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Elmer L. Towns

Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, eltowns@liberty.edu

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REACHING THE BUSTER GENERATION

Elmer L. Towns

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Elmer L. Towns is Dean, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary Lynchburg, Virginia 24506. (804) 582-2169. He is founder of Church Growth Institute and past President of the North American Society for Church Growth.

The first Baby Buster turned 25 years of age in 1991, but Busters do not march to the same drum beat as their Boomer parents. Their Boomer parents were fighters and winners, fighting for women's rights, nuclear freeze, and the Peace movement. They hated Vietnam and the Cold War and they loved the "Camelot" Kennedy Years in the White House. But their Baby Busters are different. They have no great dreams, no battles to win, no mountains to climb. They are a generation with busted dreams, busted ambitions, and busted trust.

The Baby Boomers smoked pot to escape the realities of the world and loved it; the Baby Buster snorts crack and dies. The Baby Boomers experimented with free sex and brought in a wave of sexual revolution; their Baby Buster kids go to bed with a partner, end up with AIDS, and die.

The hero of the Baby Busters is Bart Simpson, the irreverent smart mouth cartoon kid who does not respect adults, calling them "dude". Bart Simpson is equally irreverent with his father, calling him by his first name, "Homer". The ultimate dream of Bart Simpson is to be "an underachiever" in school. He complained when awarded a C+, saying it was disgracefully high. Whereas Bart's Boomer parents dreamed of landing on the moon, finding a cure to the ills of inner city poverty and a larger percent graduated from college and graduate school than any generation before them, Bart Simpson has no dreams, no tomorrows, no mountains to climb and no wars to win.

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How to Understand the Baby Buster!

The following labels describe the Baby Buster generations. They do not come from popular usage, nor are they intended to coin new terms. They are functional designations intended to help understand this perplexing generation.

The Entitled Generation.

Psychological entitlement happens when privileges become rights demanded by those who don't understand the struggle to get them in the first place. As an illustration, air conditioning in cars was originally sold to the elite, then it was offered in the family station wagon. Today, the high school student needs air conditioning in the car he drives to school. The Baby Busters' grandparents, the Depression Kids, had to fight the elements for the basic necessities of life. Their grandparents had marginal running water, perhaps no hot water in the house, no hot lunches in the schools, no interstate travel, no school buses except for rural routes, and perhaps only the wealthy went to college or became a physician. But most privileges have trickled down to the poor and Busters feel they are entitled to them all.

Sociologist Richard Niebuhr described the family cycle from rags to riches in three generations. The first generation sacrificed and disciplined themselves to rise out of poverty to make money. The second generation lived off their parents' values and enjoyed their inherited wealth, but they communicated their second generation values to the grandchildren, not the values that made the original fortune. The third generation without character and discipline can't maintain the sociological level. They blow it all and return to rags. The Busters are third generation children who have had everything given to them, yet they cannot appreciate luxuries without entitlement.

Things are important to the third generation Busters, things like cars, CDs, televisions and \$200 gym shoes and the best in entertainment. The parents of Boomers had things provided for them by their parents, primarily because the first generation sacrificed as a child. But last comes the Busters, things are almost forced on them as a way of life.

The second generation Baby Boomers are competitive. Perhaps their winning nature can be blamed on their first generation parents. The Boomers were given baseball uniforms, a fall field almost as good as Yankee Stadium, coaches, and everything to enjoy the games; things that their parents, the Depression Kids, did not have. Then these first generation parents yelled at their little Baby Boomers to hit, slide, score, and win. Children can learn to be overachievers. The driving compulsion to overcome the great American financial depression forced them to make winners out of their Boomer kids. What about the Baby Busters? Are they less competitive because things have been given to them.

The psychology of entitlement has effected the Busters, the generation of busted dreams. They expect government subsidies, and they know they are entitled to welfare, the courts told them so. The Entitled Generation expect scholarships, grants, and loans to get through college. No one works their way through college anymore.

The Buster does not go looking for jobs, jobs have always come looking for them. Since there were fewer Busters, the workplace needed them at McDonald's where they got their first job (they saw the "want ad" on the placemat). Next they were sought for summer jobs. Therefore, they feel entitled to a good job at a good wage with good conditions and good benefits.

Depression Kids worked their way through college by washing dishes, waiting tables or holding down a midnight job. Back then college was inexpensive and a student could work his way through. The second generation, the Baby Boomers were put through college in the Golden Years, paid for by hard working parents. They were the Golden Years because a college education was inexpensive and available to all who would work and study. But now on the down side of inflation, a college education is too expensive for most parents, so the Buster goes through on loans. Few Busters will graduate from college without owing \$20,000 to \$30,000. They do not value the future and borrow against it.

The It Generation.

The second generation Baby Boomers were the "now generation," they wanted everything in the present tense, but their children the Busters don't have the same time quality evaluation, they just want "it." They are the instant generation, instant cake mix, instant loans, instant replay, and instant tea. The Buster stand impatiently beating on the microwave because it takes 90 seconds to bake his frozen dinner. Yet the Depression Kids remember waiting five hours for the oven to cook a turkey.

It was the Depression Kids who lived by the value of "postponed gratification." Their motto was pay now and play later. When they were teens, weeknights were study nights and weekends were for dating. To express it in another way, you worked all week so you could have fun on the weekend. They worked a lifetime to have fun in retirement, but not so with the Boomers and Busters. The phrase is, "instant gratification." They want to pay now and play now. To them, every night is date night!

The Busters are a product of advertising and marketing that pours into their lives through television. The television says, "buy," the key words are "you" and "now." You're important. Have it your way. And buy now, don't worry about the future. "You deserve a break today."

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The Isolated Generation.

When the Buster joins a crowd with a walkman plugged into his ears, he doesn't relate, talk, or interact. He listens to music by himself and remains isolated in the midst of the crowd. To understand the Isolated Generation, compare the way different generations danced. The first generation, Depression Kids, listened to the Big Band sound and hugged and squeezed one another on the dance floor. Dancing was relationship and they whispered into one another's ears as they suggestively held each other in their arms. The Depression Kids idolized Fred Astair and Ginger Rogers for their perfect grace and flare that represented two people in perfect harmony. Then came their kids the Baby Boomers. They listened to Dick Clark and The American Bandstand. They did the twist, the swim, and a number of other dances whereby two couples danced together but seldom touched. Boomers did not have the intimacy, relationship or interpersonal involvement in their dance routine. This generation is now followed by the Busters who dance alone. They idolize Michael Jackson and Madonna, who dance with themselves; no one else is even on stage. Their idols are the perfect expression of the Isolated Generation.

The Busters are children of divorce. Many grew up in isolation, perhaps without the intimacy of a father and a mother in the nuclear family. They felt alone in this world and it's hard to dream with no one to share your intimate thoughts.

The Devalued Generation.

The very fact that there were fewer children born during the Baby Bust implies that babies were not valued as highly as before. But notice other things that crept onto center stage during their childhood. First came Roe vs. Wade (1973), resulting in rampant abortion, the ultimate act against devalued children. Because children were no longer valued as in the past, America slaughters over 3 million a year.

Also, the Busters have been the target of an explosion in child abuse. While some feel that it was going on for years, but not reported by and to the police; others feel that family restraints were lifted by changing family values. Adults took their hostilities out on their children; surely suggesting children were devalued in their thinking. Many parents did not want children, i.e. birth control by the pill or other means. When many of the Busters finally went off to college, many parents said to them, "Don't come back." In many homes they were not wanted because of parent mid-life divorce. Busters were children left to work out their own problems, they could not go to mom and dad to talk about it.

Another reason that produced the Devalued Generation is the nature of their parents, the Baby Boomers. Boomers have been called the "Me Generation" which meant that they were proud, egotistical, or at best self centered. Those who are too concerned with themselves, don't have time to give to their children, which in fact devalues the child's relationship to his parent and devalues the child's self-perception.

The Self Proclaimed Generation.

The Baby Busters grew up with parents who told them, "You are important," but many of the parents denied by actions the words that came out of their mouths. They were too busy with their own pilgrimage in life. As a result, the busters felt they were important, but did not feel importance coming from other people. Since healthy ego development comes from proper self recognition, they had to beat their own dream. They are characterized by "self proclamation" or to express it another way, Busters are "self absorbed."

The Lengthened Adolescent Generation.

One obvious thing about the still emerging Baby Buster generation, they are slow to grow up. They seem to grow into maturity later than previous generations, which means they take on the role and responsibility of adulthood later than their parents or grandparents.

Adolescence is a transition between childhood and adulthood. Generally, adolescence is a protected time when the child is allowed to find itself, develop some maturity, choose vocation, choose a partner and learn how to make his way in the world. Traditionally adolescence has been called by sociologist a time of "passages" or the "season of the soul," when the personality ripens into maturity.

Historically adolescence has lasted from age 13 to 17 or 18, at least it took that long for the Depression Kids. In her 1986 article entitled *The Postponed Generation*, Susan Littwin indicated that adolescence now lasts from age 11 to 28. Adolescence has been lengthened, on both ends. Kids enter it earlier and leave it much later. Whereas the first generation took four or five years to transition to adulthood, it takes the Buster 15 to 17 years. First the Boomers lengthened on the front end, entering it earlier because of their general sexual freedom and the sexual revolution they introduced to the world. Now the Buster is lengthening adolescence on the exit end. They are refusing to grow up. Like Peter Pan, they seem to desire perpetual adolescence, i.e. freedom to make mistakes, goof off, and mess around, all without consequence. Disturbingly, Busters come out of adolescence about ten years later than their parents, remaining young people in their twenties who have all the characteristics of a teenager. We are not taking physical

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characteristics, but their emotional outlook and commitment to handle the pressures of life.

The postponed generation knows more because of television, has experienced more in the realm of sex, has traveled farther, yet usually does not accept responsibility and usually cannot act upon what they know.

At one time there was a clear line between adolescence and adulthood, it was when you left high school, joined the military or graduated from college. At other times it was when you got married, or got your first job. But now a Baby Buster can work for five years and still live like an adolescent at home, or he can earn a Ph.D., marry and still not accept the responsibility of adulthood.

What are some results of postponed adolescence? They marry later, are not in a hurry to go to college but will reduce academic loads, change apartments, make short term commitments to sports teams, duck responsibilities and even float from one hobby to another, or from one singles' bar to another.

The Noncommitted Generation.

Busters seemed overwhelmed by life. Since they know more, have experienced more from the multitude of television advertisements, media information, and the possibilities of travel, work and an open ended life, they seldom know how to handle any of it. So they don't commit to anything. The Busters feel they must try everything before making a decision. That is life in a consumer market. They leave their options open. Rather than buying a computer, they shop around but do not make a commitment because next year the model may be cheaper and have more options. Because they live in a changing world, they do not commit to the present because it may be out of date tomorrow.

The Buster shops for a car phone but puts it off for 90 days and the price drops from \$800 to \$150. So he felt he learned a way to get along in life. Do not make a deep commitment to a girl, a better wife will come by. Do not make a deep commitment to a job, a better offer will seek you out when a head hunter phones you with an attractive offer. Do not make a deep commitment to any thing because everything is transitory.

The Non-Focused Generation.

The Busters have difficulty focusing on anything for a long period of time. Their life is like a news story presented on the evening news. Everything is instant, an instant war, an instant crisis, an instant political drama. For fifteen minutes Busters give rapped attention to earth shaking danger, then back to pizza or the football game.

Television has produced dysfunctionism more than any one is willing to admit. The way television makes us experience information and feelings is the way we relate to others and to our culture. Television presents news in nice "bite size" thirty second modules of time. So Busters drift through life unconnected to his previous experience or the next. He's dysfunctional.

Television never moves to closure on anything. The soaps never end, they just keep on going. When the Baby Buster gets wrapped up in the famine of Africa, before he knows it, it is no longer a news item. Suddenly its Grenada, then herpes, then the nuclear freeze. Before long, the flow of news makes it difficult for him to commit to any issue, so life becomes and existence of non-issues. They are the non-focused generation.

The Unisex Generation.

The Busters are the first generation that is the product of America's growing unisex orientation to life. Unisex is a movement towards the center. Both boys and girls wear jeans, t-shirts and have the same length hair. Outward adornings are not the issue. There seems to be no mystery in the boy-girl relationship. Buster children have grown up with sex education. They have seen nude pictures, can identify the plumbing fixtures, know what they are expected to do in copulation and can explain it with proper identification of the organs. But they don't know the mystery of the sexual relationships. Even in marriage, there is often a contracted agreement. They have not experienced what Jesus described, "The two shall be one Flesh."

The growth of women's rights has resulted in both men and women doing all the roles at an airline: pilots, computer operators, luggage handlers and even mechanics. This is not wrong because in many of these tasks previously relegated to men, women are observably better. The issue is that in the middle of America's social struggle to correct a historic wrong, Busters seem to be swimming in a stream where they can not find bottom.

When it comes to the church, Busters have difficulty understanding the traditional arguments of the fundamentalists against women in ministry. The issue is not whether women should be ordained or whether they should be the senior pastor in a church. That issue is explained in 1 Timothy 3. The issue is, "Should women have ministry in the church?" The Busters say unequivocally, while Depression Kids equivocate.

The Anomanilie Generation.

Anomanilie means you are hot and cold at the same time, or you are happy and sad, or depressed and vibrant. Anomanilie means you are both extremes without coming to a synthesis. The Busters are the anomanilie generation, at least to their parents and grandparents. They wear a 1500 suit

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and sneakers to work. They want to be comfortable, yet present a good image. They wear shoes without socks. They drink a diet cold drink for breakfast rather than the traditional coffee. The Anomanilie Buster Christian wears a t-shirt with a rebellious slogan, or even a silkscreened add for beer, nor caring about the anti-church implication to their parents or grandparents.

Busters are tolerant of change, expect change, and embrace change with affection. They can take charge in stride because they are nontraditional. But their parents, the Baby Boomers and their grandparents, the Depression Kids look at moral situations through the eyes of tradition. Their parents interpret by the standards of consistency, and when things are not consistent, they get uptight. But Busters don't agree. They hold contradictory beliefs and have no trouble with them. They may not believe in losing one's salvation (eternal security), but they attend a Pentecostal church that says they can. They may speak in tongues, yet attend a church that preaches against sign gifts.

The Buster generation says contradictory things, and it does not bother them because consistency is not a rule of thumb. Their view of Christianity has choices like a cafeteria so they load up their tray with a little Mexican food, southern black-eyed peas, Italian pasta, and drink a little wine that is opposed by their pastor. The Anomanilie Buster quips, "What's the big deal?"

The First Atheistic Generation.

The Buster generation is a product of Madeline O'Hair who got the Supreme Court of the United States to kick the word of god, recognition of God, and the symbols of God out of the public schools. So Buster children were reared without knowledge or training of an absolute Deity, either Jewish, Catholic or Protestant. Supposedly, they were reared in a neutral environment with no reference to God. They were supposed to be reared free of all moral restraints and choices. But that is not the way it happened. Since nature abhors a vacuum, anti-God forces rushed in under the guise of neutrality and public schools became humanistic and atheistic. The result is not just "No god" but "anti-God." What do they think about God? Their orientation is secular, humanistic and they will not allow the church to run their moral life.

The Busters do not get their theological views from the church or organized religion, rather they get their views about God from films and music. As a result, they have a watered down view of God, the church and ministers. Their pluralistic viewpoint of life makes them anti-doctrinal and anti-orthodox. Yet, they are not theologically liberal, but are against the liberalism of the mainline churches. Busters believe in supernaturalism because in the movies they see demons and supernatural events. They have seen the realism of