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The Truth of the Matter:
An Evaluation and Response to the Conflict Over Truth Between Generation X and Evangelical Christianity

A Thesis Submitted To
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Mr. Doug Randlett
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .................................................................................. 3

Chapter

1. GENERATION X ................................................................. 19

2. TRUTH AS DEFINED HISTORICALLY AND EVANGELICALLY .... 37

3. GENERATION X’S APPROACH TO TRUTH ......................... 62

4. THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE APPROACH TO TRUTH IN
   EVANGELICALISM AND GENERATION X .......................... 90

5. BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN EVANGELICALS AND GENERATION X
   BASED UPON A THEOLOGY OF TRUTH ............................. 93

BIBLIOGRAPHY ........................................................................... 108
Introduction

Western culture is at perhaps the greatest crossroads it has ever faced, certainly the greatest in the past several hundred years. This crossroads is not the result of the rise or decline of nations or of the discovery of life on Mars, but rather it is due to a changing of the guard, so to speak, in the very way in which people think. The very undergirding of knowledge and culture itself has and is changing. Since the sixteenth century the forces of modernism have held sway in Western culture. Science had already attained the position of holding all the answers to all questions, and man was only getting better. The twentieth century has exposed the chinks in modernism’s armor, even though for most of it the forces of modernism have seemingly only picked up steam. After all, scientific discoveries and advances in technology have increased exponentially.¹

All is not well in the realm of modernism. The initial seeds of modernism’s destruction can be seen as early as the writings of German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche and his “end of the moral interpretation of the world,”² as well as his “pronouncements about the demise of truth.”³ Close on the heels of Nietzsche was World War I, when modernism’s tenet that mankind was continually progressing in every way wasn’t quite holding up to reality after all. Other philosophers and social events followed; then, in the late sixties and early seventies the postmodern movement left the

² Freidrich Nietzsche, quoted in Tim Celek and Dieter Zander, Inside the Soul of a New Generation. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1996), 45
realms of only a few philosophers and began to be espoused in colleges and universities throughout the world—especially in France and the United States. Now the nineties are upon us and modernism is undergoing its death dance while postmodernism is alive and well. David Dockery explains postmodernism as:

...a new set of assumptions about reality, which goes far beyond mere relativism. It impacts our literature, our dress, our art, our architecture, our music, our sense of right and wrong, our self-identity, and our theology. Postmodernism tends to view human experience as incoherent, lacking absolutes in the area of truth and meaning.

Generation X, or the Baby Buster generation is the first generation to grow up in this postmodernist worldview. While it is often said by youth workers of all stripes that this generation is unlike any other, in this case that statement rings alarmingly true. In fact, though there is always some degree of tension between generations, especially when the younger is coming of age, the transition from the Boomer generation to Generation X is without a doubt the greatest transition that has been seen in recent history. There is one simple explanation for this fact: the Boomers were the last of the modernist generations, and Generation X is the first of the postmodern generations. The impact of postmodernism on the lives of Gen Xers cannot and should not be denied, this is especially true in the realm of truth.

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5 Dockery, 14
7 Dockery, 13-15
Problem

Today's society is becoming increasingly secular, postmodern, and if not anti-Christian, then at least, (and possibly even worse), ambivalent toward Christianity. The church must learn to adapt in regard to these and other phenomena if it is to remain both viable and relevant. This is especially true in regard to Generation X and the generations to follow. Generation X can no longer be regarded as the future of the church, if indeed this was ever a proper understanding of their place in the church at all. In 1996, the first of the Gen Xers turned thirty; thus they are increasingly a force to be reckoned with as consumers, in business, education, and especially the church.

There is a very significant problem: Even though Gen Xers are reaching a point in their lives where they are an important part of the church dynamic, very often they do not see things in the same light as Christianity historically has—this includes many of those who claim the name "Christian". The problem lies in the foundational issue of absolute truth.

Christianity in its very foundation regards absolute truth to be just that - absolute, in the objective and universal sense. The problem begins with the simple fact that, more often than not for Generation X, this foundational premise does not hold. For Gen Xers, the term "absolute truth" can mean either very little, or something entirely different than what Christianity means or has meant when using the same term. In fact, according to George Barna’s book The Invisible Generation, as many as seventy percent of Gen Xers
do not believe in absolute truth. More recent studies by Barna have shown that the percentage is even higher. Often those who do say that there is such a thing as absolute truth have an entirely different understanding of the term. For these people, absolute truth may exist but most certainly not in the objective or universal sense. Instead, ‘absolute truth’ has taken on an individual and highly subjective understanding. Often this understanding of the term is expressed in a manner something akin to “that may be true for you, but it’s not true for me.”

The conflict here is readily apparent, and obviously a significant one when one looks at Generation X in relation to Christianity. One way to look at it is by seeing Generation X and Christianity on the opposite sides of a canyon as is illustrated below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation X</th>
<th>Christianity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absolute truth</td>
<td>Absolute truth</td>
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In order for the church to remain viable and relevant in the next century, it must identify how Generation Xers approach to absolute truth affects their acceptance of Christianity and Christian truth, and then determine a way to bridge the gap.

**Purpose**

This thesis is designed to take an in-depth look at Generation X’s approach to absolute truth, especially in relation to the Christian approach to absolute truth. This

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8 George Barna, *The Invisible Generation*, (Glendale, Ca.: Barna Research Group, 1992), 80
thesis will also attempt to deliver a means for the church to address this difference in approach in order to remain relevant to both Generation X and the generations to follow.

Primarily, this thesis will be a literary study relying on the data gathered by others, and therefore will not rely on new surveys. Furthermore, due to the end goal of the thesis, that is, to bridge the gap between Generation X and Christianity as a whole, the author will focus on underlying, foundational principles, rather than specific substantive issues or methods.

Ultimately the goal of this thesis is to produce a philosophy of ministry, based upon the foundational issue of absolute truth, for reaching Generation X and the generations which follow it. In order to accomplish this goal, several areas must be studied. First, Generation X must be defined and described. Second, the significance of absolute truth as foundational for forming a world view must be demonstrated. Third, the historic evangelical approach to truth must be described and analyzed. Fourth, the world view of Generation X, as based upon their view of absolute truth must be described and analyzed. Next, the conflict between the evangelical and Generation X world views, based upon their conflicting views of absolute truth must be demonstrated. These areas lead to the final analysis. This analysis should lead to the determination of the most effective way to reach Generation X—and beyond—in spite of this clash over absolute truth.
Importance of the topic

In many ways this single issue of absolute truth becomes the key to reaching the future generations for Christ, not just Generation X. The approach that one takes to truth, and especially to absolute truth, necessarily impacts one's understanding of the nature of reality. One of the easiest ways to understand this is through a simple cause and effect relationship. If there is no absolute truth then there is no absolute morality, and if no absolute morality, then no absolute standard, if no absolute standard, then there is no sin, and if no sin then why Christ?, and why the church?¹⁰

By rejecting the concept of absolute truth, Generation X, (and all generations to follow this growing trend), has in essence rejected Christianity at its foundational level. This is not to say that Generation X has determined Christianity to necessarily be wrong or bad—though many have, but rather that it is irrelevant and obsolete.¹¹ Generation X has, in its acceptance of Postmodernism and the Postmodern understanding of truth, effectively removed itself from the very foundation upon which Christianity rests, for without objective, universal truth, Christianity cannot stand for long.¹² And if some vestige of Christianity were to be left standing, it would be both meaningless and powerless. As the previous illustration has shown, this divergence in the foundational issue of truth results in something akin to a canyon—on one side is Generation X, and on the opposite plateau is Christianity. In-between the two plateaus lies the vast chasm of

¹⁰ Dr. Elmer Towns, “When Culture Reinvents Itself,” in the Seminar for the Church Growth Institute: Reaching The Unchurched Baby Buster, Lesson Two, 1995
¹¹ Tim Celek and Dieter Zander, Inside the Soul of a New Generation, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1996), 87-93
absolute truth, separating the two. The irony of the picture is that absolute truth should in fact be the bridge between the two and not the gulf. However, due to the fact that these two groups define absolute truth in two entirely different ways, or in some cases not at all, the two ends to the span between them are not only of differing materials, but rarely are they building toward one another at all.

**Position on the Problem**

It is the position of the author that, if evangelical Christianity continues to pursue an overtly modernist understanding of life and philosophy of ministry, then it is in jeopardy of losing much of Generation X, as well as the generations which will follow it. Evangelical Christianity must develop a philosophy of ministry toward and for Generation X which both recognizes and understands their postmodern orientation, especially in regard to the foundational element of absolute truth. Ultimately, this philosophy of ministry must find a way to retain the fundamental core of Evangelicalism, while at the same time reach out to Generation X in a way which is relevant and real to them.

**Research Method and Limitations**

This thesis will be a primarily a library thesis which compares and analyzes the results of research on Generation X and their approach to absolute truth, with the historical and evangelical approach to truth. This thesis will also incorporate a certain amount of descriptive study in order to further understand the foundational significance
of absolute truth, as well as an understanding of Generation X. The final analysis and recommendation for a philosophy of ministry for Generation X will be based on the descriptive study as well as the comparative analysis of Generation Xers’ approach to absolute truth and that of evangelical Christianity.

In order to make this thesis workable and narrow, while at the same time retaining its significance, several limitations were set on the research. First, this thesis is not designed to be an exhaustive study of Generation X, but rather it is only a study of Generation X in relation to their approach to truth, specifically absolute truth. Second, the research of this thesis was not intended to be by means of, and will not rely on original surveys to determine the views of Generation X. Rather its intent is to be through the use of data already gathered by others. Third, this thesis is not an exegesis or demonstration from Scripture, although there is Scriptural support throughout. Finally, it is not the intent of this thesis to deal with specific substantive or doctrinal issues, but rather to deal with methods and principles for approaching truth, especially in relation to Christianity.

Review of Literature

Finding significant research on Generation X, let alone on Generation X’s approach to absolute truth, (especially in relation to Christianity), is a significant undertaking in and of itself. There is significantly less information on Generation X available than there is on the previous generation—the Boomers. The seeming
infatuation with Boomers, and relative lack of attention given to Generation X is not confined to secular literature, but is also evident in Christian literature as well.¹³

Even though there is a relatively scant amount of material available on Generation X (other than articles in popular periodicals), there are several important works available. Most of the literature available on Generation X does offer some insight into the general character of the generation. The whole “Generation X” phenomena began with Douglas Coupland’s pseudo-novel of the same title. Coupland’s novel was a thinly veiled look at life through the eyes of a Generation Xer who for all intents and purposes is himself. His two following books, Shampoo Planet, and Life After God expand upon what was begun in Generation X.

Beyond Coupland, there have been as few as three attempts to chronicle the characteristics and development of Generation X in the secular field. Some would no doubt disagree with this assessment, however there do not seem to be any large scale, serious attempts other than Howe and Strauss’s 13th Gen, Welcome to the Jungle: The Why Behind “Generation X” by Geoffrey Holtz, and Generation Ecch! by Cohen and Krugmann. There are other works on Generation X available to be sure, but these are the most comprehensive in scope, and attempt to give insight into the nature and character of Generation X. The significant difference in these three volumes is their perspective. 13th Gen is written from the outside looking in; that is, Howe and Strauss are both Boomers chronicling Generation X. Conversely, Welcome to the Jungle, and Generation Ecch! Are

¹³ George Barna, The Invisible Generation, 16
written from the inside looking out—the authors are themselves Xers, and the entire demeanor of their books reflect that fact.

One other volume in secular literature with the potential to give significant insight into this generation is The GenX Reader by Douglas Rushkoff, though it is not an attempt to chronicle or understand Generation X. Rushkoff has simply produced “a collection of some of Generation X’s most revered voices . . . in the words of GenX members.”¹⁴ For the most part, other references to Generation X appear in popular periodicals such as Time, U.S. News, Business Week, and the occasional newspaper article or USA Weekend feature.

In the Christian realm, the amount of information available on Generation X is much more substantial, albeit from an obviously different perspective, and for the ultimate purpose of ministry. The most significant of the Christian works, from a scholarly and methodically researched perspective, are three works by George Barna: Generation X: The Disillusioned Generation, The Invisible Generation, and Generation Next. All three of these books give insight into Generation X from without and within. Barna not only does analysis on the generation, but the basis of his analysis is actual surveys of Xers themselves.

Other significant works on Generation X are more focused on giving a basic understanding on Generation X in order to more effectively minister to them. Some of the more significant of these works include: A Generation Alone by William Mahedy and Janet Bernardi; Dieter Zander and Tim Celek’s Inside the Soul of a New Generation; ¹⁴ Douglas Rushkoff, The GenX Reader, (New York: Ballentine, 1994), pg. 4
Alan Roxburgh’s *Reaching a New Generation*; as well as Kevin Ford’s *Jesus for a New Generation*; and Gary Zustiak’s *The Next Generation*. All of these books deal with significant aspects of Generation X, including the issue of truth, though generally on a small scale. Some of these books do seem to grasp that the issue of truth is an important one, but in most cases it is seen as one of many important issues which are all on similar levels, and not as the foundational issue which becomes the basis for an entire worldview.

There seems to be only one book (at the time of this writing) which deals specifically and completely with the issue of truth in relation to Generation X, and that is Josh McDowell’s *Right From Wrong*. McDowell sees truth as a foundational issue and is very concerned with applying a truth that ‘works’ to specific life situations which teens today face.

In addition to books, both secular and Christian, there are numerous articles of one type or another dealing with Generation X, though most of them bring little that is relevant to this thesis. Most articles in secular periodicals are popular level pieces, or interested in such issues as crime, marketing to Gen X, and the like. There is not much to be gained from many Christian periodicals in relation to Gen X and truth either, with a few significant exceptions. There are two main articles which give some significant information on Generation X and their relation to the truth. These articles are Andrés Tapia’s article titled “Reaching the First Post-Christian Generation,” and Dieter Zander’s “The Gospel for Generation X”. Both of these articles add to the material available in the books to give a more complete picture of Generation X and their approach to truth.
One issue which kept coming up in all of the literature was that of the Postmodern influence on Generation X, many labeling Generation X as a “Postmodern Generation.” The very core of Postmodernism is a redefinition of truth, and therefore it is an issue of significant weight when dealing with Generation X’s approach to truth. Because of the significant effect that Postmodernism has on Generation X it was imperative to address this issue when dealing with the issue of the nature of truth. David Dockery’s volume *The Challenge of Postmodernism*, helps to explain the nature and effect of Postmodernism in addition to the definitions and descriptions available in the other sources. Other significant works on postmodernism include Middleton and Walsh’s *Truth is Stranger Than it Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age*, which gives an in-depth treatment and critique of the postmodern movement and its understanding of truth; Calvin Schrag’s *The Resources of Rationality: A Response to the Postmodernist Challenge*; and Kenneth Baynes’ (editor), anthology of postmodern authors: *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?*, which is composed of essays by such postmodern philosophers as Derrida, Lyotard, Gadamer, and Rorty among others.

For information pertaining to the historical understanding of truth, Tice and Slavens’ *Research Guide to Philosophy*, as well as *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* are particularly helpful for the overviews necessary to the proper development of this thesis. Another book significant to a historical, philosophical understanding of truth (as well as a postmodern understanding), is Barry Allen’s *Truth in Philosophy*, which includes an introduction to the historical development of truth. Allen also deals at some length with
the understanding of truth in more modern philosophers such as Nietzsche, James, Heidegger, and Derrida.

In relation to an evangelical understanding of truth, several volumes are important to note. Given the nature of the book, Dockery’s *The Challenge of Postmodernism* is helpful to some degree in this regard. Most Significant is James Emory White’s *What is Truth?: A Comparative Study of the positions of Cornelius Van Til, Francis Schaeffer, Carl F. H. Henry, Donald Bloesch, Millard Erickson*. In this volume, White traces the development of evangelicalism, gives an overview and analysis of five major evangelical theologians, compares their thought, and gives a final analysis on an evangelical understanding of truth based upon the thoughts of those five theologians. Another significant work in the area of an evangelical understanding of truth is *All Truth is God’s Truth* by Arthur Holmes, which deals with a look at truth in its entirety—specifically its relation to and grounding in the nature of God. Other important sources of information regarding an evangelical view of truth include Carl Henry’s *Frontiers in modern Theology: A Critique of Current Theological Trends*, and *God, Revelation and Authority*, as well as Cornelius Van Til’s *In Defense Of The Faith, Volume II: A Survey Of Christian Epistemology*. The evangelical understanding of truth is significantly influenced by Scripture, and therefore treatments on the subject in Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, as well as *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* are helpful.
**Contribution**

This thesis provides contributions in three distinct areas. First this thesis is designed to expose the significance of this issue as the key to reaching the minds of future generations. Second, this thesis is designed to help to develop a means for overcoming the conflict which is a result of the difference in the typical Generation X approach to truth and the evangelical Christian approach to truth. Finally, this thesis is not designed to give specific ways to reach out to Generation X, but rather will focus on principles in order to preserve its usefulness as a solution to this very problematic issue. Ultimately, this final contribution will become a philosophy of ministry whereby evangelical Christianity will be more effective in ministry to Generation X and the generations which follow in its path.

**Chapter Descriptions**

In order to deal with this complex issue in the most effective manner several chapters will be necessary. The chapters have been divided according to the logical components of the issue at hand. The divisions include the who of the problem—Generation X; the significance of the problem; the two sides of the problem—the evangelical approach and the Gen X approach to truth; the nature of the conflict between the two approaches; and the resolution of the conflict. The following is a list and description of each of the chapters.

1. **Who is Gen X?** - This chapter is designed to give a general overview of the generation. This overview will define the parameters of who fits into Generation
X, show the diversity of the generation, give social shapers of the generation, and give the characteristics of the generation. This chapter is necessary as a basis for understanding the nature of the generation targeted in this thesis, as well as providing a basis for later analysis. Though this chapter is introductory in nature, its importance in setting the tone for the thesis as a whole cannot be overstated.

2. Truth as defined by history and Christianity - After examining the foundational importance of the nature of truth, this chapter will begin the process of examining the nature of the approaches taken in relation to truth by both Generation X and evangelical Christianity. This chapter is designed to explain absolute truth from an evangelical and historical standpoint in order to help frame the problem. This chapter also gives a starting point in demonstrating the conflict over the nature of truth. Included in this chapter is a brief look at the historical view of truth in general, and a more in depth look at the evangelical view of truth specifically.

3. The Gen X approach to truth - After dealing with the historical evangelical approach to truth the new and contrasting view of Generation X must be dealt with. By dealing with Generation X’s approach to absolute truth second, the importance of the shift from the traditional evangelical approach to truth becomes even more apparent, and its importance is better shown. Included in this chapter will be both internal and external evidences for Gen Xer’s approach to truth. This will include both survey data and examples - the internal evidence, as well as evidence from the postmodern vision of truth - the external evidence. This chapter will juxtapose
Generation X’s approach with that of evangelical Christianity, as described in chapter two.

4. The Conflict Demonstrated - This chapter is designed to reveal the inherent conflict between the traditional Christian view of truth and the Postmodern approach of Generation X based upon the nature of the two approaches as shown in the previous two chapters. This chapter will seek to underscore the differences seen in the two approaches to absolute truth by means of direct comparison. Further, this chapter will give a critique of both views of truth. The conclusions of this chapter will be foundational for the formation of a philosophy of ministry toward Generation X in chapter 6.

5. The Christian Response - This final chapter is the response to the “so what?” question which is naturally raised by the previous chapter. In this chapter it is the author’s desire to give a principle centered means for responding to the conflict described in chapter five, based on the nature of Gen X, the significance of absolute truth, and of course Scripture. This means of resolution will take the form of a philosophy of ministry, which seeks to maximize effectiveness without compromising the fundamental beliefs and values of evangelical Christianity.
CHAPTER 1
GENERATION X

Introduction to “X”

The generation known as “X” has been described, defined and derided in almost every conceivable way. Most often this occurs in the words of historians, demographers and staff writers who are not members of Generation X, but members of the Boomer generation, which as a general rule looks with disdain on the generation that follows. This trend is evidenced by the continuing negative characterization of Generation X in popular periodicals and newspapers across the United States (and Canada). Here are some of the typical epithets given to this generation by the media, which, according to Geoffrey T. Holtz are “disturbingly consistent”:

“The Doofus Generation” (The Washington Post)
“The Tuned-Out Generation” (Time)
“A generation of animals” (The Washington Post)
“The Blank Generation” (The San Francisco Examiner)
“This is a generation without a soul” (A West Coast radio talk-show host)
“The unromantic Generation” (the New York Times)
A “generation of self-centered know-nothings.” (Pollster Andrew Kohut)\(^{15}\)

It is the goal of this chapter to give a somewhat brief understanding of just who and what Generation X is, and in this way set the foundation for understanding why Generation X

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\(^{15}\) Geoffrey T. Holtz, Welcome to The Jungle: The Why Behind “Generation X”, (New York: St Martin’s Griffin 1995), 1
approaches truth as it does, as well as provide a basis for the church’s strategy for
reaching out to Generation X.

The Who of Generation X

In order to determine just who generation X is, the nature of a ‘generation’ must
first be determined. The term generation can mean many things and can be defined in
various ways. According to George Barna, a generation is “an 18- to 25-year slice of the
population”, and for the purposes of his writings, uses “a generation as a 19 year era.”16
There are, according to most sources, five generations in the twentieth century: the
Seniors, Builders (depression kids), Boomers, Busters (Generation X), and the latest as of
yet unnamed generation sometimes referred to as Blasters or Boomlets. Generally a
generation is considered to be the population occupying a twenty year period. For the
purposes of this thesis, the author will define a generation according to Barna’s definition
in order to remain consistent with his research, which is the most substantial, especially
in relation to this topic.

Now that the term generation has been defined, the first order of business is to
determine just exactly who Generation X is according to year. There is a great degree of
variance in the answer to this question. Barna states that if one were to ask journalists “to
enumerate the years during which Baby Busters were born and there would likely be as
many different answers as there are journalists asked. Even sociologists and
demographers are at odds when it comes to defining the Busters.”17 According to a recent

16 Ibid., 19
17 Ibid., 19
USA Today article, there is no real consensus as to just who makes up Generation X. The article asked five different experts to define Generation X, and each gave a different answer. The start dates for Generation X ranged from as early as 1961 to as late as 1967 and ending sometime in between 1975 and 1981. The total population figures range from 46 to 85 million. One of these experts, Bruce Tulgan of the Gen X think tank Rainmaker Inc. Says that “People all recognize that there is a generation that came after the baby boomers, but absolutely no one agrees on who it is”18

Though the question of the years during which Generation Xers were born is a debated topic among the ranks of professional journalists, sociologists and demographers, this is not the case when one looks at the Boomers. Boomers are most generally a very well defined group according to year. The Boomer generation is most usually defined as including the years 1946-1964. There are some who would put the end of the Boomer generation as 1965, but the year 1946 is universally accepted as the start of the Boom as this marks the return of the American troops at the end of World War Two. If the Boomer Generation starts in the year 1946, and one defines a generation according to the standard twenty year period, then it must end at the year 1964. Given this fact, and remembering that a generation, as we have defined it, is a twenty year period, then we must define Generation X as including the years 1965 to 1984 according to this formula. The problem with this analysis is that almost no one dates the end of Generation X as being as late as 1984.

18 Staff Writer, “Gen X in a class by itself”, USA Today, Mon. Sept. 23, 1996 10B
Before leaving the issue of who Generation X is according to years, it is important to note the dating of Generation X from one other point of view. There is a push by certain elements within the Gen Xpert cohort that would like to do away with the 1965 start date for Generation X, and they are in both the secular and Christian realms of thought. In their book *13th Gen*, Howe and Strauss assert that the last Boomers were born in 1960, not 1964. “The 1961 birth year is a milestone identified by every sub-30 biographer of this generation who has looked closely at the matter.”

The list of demographers which Howe and Strauss give include Doug Coupland whose book *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture* popularized the term Generation X, (though the name Generation X was first seen as the name of a rock group in the early eighties), as well as David Gross and Sophia Scott whose 1990 article “Twentysomething” helped to popularize that term and further bring this generation into the spotlight.

There are several reasons for the desire to date the start of Generation X somewhere closer to 1961. Dieter Zander and Tim Celek observe that membership in this generation “really more of an attitude than a definitive demographic bracket.” Celek and Zander do not change the start date for Gen X, but do assert that there is an overlap with the end of the Boomer generation. Howe and Strauss give several reasons for the desire to push back the start of the “Buster” generation, which are echoed and expanded in Geoffrey Holtz’s *Welcome to the Jungle*, the desire of Holtz is to define “a group with a

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20 Celek and Zander, 20
more consistent peer personality." Paradoxically, Howe, Strauss and Griffen cite the 1961 release of the birth control pill as the milestone that ended one generation and birthed another. As Howe and Strauss put it, “they were the first babies people took pills not to have.” These are the first children of the divorce epidemic (they would have been about in kindergarten), the first latchkey kids, and the list goes on. Obviously Howe, Strauss and Holtz have some very good arguments for their position, and it is not without merit.

For this thesis, as previously stated, the intent is to remain consistent with Barna’s research, which is the bulk of the usable data that has been gathered on Gen X, and therefore the parameters for Generation X will be defined as 1965 to 1983 (though this does deviate from the standard twenty year period). The reason for following Barna’s research is that his is the most extensive and germane to the topic of this thesis, further, it is more consistent with the general start date for Generation X as defined by the majority of experts. Further, it gives a picture that is more consistent with the traditional twenty year time period for a generation than the parameters given by the experts in USA Today’s article.

Although Barna’s research is based on the 1965 to 1983 time frame, this does not mean that the conclusions of either his research or this author will not be valid for those born from 1961 to 1964. Given the arguments of Howe, Strauss, and Holtz, coupled with the assertion of Celek and Zander that this generation is more defined by attitude that it is a specific set of years, there is a very large possibility that the conclusions of Barna, this

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21 Geoffrey T. Holtz, 2
22 Howe and Strauss, 13
author, and the general characteristics of Xers themselves will also apply to those born between 1961 and 1964.

In addition to determining the years which make up Generation X, there is one other area which needs to be addressed when looking at the who of the generation, that is its ethnic make up. The ethnic make up of Generation X is the most diverse of any generation that America (or Canada) has seen, and this is a trend that will only continue. According to Barna, in 1992, 29 percent of all members of Generation X were members of an ethnic minority, as opposed to only 22 percent of older adults.23 This may not seem to be a great leap at first glance, but when it is understood to be 29 percent of a group of somewhere around 68 million people, (29 percent = 19.72 million), the number takes on added meaning. The impact is even greater understood when it is realized that Generation X makes up approximately 27 percent of the total U.S. population (as of 1992). Most experts also agree that the ethnic diversification of America is only going to continue, notably with a significant increase in the Hispanic population. Not only is Generation X more diverse ethnically, there seems to be a greater tendency to embrace the ethnic heritage of one’s past than had been the case in previous generations, as well as a greater acceptance of this cultural diversity.

23 Barna, Invisible Generation 18
The What of Generation X

Introduction

Now that the who of Generation X has been defined, the what of Generation X must be tackled. Much ink has been spilt in the area of defining just what Generation X is all about, most of it showing them in a less than flattering light. The majority of descriptions of Generation X are negative, especially when Generation X is compared with the Builder and Boomer generations. This tendency shows the very nature of the way Gen X is viewed at and defined, that is, not independently but by the standards and paradigms by which previous generations are defined and studied. The very term “Buster” refers to the fact that this generation has significantly decreased in size as compared to the Boomers.

At first glance, given the general bent of most popular literature written on Generation X, (generally in newspaper, popular magazine articles, and the so-called Television News Magazines), it is generally thought that Generation X is angry, uncommitted, selfish, lazy, cynical and a host of other negative epithets, all of which have generally been enunciated by Boomers and Builders, from the perspectives by which they operate. Ron Luce sums up the outlook of most people on Generation X in the following statement: “The world has written off today’s youth as a nameless, purposeless generation”, and further states that the Buster generation itself “has such a hazy sense of its own identity that it has been branded Generation X.”

To be fair, there have been

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24 Ron Luca, “Evangelizing the baby Busters,” Current Thoughts and Trends, Nov. 94 pg. 27
several articles in popular magazines of late which have reported that maybe the general characterizations of Generation X have been a little too generalized and harsh; however, the magazines which are saying this now are the very same ones giving the over generalized and harsh assessments of Generation X only a short time ago.

The Buster or “Gen Xer” does not look at him or herself from the same frame of reference as do the older generations. A perfect illustration of this fact is that when Howe and Strauss were “dumping” their book 13th Gen onto the Internet, a 23 year old Xer whose on-line handle was Crasher kept interrupting with his own take on what they were saying, which more often than not gave a very different picture of what Generation X is all about. The very fact that the subtitle to Cohen and Krugman’s book is “The Backlash Starts Here” reveals that Xers take exception to the way in which they are usually portrayed by the media.

So what are some of the characteristics of Generation X? Barna calls this generation “the Reality Bites generation”, and “the group that has made Beavis and Butthead national icons.”25 Barna goes on to describe Generation X’s perspective on life with six phrases; he states that they are “Serious About Life”, “Stressed Out”, “Self-Reliant”, “Skeptical”, “Highly Spiritual”, and “Survivors”.26 Business Week Magazine has given a succinct but vivid illustration of the Xers.

So far, this generation is having a tough time. Busters are the first generation of latchkey children, products of dual career households, or in 50% of cases, of divorced or separated parents. . . . they’re likelier than the previous generation to be unemployed, underemployed, and living at

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25 Barna, Generation Next, 18
26 Ibid., 18-20
home with Mom and Dad. They’re alienated by a culture that has been dominated by boomers for as long as they can remember. They’re angry . . . And if they’re angry and alienated, they dress the part, with aggressively unpretty fashions, pierced noses and tattoos.

At the same time, though, they are more ethnically diverse, and they’re more comfortable with diversity than any previous generation. Many of them don’t give a hoot for the old-fashioned war between the sexes . . . Furthermore, as a generation that’s been bombarded by multiple media since their cradle days, and they’re savvy—and cynical—consumers.27

Elmer Towns has this to say when describing the Busters:

They are a generation with busted dreams, no battles to win, no mountains to climb. They are a generation with busted dreams, busted ambitions, and busted trust . . . The hero of the Baby Busters is Bart Simpson . . . 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 before them, Bart Simpson has no dreams, no tomorrow’s, no mountains to climb, and no wars to win.28

Shaping Factors of Generation X

There are many factors which have influenced the overall character and make up of Generation X, some of which have already been touched on in a small way. Several of these factors have had an extremely profound impact upon this generation, even though

quite often the members of it do not verbalize the significant role which they have played in shaping the overall demeanor of the generation.

The first of these driving social factors is the overall unwantedness of Generation X. In 1961, as has already been stated, the birth control pill was first put onto the market, making Generation X the first generation which people took a seriously active and scientific role in trying not to have. According to Holtz, by 1980, fully one fourth of women of child bearing age were using the pill.\(^{29}\) This was only the tip of an anti-baby iceberg so to speak. In 1968 Paul Ehrlich published his now infamous *The Population Bomb*, which was followed by a host of other popular literature foretelling the doom of western civilization due to overpopulation, and giving babies everywhere a bad name. There seemed to be a growing anti-baby sentiment throughout the sixties and seventies, which is evidenced by several points.

During the peak child bearing years of the Boomers during the sixties and seventies, according to Holtz the number of childless couples increased to 75 percent. Further indicators of the anti-baby sentiment include the “swinging single” lifestyle, the surgical sterilization of some 10 million people during the seventies, the anti-child housing laws which became popular in the seventies, and the legalization of abortion in 1973.\(^{30}\) In fact, the single factor of abortion has had an enormous effect upon Generation X all by itself. Between the years of 1973 and 1996, at least 34,500,000 babies were aborted, more people per year than all of the casualties of the Revolutionary War, Civil War, World Wars I and II, Korea, and Vietnam combined.\(^{31}\) This number is fully one half

\(^{29}\) Holtz, 19
\(^{30}\) Ibid., 18, 19
of Barna’s calculation of the number of Xers, or put another way, one third of Generation X was never born due solely to the legalization of abortion. In fact, if Roe Vs. Wade had never happened, Generation X, not the Boomer generation would be the largest. This is not the end of the phenomena however. In 1975 when Ann Landers asked her readers if they would have kids if they had to do it over again, 70 percent of the 50,000 respondents said no.\textsuperscript{32}

Not only did the rising anti-baby, anti-child mentality affect the demeanor of Generation X as the unwanted generation, but the huge increase in divorce also added to the negative shaping of this generation. The number of divorces in 1961 was approximately 375,000; by 1975 the figure had risen to 1.1 million. It is estimated that over 40 percent of Generation X are the children of divorce, compared to 11 percent of the Boomer population born in the fifties.\textsuperscript{33} Current psychological research has shown that, contrary to the beliefs at the time that the divorce epidemic began to sweep the nation, the effects of divorce on a child are both negative and lasting. Not only is the issue of divorce itself traumatic, but when step-families, single parent situations, and the all too frequent drop in standard of living for the children of divorce, the effect of this issue is multiplied in the lives of Generation Xers.

Another major factor in the shaping of Generation X is the fact that from a very early age they were taking care of themselves. As parents focused on fulfilling themselves and their ambitions before addressing the wants and needs of their children, coupled with the desire or need for both parents to work, Generation X became the first

\textsuperscript{32} Holtz, 20
\textsuperscript{33} Zustiak, 42,43
of the latchkey kids. With mom off to work or wherever, increasing numbers of Xers were on their own after school from an early age. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 1990 60 percent of mothers with children under age six, and 76 percent of mothers with children between six and seventeen were working, as compared to 20 and 43 percent respectively in 1960.34

These and other social forces helped to shape what Generation X has become. Obviously there are other social forces that have shaped the character of Generation X, but this is only intended to be an overview of some of the main influencing factors. One other extremely large influence on Generation X was the emergence of Postmodernism as a “viable” alternative to the modernist viewpoint in the seventies. This issue will be dealt with at greater length in chapter three. Briefly, however, it should be noted that the postmodern viewpoint rejects the views of the Enlightenment period, and at its core, postmodernism holds that there is no core to reality, everything is subjective, reality is reduced to a myriad of competing thoughts and ideas, none of which are inherently better or more true than the next, because there is no such thing as absolute truth. To many this may seem a rather bleak picture, but this is not the full picture of what Generation X is, or what it is characterized by.

True Characteristics of Generation X
All is not as negative as it would seem, having seen some of the more negative social shapers of this generation however. This is not to say that there are not many negative

34 Ibid., 33
characteristics about this generation, to be sure there are, just as there are negatives in any generation. As pointed out earlier, many sources are now giving Generation X much more credit than they once were given, and positives are to be found among the negatives.

Dr. Elmer Towns, in his research on Generation X has developed 11 different “functional designations” to aide in the understanding of them, especially in relation to the previous two generations. The first designation is “The Entitled Generation”, which refers to the fact that Xers have lived with the pleasurable amenities that their parents and grandparents strove to gain. They therefore now look upon these things as not privileges but rather as things to which they are entitled. Second, Xers are “The It Generation”; even more than their parents who “wanted it now”, Xers are an instant generation and just want “it”. Third, “The Isolated Generation”; they listen to music through headphones, dance by themselves, are the product of divorce, and feel alone. Fourth, “The Devalued Generation”; showing the devaluation of babies as evidenced by a significant decrease in births from the previous generation, thus, not to mention legalized abortions, the explosion of child abuse, and the very “me” centered nature of their parents’ generation. Fifth, they are “The Self Proclaimed Generation”, meaning that the self-centered bent of their parents drove them to be self proclaimers, to rest their importance within, rather than without, thus becoming even more self absorbed than their parents. Next, they are “The Lengthened Adolescent Generation”. Xers grow up more slowly than did previous generations, the generally accepted length of adolescence now stretches from age 11-27 or 28. The remaining designations are for the most part self-
explanatory, "The Noncommitted Generation", they keep their options open; "The Non-Focused Generation", they don’t focus in on any one thing for a long period of time as can be seen in the influence of the sound-bite, evening news, and MTV; they are "The Unisex Generation"; "The Anomaly Generation", meaning that they seem to be at both extremes at once without any kind of middle synthesis. Finally they are "The First Atheistic Generation", they are spiritual but have a watered down view of God and the church. Xers never experienced prayer or the Bible in any realm but the church, (neither the Bible nor prayer were in public schools during their education), they get most of their spiritual education not from the church, but rather from the movies and the music that they listen to. ³⁵ Although Towns does not paint the most flattering picture of this generation, these categories do seem to be quite accurate.

Several books on ministry to Generation X have been written by those who regularly minister to them, and certain characteristics seem to be consistent in describing this generation. Before anything else is said, it must be understood that there is probably no one Xer who exhibits all of the characteristics which are generally thought of when defining this generation. To know one Xer is not to know them all, they are very diverse as has previously been shown, and the further differentiation between rural, suburban, and urban centers also impacts this diversity. Several of the six "S" characteristics given by George Barna (and listed in the introductory material on the characteristics of Xers in this chapter) are seen repeatedly in other sources as well.

³⁵ Ibid., 1-4
One of the hallmark traits of this generation is their skepticism; in fact, 57 percent of Xers admit to being skeptical as a general practice. Time and again this issue comes up, and it only makes sense. This is the generation which saw the birth of AIDS, the trillion dollar deficit, as well as the splitting up of parents who said they would love each other forever.

For many of these same reasons, several of the authors mentioned in the literature review add other characteristics (see Celek and Zander, Ford, Mahedy and Bernardi, and Zustiak). These characteristics include feelings of abandonment, alienation, betrayal, insecurity, and the like. Other often repeated sentiments about this generation include categorizing them as survivors (Barna, Celek and Zander, and Ford). In fact Ford says that Xers have shifted from the get ahead mentality of their Boomer parents to a survival mode. These negative characteristics are not the only ones evident.

On the positive side, Xers tend to be highly relational, and therefore put a great deal of significance on relationships, friendships are of extremely high value to Xers, probably due to the fact that they have seen so many relationships that were supposed to be unconditional in nature fall apart. Xers also tend to be very practical and are looking for “what works” in the real world. They tend to be well informed (in an age of information), though often not in the typical educational areas of the past. Xers have been bombarded by the media from their earliest years, and thus have become able to process enormous amounts of seemingly unrelated information at an extraordinary rate. Just sit down to watch ten minutes of MTV (at any time, whether its showing videos, the news or

36 Barna, *Invisible Generation*, 28
another program) and you will see a non-stop mass of information which Xers process seemingly without difficulty. The above mentioned qualities are assessed as follows by two analysts:

We believe that the characteristics for which Generation X has received such bad press are the very qualities which will render them the most effective as pioneers. Their pragmatism and skepticism, their sharp-eyed assessments of life and, above all, their search for community and personal relationships are exactly what the emerging era requires. 38

Contrasting Boomers and Xers

In Inside the Soul of a New Generation, Celek and Zander take a critical look at the general differences between Boomers and Xers, and have come up with a list of five contrasts to help understand these differences. These key differences, though not always expressed in exactly the same manner repeatedly arise when various authors comment upon the differences between these two generations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boomers</th>
<th>Xers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>conquest</td>
<td>community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>product</td>
<td>process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>live to work</td>
<td>work to live</td>
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<tr>
<td>individual</td>
<td>team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>active</td>
<td>reactive 39</td>
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These descriptions give the difference in the more abstract sense, and is reflective of the differences in thought patterns on more of a foundational level. Gary Zustiak gives a

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39 Celek and Zander, 31-35
comparison on a more tangible, surface level, but it is nonetheless reflective of the foundational differences between these generations.

**DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BOOMERS AND GENERATION X**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boomer</th>
<th>Generation X</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sexual Disease</strong></td>
<td>Herpes</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TV Evangelist</strong></td>
<td>Billy Graham</td>
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<td><strong>Movie Villain</strong></td>
<td>Norman Bates</td>
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<td><strong>Gang Movie</strong></td>
<td><em>West Side Story</em></td>
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<td><strong>Youth Culture Movie</strong></td>
<td><em>The Graduate</em></td>
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<td><strong>Popular Street Drug</strong></td>
<td>Pot</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Dance Craze</strong></td>
<td>The Twist</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Music Innovation</strong></td>
<td>Rock-N-Roll</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>NASA Memory</strong></td>
<td>Apollo 11 Moon Landing</td>
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<td><strong>Political Memory</strong></td>
<td>Cuban Missile Crisis</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Video Game</strong></td>
<td>Pong</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Rock Group</strong></td>
<td>The Beatles</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>What Do You Want To Be When You Grow Up?</strong></td>
<td>Fireman, Policemen, Nurse</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Musical Instrument</strong></td>
<td>Transistor Radio</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Political Cause</strong></td>
<td>Civil Rights</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Late Night TV</strong></td>
<td>Johnny Carson</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Political Loyalties</strong></td>
<td>Left vs Right</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Information Source</strong></td>
<td>Newspaper</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Philosophical Base</strong></td>
<td>Ideological</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female Musician</strong></td>
<td>Joan Baez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>War</strong></td>
<td>Cold War</td>
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<td><strong>National Threat</strong></td>
<td>Nuclear Threat</td>
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<td><strong>Nurture</strong></td>
<td>Mother's Care</td>
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<td><strong>Father</strong></td>
<td>&quot;Father Knows Best&quot;</td>
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<td><strong>Food</strong></td>
<td>TV Dinners</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Television</strong></td>
<td>Network TV</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Music Medium</strong></td>
<td>45's &amp; American Bandstand</td>
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Zustiak’s contrasts of Boomer and Xer help to get a feel for the differences in the generations, as well as helping to gain a fundamental understanding of what Generation X is all about. This is only a brief glimpse of Generation X, but it does give some idea as

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40 Zustiak, 107
to the defining characteristics of this very diverse generation, and will hopefully help in
determining an effective solution to the overall problem being discussed in this paper.
CHAPTER 2

TRUTH AS DEFINED HISTORICALLY AND EVANGELICALLY

Introduction

One of the fundamental questions of mankind has always concerned the nature of truth. One’s concept of truth automatically colors one’s perceptions of reality. Truth defines how an individual looks at his or herself, the world, God, and every other thing. Truth is especially important in relation to one’s outlook religiously, especially in relation to what one will accept as religiously valid for belief and practice. There have always been theories or understandings as to the nature of truth, however there has been a fundamental shift in the understanding as to the nature of truth, a shift which will definitely affect the way in which Generation X and other future generations will approach religion. This shift is especially significant to Orthodox or Evangelical Christianity, given its understanding of truth.

It is the purpose of this chapter to identify the historical understanding of truth from the early western philosophers until the present, with a specific emphasis on the historically Christian viewpoint, especially the evangelical understanding. It is important to understand where Orthodox Christianity stands on the issue of the nature of truth, in order to contrast it with the present shift in the understanding of truth, especially as evidenced in Generation X.
A Historical Understanding of Truth

Historically, there have been three major approaches as to the nature of truth, these are: The correspondence theory of truth; the coherence theory of truth; and the pragmatic theory of truth. Generally speaking the Orthodox or Evangelical realm of Christianity has followed one of the first two theories, and of those two, the Correspondence Theory has been primary. In the following sections, the three theories of truth will be examined, a fourth approach to truth will be dealt with a greater length in the following chapter dealing specifically with Generation X’s approach to truth, and absolute truth in particular.

The Correspondence Theory of Truth

Generally speaking, the Correspondence Theory of Truth sees truth as that which corresponds to reality, or in other words, truth is that which is real. This theory of truth has been the dominant theory in Western thought, and can be found in some form at least as far back as Plato and Aristotle. In fact, Charles Kahn writes: “the pre-philosophic conception of truth in Greek . . . involves some kind of correlation or fit between what is said or thought, on one side, and what is or what is the case or the way things are on the other side.” According to James Emory White, the correspondence theory “usually understands truth to be that which corresponds with fact, and is both objective and

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This theory of truth is seen by many to be the most common-sensical view, and the view which most people would affirm, simply because truth ought to correspond to or be "what is." The difficulty seen in this view is that there are things which are not readily verifiable, and therefore difficult to show by this method (e.g., "there is a God").

Persons Holding to the Correspondence Theory Throughout History

Heraclitus - (ca. 535-475 B.C.)

Heraclitus was a pre-Socratic philosopher from Ephesus who is probably best known for the statements "You can not step into the same river twice," and "know thyself." The influence of Heraclitus both in his day and on later philosophers was great, and he is credited with initiating the Greek concept of λόγος, or the governing principle over the world. Though his influence was great all around, one of the most valuable pieces of information about him for the purposes of this study is his statement "Thinking well is the greatest excellence and wisdom: to act and to speak what is true, perceiving things according to their nature." This one statement by Heraclitus shows that at least one of the earliest philosophers saw the nature of truth as that which is, or statements which reflect the nature of the thing being referred too.

43 James Emory White, What is Truth?: A Comparative Study of the positions of Cornelius Van Til, Francis Schaeffer, Carl F. H. Henry, Donald Bloesch, Millard Erickson, (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 5
Plato - (ca. 427-347 B.C.)

Generally, it is Plato who is given credit for the origin of the correspondence theory, even though it was in existence in at least a germ form in the thought of Heraclitus. The best example of Plato’s thought in this regard can be seen in *Sophist*, in which he develops the theory while rejecting what Prior terms an “existence theory.” In *Sophist*, Plato states: “The true [sentence] states facts as they are . . . and the false one states things that are other than the facts . . . In other words it speaks of things that are not as if they were.” Plato’s ideas concerning truth became the basis for those of his student Aristotle as well.

Aristotle - (ca. 384-322 B.C.)

Aristotle was responsible for the refinement of Plato’s ideas concerning truth. In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle states: “To say what is, is not, or that what is not is, is false; but to say that what is, is, and what is not is not, is true; and therefore also he who says that a thing is or is not will say either what is true or what is false.” Again, it is clear, that according to Aristotle, that which is true must be that which is.

Augustine - (354-430 A.D.)

Augustine was bishop of Hippo, and is well known for his theological and philosophical writings. Augustine was one of the first true philosophers and theologians.

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46 Plato, *Sophist*, 263 quoted in Pojman, 160
of the Christian era, as well as one of the most influential ones. Augustine followed very much in the Platonic and Aristotelian vein when it came to truth, though he did do much to ‘Christianize’ many of their views. In terms of the correspondence theory, it is Augustine who is responsible for the phrase *verum est id quod est*, or “The true is that which is.”48

Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225-1274)

Thomas Aquinas, like Augustine, was a significant Christian Philosopher and theologian, though much later. Aquinas though attempting to modify the thought of some of the earlier Christian thinkers like Augustine and Anselm in a more Aristotelian direction, he nevertheless “confirms the older Greek idea that considered in relation to intellect, *to be* is to be true-making.”49

Later Proponents

In more recent times, especially the 20th century, there have been several notable philosophers who have held to one form or another of the correspondence theory. Among these philosophers are Bertrand Russell who did much to bring this theory to prominence in the early 20th century, as well as G. E. Moore, and the later Wittgenstein who stated that “the general form of propositions is: this is how things are.”50

This brief overview of some of the more significant thinkers throughout history who have held to some form of the correspondence theory shows that there is a

48 Augustine, *Soliloquies*, II.8, quoted in Allen, 12
49 Allen, 13
50 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, quoted in Prior, 229
significant historical precedent, spanning some 2500 years of history to support the basic conclusion of the hypothesis that truth is that which is. Further, the author has made it a point to include only two ‘Christian’ scholars in this section to show that this theory is by no means a Christian invention or relegated only to the Christian realm. At this point the discussion of truth will turn to the coherence theory rather than the later Christian understanding of truth for two reasons. First it is important to get an overarching view of both of the major theories which have explained truth and, second since the contemporary (and often Modern) Evangelical view of truth relies heavily on both the correspondence and coherence theories of truth, it should be looked at as an independent entity.

The Coherence Theory of Truth

The coherence theory of truth\(^5\) is seen to be the classical opposition to the correspondence theory of truth, though not nearly as old as the correspondence theory. While those holding to the correspondence theory would assert that truth is factual, or “what is,” those holding to the coherence theory would argue that truth is coherent, that is, “that more systematically coherent our beliefs are, the truer they are. If a system of thought does not contradict itself, then it is a mark of truth.”\(^6\)

This view of truth, has some obvious pluses as well as some obvious minuses. On the positive side, this view of truth helps a given system to maintain integrity, because if

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\(^6\) White, 5
it were self-contradictory, then it would be problematic at best. On the minus side, it is obviously possible for a system of thought to be coherent, yet at the same time be in direct contradiction to another coherent system of thought (e.g., Nazism contra Evangelical or even Liberation Theology). Another important point when considering the coherence theory of truth is to understand that while it may be the classic opposition to the correspondence theory of truth, it is by no means in contradiction to it.\textsuperscript{53}

**Persons Holding to the Coherence Theory of Truth**

G. A. Hegel - (1770-1831)

Georg Hegel was probably the most influential German philosopher in the mid to late 19th century. Hegel is most famous for his dialectical method which consisted of a thesis and antithesis which resulted in synthesis, and the whole process then repeated itself. The moving force of this dialectical process was, for Hegel, the *Zeitgeist* (‘God’/‘Absolute Spirit’). This dialectical method was the outworking of Hegel’s coherentist perspective on truth. One commentator on Hegel explains:

Hegel’s philosophy purported to find a place for all ideas within an all-encompassing, historical-dialectical system, offered an idealist perspective from which to criticize relatively undeveloped ideas, and enabled religious believers and nonbelievers, social-cultural-political conservatives and

\textsuperscript{53} Note: While the correspondence and coherence theories of truth are seen as being in classic opposition to one another, this does not mean that the two are therefore either contradictory or mutually exclusive. At least on a practical level, it seems obvious that most evangelicals hold to a hybrid of these two views, one that sees truth as both corresponding to reality and as a coherent whole. In fact, this hybrid seems the most logical given an infinite, omnipotent creator God; that is, it stands to reason that given a God with the aforementioned attributes then truth would be both actual and coherent, thus removing any contradiction. This understanding of the Evangelical approach to truth will be explored at length in the next section.
revolutionaries alike to claim a firm understanding of their destiny within the total scheme of things."54

Hegel’s system shows one outcome of a particular coherentist system of truth, though by no means the only or unopposed system under the general rubric of coherence.

Leibniz - (1646-1716)

The complete thought of Leibniz, that is, what he is actually saying, is often difficult to get at to say the least. This is due to several factors, including the fact that though he was a voluminous writer, very little that he wrote was ever published. Further, it was the analysis of Russell in 1900 that brought about a greater understanding of what Leibniz was really about. The one thing which is certain concerning the thought of Leibniz lies in relation to the foundation of his metaphysics. Leibniz held that “all truths whatsoever, whether necessary or contingent, are analytic.”55 This idea of all ‘truths’ being analytic is another example of the coherence theory at work.

Spinoza - (1632-1677)

Spinoza was a Jewish philosopher who lived in Holland during the mid seventeenth century, and again it is difficult to completely understand his works, though unlike the problem with Leibniz, this is due to the fact that most of his works seem to be radically different from one another. Spinoza’s philosophy was a completely integrated intellectual and religious vision, one which held that “every problem was to be

55 Ibid., 89
formulated and solved in the nonmetaphorical language and the impersonal, lean form of geometry."\textsuperscript{56} Spinoza, like the other coheretists, placed his emphasis on, how individual truths hung together as a whole.

Brand Blanshard - (1892-1987)

Blanshard is perhaps the most influential of the latter philosophers holding to the coherentist position, though his understanding is decidedly modified from those of the previous representatives. For Blanshard, this framework sees “coherence with what is true of reality as a whole and therefore its every part.”\textsuperscript{57} Blanshard’s understanding of the coherentist position thus shows at least some common ground with the correspondence position.

The coherence theory of truth is to be seen as emphasizing the whole of reality, as opposed to the correspondence theory which places greater emphasis on the particular. The coherentist understanding of truth brings up one important issue which the correspondent position can leave out, which is the big picture. It is certain that everyone approaches life from some schema or another, and applies that to their understanding of truth. It would be incorrect that due to his correspondent understanding of truth, that therefore Plato was unconcerned with the larger picture, or truth as a whole. This point is even more poignant when applied to Aristotle, the father of logic, and the law of non-contradiction. This is not to say that there are no problems with the coherence theory, as pointed out in the introduction to this section there are some obvious problems. The one

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 87
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 324
thing that can be said about the common ground between the correspondence and coherence theories is that they both emphasize truth in relation to reality. This is the main difference between these two theories and the third major theory of truth, the pragmatic.

The Pragmatic Theory of Truth

The other major view seen to be in opposition to the correspondence theory is the pragmatic theory of truth.\textsuperscript{58} This theory holds that truth is that which “works,” and is primarily concerned with neither correspondence nor coherence, but rather with function, that is, is it meaningful to say that Y is true? Though the pragmatic theory of truth is largely a 20th century American phenomenon, this fact has not prevented it from having a great deal of impact upon the way in which truth is viewed (especially in North America).\textsuperscript{59} In many ways, as will be seen in the next chapter, this view of truth has influenced the development of Generation X’s approach to truth.

Persons Holding to the Pragmatic Theory of Truth

C. S. Peirce - (1839-1914)

The first major pragmatist was Peirce, however, he was ahead of the movement itself. Peirce “sought to relate truth to observable practices.”\textsuperscript{60} It was Peirce who named his understanding of truth ‘pragmatism’, and hence named the movement that would

\textsuperscript{58} For a greater treatment of the pragmatic theory of truth see “Pragmatic Theory of Truth,” Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 1967 ed.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 240
follow him. According to Peirce, “truth could not be conceived apart from its practical relationship to doubts and beliefs within the framework of human inquiry.”\textsuperscript{61} It should be noted that peirce’s pragmatism was somewhat different than those who followed him as pragmatists in that Peirce saw some sort of a universal sense to truth. For Peirce, “truth is the consequence of the experimental method, and will ultimately be agreed upon by the scientific community.”\textsuperscript{62} This approach of truth is decidedly from a different angle than the approaches of James and Dewey which follow.

William James - (1842-1910)

William James is generally recognized as the founder of the pragmatic view of truth with its emphasis on what works, and remains arguably the most influential of the pragmatist philosophers.\textsuperscript{63} James understood truth as that which is either useful or expedient; to the extent which it is neither, it is not true. James stated: “The true is only the expedient in the way of our behaving, expedient in almost any fashion, and expedient in the long run and on the whole course.”\textsuperscript{64} Truth, for James, seems to be nothing more than practical success, or as Pojman puts it: “What, in short, is the truth’s cash-value in experiential terms?”\textsuperscript{65}

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 240
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 240
\textsuperscript{63} While this James is generally held to be the founder of the pragmatist movement, Tice and Slavens note that “in principle, Charles Sanders Peirce founded pragmatism in the 1870s, though it was not launched as a movement until the late 1890s.” Tice and Slavens, 237
\textsuperscript{64} William James, \textit{Essays in Pragmatism}, (New York: Hafner, 1948), 170 quoted in Pojman, 162
\textsuperscript{65} Pojman, 162
John Dewey - (1859-1952)

Dewey, famous for his system of organization for books, was probably more influential in the realm of pragmatism. Dewey’s pragmatism was somewhat different than that of James. Where James stressed individualism and the diversity of experience, Dewey stressed cohesion and social change, though in a decidedly nontheological bent.66 Though Dewey’s philosophy is often referred to as ‘instrumentalism’ it is nevertheless still pragmatic in its approach. For Dewey, “knowledge and thinking are instruments by which men manipulate the world around them.”67 Dewey’s philosophy reflects a pragmatic approach to truth in that:

Nothing is valuable in itself. Facts are important only to the extent that they produce a hypotheses for action. Therefore, knowledge is not the accumulation of isolated facts to be salted away in the mind for future reference but a method for integration and survival. Instrumentalism is not a philosophy of knowing, but of doing and living, hence the progressivist shibboleth, “We learn by doing.”68

The Enlightenment/Modernist Influence on Truth

The impact of the enlightenment mindset and the Modernist period on the understanding of truth can not be overstated, and is essential to the understanding of the historical development of the understanding of truth both generally and specifically in relation to the evangelical understanding. This period, which many argue is either over or

66 Tice and Slavens, 241-244
68 Ibid., 313
quickly dying has had a tremendous impact on the way the entire thought process of the Western world has developed.

First, definitions of the Enlightenment and Modernism are necessary. Generally the contemporary Postmodern authors “treat modernity as synonymous with the Enlightenment,” however, this does not tell us much about he makeup of the period. For the purposes of this study the Enlightenment and the modern period are seen as similar, though distinct in nature.

The period of modernity is the larger of the two periods and is seen in opposition to the pre-modern and post-modern periods. The exact time frame of the modern period is determined differently by different authors. Thomas Oden defines the time span of modernity as the “200-year period between 1789 and 1989, between the French Revolution and the collapse of Communism.” The problem with Oden’s dating of the modern period is its severe limitation of the time frame, which presents problems when analyzing the period before 1789. The Enlightenment is, by all accounts seen as at the very least encompassing the 18th century, most of which, by Oden’s dating would fall outside of modernity. The Enlightenment is nothing if not a part of the modern period, and therefore needs to be placed within the framework of modernity. The main designator of the modern period is its shift in the mindset from the premodern period. Middleton and Walsh propose “that the basic impulses of the modern worldview are

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69 J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, Truth is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age, (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 13

much earlier . . . somewhere between 1470 (the beginning of the Italian Renaissance) and 1700 (the start of the Enlightenment) the modern world was born.\textsuperscript{71}

The Enlightenment was an intellectual and philosophical movement that began in France around 1700, and ended somewhere around the turn of the 19th century, and is often called the ‘Age of Reason’. Though the Enlightenment was begun and centered in France it was no means confined to it. Some of the major figures of the French Enlightenment include Voltaire, Diderot, Condorcet, Holbach, Becceria, and Rousseau; in other countries the thought of Kant, Hume, Jefferson and Thomas Paine were significant.

The Enlightenment was not a phenomena unto itself by any means, and was firmly grounded in the thought of several major figures in the 17th century such as Francis Bacon, Isaac Newton, René Descartes, and John Locke. The most influential of the 17th century figure upon the Enlightenment was no doubt Descartes, whose skepticism became the model for much later development both philosophically and scientifically, and whose thought has spawned the Cartesian system.\textsuperscript{72} Generally, it can be said that there are three main themes involved in the makeup of Enlightenment thought: the advancement of human reason above all else as the source for knowledge and understanding; the realm of nature or the natural (as opposed to the nonexistent supernatural or the evil unnatural); and the idea of the progress of humankind.\textsuperscript{73}

Of the thinkers of the Enlightenment era, apart from the raw naturalism of Hume, the watershed figure is no doubt Immanuel Kant. Kant’s thought was to have profound

\textsuperscript{71} Middleton and Walsh, 13-14
\textsuperscript{72} Bernard Williams, “René Descartes,” The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 1967 ed., 344-354
\textsuperscript{73} Crane Brinton, “Enlightenment,” The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 1967 ed., 519-567
impact in the future of philosophical thought, and is still being felt today. Kant’s ‘Critiques’ of both pure and practical reason have had significant shaping influence in Western thought, especially in the realm of truth and how it is understood. Kant divided reality into the realms of the noumenal and phenomenal, the noumenal realm being the realm of the ‘ding an sich’ or thing in itself, that is, the realm of essence/being/eternal realities; the phenomenal realm being the realm of sensual reality, or the experiential realm. It is largely due to the influence of Kant that the present division of “objective” realm of science and “subjective” realm of religion or belief. Thus, for Kant, the noumenal realm was very much real, however, mankind could have no direct knowledge or understanding of it, only the phenomenal realm could truly be known. Kant’s reasoning in this area has had a significant impact upon the understanding of truth in modern period, and has produced scores of philosophical systems.74

The period of modernity, and especially that part of it known as the Enlightenment has had a significant impact in the understanding of truth, and continues to influence the postmodern understanding of truth (though often this understanding is in reaction to the modernist viewpoint). The modifications to the understanding of truth in the modern period have had a significant impact on the understanding of truth in the Evangelical movement, which was birthed during its time frame.

74 John D. Morrison, “Immanuel Kant,” class lecture for Modern and Contemporary Theology, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, Lynchburg, VA, on 17, 22 January 1997
An Evangelical Understanding of Truth

Introduction

When referring to the evangelical understanding of truth, it is important to be clear in the definition of evangelical. Thomas Oden gives a very clear picture of the makeup of Evangelicalism, one which is being followed in this thesis. Oden Explains:

By evangelical we embrace all those who faithfully believe and joyfully receive the Gospel of God in Jesus Christ. In particular we are thinking of those who even today deliberately remain under the intentional discipline of ancient ecumenical consensual teaching and classic Lutheran, Calvinist, Baptist, or Wesleyan connections of spiritual formation, especially in their renewing phases, freely subject to classic Christian teaching, admonition, and guidance. 

Basically this author understands the term evangelical to apply to those who would adhere to the primary Reformation doctrines, especially justification by faith.

The evangelical understanding of truth has been determined according to two main sources. The first source, which has led to the development of the evangelical understanding of truth, has been chronicled in the previous sections of this chapter (i.e., the historical, philosophical development of the theories of truth), though generally evangelicals have distanced themselves from the typical forms given previously, modifying them to fit the evangelical worldview. The second, and more important source, (though often secondary on a practical level due to the general thinking and worldview produced by the first source, particularly the modern Enlightenment understanding), is that of Scripture. Evangelicals, by definition hold to the authority of

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75 Oden, 20
Scripture, and therefore its view of truth is necessarily of utmost importance to the evangelical conception of truth.

The task of analyzing and defining the evangelical understanding of truth is a daunting one to say the least, not to mention beyond the scope of this thesis. Therefore this chapter will not seek to investigate all of the intricacies of the evangelical view, but rather will show the general understanding of evangelicalism as to the nature of truth, with the main goal of forming a basis with which to juxtapose the understanding of truth in the eyes of Generation X.\textsuperscript{76}

The Significance of Truth in Evangelicalism

The importance of truth for evangelicals cannot be overstated. White explains that:

the subject of truth has arguably been the fundamental concern for Evangelicals from the onset of their existence. A self-conscious attempt by a group of evangelicals to describe themselves opens with the following quotation from Blaise Pascal's \textit{Pensees}: “Truth is so obscure in these times, and falsehood so established, that unless we love the truth, we cannot know it.” The quotation reflects the essence of Evangelical theology: from their perspective Evangelicals both love and possess the truth in a way distinctive from other faith traditions.\textsuperscript{77}

\textsuperscript{76} For an in-depth study of the Evangelical understanding of truth, see James White’s book \textit{What is Truth?}, in which he discusses the origin of American Evangelicalism and gives a solid study and comparison of five of the more influential evangelical theologians of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century: Van Til, Schaffer, Henry, Bloesch, and Erickson.

\textsuperscript{77} White, 32
The noted theologian Carl Henry also places truth in a foundational role. He says that “the fundamental issue remains the issue of truth, the truth of theological assertions. No work on theology will be worth its weight if that fundamental issue is obscured.”

Correspondence and Coherence in Evangelical Thinking

While it is true that Evangelicals have from the outset understood truth to be foundational, there is some disagreement over the nature of the correspondence of truth to reality, this can be seen in the differences between evidentialists and presuppositionalists, as well as the current debate over inerrancy. Though these differences exist, and are important distinctions in and of themselves, the greater import is that all are approaching the issue of truth from generally the same perspective. This is to say that for the most part evangelicals have rejected the idea of the pragmatic theory of truth in favor of the correspondence theory, which has in turn been given at least a priority over the coherence theory.

While White’s argument that Evangelicals have traditionally seen truth as correspondence, his evaluation unnecessarily relegates the coherence theory to a small impact at best. The coherence theory of truth still impacts the theological undergirdings of Evangelicalism, as is evidenced by the very nature of the position and work of the theologian. There is a certain systemization involved in the theological task, regardless of

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79 For a greater discussion on these issues see White, 33-35
80 White cites Koivisto’s article in the June 1981 *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* as concluding that Clark Pinnock had indeed begun to view truth from a pragmatic approach. See note 7, pg. 34
the specific nuances of individual theologies. The very term ‘systematic theology’ implies that at some level a coherence theory of truth, though this is not to say that the systematic theologian rejects or is unconcerned with the correspondence theory of truth, on the contrary, the evangelical systematic theologian is very concerned with this as well.

Cornelius Van Til, in his Survey of Christian Epistemology, shows that the true evangelical understanding of truth, (though he does not use the term evangelical), consists of both a correspondence and coherence understanding, though not in their original forms as discussed above. Van Til states:

True human knowledge corresponds to the knowledge which God has of himself and his world. ... Complete knowledge of what ... is can be had only by an absolute intelligence, i.e., by one who has, so to speak, the blueprint of the whole universe. But it does not follow from this that the knowledge ... that I have is not true as far as it goes. It is true if it corresponds to the knowledge that God has ...

God has to be taken into the correspondence ...

It is our contention that only the Christian can obtain real coherence in his thinking. If all our thoughts about the facts of the universe are in correspondence with God’s ideas of these facts, there will naturally be coherence in our thinking because there is a complete coherence in God’s thinking. 

It is obvious then, from Van Til’s statements, that the Christian understanding of truth must be one of both correspondence and coherence, but from the perspective of God as the source of truth.

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Though not in the same manner, Henry affirms both a correspondence and a coherence understanding of truth, though he objected to those terms, based on his view of divine revelation, which in his words “is the source of all truth.”\textsuperscript{82} White explains:

Henry holds to a correspondence understanding of truth in terms of divine revelation, which gives us reality in true correspondence. In deference to the coherence view of truth, Henry holds that ‘truth is a consistent system, and that all facets of it (including all facts) have meaning as a part of that system.’\textsuperscript{83}

It should also be noted that there seems to be a distinction between the specific nature of truth as seen through the eyes of the evangelical layman, and the academic evangelical theologian such as Van Til, Henry or Erickson (not to mention the professor of theology). The difference between the theologian proper and the ‘typical’ evangelical layperson lies mainly in frame of reference. This is to say that the theologian has (or should have) a greater background in and understanding of the nature of the coherency of the theology to which he ascribes. Further, it is unfortunately the case that more and more of today’s evangelical churches are less concerned about the ‘truth,’ regardless of how it is to be perceived, than they are about growth, small groups and felt needs.\textsuperscript{84}

This is not to say that the laity has no understanding as to the nature of truth but that given the common-sense nature of the correspondence theory of truth, it is most likely the view which is held, regardless of whether the theory is recognized or even given a second thought. This is not a slight on the layman, but rather is a failing of most evangelical churches to teach the people of those churches what truth is, and the

\textsuperscript{83} White, 104
\textsuperscript{84} Charles Colson gives a scathing rebuke of this type of cultural Christianity in chapter 10 of \textit{Against the Night: Living in the New Dark Ages}, (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Vine Books, 1989)
significance of it. This lack of attention to the understanding of truth will be seen in
greater detail in the following chapter, but it should be noted that this problem can be
readily seen in the similarity of responses by both Christian and non-Christian Xers.

The influence of the philosophical development and understanding of truth in the
realm of Evangelicalism should not and cannot be denied, since the concept of truth is
important to all realms of life and therefore it is only natural that philosophers throughout
the ages have dealt with the concept. To be sure, the concept of truth in Evangelicalism
has been modified to fit the orthodox worldview and understanding of Scripture. This
does not however, deny the reality of the influence of philosophy and philosophers on the
understanding of truth held to by evangelicals.

A Scriptural Understanding of Truth

Introduction

The other main force in shaping the understanding of truth is that of Scripture.
Obviously, of the two sources for the understanding of truth for evangelicals, this is the
more important. An evangelical could get by quite well without any direct knowledge of
philosophical theories of truth, but by the very nature of the term evangelical as defined
previously, that same evangelical cannot get by without Scripture. The terms ‘true’,
‘truly’, ‘truth’, and ‘truth’s’ combine for a total of 358 occurrences in Scripture (KJV). \(^{85}\)
It is important therefore to determine what the Scripture says concerning truth in order to

1451, 1453
get a proper understanding of the evangelical viewpoint. There are two primary terms for truth in Scripture. The first is the Hebrew - 'emeth, and the second is the Greek - alēthes.

**Truth in the Old Testament**

The Hebrew term 'emeth is the most common Old Testament word to be translated as either true or truth. Kittel states that this word "denotes a reality that is firm, solid, binding, and hence true. With reference to persons it characterizes their action, speech, or thought, and suggests integrity." In the Old Testament, the concept of truth is especially identified with the God Himself. Isaiah 65:16, using the word transliterated amen (based on the same root as 'emeth), identifies God as the 'God of truth.' Genesis 32:4 says that God is a 'God of truth.' Not only is truth identified with God Himself as an attribute, it is seen as a possession of God; it is His, specifically in regard to His word and His law (Ps. 40:10,11; II Sam. 7:28). Further the idea of truth in the Old Testament (as a possession of God) is seen to be eternal, that is it remains constant and unchanging or is absolute (Ps. 100:5; 117:2). Concerning the Old Testament understanding of truth, Arthur Holmes writes, "That all truth is God's truth is implicit in the Old Testament understanding that all of life and history is known to and governed by a good, wise, and powerful creator." 


The influence of the Old Testament understanding of truth can be seen in the Rabbinic teachings as well. Kittel relates: "The Rabbinic use [of truth] follows that of the OT. Truth is the basis of law, but with religious reference, since law is a religious function. God's judgment is one of truth, but this is because God's very being is truth, and that truth has its being in God." ⁸⁸

The Old Testament understanding of truth then, just by itself sets up a substantial foundation for the evangelical view of truth with its emphasis on the Biblical understanding. The Old Testament sets up truth as founded in the nature of God, as well as an eternal unchanging extension of Him in His word, law, and action. This concept of truth was the basis for the New Testament writers, as well as Jesus Himself, though in the Greek usage, the concept was expanded.

**Truth in the New Testament**

The Greek term ἀλήθεια (alētheia), along with its cognates, is the basic word translated truth in English. The term in the verbal form is alētheia. Bultmann explains the usage in TDNT:

The NT usage is partly determined by the Hebrew term and partly by the nonbiblical use of alētheia. The two are not coincident, for the LXX had to use such words as pisteis and dikaiosyne as well as alētheia for the Hebrew. If it could use alētheia too, this is to be seen in the light of the flexible Greek usage.

1. The Original Greek Usage and Its Differentiations. Etymologically alētheia means "nonconcealment." It thus denotes what is seen, indicated, expressed, or disclosed, i.e., a thing as it really is, not as it is concealed or falsified. alētheia is "the real state of affairs," e.g., the truth in law, or real events in history, or true being in philosophy. . . . alētheia can thus denote "truthfulness" as a personal quality. The philosophical question of . . .

⁸⁸ Kittel, TDNT, cited in Logos v.2.0a
absolute truth as distinct from relative truths, while alien to the OT, raises the similar concept of truth as a norm, which in practice yields the sense of “correct doctrine” that indicates the truth.

2. The Usage of Dualism. If in philosophy alētheia denotes true being, and if this is located in the world of ideas that is hidden from the senses and comprehended in thought, alētheia comes to mean “genuine reality” in antithesis to appearance. In Hellenism what truly is can then be equated with what is divine or eternal, in which one must share to be saved.

D. The Early Christian Use of alētheia.

1. alētheia is “that which has certainty and force”: a. as a valid norm (with a hint of what is genuine) in Eph. 4:21; Gal. 1:6; b. as trustworthiness (Rom. 3:3ff.; 15:8). b. as sincerity or honesty (2 Cor. 7:14. 11:10; 2 Jn. 1; 3 Jn. 1).

2. alētheia is “the state of affairs as disclosed” (Rom. 1:18, 25; 2:2; 1 Jn. 3:18).

3. alētheia is “truth of statement” used with speaking (Lk. 4:25) or teaching (Mk. 12:14).

4. as a “truth of statement” used with speaking (Lk. 4:25) or teaching (Mk. 12:14).

5. alētheia is “true teaching or faith” (2 Cor. 13:8; 4:2; Gal. 5:7; 1 Pet. 1:22); thus the preaching of the gospel is the word of truth (2 Cor. 6:7), becoming a Christian is coming to a knowledge of truth (1 Tim. 2:4), the Christian revelation is truth (2 Th. 2:10ff.), the church is the pillar and ground of truth (1 Tim. 3:15), and the alētheia is Christianity (2 Pet. 1:12).

6. alētheia is “authenticity,” “divine reality,” “revelation,” especially in John, where this reality, as a possibility of human existence, is out of reach through the fall but is granted to faith through revelation by the word (cf. Jn. 8:44; 1 Jn. 1:8; 2:4). Ambiguity thus arises when Jesus is said to speak the truth, for this means not only that what he says is true but also that he brings revelation in words (Jn. 8:40, 45; 18:37). As revelation, alētheia is known (Jn. 8:32; 2 Jn. 1). This is not just a knowledge of a complex of statements but an encounter with Christ, who is the truth (Jn. 14:6) and who sanctifies in truth (Jn. 17:17, 19). God himself is disclosed herewith, the incarnate word being “full of grace and truth” (Jn. 1:14; cf. v. 17). Worship in truth is to be understood similarly, i.e., not just in pure knowledge but as determined by God's own reality, in pneuma (Spirit), and by the revelation made in Jesus (Jn. 4:23-24). Again, the Paraclete as the Spirit of truth insures ongoing revelation in the community (Jn. 14:17; 16:13; cf. 1 Jn. 5:6), and this comes to expression in right doctrine (1 Jn. 2:21) and a right way of life (1 Jn. 1:6). Thus the church's witness may be equated with that of truth (3 Jn. 12) and Christians are to be fellow workers in the truth (3 Jn. 8), loving one another in the truth and united in truth and love (2 Jn. 1ff.).

alēthēs.

1. alēthēs means a. “constant” or “valid,” as in 1 Pet. 5:12; b. “judicially righteous” (alēthinōs in the NT); c. “upright” (Phil. 4:5).
2. It also means a. "trustworthy" (Rom. 3:4); b. "sincere" (Mk. 12:14; 2 Cor. 6:8; Jn. 3:33).

3. Another sense is "real" (Acts 12:9; Jn. 4:18; 1 Jn. 2:8).

4. It indicates a "true statement" (e.g., Tit. 1:13; Jn. 5:31).

[R. BULTMANN, I, 238-51]89

Though a lengthy quote, and from a decidedly nonevangelical source, Bultmann's article on truth is both comprehensive and an accurate representation of the understanding of truth by early Christianity based both on its roots and Judaism, and the Hellenistic culture of the day. Bultmann shows the distinct understanding of early Christians, an understanding which has been maintained to a large degree, at least in principle, by evangelicals.

Conclusion

The evangelical understanding of truth has been influenced by both philosophical and Scriptural sources, and is very reflective of both the New Testament and Old Testament understandings of Scripture. The effect of philosophy from the Pre-Socratics to modern philosophers such as James, Rorty, and Lyotard cannot be denied, and continues to effect the culture and therefore the evangelical understanding of truth. The basis of the evangelical understanding of truth however must be approached in the context of Scripture. Truth is seen to be a characteristic of God. In fact God is truth, and therefore by extension His words and actions are true as well as being eternal and absolute. This understanding of truth for evangelicals is therefore to be seen as one of correspondence to the nature and being of God which is therefore necessarily coherent.

89 Kittel, TDNT, cited in Logos v.2.0a
CHAPTER 3
GENERATION X'S APPROACH TO TRUTH

Introduction

While the Evangelical understanding of truth is a well documented and somewhat easily traceable phenomenon, the understanding of truth by the generation known as X is a somewhat more difficult undertaking. The term X as a designator for this generation is a clue as to the difficulty presented in this search. Further, when the makeup and characteristics of Generation X, as defined and described in Chapter one, is taken into account, the task becomes even more difficult. Perhaps the easiest way to approach the issue of truth as seen by Generation X is to first designate what it is not.

There has been relatively little research into just what Generation X believes and doesn't believe about truth, though George Barna has provided some. A general idea of the Xer approach to truth can be determined by looking at some of the characteristics of Generation X as well as by looking into the generally accepted means to reach them given by youth specialists.

This chapter will be focusing specifically on the area of ‘absolute truth’, which is really what was looked at in the previous chapter as well. Truth for the evangelical is by definition understood to be absolute, and so it is this characteristic of truth in particular that is most significant to this study.
Introduction

Given the limited amount of solid statistical information available concerning Generation X and its perception of truth, it is first necessary to determine the credibility of the source of the information which is available. The primary researcher in this realm has been George Barna and the Barna Research Group. George Barna has done several studies concerning Generation X and their characteristics and beliefs, and each time he has addressed the issue of absolute truth in his research. The Barna research Group is an organization which specializes in research for Christian groups and churches, though not exclusively so. Barna Research began in 1984, and since its inception has done research for over 200 organizations:

Some of its better known clients have included Visa, The Disney Channel, Southwestern Bell Telephone, the U.S. Army, CARE, United Cerebral Palsy and BankOne. Among the many ministries served have been the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, Campus Crusade for Christ, World Vision, Word Publishing Thomas Nelson Publishing, ... Fuller Theological Seminary, Dallas Theological Seminary, ... and many others.  

As the previous list of former and continuing clients shows, Barna’s research is accepted and used by major companies, charitable organizations and ministries. Given the acceptance of Barna’s research by this wide range of clientele, it is, in the opinion of this author, safe to treat as trustworthy.

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The three different sources of statistical information concerning Generation X and truth come from three different books: *The Invisible Generation: Baby Busters*, and *Generation Next*, both by George Barna, as well as *Right From Wrong*, a book by Josh McDowell and Bob Hostetler which utilized a survey by the Barna Research Group for its raw data.

Statistics on Generation X and Truth

**Generation X and Truth in *The Invisible Generation***

In his 1992 book *The Invisible Generation*, George Barna analyzes the overall characteristics, morals, demographics and other areas of Generation X. The book used statistical data gathered by the Barna Research Group over a period of three years: 1990, 1991, and 1992. There was not one ongoing study which took place, but rather a series of studies relating to the entire population, not just Generation X, in order that an effective comparison of that group to other segments of society could be accomplished. In order to show the validity of the raw data gathered from these surveys Barna writes:

The studies were conducted among nationwide, representative samples of adults. The adults were interviewed anonymously by telephone . . .

Those individuals were chosen through the use of a sampling technique known as “random-digit dialing” (RDD). This is a means by which a computer generates telephone numbers to be called by the research company’s interviewers. . . . The advantages of using an RDD sample, as opposed to selecting numbers from a telephone book, are myriad. Perhaps chief among them is greater inclusivity (i.e. all telephone households are equally likely to be called, even if they have new or unlisted numbers).

The sample sizes ranged from 1,002 to 1,500, all respondents being 18 or older (unless otherwise noted). In some cases, due to the use of the same question with an equivalent sample universe and the same
data collection methodology, data were added from two or more surveys conducted within a twelve-month period. This had the effect of increasing the aggregate sample size and decreasing the estimated sampling error.

The data presented regarding Baby Busters represents a slice of the aggregate survey data collected. Thus, in a survey of 1,500 people, we would generally interview approximately 250 Busters.

Additional studies had been conducted among younger respondents (13-18 years of age). In those studies, the entire base of respondents was included among those individuals who were referred to as Busters. When their responses were added to those of older Busters, the ages of the respondents were statistically weighted to provide a balanced perspective of the Buster reality. 91

The careful manner in which Barna researched Generation X in regard to their characteristics and beliefs as well as relation to the rest of society gives further credence to the reliability of the data.

The single most significant statistic provided by Barna in The Invisible Generation is just how many members of that generation do not believe in absolute truth. According to Barna, “To the typical Buster, there is no such thing as absolute truth. Statistically, 70 percent claim that absolute truth does not exist, that all truth is relative and personal.” 92 Barna also states that this statistic is supported by the fact that “two-thirds of the Buster generation concede that ‘nothing can be known for certain except those things that you experience in your own life’. ” 93

The previous two statistics which are straightforward in their approach to the question of Generation X and truth, are supported in other areas as well. The skepticism seen in Xers’ approach to absolute truth is borne out in their attitudes concerning morality and society as a whole. For instance, when asked if they agreed or disagreed

91 Barna, The Invisible Generation, 180, 181
92 Ibid., 81
93 Ibid., 81
with the statement “lying is sometimes necessary”, 44 percent of Xers agreed either somewhat or strongly, and only 29 percent disagreed strongly with the same statement.\textsuperscript{94}

A further example of the effect of the truth perceptions of Generation X on other areas of their beliefs can be seen in the issue of abortion. When asked if abortion was morally wrong, 51 percent of Xers disagreed.\textsuperscript{95} Barna links the lying question specifically with the “widespread acceptance of relative truth among the Busters.”\textsuperscript{96} It is important to note that in 1992 the oldest members of Generation X were only 25, and the youngest were only 9, so the sample was not a complete one, and as continuing studies would show the trend towards a relative view of truth would only get larger.

**Generation X and Truth in Generation Next**

In 1995 George Barna published another book dealing with the members of Generation X, this time focusing on the younger end of the generation, the teens. In *Generation Next*, Barna focuses on the approximately 22 million 13-18 year olds of Generation X.\textsuperscript{97}

Once again, the Barna Research Group did a random, nationwide telephone survey, this time focusing on the 13-18 year old population. The study entailed an approximately 25 minute phone conversation with 723 teenagers in the months of December 1994 and January 1995. Barna states that the sample group used in the survey was representative of teenagers across the country. Involved in the survey were “kids

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 82  
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., 82  
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., 81  
\textsuperscript{97} Barna, *Generation Next*, 10
from lower, middle and upper-class households; teens who were Caucasian, African-
American, Asian-American, and Hispanic-American; and kids who were churched and
unchurched, Christian and non-Christian. Barna concludes that “statistically speaking,
the data for the entire sample are described as accurate to within plus or minus four
percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level . . . .” Additionally when dealing
with the issue of absolute truth, the overall picture becomes somewhat clearer due to the
way in which the question was asked. When dealing with the area of truth, the survey
asked five individual questions in order to get a clearer picture of how this segment of
Xers approached truth. The truth issue was also coupled with questions concerning faith
and worldview and lifestyle, all of which are issues which directly relate to the question
of truth and the approach to it by Xers. The following chart shows how Xers reacted to
questions in these areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Related to truth:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is right for one person in a given situation might not be right for another person in a similar situation</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When it comes to matters of morals and ethics, truth means different things to different people, no one can be absolutely positive that they know the truth</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is no such thing as &quot;absolute truth&quot;; two people could define &quot;truth&quot; in conflicting ways and both be correct</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bible provides a clear and totally accurate description of moral truth</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lying is sometimes necessary</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

98 Ibid., 11
99 Ibid., 11
Related to faith:
God established limits for humankind; acting in conflict with His laws has negative consequences

- The Bible does not provide practical standards for living in today's world
- Anyone who relies upon the Bible or religious faith for moral guidance is foolish

Related to worldview and lifestyle:

- The main purpose of life is enjoyment and personal fulfillment
- You know that something is morally or ethically right if it works
- One person cannot really make much of a difference in this world

(*indicates less than one-half of 1 percent gave this response)

As the chart above illustrates, absolute truth is, for the most part, not held to by members of Generation X. Perhaps the greatest sign of the lack of belief in or understanding of absolute truth in these statistics is the fact that 72 percent of teens surveyed claimed that the Bible was "a clear and totally accurate description of moral truth," while at the same time 57 percent say that lying is all right; 80 percent say that no one can be certain that they know the truth; and that 90 percent say that what is right for one person in a given situation may not be right for another. There is a distinct contradiction between the first statement and the following three, a contradiction which is clearly seen and understood in light of the fact that 72 percent of these teens stated that two people can define truth in conflicting ways and both be correct. It is quite apparent then, that for the Generation X paradigm, logically contradictory views are not a

100 Ibid., 32
problem. Further, it is clear from the data given that when the issue of truth is approached, Generation X does so from a completely personal or subjective angle. This fact can be seen most clearly in that over 90 percent of respondents agreed that what is right for one person in a given situation may not be right for another in a similar situation.

Finally, it is clear that the loss of belief in absolute truth among Xers is a growing phenomena. When the data from this study is compared with the data from the previous studies, there is a definite increase in the amount of Xers who do not believe in absolute truth. In the earlier studies, published in The Invisible Generation, the amount of Xers who said they did not believe in absolute truth was approximately 70 percent. In this study, dealing with the younger members of Generation X, the percentage has increased. At best, 72 percent of these younger Xers say they do not believe in absolute truth, at worst 91 percent do not. Even if the first three questions dealing specifically with the issue of truth are averaged together in attempt to get a more legitimate percentage, there are still a full 81 percent of Xers who say they do not believe in absolute truth. If the question concerning lying is averaged along with the first three, the number only falls to 75 percent. In any case it is quite clear that claims about disbelief in relation to absolute truth among are greater among the younger members of Generation X than among the older members of the generation. If this trend continues, and there is no evidence showing that it is not, the percent of those not claiming belief in absolute truth in the next generation will only continue to grow. This is not a phenomenon which has left the church alone either, as the next section will show.
Generation X and Truth in Right From Wrong

The statistics relating to Generation X's perception of truth in *Right From Wrong* are different from those in the other two books cited due to the nature of the group surveyed. Rather than using a random telephone sample for the raw data for the survey specific to this book, the survey group consisted of "responses from 3,795 youth from 13 denominations who participated in the 1994 Churched Youth Survey." This survey was conducted among members of 13 different Protestant denominations over a five month period in 1993 and 1994. Barna makes it clear that the data were not weighted statistically, that is, the "results are weighted according to the responsiveness of the denomination's churches, rather than in response to each denomination’s magnitude within the Protestant church world, or among the thirteen participating denominations." While it may be argued that a different weighting of the data would have given a more accurate representation of the meaning of the data, it does not compromise the significance of the data in relation to being churched as opposed to unchurched. The data show that churched youth have a somewhat different set of beliefs in regard to truth than the overall Generation X population, but that the differences are not as great as many would assume. The following is chart is from section E of the survey used in the writing of *Right From Wrong*. This section specifically deals with the beliefs and perspectives on life of churched Xers.

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101 McDowell, 251
102 Ibid., 252
103 Barna, cited in McDowell, 252
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. freedom means being able to do anything you want to do, as long as its legal</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. there is no such thing as “absolute truth;” people may define “truth” in contradictory ways and still be correct</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. the Bible does not provide today’s people with practical standards for living</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. everything in life is negotiable</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. there’s nothing wrong with breaking the law as long as it doesn’t hurt anybody</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. lying is sometimes necessary</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. only the Bible provides a clear and indisputable description of moral truth</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. nothing can be known for certain except the things that you experience in your life</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. when it comes to matters of morals and ethics, truth means different things to different people; no one can be absolutely positive that they have the truth</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. what is right for one person in a given situation might not be right for another person who encounters that same situation</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k. God may know the meaning of truth, but humans are not capable of grasping that knowledge</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l. every religion offers a different explanation of the meaning of life and truth</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m. the best philosophy for life is: do whatever feels or seems right, as long as it doesn’t harm anyone else</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n. you know that something is morally or ethically right if it works</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o. God established the limits for humankind; acting in conflict with His laws has negative consequences for those people</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. the Bible isn’t very relevant for today’s problems</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q. the moral standards of Americans these days are just as high as ever</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r. the only intelligent way to live is to make the best choice you can in every situation based on your feelings at the moment</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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104 McDowell, 259, 260
Initially the results of this survey seem to present a better picture for Xers and truth, but it must be remembered that these are churched kids coming from churches with youth programs which were at least developed enough to have regular meetings in which the surveys were administered. Further, the statistics in several key areas relating to the concept of absolute truth betray numbers which show that the problem of absolute truth crosses church lines. While the percentages for churched kids are most certainly better than the whole of Generation X, 71 percent still say they believe that what is right for one person in a given situation may not be right for another, 48 percent say they believe that no one can no for certain that they have the truth (only 29 percent disagreed); and 59 percent agreed to the statement that all religions offer different explanations of the meaning of life and truth. These results show that while churched youth may be behind the rest of the generation in forsaking absolute truth, there are still a considerable number who have. Further, it should be noted that the surveys used in the research for Right From Wrong were administered in church youth group settings. This fact, even though the individual surveys were anonymous, could have a significant impact on how those being surveyed responded. Pressure to give the “right” or “Christian” response to the survey questions cannot be written off, a fact which would certainly increase the negative numbers in relation to belief in absolute truth.

Conclusion of Statistical Information

It is quite clear from the statistical data above that the incidence of Generation Xers who do not believe in absolute truth is both widespread and growing. It is also the
case that this phenomena has not left those Xers who are churched untouched. The facts show that less than 30 percent, and probably closer to only 20 percent, of the younger Xers say they believe in absolute truth. This is only a statistical analysis, the way in which Generation Xers live out their beliefs is another matter, as well as another means for determining the relation of Generation X to truth.

**Generation X and Truth as Seen from Characteristics and Lifestyle**

The approach to absolute truth by Generation X is not simply a statistical reality, it is worked out in the very characteristics and lifestyles of the generation. In the myriad of books now available which deal with Generation X, especially those dealing with ministry to them, certain characteristics and methods for reaching the generation continuously appear. These characteristics and ministerial methods in themselves can provide significant insight into the truth views and approach of Generation X.

Over and over in the books written about Generation X and ministering to them, certain patterns emerge. For instance, the following list includes section, chapter and subsection titles from several Generation X related books: Generation Angst; A Hunger for Purpose; Anything Goes; Only Experiences Need Apply; “Image Is Everything;” This is My Story\textsuperscript{105}; Hope for the Hopeless; We Are Hopeless; We Are Immediate; We Are cynical; We Are Angry; We Are Accepting; Fears that Shaped the Generation; The Story of Our Lifetime\textsuperscript{106}; We Could Care Less, Care Less; The Choices are Ugly and Few.\textsuperscript{107}

\textsuperscript{105} Celek and Zander, 7
\textsuperscript{106} Todd Hahn and David Verhaagen, Reckless Hope: Understanding and Reaching Baby Busters, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 86, 21, 23, 27,28,33, 41, 59
\textsuperscript{107} Howe and Strauss, 126, 160
These headings are all erected on the same foundation—emotion. Just from the previous headings it is apparent that it is feelings and not truth that drives this generation. The simple fact is that truth apparently does not drive the lives and actions of the Xer; rather, ‘how it makes me feel,’ seems to be the motivating force. This phenomenon is evidenced by the very way in which the generation is explained and ministry to them is presented.

Hahn and Verhaagen use the area of Bible study as an example of how this type of thought pattern has even affected the church. “Everyone’s opinion is considered equally viable. Respecting the ideas of others has been given precedence over a search for the actual intention of the author. In fact the unrealized assumption is that one’s sincere ideas are synonymous with truth.”\(^{108}\) This statement could be applied to almost any area of the Xer’s life and be equally valid. The approach outlined here goes beyond a mere pragmatism in regard to truth, it is completely subjective.

Celek and Zander give four “R’s” for effective ministry to Xers, one of which is ‘Rousing.’ When they define rousing, Celek and Zander use the phrase “to awaken from slumber.”\(^{109}\) The very phrase, not to mention the point of section ‘Rousing’ is to get the attention of Xers; it implies an emotional or opinion driven response to what is being said. Other “R’s” include ‘Relevant,’ or ‘how does this affect me?’ and ‘Relational,’ that is, in reaching Xers, relationships are of utmost importance. Celek and Zander are not off by any stretch in their analysis, these are all important factors in reaching Generation X,

\(^{108}\) Hahn and Verhaagen, 39
\(^{109}\) Celek and Zander, 103
however, these are symptoms of the disease which has eaten away the belief in absolute truth by Xers.

The desire for genuine relationships in Xers is very much a sign of the feelings based approach to life of their generation. Barna states that “in terms of the life priorities of teens, their friendships are definitely at the top of the list.” Hahn and Verhaagen link this extreme desire for relationships which are genuine directly to the issue of truth. They state:

As a Generation without a sense of truth, we have no unifying beliefs. We simply all agree to respectfully disagree. This concept of truth has shaped the generation’s worldview. It has also contributed to its sense of disconnection and fragmentation. Without a set of commonly held core beliefs, we are left as a group of individuals who are alienated from each other. We are left without much in common.

The connection between relationships and truth then is quite clear, the two cannot be separated.

Overall Gen Xers are driven not by the long term issues and thought patterns of their predecessors, but rather on more immediate concerns. Barna observes that:

the dominant crises are immediate and short term. That’s the way teenagers think and live, more than ever before. They are not overly concerned about things that may be significant problems eons from now . . . Also, recognize that teenagers do not tend to think about underlying causes as much as they wish to confront the outgrowth of those causes. For example, morality and values are a frontline issue for just 1 out of every 20 kids. Faith decisions and choices are of pressing concern to 1 out of every 25 teens.

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110 Barna, Generation Next, 52
111 Hahn and Verhaagen, 39
112 Barna, Generation Next, 26, 27
This short term approach to life is a further indication of the fact that Xers (in this case the younger Xers) are not concerned with questions of lasting or absolute truth.

When dealing with the paradox seen in the beliefs of Xers concerning the necessity of lying in some cases (57 percent agreed that this was the case) and the fact that 72 percent believe that the Bible presents a clear and totally accurate description of moral truth, Barna has come up with four explanations which are crucial for understanding the Generation X approach to and concept of truth.

First, many teenagers use the words "moral" and "truth," but really do not know what they mean. Theirs is a vague understanding of truth and morality—"stuff that has to do with right and wrong." Thus, when they speak about "absolute" moral truth, they’re not really sure what they’re talking about, even when an explanation is provided.

Second, some teens are willing to state that the Bible contains absolute truth claims, but because they have not and do not read the Bible, those claims may as well not exist. As a result, any insights or wisdom it contains are beyond their comprehension or concern.

Third, many kids seem to distinguish between the concept of truth and the practice of truth. Sure, they’ll allow that there may be a definitive body of truth somewhere. But in their personal reality, truth is always relative to the individual and to the situation.

In fact, the intellectual and emotional separation many teens make between impersonal absolute truth and personal truth is very crucial to understanding them. Fourth, we have found that today’s young people, probably more than recent generations of youth, are perfectly capable of living with intellectual contradictions. Again, theirs is a tangible world; survival is more important than intellectual consistency or perfect wisdom. If they possess contradictory views, so be it.13

Alan Bloom has stated that "There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative."14 Josh McDowell sums up the Generation X approach to truth when he says

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13 Ibid., 33, 34. Lest it be thought that this is simply a teen 'phase,' it is clear from other research conducted by the Barna Group that the lack of belief in absolute truth does not significantly decrease with age. For more information see George Barna, What Americans Believe, (Ventura: Regal, 1991, 1992)

Today's youth are being raised in a culture that reflects Hugh Hefner's "Playboy Philosophy," the creed that "if it feels good, do it."... This view has been expressed to me over and over, by parents and young people alike who refer to a certain behavior, and say, "I feel it's wrong—for me—but people have to decide for themselves whether it's wrong for them; I can't push my beliefs on others."115

It is clear that Generation X approaches life from a paradigm of feeling and not truth, based on the fact that truth for the Xer has been relegated to a place of little meaning. In fact, the Generation X approach to truth cannot really even be said to conform to the pragmatic approach of William James, due to the fact that it does not even attempt to look at or be "expedient in the long run" or "on the whole course." Where does this approach to truth as entirely subjective and based solely on "my" opinion come from? This is the question which will be dealt with in the next section.

The Postmodern Question

Introduction

Most every writer on Generation X has called it the first postmodern Generation, a name which has more significance than that of a trendy title or observation. Postmodernism represents a shift in worldview and thinking, a shift as fundamental as was the shift from the premodern age to the modern age. Postmodernism cannot be and should not be ignored, it is a force to be reckoned with, and it will not simply go away.

115 McDowell and Hostetler, 13,14
Definition of Postmodernism

Defining the phenomenon that is postmodernism is a difficult task at best. Technically speaking postmodernism is just that—post the modern. Postmodernism, though it shares in many ways some of the characteristics of Modernism, is largely a reaction to what is seen as a failed modern system. In opposition to the modern worldview, postmodernism focuses on community, spirituality and a lack of any objective truth. Unfortunately the term ‘postmodern’ has become such a buzzword and has been applied to so many things that its meaning has largely been lost. Kenneth Gergen states that the postmodern condition “is marked by a plurality of voices vying for the right to reality.” In a word postmodernism is plurality, a radical plurality in fact. James Sire has given a clue to the nature of postmodernism by delineating five characteristics which are central to the postmodern framework.

(1) Things and events do not have intrinsic meaning. There is only a continuous interpretation of the world. (2) Continuous examination of the world requires a contextual examination; we ourselves are part of the context. (3) Interpretation depends not on the external text or its author, but on the relative viewpoint and particular values of the interpreter. (4) Language is not neutral but relative and value laden. (5) Language conveys ideology.

From the preceding aspects of postmodernism, it is easy to see that Generation X’s approach to absolute truth is significantly congruent with the postmodern worldview. In fact, it is in many ways the influence of postmodernism which has made Generation X

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116 Thomas C. Oden argues in his essay “The Death of Modernity and Postmodern Evangelical Spirituality,” that the term postmodern is really a misnomer, and it would be more accurate to label it ultra-modernity. Dockery, 19-32
what it is today. While it is impossible to define postmodernism, let alone study it in a paper such as this, several of the more significant elements of the movement can be seen. It is important to gain an understanding of postmodernism because it is the foundation of Generation X’s perception of truth, and without at least a rudimentary understanding of the foundation, the only thing which can be treated is the symptoms of the problem.

Postmodernism is a diverse set of beliefs and philosophies floating around a center which by definition does not exist. Hahn and Verhaagen sum it in relation to Generation X with the simple analysis that “it has no core.” 119 Calvin Schrag adds, “Postmodern philosophy is anti-foundationalist, suspicious of theory, and distrustful of any universal claims of reason.” 120 By denying that there is any foundation, postmodernism necessarily denies the reality of absolute truth.

A General Overview of Postmodernism

Introduction

The previous definition of postmodernism, while helpful, does not relate either the full story or all of the elements necessary for understanding the relationship between Generation X and postmodernism. In the following section, postmodernism will be broken down into the four areas which affect the Generation X approach to truth in the most significant ways. Additionally, the section will begin with an analogy used by Stanley Grenz, drawing from the popular science fiction series Star Trek. This analogy is designed to point out the differences between the worldview of modernism and the

119 Hahn and Verhaagen, 37
worldview of postmodernism, specifically it is helpful in showing the shift which has taken place.

The Star Trek Analogy

In order to give a clearer understanding of the postmodern mindset, it is appropriate to begin the section on postmodernism with an illustration used by Stanley Grenz which contrasts postmodernism and modernism. This illustration is important for two reasons: first, it allows for a greater understanding of the foundations of the Generation X mindset, and second, it reveals areas which, in the final chapter of this thesis, will be looked at in regard to bridging the gap between Xers and orthodox Christianity.

In his Article entitled “Postmodernism and the Future of Evangelical Christianity: Star Trek and the Next Generation,” Stanley Grenz compares the original Star Trek series with the Next Generation series as a means to show the differences between a modernist and postmodernist worldview. Grenz does an excellent job of showing the two contrasting worldviews as depicted in the two series. Grenz writes:

The postmodern perspective is reflected in the second ‘Star Trek’ series, ‘The Next Generation’. The humans who make up the crew of the original Enterprise are now joined by humanoid life forms from other parts of the universe. This change represents the broader universality of postmodernity. . . . the crew of the Enterprise symbolizes the ‘new ecology’ of humankind in partnership with the universe. Their mission is no longer ‘to boldly go where no man has gone before’, but ‘where no one has gone before’.

In ‘The Next Generation’, Data replaces Spock. In a sense Data is Spock, the fully rational thinker capable of superhuman intellectual feats. Despite his seemingly perfect intellect, rather than being the transcendent human ideal Spock embodies, he is an android—a subhuman machine. His desire is not only to understand what it means to be human, but also to
become human. However, he lacks certain necessary aspects of humanness, including a sense of humor, emotion, and the ability to dream.

Although Data often provides valuable assistance in dealing with problems, he is only one of several who contribute to finding solutions. In addition to the master of rationality, the Enterprise crew includes persons skilled in the affective and intuitive dimensions of human life. Especially prominent is Counsellor Troi, a woman gifted with the ability to perceive the hidden feelings of others. The new voyages of the Enterprise lead its variegated crew into a postmodern universe. In this new world, time is no longer simply linear, appearance is not necessarily reality, and the rational is not always to be trusted.

In contrast to the older series which in typical modern fashion generally ignores questions of God and religious belief, the postmodern world of 'The Next Generation' also includes the supernatural, embodied in the strange character 'Q'. Yet its picture of the divine is not simply that of traditional Christian theology. Although possessing the classical attributes of divine power (such as omniscience), the godlike being 'Q' is morally ambiguous, displaying both benevolence and a bent toward cynicism and self-gratification.121

There are other aspects of 'The Next Generation' (and its spin offs Deep space Nine and Voyager) which could be added to Grenz's analogy. These areas include the heightened sense of the importance of spirituality seen in the Klingon and Vulcan religions, the idea of the team concept rather than the individual (crew as opposed to Kirk), and the idea that one's set of beliefs can not be imposed on an alien culture. All of these areas show the differences of postmodernism and modernism, thus providing a window into the thought and worldview of the postmodern Generation X.

The Social Construction of Reality - Richard Rorty

One of the most elementary tenets of the postmodern worldview is that reality is simply what we make it to be. The postmodern philosopher Richard Rorty is one of the leading voices in this element of postmodernity. The question being asked by philosophers in this realm is, “How do we know, after all, if there is anything ‘real’ beyond our judgments?”122 This question would have been unthinkable in the modern mindset which asserted that truth and reality was empirically verifiable (see the section on the influence of Kant). Middleton and Walsh explain the conflict as follows:

The modern project was predicated on the assumption that the knowing autonomous subject arrived at truth by establishing a correspondence between objectively “given” reality and the thoughts or assertions of the knower. To the postmodern mind, such correspondence is impossible, for we simply have no access to something called “reality” apart from the way in which we represent that reality in our concepts, language and discourse. [italics added by this author]123

The point being made here is that there has been a dramatic shift in the way in which reality is understood by the postmodern mind. Put another way, the postmodernists asserts that “we can never get outside our knowledge to check its accuracy against ‘objective’ reality. Our access is always mediated by our own linguistic and conceptual constructions.”124 Basically the postmodern tells us that we view ‘reality’ or what is ‘true,’ only in terms of our own worldview, some overarching vision of life which forms the filtering grid for our own version of ‘reality.’

122 Middleton and Walsh, 31
123 Ibid., 31, 32
124 Ibid., 32
Rorty states that “Truth is established neither by correspondence of an assertion with objective reality or by the internal coherence of the assertions themselves.”125 Rorty argues for a “pragmatist” (not in the sense of James or Dewey) philosophy which does not seek to give any theory concerning truth at all, rather the pragmatist philosopher “would simply like to change the subject.”126 For many postmodern thinkers, as well as the emerging postmodern culture, one of the defining features is a “growing awareness . . . of the perspectival character of human life and knowing.”127 Ultimately for the postmodern philosopher, “not only is reality a human construct, it is more practically a social construct. It is always someone’s or some group’s construction of reality that ends up being the dominant construction that guides social life.”128

This view of the nature of reality (and thus de facto, truth) is lived out in the lives of Xers. The statistics cited in the previous section, are understood more clearly when the underlying conception of truth as a product of human construction is understood. The postmodern, the Xer asks the question “Why is any one construction of reality given privileged status, thereby marginalizing all others?”129 This view of truth and reality as simply products of human construction naturally leads to the area of postmodernism known as deconstruction.

125 Grenz, 326
127 Middleton and Walsh, 32
128 Ibid., 33
129 Ibid., 33
Deconstruction - Jacques Derrida

The idea of marginalization leads directly to the realm of deconstruction. The deconstructionist philosophers attack the idea that a given descriptor of reality is actually correspondent to reality as it is. Rorty, following in the footsteps of the French philosopher and one of the founders of Deconstructivist Postmodernism, Jacques Derrida, has stated that any criteria or norm given in relation to truth “is itself a human construction.”¹³⁰ The postmodernist then tells us that what we perceive to be true is only a product of our own human, biased and fallible construction. Middleton and Walsh explain the core of the deconstructionist task as the:

theme that we can never get to a prelinguistic or preconceptual “reality.” Instead, deconstructionism insistently attempts to show us that what is claimed to be present is really absent and that the given is itself a construction of human discourse.¹³¹

It should be noted that the goal of this deconstruction is not nihilism, but rather it is a desire to “play a positive, therapeutic role in the culture of late (and decomposing) modernity. We are to face up to our constructions and own them as such.”¹³²

While this therapeutic desire is one goal for deconstruction, the process, according to the deconstructionists, reveals something else as well. The deconstructionists assert that the process of deconstruction reveals in humanity “the impulse to mastery and ultimately to violence.”¹³³ The deconstructionists’ argument is, that by claiming to see reality as it really is, the desire to have mastery over others is

¹³⁰ Ibid., 32
¹³¹ Ibid., 33
¹³² Ibid., 34
¹³³ Ibid., 34
revealed. Derrida states, "the entire philosophical tradition, in its meaning and at bottom, would make common cause with oppression."\(^{134}\)

Again it is easy to see the connection to the Generation X approach to truth, for the two are virtually the same. As has previously been shown, the Xer sees truth in completely personal and subjective terms, truth is an individual matter, and what is true for one is not necessarily true for another; at the same time both positions, though they may be logically contradictory are equally held to be ‘truthful.’ When an individual or group claims to have ‘The Truth,’ others are necessarily relegated to a second class status in this view. The Xer sees truth as relative not only for individuals, but also for worldviews, hence the majority of Xers feel that all religions have truth and point toward salvation. The Xer rebels against the idea of one overarching reality that necessarily pushes dissenters to the side as wrong. This idea of one person’s reality being seen as oppressive to and marginalizing dissenting persons and groups bleeds into the third major issue that must be dealt with, that is the postmodern refusal to accept metanarratives.

**Metanarratives Verses Mininarratives - Jean-François Lyotard**

Another postmodern philosopher, Jean-François Lyotard attacks the idea of marginalization and the nature of truth from another angle, though it is logically consistent with the previous attacks. Lyotard states, “I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives.”\(^{135}\) For Lyotard a metanarrative is a story which tries to incorporate all of reality into its parts. In other words, the metanarrative is a “grounding

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\(^{134}\) Jacques Derrida, quoted in Middleton and Walsh, 34

or legitimating narrative, the worldview which guides the practice of a given community." The purpose then of these metanarratives which societies create, is to show the ultimate truth, whether it relates to the world, humanity, evil, or anything else.

The postmodern thinker like Lyotard reacts harshly to this kind of thinking, for him the metanarrative is of necessity a thing to disavow. Simply put, "to the postmodern mind, metanarratives are mere human constructs, fictive devices through which we impose an order to history and make it subject to us." Middleton and Walsh describe the postmodern mindset against metanarratives as follows:

If a narrative purports to be not simply a local story . . . but the universal story of the world from archē to telos, a grand narrative encompassing world history from beginning to end, then such a narrative inevitably claims more than it can possibly know.

The postmoderns like Lyotard do not leave the issue at this point; in the place of the metanarrative, they would put the mininarrative, or localized stories. The basic drive of the postmodern philosophy in this regard is that:

If no grand narrative is true, and if all narratives are constructed by individuals and communities, then no narrative must be privileged, and local, multiple and marginal narratives must be encouraged. . . . One story may legitimate a style of life and course of action very different from another story. And since there is no transcendent court of appeal—no finally true story for everyone and everything—the postmodern condition requires us to find a way in which to live with radical plurality.

This total disbelief in overarching stories is again reflected in the fact that Generation X sees truth not in terms of one universal overarching reality, but rather as subjective and

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136 Middleton and Walsh, 69
137 Ibid., 71
138 Ibid., 70
139 Ibid., 73, 74
relative to the individual. Xers do not want to marginalize other groups by purporting to have the only truth, hence their belief that other religions offer truth, as well as the fact that what is right for one person is not necessarily right for another, and life should be understood from this kind of a framework.

The Problem of the Self in a Postmodern Context

The previous issues dealt with by the postmodern philosophers lead to significant impacts for the postmodern individual, many of which have been touched on already. The modernist worldview saw humans as *homo autonomus*, humanity is seen as "independent, self-reliant, self-centering and self-integrating rational subjects."¹⁴⁰ Postmodernism has rejected this view of humanity as a necessary outworking of the preceding understanding of the nature of reality and truth. The first reason for this rejection is that when the postmodern mind analyzes the modernist understanding of humanity, "it seems that when left to their own self-directed devices, the heroic individual, and the culture of heroic individualism inevitably and invariably do violence."¹⁴¹ Secondly, "our anthropological self-assuredness has been shaken... postmodern thought has come to recognize that that humanist understanding of the self-constructed and self-centered ego it itself a construct."¹⁴² This fundamental shift in the nature of the conception of the self leads to a self which really isn’t. Gergen states:

Under postmodern conditions, persons exist in a state of continuous construction and reconstruction; it is a world where anything goes that can be negotiated. Each reality of self gives way to reflexive questioning.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 47
¹⁴¹ Ibid., 49
¹⁴² Ibid., 50
irony, and ultimately the playful probing of yet another reality. The center fails to hold.\textsuperscript{143}

It is clear from the above statement that this new sense of self is not necessarily seen as a bad thing (at least not on the surface) and is often looked upon as a good thing because “I can be whatever I construct myself to be.”\textsuperscript{144}

Ultimately the result of such a view of self is one driven not by truth or reality (as if one could legitimately define them to begin with), but rather on feeling. Bob Pittman, the founding chairman of MTV states “we rely on mood and emotion. We make you feel a certain way as opposed to you walking away with any particular knowledge.”\textsuperscript{145} The individual who has no real knowledge of his or herself, cannot by definition know anything about the world or truth around him or her. Ultimately the result is a vicious circle which continues to propagate a superrelativity, a reality without a core.

Concluding Remarks on postmodernism

Ultimately postmodernism is a celebration of diversity. Middleton and Walsh correctly summarize that “our postmodern context is populated by deconstructionists and others celebrating the confusion. ‘Here’s to heterogeneity!’ could be the quintessential postmodern toast.”\textsuperscript{146} Postmodernism in its core is coreless, it goes beyond a mere relativism, stating that there is and can be no center to reality, truth is simply what we make it to be as individuals or as communities.

\textsuperscript{144} Middleton and Walsh, 53
\textsuperscript{145} Bob Pittman, quoted in Middleton and Walsh, 55
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 44
There is much more that could be said in regard to the postmodern worldview including its emphasis on community and spirituality, however, there is not room for that here. Middleton and Walsh give a good introduction to the nature and concerns of postmodernity in a more in-depth manner in their book *Truth is Stranger Than it Used to Be*.

**Concluding Remarks on Generation X and Truth**

It is clear from the data above that Generation X’s approach to truth is quite different than that of evangelicalism as a whole. Generation X, both in their response to surveys and in their lifestyle show an increasing acceptance of a postmodern view of truth. For Xers, truth is relative and personal; it is not absolute or simply ‘out there’ devoid of relation to ‘my life’. Actually, as has been demonstrated above, Generation Xers are driven more by feelings than they are by an idea of truth, and hence do not really even fit into the category of the pragmatic understanding of truth.
CHAPTER 4

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE APPROACH TO TRUTH IN
EVANGELICALISM AND GENERATION X

Introduction

The previous two chapters have dealt with the primary understanding of truth from several different angles. The understanding of the nature of truth has been looked at from a historical, an evangelical, and a Generation X or postmodern approach. It is the purpose of this chapter to demonstrate the inherent conflict between the approach to truth of evangelical or orthodox Christianity and the postmodern approach of Generation X. While the differences between these two approaches to truth are glaring simply based on the explanation of them, it is important to underscore the nature of this difference to show the gravity of the situation for evangelicalism.

The Conflict Underscored

The problems that the postmodern approach to truth present for evangelicalism cannot be understated. In regard to this issue, R. Albert Mohler warns that “nothing less than the integrity of evangelical Christianity is at stake.” The postmodern view of truth as seen in the lives and beliefs of Generation X represent a significant problem for evangelicalism if for no other reason than communication—evangelical Christianity is at the very least speaking a different language than Xers are. This is by no means the only

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or even most important reason however. The most important implication of the postmodern approach to truth of Generation X for evangelicals is its foundational nature. One’s view of truth necessarily determines at least how one approaches evangelical Christianity, if it is to be accepted at all.

As shown in chapter two, the evangelical view of truth is one of a coherent correspondence to reality based upon and in the very nature of God Himself. The postmodern approach of Generation X, as seen in chapter three, is obviously not in agreement with this understanding of truth. The postmodern view of truth outright rejects the notion of truth as correspondence let alone coherence, and thus poses a severe problem for the acceptance of evangelical Christianity by Xers. By the very nature of their position concerning truth, the average Xer cannot accept an evangelical view of the reality without some modification. Further, if the Xer does decide to ‘buy into’ the evangelical Christian understanding of reality, the previous information concerning the frame of reference of Xers makes it probable that the acceptance is based on how it makes that person ‘feel.’ Doug Randlett states that college students want to know God in so far as they can feel Him.  

Evangelicalism, if it is true to its foundational tenets cannot accept a postmodern understanding of truth due to the simple fact that it must necessarily be founded upon a truth that is not based on merely subjective ‘human constructs’, but rather on a truth that is absolute, a truth that is reflective of (at the very least) the nature of things as they really

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148 Doug Randlett, class lecture for “Introduction to Youth Ministry.” Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary: Lynchburg, Va., Fall 1994
are. Evangelical Christianity quite simply demands a truth that is universal and objective, a truth that is based in reality and not opinion.

**Conclusion**

Given the two distinct views of truth given by evangelicalism and Generation X, conflict is inevitable—it cannot help but exist. However, in order for evangelical Christianity to reach Generation X (whether effectively or otherwise) it must find a way to bridge the gap between itself and the generation which is the future (is the now) of evangelicalism in North America. In the next chapter, a solution will be offered for bridging this gap which will retain the necessarily universal and absolute nature of truth, while still speaking to the postmodern sensibilities of Generation X in a way which will allow for their entrance, as legitimate and viable members, into the body of Christ.
CHAPTER 5
BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN EVANGELICALS AND GENERATION X
BASED UPON A THEOLOGY OF TRUTH

Introduction

The conflict concerning truth which arises from the views of evangelical Christianity and Generation X as a whole cannot be denied, but neither can it be ignored. In order for evangelical Christianity to remain viable among the coming generations of Western people, the postmodern approach to truth must be addressed. Evangelical Christianity cannot forfeit its commitment to an absolute view of truth which is grounded in the very nature of God, or it will cease to be truly evangelical, whether it retains the name or not. Therefore, a means of conveying this absolute truth to Generation X and the generations to follow it must be both found and utilized.

This thesis will present a two pronged approach for retaining and conveying the idea and ideal of absolute truth to Generation X from a distinctly evangelical viewpoint. Further, the second prong will be built upon the foundation of the first. It should be noted again at this point that it is not the purpose of this thesis to present a specific method or methods for ministering to Xers; methods change, principles—truths—do not. This chapter is intended to give an overarching principle relating to the conveyance of absolute truth, and not a specific culturally or generationally tied method which will be obsolete by the time that this thesis is read.
The first prong of the principle for conveying the nature of truth is this: evangelical Christianity must retain a commitment to the objective and absolute nature of truth, as grounded in the person and Being of God while at the same time retaining the subjective or personal nature of truth inherent in its grounding in the person and Being of God. The necessity of this twofold or holistic approach to the nature of truth is twofold. First, it is important to accurately relate the entire nature of truth, and not simply a part of it. Second, it is important to address truth in relation to the subject as well as the object, due to the fact that it is this aspect of truth to which Generation X (given its approach to truth as seen in chapter three) is most likely to accept.

The second prong of the principle is the demonstration of truth as both objective and related to the subject (as based in its grounding in the person and being of God) in a real world. That is, it must be demonstrated that a purely postmodern approach to truth cannot truly work in a real world.

**Prong I: Truth as Grounded in the Nature and Being of God**

As seen in chapter two, evangelical Christianity understands truth to be both correspondent and coherent to and in the nature and being of God; therefore, this grounding of truth in the very nature and being of God must be the starting point for any legitimate evangelical theology of truth. In regard to this grounding of truth, Arthur Holmes writes:

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149 Note: The meaning of truth in this 'subjective' or personal context will be dealt with and defined at greater length in the second section of prong one. It should be made clear from the outset that the term 'subjective' in this context is not intended to convey relativity or any lack of absoluteness, but rather it is to be seen in contrast to a cold, detached understanding of truth often associated with the term 'objective.'
The early church claimed that all truth is God’s truth wherever it can be found. The focus here is on truth. But the ultimate locus of truth is God. If he is the eternal and all-wise creator of all things, as Christians affirm, then his creative wisdom is the source and norm of all truth about everything. And if God and his wisdom are unchangingly the same, then truth is likewise unchanging and universal. If all truth is his, and he understands fully its interrelatedness, then truth is unified in his perfect understanding.\(^\text{150}\)

Given the nature of God as the starting point for a theology of truth it is important to understand something as to the nature of God. While it would be impossible to do a complete study into the nature of God in this paper, several aspects of the nature of God must be studied in order to get a proper orientation to the nature of truth. Further, it is from these very attributes of God that an understanding of both the objective and subjective nature of truth as grounded in the nature and being of God will be determined.

The Objective Nature of Truth as Grounded in the Nature and Being of God

God as Transcendent

The evangelical concept of God holds to the idea that God is transcendent. As D. A. Carson puts it, “By transcendent, I mean that God exists apart from the creation that he made, and thus above space and time. Thus he is not in any way dependent upon his creation; he is self-existing—that is, he draws his existence only from himself. He is absolute.”\(^\text{151}\) In explaining Søren Kierkegaard’s model for the transcendence of God, Martin Heinecken labels God as qualitatively distinct from man, he explains:

By qualitative distinction is meant that the difference between God and man is not merely one of degree. God is not merely like a man but more

\(^{150}\) Holmes, 8

so. They are of fundamentally different kinds. Thus God cannot be known by taking the highest and best elements within man and amplifying them.\textsuperscript{152}

The point being made by Heinecken, and thus Kierkegaard is that God is wholly other. If God is understood in this light, and truth as demonstrated in chapter two is grounded in the very nature of God, than it too must necessarily be transcendent, that is, it must not simply be a human construct. Therefore, it is safe to say that truth must therefore be objective in the sense that since it is grounded in the very nature of God; it is completely separate from man, while at the same time retaining its real nature.

**God as Sovereign**

The understanding of God as transcendent goes a long way toward revealing the objective nature of truth, and the understanding of God as sovereign furthers that understanding. "As absolute ruler God not only wills what He freely chooses, but also has the fullness of power to effect His free will."\textsuperscript{153} Since truth is grounded in the being of a sovereign God, a God who effects the reality he has chosen, truth must not only be completely separate from man, but must also be correspondent to the cohesive reality which God has brought about.

\textsuperscript{152} Martin Heinecken, quoted in Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 315

\textsuperscript{153} John D. Morrison, class notes for "Doctrine of God," Fall, 1996
God as Constant

Not only do evangelicals hold to an understanding of God as both transcendent and sovereign, but also to a God who is constant. Generally this idea of constancy is understood to mean that God does not change.\(^{154}\) Erickson writes:

This divine constancy involves several aspects. There is first no quantitative change. God cannot increase in anything, because he is already perfection. Nor can he decrease, for if he were to, he would cease to be God. There is also no qualitative change. The nature of God does not undergo modification. Therefore, God does not change his mind, plans, or actions, for these represent his nature, which remains unchanged no matter what occurs.\(^{155}\)

Given an unchanging God, and following the premise that truth is grounded in the very nature of God, it stands to reason that truth does not change either—it is eternal.

Concluding Remarks on the Objective Nature of Truth

The understanding of God in His very nature as transcendent, sovereign, and constant, while not exhausting either the nature of God or the case for truth as objective based on that nature, does give considerable support for the idea that truth is objective. Being objective, truth is understood to be wholly separate from man, real (in the sense that it actually exists and corresponds to God's cohesive, created reality), and constant. These three attributes of truth are all upheld by and essential to evangelical Christianity. This does not however, address the concerns of the subjectivist postmodern sensibilities of Generation X.

\(^{154}\) Note: The idea of God as constant is not intended to convey the thought that God is therefore in some way static, rather that God is stable and consistent in His character. Further, as will be brought out in the next section, God is person, and a personal God cannot by definition be static.

\(^{155}\) Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 278
The Nature of Truth in Relation to the Subject, as Grounded in the Person of God

Introduction

While evangelicals have no problem with an objective understanding of truth, the idea of a subjective understanding of truth makes most cringe, and the idea of truth being not only subjective, but also grounded in the nature of God at the same time probably borders on heresy for many. When the term subjective is used in the context of this thesis, it means just that—of or toward the subject—the person; subjective in this context is not to be equated with relativism or opinion. In order to remove any doubt as to the meaning of this understanding of truth, it is perhaps better to use the phrase ‘in relation to the subject’. Other terms such as ‘personal truth’ or Emil Brunner’s designation ‘Thou-truth’ may also be helpful. Unfortunately any of these terms can be misconstrued in their meaning given the current understanding of truth as seen in the previous chapters, and so it is imperative that a proper understanding be developed from the outset.

In order to present the whole nature of truth, which should be the desire of every evangelical by the very nature of the evangelical worldview and understanding of truth, an understanding of ‘truth in relation to the subject must’ be considered alongside, and not beneath or inferior to the objective nature of truth. It is important to realize that truth does not exist in an objective vacuum; it necessarily exists in relation to persons, whether those persons are human, or more importantly, the person is God Himself. By viewing truth in this manner, its importance for humanity is brought into clearer perspective.
Further, on a simply practical basis, it is the subjective element of truth to which Xers will be drawn. This is not to say that the understanding of ‘truth in relation to the subject’ being proposed by this author is the same as the Generation X understanding of subjectivity; it is not.

As is clear from chapter three, the postmodern view of truth adhered to by the majority of Xers is subjective in the sense of relativity, not in relation to the subject per sé. Though these are different understandings of truth, there is still a valuable link for evangelical Christianity to Generation X entailed in this ‘truth in relation to the subject’, or as Brunner would put it, ‘Thou-truth’. Specifically, Generation Xers are, as seen in chapter three, driven by their ‘feelings’ and desire for relationships, for what “makes me feel good”. This desire for a relational, feeling based, personal understanding of truth becomes the bridge for evangelicals into the realm of Generation X. Though the understanding ‘truth in relation to the subject’ being espoused in the evangelical context here is significantly different than the relativistic subjectivity of the postmodern position, it nonetheless reaches out to the relational, personal desires evidenced by Generation X. The significant desire of Xers for meaningful relationships and community, as well as their desire for happiness (“making me feel good”) is a point of contact for this aspect of truth which, because of its very nature can provide these things in an eternal present.

The idea of Christian truth as subject related or personal and passionate is not a foreign concept. As has been alluded to previously, the German theologian Emil Brunner, saw two designations for, or types of truth—‘It-truth’, and ‘Thou-truth’. Brunner designates these two understandings of truth specifically in relation to the idea of divine
revelation. 'Thou-truth' "speaks to the world of persons." Further Brunner argues that a "fundamental difference exists between persons and objects; failure to recognize this difference and carry through its consequences in all areas of life lies at the foundation of the errors of philosophy." While Brunner's ultimate conclusions (not discussed here) are suspect from an evangelical standpoint, he does bring up a good point. Evangelicals understand God to be person, and truth to be grounded in the nature and being of God; therefore, truth in some aspect must be 'Thou-truth'.

In his writings, Kierkegaard stressed the nature of Christian belief in relation to the subject. Concerning Kierkegaard's approach to the non-objective nature of truth, Holmes writes:

We can approach it in a detached and impersonal way ("objectively") or else passionately, in a personally concerned way ("subjectively"). Religious faith is clearly subjective, in this sense, as is the virtue of love practiced by Christ and taught in the New Testament. The important point I want to stress, and which the enlightenment missed, is that metaphysical objectivity is perfectly compatible with epistemological subjectivity.

The point being made by Holmes and Kierkegaard is that truth is objective in the constant universal sense, yet due to its very grounding in God and relation to man is also personal and passionate. This 'truth in relation to the subject' can be seen in at least two areas related to God. First, truth must be seen as 'truth in relation to the subject' in light of the personal nature of God, and second truth must be understood as 'truth in relation to the subject' due to the person and work of Christ.

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157 Ibid., 80
158 Holmes, 6
Truth as ‘Truth in Relation to the Subject’ Based on the Nature of God as Person

If evangelicals understand truth to be grounded in the nature of God, this must be true of both the objective understanding, and in order to remain consistent, ‘truth in relation to the subject’ as well. The very understanding of God as a person shows that truth is in that sense subjective. In order for God to communicate to man via revelation of any kind, a fact which again evangelicals hold to by definition, He must be a person, not simply an impersonal force. A personal God necessarily implies an element of ‘subject-ness’ or ‘Thou-ness’. Truth as grounded in a personal God must also be personal, and therefore cannot be objective in the detached sense of the term.

‘Truth in Relation to the Subject’ Based upon the Person and Work of Christ

The Gospel of John shows a God who is intimately concerned with humanity (as does the whole of the Bible), a God who has become man in order to provide salvation for mankind. The story of Christ is one of a passionate God, a God who according to John 1:1-18 created the earth, and then came to that earth in order to reconcile humanity to Himself. This is a picture of a passionate truth, a ‘truth in relation to the subject’ that is nonetheless universal and absolute. Truth grounded in the nature of a passionate God must also be passionate, and therefore is ‘truth in relation to the subject’.
Concluding Remarks Regarding ‘Truth in Relation to the Subject’

Holmes, Kierkegaard and Brunner cannot be overlooked in their analysis of truth as personal or ‘truth in relation to the subject’. Due to the very nature of God as both person and the person and work of Christ as the passionate God, truth must necessarily be understood as in relation to people, it must by its very nature be personal. It is important to reiterate that, in this context, subjective truth or ‘truth in relation to the subject’ is not to be understood as relative, but rather as being truth as grounded in the nature and being of a personal God, as well as in relation to a personal humanity.

Conclusion of the Understanding of Truth as Grounded in the Nature of God

It is clear from the evangelical understanding of truth as based in the being and nature of God that truth must be seen in both objective and subjective terms. This understanding of truth is a legitimate and Biblical understanding of both God and truth. Truth is objective in that it is universal, absolute and unchanging. Truth is also non-objective or ‘truth in relation to the subject’ in that it is personal and passionate.

Evangelicals tend to emphasize the objective nature of truth, while the postmodern approach of Generation X is more inclined to pay attention to the more personal elements. In order for evangelical Christianity to reach the postmodern Xer, it must emphasize not one aspect of truth to the detriment of the other, but rather the whole of truth. The Postmodern Xer is concerned about feelings and people, about relationships and story. These concerns can be addressed by a presentation of the whole of truth.
Truth as shown above is both passionate and personable, it is about a God who seeks a relationship with humanity, it is the story of reality, the story of God intersecting the story of humanity. This passionate and personal God, does not lack the absolute or objective qualities of truth which are denied by a postmodern understanding of truth, rather those qualities are in concert with and necessary to such a personal and passionate God.

Again, though there is a difference in the understanding of truth fundamentally between Generation X and evangelicals (the relativistic understanding of truth in a postmodern context is not the same as ‘truth in relation to the subject’ in an evangelical context) there is enough common ground to at least make a point of contact. In short, these personal, subject related or ‘Thou’ elements of truth will be the springboard for reaching Generation X. Then Xers can be shown that the objective elements are not mutually exclusive to the ‘Thou’ or personal elements, they are a part of a whole. The whole of truth must be understood and presented in order for evangelicalism itself to have a proper view of truth and reality. Only then can it effectively reach out to a generation which does not share its ideals about the nature of reality and truth.

Prong II: The Postmodern Approach to Truth is Unlivable

Introduction

Where prong I is the foundation, prong II is the building. Generation Xers are highly pragmatic according to the characteristic outlined in chapter one and the
postmodern outlook outlined in chapter three. This pragmatic nature which is looking for “what works” is an avenue for exposing the foundational nature of truth as outlined in prong I. Generation X is a searching generation, a generation that is not only searching for what works, but for a truth that will transcend the drifting life that is postmodernism. A truly evangelical understanding and living of truth can provide what Xers are looking for.

In order to get Xers to the point where they can even approach the evangelical understanding of truth, let alone accept it, two things must take place. First, the Xer needs to see that the postmodern understanding of truth ultimately does not work. Second, the Xer needs to see that an evangelical understanding of truth can be lived. The first issue may take more explaining, but the second takes more work.

Living the Truth

While it is easy to poke holes in another person’s view of reality, it is much harder to actually live out one’s own; however, that is exactly what must happen in order to reach out to the X generation. Over and over, evangelicals writing about ministry to Xers push the idea of being real. Celek and Zander talk of being transparent: not perfect, but imperfect and willing to admit vulnerability. In the last chapters of Generation Next, Barna pushes those working with youth to be real in their faith, to live up to the truths that they espouse. This idea is critical to Xers being willing to even look at the evangelical view of truth, let alone accept it.

159 Celek and Zander, 101, 102
160 Josh McDowell’s book Right From Wrong, deals solely with the issue of showing that the evangelical understanding of truth really does work, and is an excellent resource toward that end.
Showing the Flaws in the Postmodern Conception of Truth

The specific ways of showing the inconsistencies and flaws in the postmodern truth paradigm are many, and it is not the intent of this section to deal with them specifically, but rather to critique several of the more glaring fallacies of the postmodern view of truth, specifically in relation to the major elements of the postmodern movement outlined in chapter three.

In regard to the postmodern concept that everything is reduced to human construction, several issues arise. First, the postmodern idea of social construction has opened a valuable door which evangelicals, as well as everyone else, would do well to appreciate. Namely, that one cannot divorce one’s self from one’s culture or background, everyone does in fact view reality from their own individual and fallible perspective. This does not mean, however, that one’s perceptions and beliefs are invalid or necessarily only true for that individual, it is merely an argument toward caution, and the realization of the fact that one’s perception of truth is colored by his or her background, culture, and other factors. Further, the very statement that all of reality is merely social or human construct is by its own definition a human construct, and therefore meaningless.

In regard to deconstruction and the abolition of the metanarrative, again there is a performative contradiction. That is, the very belief that all overarching stories necessarily do violence to marginal groups who do not neatly fit into the mold of the story is in itself a metanarrative. Further, history has shown that local or mininarratives are every bit as capable of being violent (let alone flawed) as are metanarratives. Middleton and Walsh
explain that “local stories can legitimate violence on a scale to match any metanarrative. . . . Take for example the present tribal violence and ‘ethnic cleansing’ in the Balkan states . . . tribal violence between Zulus and the ANC, and even intra-Zulu fighting.”161

In regard to the self, “The postmodern condition could be described as at once liberating from past distortions and lies, yet also ‘cast adrift—exposed, unprotected and above all frightened.’”162 The postmodern view of truth says that all proclamation is by definition true (regardless of its content). If this is the case, then any choice which excludes any other, (and by nature, all choice excludes something), is necessarily flawed because it de facto says that what was chosen against was invalid, a position which postmodernism does not allow for (the one absolute in the postmodern conception of truth is that there are no absolutes). Even the choice not to choose is a choice. Middleton and Walsh correctly observe that “a postmodern approach to choice in a pluralistic universe results in moral paralysis. In the end, no choices can be made—or at least no choices that really matter.”163 The very position of postmodernist truth reduces the self to nothing, and is self defeating in its essence.

Conclusion Concerning Prong II

The postmodern life and conception of truth is contradictory at its very core, and in reality is unlivable. In contrast, the evangelical view of truth and life can be lived, maybe not perfectly, but it can be lived. The combination of a life lived according to a true evangelical understanding of truth, and lovingly pointing out that the postmodern

161 Middleton and Walsh, 75
162 Middleton and Walsh, 26
163 Ibid., 59
life is unlivable, based upon a view of truth that allows for both the objective and subjective nature of truth is necessary for the evangelical view of truth to gain any ground with and begin bridging the gap toward Generation X.

**Conclusion**

The issue of truth is foundational to evangelical Christianity, without an absolute truth it is pointless. However, without the elements of 'truth in relation to the subject' as outlined in this chapter, an absolute truth that is purely objective is also pointless. If truth is not personal, if it is not passionate, if it is not grounded in the nature and being of God as a subject, then it is of little real value, for there is no ultimate gain. Truth is both objective and personal or 'in relation to the subject' and must be understood as such. The approach of Generation X to truth is in direct conflict with a truly evangelical understanding of truth. However, it does allow evangelicals some handholds with which to begin the process of bridging the gap. If the Church is to remain viable and true to itself in the coming generations, it must show the world truth, and it must base its philosophy of ministry upon a theology of truth.

Evangelicals have that for which the world is searching, a center—a stable core. This core is truth, which is Christ Himself (Jn. 14:6). Douglas Coupland, Generation X guru, progenitor and icon reflects this answer when he states:

Now—here is my secret: I tell it to you with an openness of heart that I doubt I shall ever achieve again, so I pray that you are in a quiet room as you hear these words. My secret is that I need God—that I am sick and can no longer make it alone. I need God to help me give, because I no longer seem to be capable of giving; to help me be kind, as I no longer
seem capable of kindness; to help me love, as I seem beyond being able to love.\textsuperscript{164}
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