

**AN OCCASIONAL PAPER: EMBRACING THE MISSIONAL RESURGENCE  
OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION  
WITHOUT GOING EMERGENT  
Presented to Research Department of NAMB  
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God has providentially led the largest evangelical convention of churches through a theological resurgence. I believe that He has done so to launch an incredible missional resurgence in North America. We no longer doubt or argue that God has spoken, that Jesus explicitly saves, and that people are lost and need the Savior. This fledging movement must not be sidetracked by arguments over missional methods and models. Nor must it be polarized by different philosophies of mission. Southern Baptists have unified in doctrine and now they must be unified in mission even if they have differences of opinions on how mission takes place in individual lives, churches, associations, state conventions, agencies, etc. As recent as the SBC in June of 2006, Southern Baptists recently upheld the local autonomy of the church in regards to mission giving and at the same time affirmed the tried and tested best tool and vehicle of the worldwide evangelism, the Cooperative Program. Southern Baptists must continue to uphold their understanding of Christian liberty and autonomy as well as their collaborative missional responsibility. One thing is certain, the missional church will be as different as the cultures and communities they impact and transform. Without compromising the gospel, we must diversify in models and methods.

Contending faithfully for the gospel (Jude 3), we must contextualize the good news in diverse cultures using forms and methods (1 Cor 9) that best communicate (1 Cor 1/2) the never changing gospel of Christ. To do less is to compromise the very heart of

the gospel that is to be communicated in all languages and cultures to all people. We fought hard for a theological resurgence, now we need a missional one as well. With this in mind, I challenge us to missional unity.

### **A Call to Missional Unity**

Coming out of twenty-five years of in house theological resurgence, we now face more than a brave new world. We have awakened to a North American culture that is more diverse than ever before in its history. Immigration has given us the most diverse mission field in the world. Literally, our neighbors are Hindu, Buddhists, Hare Krishna, and New Age to mention just a few. Postmodernity and globalization have changed the religious landscape of North America.

Sociologists refer to a creative class and culture emerging in our postmodern urban centers. The rise of the creative church is very evident with its indigenous expressions of art, music, and technology. We must embrace this culture as culture rather than the world's evil system and seek ways to plant indigenous churches providing ways for people to hear and understand the gospel in new ways. Southern Baptists are not facing a generational issue. If so, we have done that before and we could handle it. It's much bigger. It's not a generational issue, it is a missional and cultural issue.

We cannot fight over how to win this new mission field to Christ. We must earnestly do three things together well in the next twenty-five years.

1. WE MUST CONTEND FOR THE FAITH- (Jude 3)
  - a. We are stewards of the gospel.
  - b. The core is delivered.
  - c. It has divine substance.
  
2. WE MUST CONTEXTUALIZE THE FAITH- (1 Cor 9)
  - a. We are missionaries of the gospel.
  - b. The context is diverse.

- c. It has human situation.
3. WE MUST COMMUNICATE THE FAITH- (1 Cor 1/2)
- a. We are heralds of the gospel.
  - b. The communication is distinct.
  - c. It has cultural style.

This paper is created by a Southern Baptist to convey that there are traditional, young, and younger evangelicals in the body that are committed to fish rather than fight over models and methods. We believe God is orchestrating a strategic missionary movement among Southern Baptists. We must be faithful to the theological resurgence by allowing our biblical theology to inform our ecclesiology and missiology. This positional paper is not about politics, power, or leadership position, but is about a movement of God to reach the nations.

To experience a missional resurgence, it should be noted that those advocating missional unity must embrace the current Baptist Faith and Message and believe the Cooperative Program remains the best way to reach our world and accomplish worldwide mission endeavors. They must advocate a very clear, contextual message to a very diverse world in North America that requires communication across all kinds of languages and cultures. They recognize the incredible opportunity that God has afforded Southern Baptists to enter the new mission field of North America with the unchanging gospel of Christ and praise God when Christ is preached in different situations with different styles when the substance is the same (Phil 1).

The new missional leaders will refuse to confuse the substance of the gospel with the style of presentation. They do not confuse the validity of biblical functions with the need for viable, new cultural forms and expressions. A study of the cultural landscape of North America reveals the tremendous cultural distance between the current

waves of postmodern cultures and the dominant culture of most Southern Baptist churches committed to reach the world to Christ. One primarily exists in a modern world, while the other predominately exists in an emerging postmodern world. Coming to the realization of this cultural distance is of utmost importance if Southern Baptists are to impact the future cultures and people groups of North America. The marginality is too great to propose simply a few new programs and tracks in the hopes of evangelistic recovery. While Southern Baptists were huddled for biblical and theological recovery from neo-orthodoxy, the North American religious and spiritual landscape forever changed. Now in the mission field of a plethora of diverse North American truth claims, Southern Baptists must face the challenges of the emerging postmodern sub-cultures or face the reality of irrelevance. There is a better way.

A whole new philosophy of missions is warranted. The current Southern Baptist theological resurgence misses the point if it does not result in a missional resurgence defined by new effective models of ministry and mission to successfully embed the message of Jesus in all cultures and communities. Only then, does Jesus transform souls and society as intended through His kingdom advance and the coming missional resurgence. Most of the current population will not be reached by the modern program (predominately builder) or purpose driven (predominately boomer) churches. Hirsch and Frost suggested that current models and methods of ministry and mission target 15 percent of the their Australian population suggesting that even with success, the target is way too small.<sup>1</sup> I have concluded that this same diagnosis is true for our North American postmodern urban context. Our target is too small. We are in an increasingly large

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<sup>1</sup>Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost, conference and interview, 19 April 2005.

mission field. We can no longer target the population most like us and be effective in fulfilling the mission call of God to reach everyone, everywhere (Matt 28, Acts 1:8).

That is not to suggest that our builder and boomer driven models are not successful. The opposite is true as their success is well documented. They continue to effectively reach the modern builder and boomer cultures, but the world is increasingly becoming postmodern and millennial.

The prognosis need not be bleak. I do not share the opinion of those who are pessimistic about our future. God is orchestrating the missional resurgence. The gospel is relevant. Committed to Christ, His Word and His Mission, I believe Southern Baptists will make the decisions necessary to keep our biblical fidelity as well as our missional focus. The church informed and driven by an updated philosophy of missions for the postmodern age will most likely achieve the changes necessary to reach postmoderns through new approaches of to worship, discipleship, fellowship, evangelism, and missions. Our hope for a theological recovery centered in a recommitment to the authority of God's word. Our hope for a missional recovery centers in a recommitment to the heart of God for the nations revealed in the Scriptures. Without recovery, the church will remain marginalized and huddled in irrelevance. Some churches are already navigating the way. Others are setting their sails in another direction. They are beginning to be identified by new waves of missional thinking and commitment.

### **Twenty Current Evangelical Missional Characteristics and Recommendations**

I conclude with twenty evangelical characteristics and recommendations for future missions in North American mission contexts to help guide the missional

resurgence into the twenty-first century. These characteristics and recommendations have tremendous missiological implications for the future of the church in North America. The evangelical church must not become the equivalent of the Amish of the twenty-first century. Again, I am optimistic. However, the church must change. It must transition. Missional leaders must lead the way. Its time for a extreme missional makeover. In 1989, Rick Warren wrote an occasional paper entitled “Contemporary Approaches to Ministry, Evangelism and Organization” in order to encourage churches to contextualize to the dominant boomer culture of his day. In this paper, Warren attempted to update Lyle Schaller’s earlier descriptive work of the “contemporary “church for the 1970s and 1980s. He lists 33 characteristics of the CAMEO churches.<sup>2</sup>

My recommendations are updates for the evangelical church desiring to reach North American postmodern cultures today. I limit these characteristics to twenty. These characteristics are observed in Southern Baptist churches with such names as Sojourn, Journey, Mosaic, Mars Hill, and Logos.<sup>3</sup> These churches continue to relate to Southern Baptist conventions, associations, and agencies, but also network with other groups like Acts 29, Glocal Net, Willow Creek, Saddleback, and others. They believe in the Cooperative Program. They believe in the Baptist Faith and Mission. These characteristics are not about an emerging church, they are about Southern Baptist

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<sup>2</sup>See Rick Warren, "Contemporary Approaches to Ministry, Evangelism and Organization: Reaching the Baby Boom Generation" (unpublished occasional paper no. 14 [1989], prepared for Metropolitan Missions Department, Home Missions Board, Atlanta, n.d.) and also Lyle Schaller, *Hey, That's My Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979).

<sup>3</sup>See [www.sojourncommunity.com](http://www.sojourncommunity.com), [www.nyjourneychurch.cc](http://www.nyjourneychurch.cc), [www.mosaic.org](http://www.mosaic.org), and [www.marshillchurch.org](http://www.marshillchurch.org), for examples of these new characteristics.

churches experiencing a resurgence in missional intent and thrust defined by a commitment to biblical fidelity and missional integrity.

These characteristics and approaches to missions are not exhaustive. Churches engaged in reaching Postmodern cultures are characterized by diversity so some of these characteristics will not describe some churches nor will any one expression of church have all the characteristics. These trends need more serious study, but provide the basis for continuing dialogue among missional leaders who desire to contextualize the gospel to all people groups and population segments. These characteristics deal with the theological as well as missiological issues that guide the current wave of churches. Missionally, these characteristics begin to describe the result of critical contextualization in a postmodern context. Theologically, the characteristics begin to describe an attempt of a postmodern focused to “self-theologize.” What will they believe? What must they believe? How will they express those beliefs? How will they behave? How will the church “do theology?” How will they describe and do missions? How will they express themselves as a missional church? The following characteristics begin to answer some of the questions. I believe Southern Baptists need a Missional Summit and subsequent Missional Networks to work through some of the following theological, ecclesiological, and missional emerging thoughts in the coming missional resurgence.

## God

1. The Triune God is Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. In postmodern churches, the emphasis is on Jesus characterized by a High Christology. The gospels are emphasized more than the epistles. Jesus is the center of the church. The church is Christocentric.
2. The activity of the Spirit of Jesus is also emphasized. Pneumatology is important in creative expressions of church life. A strong belief in the activity of the Spirit of Jesus exists, but not acknowledgement of what is commonly referred to as the

Pentecostal excesses. Emphasis on spiritual formation and spiritual disciplines are prevalent. They also value “experiential praise.”<sup>4</sup> The Spirit of Jesus is over all spirits and powers and is presented as such in new animistic contexts

### Mission and Missions

3. Mission is rooted in the *Missio Dei*. The creative church understands that mission and missions begin and end with God. He takes the initiate. He is on mission as the missionary God.<sup>5</sup> The Christ follower is a disciple on mission with God. This disciple is a missionary. The missional church emphasizes multiplication of disciples and churches not a linear approach to discipleship. Disciple making is missionary making. Every believer should be a missionary in the context where God has placed him or her. Believers are called to be and should be missionaries from the very beginning.
4. Models and methods are as diverse as the cultures. Postmodern expressions of faith offer multiple contextual options. Biblical principles and functions provide enormous possibilities and an unlimited number of choices in form. Methodology is fluid and flexible in a postmodern context. Even as Rick Warren said concerning the earlier CAMEO church, “They do not expect any program to meet everyone’s needs or appeal to everyone’s interest.”<sup>6</sup> The authentic expression of worship is more important than whether a style of worship meets human need or preference.
5. Incarnational ministry is more important than merely attractional methods and models. The church is on the move in the streets. The church relies on the Holy Spirit to raise-up indigenous leadership.<sup>7</sup> The attraction becomes Christ and authentic Christian community.
6. The urban centers of North America have become the new mission frontier for those planters, churches, and denominations interested in reaching postmodern cultures. Currently, most postmodern type churches are found in the urban centers. Church planters are moving into the city to stay. The postmodern church reconnects to the city centers and inner cities. Postmodern churches will focus on both the transformation of soul and society. The gospel preached in postmodernity will

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<sup>4</sup>Ed Stetzer, *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003), 143.

<sup>5</sup>Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 389-93.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>7</sup>This thesis is argued well in Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come* (Peabody, MA: Henderson Publications, Inc., 2003).

liberate from sin, social justice, and poverty.<sup>8</sup> The postmodern missional church exists to make the world a better place to live.<sup>9</sup>

7. Relationships matter. New churches and younger leaders make missions up close and personal. Making use of a relational and experiential economy, they connect and participate in missions. In this context, direct missions and societal missions will provide increased opportunities to embrace the Great Commission.

### The Bible and Theology

8. Doctrinal diversity on nonessential issues is valued and accepted for the greater good of cooperative Kingdom work.<sup>10</sup> Missional churches affirm biblical authority, but are not dogmatic where conservative theologians disagree. Among these evangelical fellowships, unity is essential in ministry and missions when reaching the unchurched and those from other faith traditions. In this emergent or resurgent church it is more important to be in agreement with the philosophy of missions statement than it is to agree with every minor point of its doctrinal statement.<sup>11</sup> However, it is common for the church to identify with evangelical confessions of faith and doctrinal statements of their convention concerning orthodoxy (This explains why I placed God and Missions before The Bible and Theology. The Bible is understood with no less authority, but it is a missionary document. Theology is a discipline within Christian mission).<sup>12</sup> Many Southern Baptist churches experiencing the missional resurgence will find common ground centered in an unapologetic commitment to a new philosophy of missions as well as a commitment to biblical, reformed theology.
9. A return to ancient mission history is evident in most of these churches. In postmodernity, a new interest in many ancient-future things is strong. Postmoderns have more in common with a pre-Christian culture than a modern church one. In a postmodern church it is not unusual to experience Gregorian chants, expressions of Celtic Christianity, and other ancient writings and practices.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 432-46.

<sup>9</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh, *Reaching a New Generation: Strategies for Tomorrow's Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 25-30.

<sup>10</sup> See Town's and Stetzer's *Perimeters of Light* for an attempt to address this diversity among conservative churches. Covenant and confessional cooperation is becoming significant among these networks and new associations.

<sup>11</sup> Warren, *Contemporary Approaches*, 4.

<sup>12</sup> McLaren, *a Generous Orthodoxy*, 107.

<sup>13</sup> For more on this renewal see George Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How*

## Ecclesiology

10. The church is “missionary by nature.” The church is the “pilgrim” church. The church is the people of God on mission. The church is sent and sending. Everyone is a missionary. Mission is not a function of the church, it is the purpose of the church. The church is “servant.”<sup>14</sup> Postmodern churches focus on being the people of God on mission with God.
11. Authenticity is a must in the transforming communities of postmodernity. In the postmodern missional church one finds an insistence on authenticity in practice. The focus is on the “real.” They expect real fellowship and community. Postmodern missional churches develop community around various groups within their congregations. Community is a key value for this intimate and transparent group dynamic. They are likely to “belong” before they believe or behave.
12. Cultural and indigenous forms are as important as the biblical functions of the church as a means of communicating the gospel. Worship, preaching, discipleship, fellowship, evangelism look different in postmodern communities, but they function the same. Postmodern missional churches create a serious atmosphere in their worship. However, missional churches are more visual, artsy, and participatory in worship and sermon presentations. They are more right brain than left. They are more narrative than expository in form. Storytelling is common. Ed Stetzer suggests a “new narrative exposition.”<sup>15</sup> The missional church committed to reach the Bohemian Creative relies more on art, music, literature, and drama to effectively communicate the message.
13. Denominational identity is important but it is transcended by a commitment to affiliate with like-minded networks and associations. These missional leaders will take Article 14 of the Baptist Faith and Message seriously (Cooperation). Though many postmodern missional churches connect with their denomination, they prefer not to use the name in their public identity. They believe they can be loyal to the nature and purpose of the denomination without the label. They are more likely to see denominational identity as a hindrance in evangelistic dialogue, but important in discipleship after the initial commitment to Christ. Southern Baptist churches will continue to emphasize the loyalty to the Bible and mission rather than a denominational brand.
14. Social cohesiveness is important. These new churches function more like families than organizations or corporations. They organically grow out of intentional relationships and incarnational ministries rather than by marketing techniques and

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*Christianity Can Reach the West Again* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000).

<sup>14</sup>Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 368-74.

<sup>15</sup>Stetzer, *Planting New Churches*, 145.

managerial skills. They see the church as a caring body, not a corporate business.

15. The place of ministry and church is not as important as the purpose and process. These churches are not convinced that the traditional church house is the best way to reach the unchurched. Incarnational ministries and congregations are more likely to be seen at the park, theater, or coffee house than under a steeple. They have been known to network in house or cell churches. The “meta-church” is finding better soil in postmodernity than in modernity. Southern Baptist churches will continue to look at alternative ways to work within the community context rather than from outside of the culture.

### Evangelism and Ministry

16. Salvation is holistic and comprehensive. The focus is on changed lives, homes, and communities. Rather than an emphasis on church membership and becoming good church members, the emphasis is on becoming a Christ follower and missionary in the world. These missional churches speak to the sense of purpose and meaning when confronting the lost. It includes both personal and social redemption. Likewise, salvation is for the “here and now” as well as “later.” Effective evangelism and ministry ushers in the kingdom of God as God’s reign over the city increases. Postmodern Bohemian Creative focused evangelism is a broader and more complete process for the individual as well as society.<sup>16</sup> The missional church loses the false dichotomy of evangelism and ministry noted in most modern churches.
17. Fluidity and flexible “systems” and “design” characterize these churches. The churches are innovative in their ministry. Less structured and programmatic, these churches flex to meet the felt needs of the congregational community.
18. Sensitivity and commitment to all ethnics and cultures are clearly embraced. The Bohemian Creative focused church is not defined by ethnicity. Missional churches clearly utilize the homogenous unit principle of church growth when doing initial evangelism, but quickly embrace multiple cultures to reach all people.
19. Apologetics are important in this context. However, Missional churches engage in apologetics differently. They are less dogmatic and more dialogical. Classical apologetics assume the need to be rational and reasonable. Postmoderns affirm mystery and paradox, while at the same time expressing experiential and propositional truth.
20. In modernity, everyone was a minister. In postmodern churches, everyone is a missionary. Missional churches affirm the ministry of the laity. Everyone is on mission. The dichotomy of clergy and laity is lost in the understanding of gifted

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 399.

community. Affirming leadership development and roles, the emergent church is less concerned about position and more concerned with servanthood.<sup>17</sup> This is not to suggest that the scripture does not have clearly defined roles of pastors and deacons.

The new missional church cannot rest until every culture and community has heard and seen the good news demonstrated in indigenous models and contextual methods so they can understand and respond to Christ. The eschatological vision of the apocalyptic dream foreseen by the Apostle John on the isle of Patmos continues to drive the missional church into an eternal future when all peoples of all cultures will worship the exalted Lamb of God and Lord of Glory (John 22). Until then, the church will always be challenged to contend for the faith, contextualize the gospel, and communicate the good news in diverse cultural forms providing the opportunity for Jesus to embed, impact, and transform every culture and community.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 470-72.

<sup>18</sup>Millirons, James H. "An Analysis of the Interface Between Cultural Creatives and Bohemians in Atlanta, Georgia and the Missiological Implications for Southern Baptists." D. Miss. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2006. Adapted from chapters 1, 7 and appendix 2.