connect to People's Desires**

When interviewees reported their conversion process, they explained that their initial curiosity and attraction developed into conscious desires and longings over time and through positive encounters with Christians. The examples from the Gospels show a similar process. To draw people to God's truth and to himself, Jesus used expressions and illustrations for the kingdom of God such as treasure, gift, joyful celebration, great value, etc. Human desires, which were engaged by multiple prior choices preceding the encounters Jesus now had to compete in the heart of the non-believers upon hearing Jesus' alternatives. The illustrations Jesus used were all with very desirable outcomes for the listeners. With them, Jesus awoke curiosity and redirected their desires toward God. Outreach needs to understand and be attentive to the already present hopes and desires people have.

### **Engage Millennials Pre-evangelistically**

Speaking about religion with Millennials in Hungary is especially challenging for many reasons. One is that the concepts of sin and forgiveness are strange to them. Participants did not speak about desires for God's forgiveness or for being freed from the burden of sin. They were aware of their imperfections, but they considered them natural and human, something they thought they just have to accept in themselves. The culture

teaches the original goodness of humankind, and that people are the master of their destiny and they must actualize themselves. This message leads to the denial of immorality and evil in oneself.

Millennials generally do not use the language of sin for their unlawful or immoral actions and thoughts. Instead, they call them mistakes or wrong doings. The language reflects the desire to avoid experiencing shame and guilt. When they act shamefully, they think they are obliged to try to salvage the damage they caused. Sin merely involves human transactions and is something people should learn from. Millennials do not think about their actions in a transcendent frame. They suffer from their experiences of life in a sinful and broken world, but they have no way to make sense of it. The sacrificial or judicial language of the Bible about sin is unknown to Millennials. However, they have longings connected to the brokenness of their lives, such as to heal from the scars of the past, to find guidance, or to find a good reason for living, and to escape the dullness of life.

Sharing the gospel with them requires more pre-evangelism. Anything that threatens to expose their shame shuts them down. They first need the love, respect, and welcome of the fellow image bearer that a Christian can provide. Later, the truth of the Gospel of God's love will give them courage to face reality, even the reality of inner sinfulness. Jesus has deeper access to people's very being than humans ever could. He can bring real change and healing. Pre-evangelism can show that being the autonomous captain of our souls brings no freedom, flourishing, or fulfillment; but rather captivity, addiction or superficial living. The idols of the heart never satisfy deeper human desires.



## **Communicate Meaningfully Within the Culture**

Christian concepts and language are alienating in our society, as László Kósa summarized in 2000. Interview participants pointed out how they felt the cultural differences between their normality and the Christian church and community, especially in the difference in language. Although their strong desire helped them overcome the cultural differences and get closer to God, the culture change required much on their side.

The church needs to lower this language and cultural barrier. Incarnation is the theological doctrine that Hungarian Christians need to understand and imitate better. The biblical expressions like grace, salvation, justification, etc. are not common words or concepts anymore. Even the explanations seem irrelevant for non-believers because their desires and aspirations are culturally specified and differently directed. The Reformation was in accordance with people's greatest desire at the time, "Where can I find a gracious God?" It was the question of many, not just Luther's. It is still the deep desire of people, but they need initial communication with believers and the church which make sense and can be easily understood.

## **Ask Good Questions and Listen Well**

The church has given up the conversation with the culture for 70 years now and created its own sub-culture. For the church to speak from a position of authority and a posture of revelation is theologically legitimate, but it is culturally offensive and misunderstood by those outside. The church also lost its voice by disqualifying itself through ethical evils. Instead of self-righteousness and a knowing-better posture, humility, honesty, and authenticity are attractive characteristics to the non-believers. It is

time to change the posture and character of the local churches in Hungary. Christians should ask questions of others instead of telling. They need to seek to understand people's perceptions, problems, concerns, hopes, and joys; and not just on a superficial level but on a heart level. Christians need to get to know non-believers around them and have real connections, understanding, friendships, and care for them. Asking good questions are invitations for non-believers to be themselves. It leads to a blessing of real knowing and therefore it is a sign of love. Participants were genuinely impressed and felt accepted and valued when they were asked about their lives and opinions with sincere interest.

The church activities like sermons, Bible studies, and youth group gatherings need more good questions and conversations. This idea is also true for our hermeneutics. Preachers should be ready to learn and to listen well to the intentions of the biblical writers and through them to the intentions of God. Being curious and open, and wanting to understand well and connect in reality, are the calling of a pastor for the sake of others.

### **Present a Bigger Gospel with Stories**

Christians do well to remember that it is not easy others to change their worldview. Gospel conversations might take lots of time. The biblical message never arrives to an empty heart. The heart is already full of multiple prior choices and desires that are contrary to the message of God.<sup>378</sup> Initial interest and growth towards the gospel continues when a believer's loving relationship with the other reinforces the good desires

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<sup>378</sup> Cole, *Mark*, 153.

for God again and again and models a response of faith and faithfulness.<sup>379</sup> It takes time are caring relationship for people to accept that they have souls and deep needs; religion is human and natural, not something to be ashamed of. These changes require the supernatural power of God. Therefore, the first key to gospel presentation is prayer for the Spirit's work.

Over the past many decades, the gospel presentation of the church had been reduced to the proclamation of human personal sinfulness and the personal redemption in Jesus – both ideas sound irrelevant in the cultural present. The reduced gospel must be restored to the full story of the Bible. The goodness of creation and the sure hope gospel, alongside individual sin and redemption. As elements of the Christian worldview are increasingly disappearing in the cultural context, gospel presentations require the bigger story of God's love and more explanation using popular language and cultural references.

The propositional and theological language of church doctrines about redemption need to be replaced by storytelling for outreach. Stories are much more easily understood and can embrace the whole of our humanity, including mind, emotions, and motivations. Christians should be confident and joyful in the biblical message of the gospel. We are called to present good news. If we do not regard it as a source of joy and are not genuinely grateful for it, we will not be able to present the gospel well.

As our models, Jesus himself and the apostles explain and represent the gospel message in ways the people could easily understand. They took ideas and concepts from the culture to express and explain their transcendent message better. They had freedom to change the “wrapping” so that people could accept the gift.

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<sup>379</sup> Green, *Luke*, 236.

## **Respond to Different Assumptions About the Church**

Successful church outreach cannot be done with general proclamation of the gospel but needs particular application to varying groups of people. Survey results show how Millennials cluster by needs that would require different emphases of the same gospel message. The “religious consumers,” aka experience-centered church shoppers, need the message of corporate aspects of the gospel. They need help to see the beauty of rootedness and of taking on suffering out of love. God’s plan is a new people, a new humanity, and formation happens in community. “God seekers” are suspicious of authority. They need a safe place to explore Christianity while they are not judged or rushed. This can show real love toward them. “Church avoiders” described most of the interview participants of my research before their conversion process. The church needs to face the fact that people evaluate the church as non-attractive, and the main reason is the lack of relevancy. Those not in the church believe religion is a left-over of human history, the church a museum about the past. This belief is reinforced by the outdated music, the liturgy, the dress, the passivity of the congregation during worship, the lack of a sense of community, and the one-man performance of the lecturing pastor. These critiques are meaningful comments for the ears of the church. The “church supporters” seem to be the furthest group from the church as an institution. Their “support” seems mainly administrative. They need prayer to experience change of their pride, as some participants had.

## **Teaching About Suffering**

Teaching about suffering is a key task of the church in this cultural atmosphere because there are many people who have no handrail for life. Millennials suffer from

unprocessed scars and conflicts. They are characterized by, as Tari calls it, “emotional incontinence.” To survive, they rush through emotional experiences; there is no room for sorrow because life is too short. They do not have a worldview to make sense of, or deal with pain. The need to escape pain is one of the reasons why Buddhism can be popular among Millennials. The church needs to address suffering because young people are desperate for explanation and meaning.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This study focused on human desire and longing in the conversion process of Hungarian Millennials. As with any study, there are limitations as to how extensive the research can be. Therefore, pursuit of the following areas of study could be highly valuable for the church.

Both research and practical experience show that the Hungarian people adapt and accept an otherwise difficult situation of living in the current secular culture. They may grow into it or consider it natural, but they are not even aware that they can change it. Worthwhile future research could look at what it takes for someone to want to change.

This research showed that human imagination is highly related to our desires. Another possible area of further research is the connection between imagination, desire and longing, and how they relate to mission.

The question of how to talk about sin in the present cultural context is crucial for the church. Without understanding the human need for salvation, the work of Christ has no meaning. To explore the interrelated areas of desire, sinfulness, and mission, which would be an important research to further the church in its calling.

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