The Boomer Generation: For Such A Time As This

by Judy Weerstra

deeply appreciate the current emphasis on the mobilization of baby boomers. I appreciate what I consider to be the positive elements of the baby boomer culture, of which I am a part. As a boomer I have a glorious sense of self. I would not trade my generation's experience with any other's, in any other culture, of any other time in history. Yet at the same time, I am concerned about a generation (including Christian boomers) that seems to be becoming increasingly enamored of itself. Much of what I read and see fails to bring out the weaknesses of my culture, the "shadows" of my boomer lifestyle. Few if any explore the forces which served to shape my character as a boomer, many of which I still struggle against, in order to serve my God and King.

As I read through the Christian literature relating to the boomers, I am well aware that the reading audience may very well be those in current leadership who are befuddled by this "radical" generation who has yet failed to conform to the expectations of what Annette Elder has identified as the "maturity generation," (see IJFM, April 1991 Vol 8:2 pages 51-55). If so, these articles serve as "keys" to getting the boomer's attention and involvement. But if the boomer is going to sustain the movement of missions, specifically "frontier missions," without propagating a different form of cultural imperialism, then it is time that we as boomers address the realities that we have tended to overlook in our zeal to lead others into missions.

Without a doubt, the baby boomers are the most written about culture of all times. Their likes and dislikes are published both in the secular and Chris-

tian press. The following article is presented with two purposes in mind 1) to explore the population explosion of the 1940s and 50s from the perspective of redemptive history, 2) and to explore the boomer world view in an effort to understand how it might actually hinder the very purpose we were called forth to accomplish.

A Destiny to Fulfill

Apart from God, events in history just seem "to happen," making it appear as if history simply evolves to provide a configuration of events to intrigue and confound the social scientists. Such was the case with the baby boom after World War II. In 1945 Germany surrendered and Japan gave up in August of the same year. "In the following months, 16 million men came home, igniting a 19 year boom that gave birth to 76 million Americans."

"Social scientists have been trying to explain why the baby boom happened. They might as well try to explain the hoola hoop. The baby boom was a freak storm of life, a baby fad sparked by the euphoria of victory in World War II" demographer and author Cheryle Russell tells us. She continues by saying that "the baby boom was an accident, a coincidence of events. Seventeen million more people were born between 1946 and 1964 than would not have been born if the young American women of the postwar years had followed the traditions of their mothers. Without the extra births, those born between 1946 and 1964 would have grown up inconspicuously."3

Secular social scientists, falling victim to what Leslie Newbigin calls "the

schism of fact and value," would never see God's providence at work in those cataclysmic times and events. Russell, like most people of her day, sees history apart from God. But as Christians we know that something as phenomenal as the birth of 73 million people, born in a 19 year span, does not happen by mere coincidence. It was not a fluke of history, nor as Russell believes, "purely the result of a "domestic fad," sparked by the euphoria of a victorious war and a renewed confidence in national leadership. 4Do we as Christians believe this? Or should we ask ourselves if there is anything more significant about the birth of this phenomenally large group of people known as the baby boomers?

Understanding the biblical significance of "generations" might help us, perhaps as nothing else can, to see the impact and significance that a single generation could have on the world. The Hebrew word for generations, "toledoth" is not just a period of time, but rather needs to be understood as people in time and space raised up by God dedicated to fulfilling His ordained purpose in their earthly history. Toledoth always refers to a people's history being played out on earth with a new beginning in time. This new beginning is a new day with new opportunities, bringing new promises, new hope, and for God's people, it is a new history specifically created for fulfilling His purpose and plan.⁵

"This is the book of the generations" says the writer of Genesis. The first reference to "generations" is seen in "the generations of the heavens and earth" written so because the heavens and the

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF FRONTIER MISSIONS, VOL 11:3 JULY/AUG. 1994

earth were the "appointed sphere so far as time and space are concerned, for the kingdom of God. Because God, according to His eternal counsel, appointed the world to be the scene both for the revelation of His invisible essence, and also for the operations of His eternal love within and among His creatures."

The listing of generations continue from there to Adam, Noah, Shem, Terah, Ismael, Isaac, Esau and lastly Jacob making a complete list of ten groups each with the uniform heading "these are the generations." A generation thus is an appointed group of people which shows "a simple and unvarnished description of the development of the world under the guidance and discipline of God,"⁷... of how God operates "through theophanies, revelations, word and deed" to make the historical development of the human race also the history of the plan of salvation."8 Each generation (for whom the kingdom of God is a reality) contributes to the will of God. Therefore, "generations" is not just another people group sharing time and space together, without any unique purpose or plan, but biblically, it is God's "new acts to a new generation of people." These then take on features which are unique to their place and time.

The significance of this in our generation is that God now has a new people who are fundamentally unique to this place and time, with more revelation, knowledge and resources with which He can effect the world in entirely new ways than ever before. Never before have so many factors converged in a given point in history as we see today, making it actually possible to complete world evangelization in this generation. Never before have we had in place the technology, the mobility, the theology and missiology as we have today. 10 We are the first generation to know who all the peoples are, where they live, what languages they speak. 11 Not only have the sociological dimensions of missiology matured as a science, but the biblical basis for missions is becoming the central focus of the Church.

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The significance of the final lap in this era of modern missions is that the runner is equipped as no other. This convergence of factors is not a man made phenomena, nor could a single generation have accomplished this. It is the culminating point of the "generations," a purpose which began with the creation of the heavens and earth, clearly communicated to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3), victorious through Christ, and carried on by His Church. Failing to understand this is tantamount to ignoring the significance of the last runner in a relay race. But will this "toledoth" understand its significance from this godly historical point of view? That is: If a final thrust of missions from North America is to be accomplished by the end of this decade, a large mature labor force by 1990 would have had to have been born around 1945 following.

Curiously, Russell records that women who were interviewed in the 1940s reported that they did not want to have extra children, but that it "just happened," giving credence to the notion that God might have had something to do with it. Russell blames it on "sloppy birth control," in spite of the fact that couples in the preceding generation had been able to limit their family size before the baby boom years. Why did couples fail to do so during the 1950s? Furthermore what kept it going for nearly two decades still puzzles demographers, sociologists and economists alike. 12 It is God working in history to produce a "toledoth" designed to fulfill His plan and purpose!

If only we were a "pig in a python" then we would be justified in becoming just another sociological phenomena that is to be commended as we pass through the predicted rites of passage or perhaps just another economic force which must be catered to as we move through life. However, if we are a labor force destined by God to extend His kingdom into the remotest regions of the world then we need understand what that means for our lives, and the kinds of choices we should make in light of this.

The Dark Side

But the word "generation" is not only a temporal designation, it also is a qualitative one as well. The Scriptures frequently make reference to entire generations as an "adulterous generation" or "this evil and adulterous generation", or an "unbelieving and corrupt generation." (See Mt. 8:38; 17:17; Mk. 12:45; 9:19; Lk. 9:41; Acts 2:40) If any qualitative criticism of the boomer generation can be made, it can be said that we are a "rebellious generation."

"The twentieth century has witnessed an almost worldwide revolt against all forms of authority that have been generally recognized by the human race for millennia. Major areas of social structure have been affected including the family, the church and the various branches of secular education." In interviewing and listening to Christian boomers, many have confessed that they have always struggled with rebellion.

"For rebellion is like the sin of witch-craft." (2 Sam. 15:23)"... and I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations." (Ex. 20:1-5) Che Ann, regional Christian leader and pastor in the charismatic movement of the Greater Los Angeles area, has recently spoken about what he calls a territorial spirit over this nation called the spirit of Jezebel—a spirit without limit or controls, whose main trust was and is to encourage rebellion.

In the boomer manifesto called the "The Greening of America" written by Charles Reich during the 1970sthe boomer agenda was set in print. An articulate and passionately written revolution is mapped out for future generations. He boldly states," There is a revolution coming. It will not be like revolutions of the past. It will originate with the individual and with culture, and it will change the political structure only as its final act. It will not require violence to succeed and it cannot be successfully resisted by violence. This is the revolution of the new generation."

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He goes on to say,"The logic and necessity of the new generation and what they are so furiously opposed to (italics mine) must be seen against a background of what has gone wrong in America. It must be understood in light of the betraval and loss of the American dream, the rise of the Corporate State of the 1960s and the way in which the State dominates, exploits and ultimately destroys both nature and man."16 The boomer agenda offers man a "new head," "a new way of living," a "new man," one which is consistent with new technologies and promises a life that is more liberated and more beautiful than man has ever known. Essential to the boomer world view is a complete reconstruction of society's values, norms and goals. Reich says "no mere reform can" do it."

The following represents some of the issues that the boomers are "furiously opposed to" 1) Disorder, corruption, hypocrisy and war; 2) Poverty, distorted priorities, and law-making by private power; 3) Uncontrolled technology and the destruction of the environment; 4) Decline of democracy and liberty, *powerlessness*, (italics mine); 5) Artificiality of work and culture; 6) Absence of community, and finally; 7) Loss of self.¹⁷

These noble requests bear a striking resemblance to the writings of of Karl Marx, calling for the transformation and complete overthrow, not only of the State, but of all major institutions of our culture. Reich states that the primary place that self is stripped of all its identity is in the schooling process. "He (the student) is systematically stripped of his imagination, his creativity, his heritage, his dreams, and his personal uniqueness, in order to style him into a productive unit for a mass, technological society." ¹⁸

The rest of his book is dedicated to expanding these main points, but his most insightful comment is that the American crisis owes its existence to a universal sense of *powerlessness*. "We seem to be living in a society that no one created and that no one wants."

The present American crisis is the fruit of this reasoning. More liberty has not created the "new man," it has only made the "old man" stronger. Nowhere else can you see its effect more clearly, than in the feminist movement" which emerged from that decade. It has not given more freedom to American life, but on the contrary has affected American life (and the world) in two very significant and negative ways: 1) "It has spawned a whole generation of Americans who rebelled against all authority",²⁰ (potentially disabling the "toledoth" from its destiny and task), and 2) Served to obscure gender differences and at the same time solidify boundary lines between the genders which has served as a seedbed for the emergence of the homosexual community, effacing the very character of God as seen and demonstrated in the act of heterosexual marriage and love.

The ultimate sin in our society today is to violate the autonomy of another person. That translates into: "Don't tell me what to do!" Philip Greenslade in *Leadership, Greatness and Servanthood,* shares a story where the whole issue of rights, and the absolutization of equalitarianism was seen for what it was when a member of his own church bluntly asked him, "What right do you have to introduce change amongst us?"²¹

Joni Mitchell's latest song, written after almost 20 years of silence, is titled "Boundary Lines". The song portrays a society that is hot to defend its boundary lines, between lovers, between friends, between neighbors, between anyone who threatens not only the freedom of conscience but the freedom from morality. Her boomer lament is obvious!

"For rebellion is like the sin of witchcraft," (2 Sam15:23)" Who can argue that the apathy of the" busters" is anything but an obvious consequence of boomers' rebellion? Rebellion has also shaped the way we have come to see God and His will for our lives. For the boomer God is primarily friend, mentor,

and confidant-God is immanent, but we have lost much of His ownership, His right to rule over us. The"maturity generation" in trying to pass the baton to the boomer generation finds the boomer unwilling to assume a position which does not guarantee high visibility or a sense of personal power (often translated into "personal ownership") over his environment. Yet Jesus clearly said that "if you lose your life, you find it," but often the baby boomer wants that guarantee up front. In a real sense there is no "plausibility structure" as Leslie Newbigin calls it, to give us a deep understanding of "lordship." The fruit of the 1960s is, sadly to say, an inability to appreciate God-given leadership, an inability to correctly perceive one's role (contribution) in the overall effort to reach the world, and a constant hunger for self-fulfillment.

Ironically, most baby boomers admit to feeling they are called to do something significant in their life and time. Could this be the work of the Spirit convicting them of their destiny with the charge to fulfill God's redemptive purpose and plan in the world at this time? If this is true, as I believe, then part of the recovery process for Christian baby boomers is to break the curse of rebellion (repent of rebellion against all authority), which has now become part and parcel of the fabric of our dysfunctional society.

Boomers for Such a Time as This

In frontier missions it has been said that, "There are no easy places left."
This means that we have been dealt a hand in missions that requires the finest missiology ever! No doubt that each missionary endeavor will require greater endurance, broader perspective, more maturity, servanthood and sacrifice than in the past. The challenge is truly profound. Material possessions we might be able to part with, but our freedom of choice, our independence, serving under someone's else command, acknowledging our dependence on

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each other, of casting away the mantle of middle class virtues might be close to impossible. Peter said as much, wherein Jesus replied "This is impossible for man, but for God everything is possible." (Mt. 19:25-26)

There is an urgent need to come to terms with several hard points: 1) Many of us have not seriously evaluated the seedbed of our birth as a generation. Have we indiscriminately embraced every boomer value as a godly virtue? Have we failed to acknowledge a generation of people who were faithful to boring and tedious jobs day after day, on our behalf. Have we disdained the missionary movement of the last 200 hundred years who through bloodshed and tears has written of its own mistakes that we might not repeat them? 2) The Holy Spirit, through the Word of God can accomplish "that change from judgment to grace," who can move us from rebellion to obedience through repentance. There is a radical need to come to conversion in this area of our lives, which ironically holds us from completing the very task we so desire and have been destined for—to change the world! 3) Without God's grace, we are a indeed a perverse and as George Otis warns "a dispensable generation."

Personally, the thought of long term missions scares me. For instinctively, I know I am not constitutionally made to endure long commitments which require endless sacrifice and patient endurance. I haven't been bred in that kind of milieu. But I can do it provided I live a life of repentance from my rebellious, self-centered, and wealthy ways. The moment I move away from a life of repentance, I move into a life which is against Christ, and a life incapable of fulfilling the Great Commission. For that reason all of us need to move with understanding into the following prayer:

"Father God, we see that you have ordained great things for us, (a new generation) but we are a rebellious and wicked generation, who need cleansing from our sins which are ever before us. Father we acknowledge that we were born in rebellion, and have passed that on to our children. Please forgive us and blot out all our iniquities (our self-ishness and arrogance), and create in us a new clean heart, so that we, as a people, might fulfill the plans you have for our lives Amen.

Repentance and forgiveness should equip us with the necessary transparency and humility to overcome our wealth and our knowledge as instruments for the flesh. We should experience afresh a love for the law of God as well as for the law of the nation, and the authority vested in our parents. We should be able to have a true response of the soul as we have entered into incorporation with the Body of Christ locally and globally, being under authority (godly leadership) in the fullest sense and receive God's fullest blessings.

We are not advocating that the baby boomer returns to a post-World War II mind-set. That is not possible nor desirable nor even biblical. But the sting, the curse of rebellion, must be broken as we need to be set free to use our gifts and talents in a way that appreciates godly authority and submission as biblical principles, being able to see them without the errors and abuses of the preceding generations.

Missiologist Johannes Verkuyl said it well: "more and more there is a tendency to write off the participation of churches in the Western world in the unfinished task of world mission... I place my hope on a younger generation of women and men in the Western world who are humble enough to assist their Asian, African, and Latin American colleagues..." ²¹

This is our hope too. We are a special generation raised up for such a time as this!

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Judy Weerstra is a graduate of the SWM of Fuller Theological Seminary. She co-directs the Southwest Center for World Missions located in El Paso, Texas.