

## Book Reviews

*Chrisman Goes to College*, by James W. Sire. InterVarsity Press, 1993. Reviewed by Dr. Phil Briggs.

An intriguing style of writing. A must reading for any campus minister. Sire uses his background in English literature to magnify his "wordsmithing" while weaving a very readable story of a college freshman. Hinged between the narrative are chapters on relativism, individualism, and pluralism. The strength of the story comes from the believable characters Chris encounters in campus life from the dorm to the classroom. He meets Bill Seipel and Bob Wong. Two of the boys are Christians, while the third is a self-avowed atheist. However, the two types of Christians were almost opposites. Nonetheless, the new friends become a trilogy of players on a stage of academia, struggling in class and beyond with new ideas that whetting their appetite for dialogue while being on a search for "soul-u-tions"(sic) from their sheltered backgrounds. The pilgrimage for Chris and Bill is roller-coaster ride into the reality of life that challenges personal beliefs in their a multi-cultural context. Chris is the personification of so many youth who arrive on the campus from Christian homes and evangelical churches while Bill reflects a fundamentalist mentality of evangelical churches. Bob Wong is Buddhist although his search for Christ is thought-provoking and touching. He causes the reader to think through the propositions. His interpretation of the questions is a strong apologetic. Sire identifies six types of relativism which Christians

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face in college. One cannot fail to appreciate the candor with which the author writes revealing his insights and exposure to college life. The clever titles for the 14 chapters spurs the reader on as if the dialogue itself does not. However, there is more to the story than religious pursuits as Sire weaves into the fabric of the story the search for community among the boys and the college coeds they encounter. The author documents well his sources and offers the reader an excellent bibliography for further reading and reflection.

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### **Generation X and Beyond**

You may be overwhelmed and overloaded with information about Generation X. Most of what you read and hear about these young people born between 1965 and 1980 isn't flattering, but if you're working with this group of students, you may find the statistics somewhat frustrating. Like any demographic group, general characteristics don't easily translate to specific individuals. And sense, Xers are a paradox to begin with, they defy clear descriptions. Nevertheless, countless books have been published over the last few years which valiantly try to explain these folks. If you haven't read these selections, you might check them out:

*A Generation Alone (Xers Making a Place in the World)*, by William Mahedy and Janet Bernardi. InterVarsity Press, 1994. Reviewed by Gina Howard.

By alternating between the two authors, this book moves along and gives a dual perspective of Xers, one from a veteran campus minister and one from his young Xer associate. Together, they have forged a personal and professional relationship that works, but isn't without its frustrations. If you're working with an Xer associate or intern, this book may be of particular interest to you. It affirms what most other Xer books will tell you--Xers are searching for meaning, purpose, and value in their lives.

In their conclusion, Mahedy and Bernardi offer this: "We believe their aloneness is, on the one hand, an impoverishment resembling alienation. But aloneness is a different matter when it

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becomes a place from which to lift one's soul to seek community and to bear one another's burdens. Aloneness is empowerment and grace when it cries out to God to fill the empty spaces in the soul. Aloneness is a strength because it can become a place of real solitude wherein one can hear the subtle whisperings of God. Aloneness is the springboard from which members of a 'lost' generation, having been transformed by God, can open their hearts and hands, inviting others to partake of the gifts they have received. And so it is with Generation X" (pp. 176-177).

*Jesus for a New Generation*, by Kevin Graham Ford, InterVarsity Press, 1995. Reviewed by Gina Howard.

Ford, also a member of Generation X, relies on a storytelling format in this book which gives life to the statistics and research other books offer. This is one of the most entertaining of the wide array of Xer books, but contains helpful suggestions about how to reach this generation. Ford is passionate about reaching Xers, and while I personally found his disdain for Boomers somewhat hard to take, I realize that Xers carry some heavy emotional baggage about the preceding generation. Like Busters, however, no one enjoys stereotypes and pejorative labels, Boomers included. When I could put aside my frustration about this Boomer and Buster conflict, I found Ford's book incredibly challenging. Ford speaks with the authority of one who lives within this generation, and I needed to hear what he had to say. Since most campus ministers are Boomers or older, perhaps Ford needs to be read with care and with pen in hand to note what he's saying so

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clearly, if we're willing to listen.

***Inside the Soul of a New Generation (Insights and Strategies for Reaching Busters)***, by Tim Celek and Dieter Zander, Zondervan, 1996. Reviewed by Gina Howard.

Dieter Zander is one of very few acknowledge experts in Generation X, at least in ministerial circles. This book reinforces what all the others say; Celek and Zander's four R's provide an easy summary for understanding what Xers seek: Real (Xers are looking for people they can trust); Rousing (Xers need to awakened); Relevant (Xers want purpose and meaning); Relational (Xers long for deep interpersonal relationships).

***Generation Next***, by George Barna, Regal Books, 1995. Reviewed by Gina Howard.

This book is just what you'd expect from Barna--lots of research that is fairly interesting reading. It focuses on the group of students coming behind the Xers, so it may be the most valuable of these selections. You can begin preparing now to reach the next generation who are very much like to Xers we're finally getting to know. The best part of the book for me was the list of 15 new rules by which these students operate. These rules were startling, eye-opening, and somewhat frightening. For example, Rule #9 says, "Whenever necessary, gain control--and use it wisely." Rule #14 is more blunt: "Express your rage." The others are just as clear and direct, although not all of them are so depressing.

In spite of all the research, statistics, generalizations, and

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unflattering portrayals, Generation X is a group we can reach. They welcome change and they are comfortable with ambiguity. In this, if in nothing else, they can teach us how to live. Even more, they help us to see new ways of looking at the message of the Gospel.

Because they play with paradox, the teachings of Christ which some of us find difficult to accept and apply to our lives (“the first shall be last”) are welcomed and easily digested by Xers. Get to know them and study to understand them. They are a unique and fascinating group.

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