

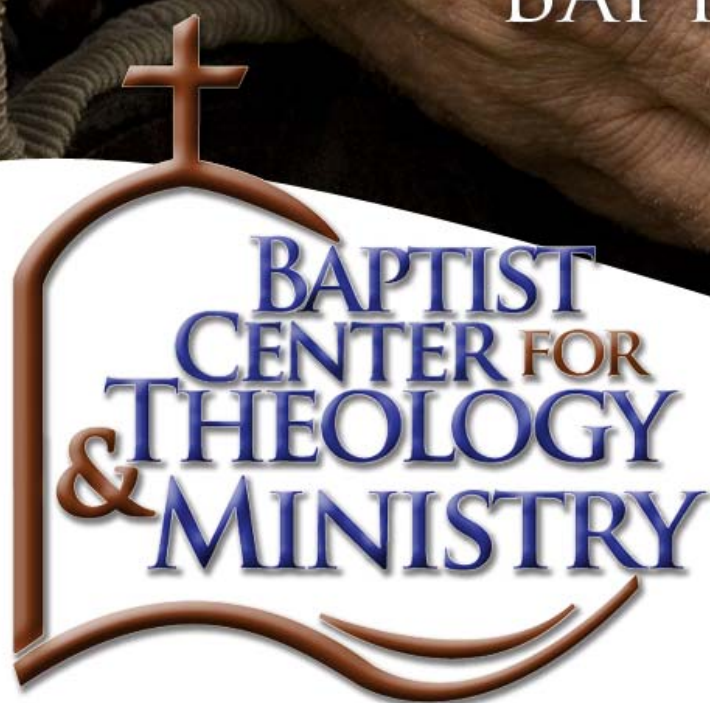
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BAPTISTS ON MISSION



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THE JOURNAL

FOR BAPTIST THEOLOGY & MINISTRY

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EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION: BAPTISTS ON MISSION

DR. STEVE W. LEMKE

The marching orders for missions and evangelism came not from a human organization, but from Jesus Christ Himself. Before His ascension into heaven, Jesus gave us the Great Commission: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20a, HCSB). However, sometimes the church has neglected this charge. Once while teaching a New Testament survey course at a Baptist college, one of my students mistakenly labeled this passage of Scripture as “the Great Omission.” As I was moving to mark the answer as incorrect, it struck me that in fact the student’s response might unfortunately be correct far too often in the life of the church.

From its inception in 1845, one of the primary *raison d’être* of the Southern Baptist Convention has been to organize to do missions and evangelism. The Charter of the SBC states that it is “being created for the purpose of eliciting, combining, and directing the energies of the Baptist denomination of Christians, for the propagation of the gospel.” The SBC Constitution likewise describes “the purpose of the Convention to provide a general organization for Baptists in the United States and its territories for the promotion of Christian missions at home and abroad”¹

Being *missional*² involves not only going “to the ends of the earth,” but also to our own equivalents of Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria for the early church (Acts 1:8, HCSB). An important part of the SBC’s focus on missions and evangelism has been giving careful attention to making the city of New Orleans an important *locus* for missions activity. At its first meeting in Augusta, Georgia in 1845, the newly formed convention instructed its Domestic Mission Board to focus on two primary activities: to reach Native Americans and “to direct its effective attention to aid the present effort to establish the Baptist cause in the city of New Orleans.”³

This same passion for missions in New Orleans led to the creation of Baptist Bible Institute in 1917, which we now know as New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. In an

¹SBC *Charter and Constitution, 2007 Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention*, 4.

²The term “missional” was coined or popularized by Baptist Center fellow Ed Stetzer in works such as Ed Stezer and David Putman, *Breaking the Missional Code: Your Church Can Become a Missionary in Your Community* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006); and Ed Stetzer, “The Missional Nature of the Church and the Future of Southern Baptist Convention Churches, in *The Mission of Today’s Church*, ed. R. Stanton Norman (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2007).

³*Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention*, 1845, 15.

editorial in the Mississippi *Baptist Record*, the paper's editor P. I. Lipsey stated the need for a Southern Baptist seminary to be planted in New Orleans:

There is . . . room for and need of just what a seminary can do in the district surrounding the city of New Orleans. Baptists have attempted to assault that stronghold of Satan with paper balls. Hitherto we have not made much impression on it; and are not now working in any adequate way. . . . A seminary there would plant the Baptist cause in this city in a way that would immediately command the attention and the respect of all. It would be planting the siege guns at the enemies' gates. It would rally the Baptists and put heart into them and equip them for their work as nothing else could. This is missionary territory in every direction from the city. Louisiana is probably the most needy mission field in the Southern Baptist Convention⁴

Southern Baptists are committed to fulfilling the Great Commission in our own cities, states, regions, nation, and around the world internationally. The primary issue is thus not about whether or not Southern Baptists are committed to missions and evangelism, but the methodological question of how Southern Baptists can accomplish missions and evangelism most effectively. Southern Baptists have been blessed through the mechanism of the Cooperative Program, which provides consistent funding and support for over 5,000 missionaries and church planters in the United States, and another 5,000 missionaries internationally. The missionaries do not have to go through the expensive and time-consuming process of raising their own support in local churches. The Cooperative Program, supplemented by the state mission offerings within state conventions, the Annie Armstrong Offering for missions in North America, and the Lottie Moon Offering for international missions, provide a consistent and reliable funding stream for our missions efforts.

The question of what the most effective means God would have us use to reach the world with the gospel, however, is subject to debate. Scholars in the discipline of Missiology weigh the advantages and disadvantages of various methodologies, and propose approaches which they deem best able to optimize resources and maximize impact for the gospel. Of course, the power of God transcends any human methodology. God could use simple fishermen, "unlearned and ignorant men" (Acts 4:13, KJV) to accomplish His work. However, a prepared vessel such as the Apostle Paul was used to accomplish even greater things. There is no premium on bad methodology in sharing the gospel. It is incumbent on those who take the Great Commission seriously to utilize the most effective means to accomplish the propagation of the gospel.

This issue of the *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* focuses on "Baptists on Mission," offering various perspectives on the most effective Missiological methodologies to accomplish the Lord's work. In Spring 2005, the Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry sponsored a conference on "The Mission of Today's Church." Some of the papers delivered at that conference were printed in *The Mission of Today's Church*, edited by Stan Norman and published by Broadman and Holman in 2007. The first four articles in this issue of the *Journal* were also originally presented at that conference, and we felt they were of such significance that our readers would appreciate our sharing them. This issue has six articles

⁴ J. I. Lipsey, editorial in the Mississippi *Baptist Record* (November 26, 1914), 4.

addressing missiology in North America, and six addressing missiological approaches in an international setting.

The first section deals with Baptist missions in North America. Three of these articles address the interrelationship of Baptist ecclesiology and missiology. Dr. Phil Roberts, President of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, describes the early days of Baptist missions in “*Ad Fontes* Baptists: Continuity and Change in Early Baptist Perceptions on the Church and Its Mission.” Dr. John S. Hammett, Professor of Systematic Theology at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, relates ecclesiology and missiology in an article entitled “The Mission of the Church as the Mark of the Church.” Continuing this theme, Dr. Roderick Durst, Professor of Historical Theology at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, contributes “The Emerging Missional Churches of the West: Form or Norm for Baptist Ecclesiology?” The *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* expresses appreciation to *The South African Baptist Journal of Theology* for permission to publish this article, a slightly revised version of which was published under the title, “Ecclesiology as Stewardship of the Gospel of Grace” (vol. 16, 2007). David Whitlock, Mick Arnold, and R. Barry Ellis offer “An Examination of Tentmaker Ministers in Missouri: Challenges and Opportunities.” At the time of the writing of the article, all three of these men served on the faculty of Southwest Baptist University in Missouri: Dr. David Whitlock as Associate Professor of Business, Associate Provost, and Dean of the College of Business; Dr. Mick Arnold as Professor of Educational Administration; and Dr. R. Barry Ellis as Professor of Business Administration. Dr. Ellis now serves as Associate Professor of Finance at the University of Central Oklahoma. The next article is authored by Dr. Jack Allen, a church planter who serves as the Nehemiah Professor of Church Planting and Director of the Day Center for Church Planting at NOBTS. Allen’s article connects the character of the church planter with effectiveness in church planting in “The Way of the Disciple in Church Planting.” Ecclesiology is a key doctrine for North American church planting, and the North American Mission Board (NAMB) statement on ecclesiological guidelines for church planting is included at the end of the domestic missions section. The background for this statement was developed by our Baptist Center founder, Dr. Stan Norman, vetted by the Deans of the six SBC seminaries, and approved by NAMB.

The second section of this issue focuses on missiological approaches to international missions. It begins with the International Mission Board statement on ecclesiology relating to international missions, which was crafted by IMB after the approval of the NAMB statement on ecclesiology. It is interesting to compare the NAMB and IMB statements side by side. Two of the articles in this section examine the viability of the practice of utilizing short-term missionaries to supplement the work of career missionaries on the field. Dr. Stan May, a former IMB missionary to Zimbabwe who now serves as Associate Professor of Missions and Chairman of the Missions Department at Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, contributes an article on “The Priority of Incarnational Missions: Or ‘Is The Tail of Volunteerism Wagging the Dog?’” Likewise, Bob Garrett, a former IMB missionary to Argentina who currently serves as Professor of Missions at Dallas Baptist University, suggests guidelines for using short-term missions groups in “Towards Best Practice in Short Term Missions Trips.” Another significant tool in contemporary missiology is the use of chronological Bible storying. Dr. Grant Lovejoy, formerly a faculty member at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, now serves as Director of Orality Studies at the IMB. He has taught chronological Bible storying in over 20 countries, and has been a

keynote speaker in international conferences orality. Lovejoy contributes an article entitled “The Extent of Orality,” which describes this approach to missiology. This article was originally published in *Dharma Deepika*, a journal on theology and missions in India, and we express our appreciation to the journal for allowing us to share this article with an American audience. The last two articles address ministry to persons in Buddhist and Islamic settings. Dr. Philip Pinckard is a former Southern Baptist missionary to Macau who serves as Professor of Missions, occupying the Owen Cooper Chair of Global Missions, and as Director of the Global Missions Center at NOBTS. He addresses a key issue confronting missiology—contextualization. In his article, Pinckard builds the case that “The Truth is Contextualization Can Lead to Syncretism: Applying Muslim Background Believers Contextualization Concerns to Ancestor Worship and Buddhist Background Believers in a Chinese Culture.” The final article in the international missions section is authored by Dr. Michael Edens, Associate Dean of Graduate Studies at NOBTS and Professor of Theology and Islamic Studies. A veteran missionary in the Middle East, Edens contributes a helpful essay on “Addressing Islamic Teachings about Christianity.”

We are happy with this issue to be publishing book reviews again in the *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry*. I am grateful to three NOBTS faculty members who have agreed to serve as book review editors for various disciplinary fields: Dr. Dennis Phelps in ministry studies, Dr. Archie England in biblical studies, and Dr. Page Brooks in theological and historical studies. We encourage our readers to submit book review proposals to these gentlemen for publication in the *Journal*.

For our next issue, the *Journal* will be focusing on theological issues of concern to Baptists. Many of the articles in this upcoming issue will flow from two recent Baptist Center conferences – “Southern Baptists and Calvinism” in February 2007, featuring a paper by Steve Lemke; and “The Emerging Church, the Emergent Church, and the Faith Once Delivered to the Saints,” in April 2008 featuring a paper by Ed Stetzer.

Speaking of Calvinism in the SBC, the Baptist Center is also pleased to announce that we are co-sponsoring with Jerry Vines Ministries the John 3:16 Conference at First Baptist Church of Woodstock, Georgia, on November 6-7, 2008. The conference will provide a biblical and theological assessment of five-point Calvinism. Jerry Vines and Charles Stanley will preach sermons on the John 3:16 text, and then Southern Baptist scholars will address the five points often associated with Calvinistic theology – Paige Patterson on total depravity, Richard Land on unconditional election, David Allen on limited atonement, Steve Lemke on irresistible grace, and Ken Keathley on perseverance of the saints.

Our hope is that the essays in this issue on Baptists on Mission will help further and sharpen the discussion of missiological approaches utilized to reach our world for Christ. We are already blessed as Southern Baptists with the most effective missions team in the world. May God bless us in our efforts to fulfill the Lord’s Great Commission to us.

In Christ,

Steve W. Lemke

Acting Editor and Director of the Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry

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March 13-22
2009

NEW ORLEANS
BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

SECTION 1

NORTH AMERICAN MISSIONS
& CHURCH PLANTING

“BUT YE SHALL RECEIVE POWER... AND YE SHALL
BE MY WITNESSES UNTO ME BOTH IN
JERUSALEM, AND IN ALL JUDEA...”

ACTS 1:8

AD FONTES BAPTISTS? CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN EARLY BAPTIST PERCEPTIONS ON THE CHURCH AND ITS MISSION¹

R. PHILIP ROBERTS²

PRESIDENT, MIDWESTERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Southern Baptists, or even Baptists generally, are known as a missions people. A people committed to evangelism, the sharing of the Gospel and the support of reaching the whole world with the truth of the Gospel. It could easily be argued and understood that this priority is an axiom of Baptist life and practice. And amazingly wherever one might look on the continuum of Baptist theology from the right to the left, the same principle, it seems, is espoused. Even Baptists of the most moderate bearing would likely endorse publicly the priority of evangelizing, realizing that to do less would be a form of financial and public relations suicide. Scan a list of Baptist distinctive produced by just about anyone and you won't have to look far to see evangelism as a principle characteristic of Baptist life, thought and practice.

But has this position always been the case for Baptists? Was there a time or place when evangelism, while important as it would be for any believers' church movement, was not the given that it is today. It is my position that evangelism, though seminal in the thinking of many Baptists, was not a principle of priority and that missions was missing from the "To Do" lists of many congregations for much of the first century of Baptist existence. Mainly I am referencing the 1600's and much of the 1700's. Calvinism and hyper-Calvinism, evidenced particularly among the element known as Particular Baptists, are most often to blame for the lack or decline of Gospel fervor in this period. Doubtlessly hyper-Calvinism contributed to missions malaise but there were other and perhaps even more fundamental ecclesio-theological factors at play during that era. The results of the position of this presentation are that the 18th century Awakenings, particularly in England, provided the fundamental experience necessary for Baptists to discover the priority of missions.

¹The contents of this paper are based on Dr. Roberts' doctoral dissertation, *Continuity and Change: London Calvinistic Baptists and The Evangelical Revival 1760-1820*, done at the Free University of Amsterdam and completed in 1989. The book is published by Richard Owen Roberts, Publishers, Wheaton Illinois, 1989. Chapters are included in it on interdenominational relations, church growth, theology, Baptist societies, etc. The research done in it supports the positions of this paper.

²In addition to his scholarship and service in SBC life, Dr. Roberts has spent a lifetime dedicated to missions—North American and international. Prior to his appointment at Midwestern, Dr. Roberts served a seven-year tenure with the North American Mission Board. Dr. Roberts has pastored several international churches in England, Germany and Belgium. Roberts taught evangelism and discipleship for the Evangelical Theological Faculty in Belgium with continued ties to the school; he served as dean of theology for the Institute of Biblical Studies in Oradea, Romania and served as dean of theology at International Academy of Modern Knowledge in Obninsk, Russia.

Whether one accepts the Separatist-Puritan or Anabaptist theories of Baptist roots and foundations, it can be clearly seen that the earlier Baptists were anxious and eager to set the record straight on the nature and practice of the New Testament Church. *Ecclesia Semper Reformanda* was the watch word as churches sought to find the pattern which was to fit Christ's will and purpose for discipline, order and polity. Evangelism - sharing the Gospel - always, to some degree, bubbled under the surface, however, of how a New Testament Church ought to look. This dynamic is evident, for instance, in the 1677-89 London Confession, better known as the Second London Confession. Following the Westminster Confession in their attempt to prove their theological acceptability, London Baptists none the less made significant alterations to its precursor. The Baptists, among other changes, removed the statement on double predestination and included an article entitled "The Gospel," in which they advocated evangelistic preaching. But other challenges developed.

The dawning of the 18th century introduced a period believed and espoused to be an era marked by the dominance of hyper- or high Calvinism, notably via the influence of London pastors John Brine (1703-1765) and John Gill (1697-1771). Five-point or TULIP soteriology was not the issue at this point. The Second London Confession had fully embraced the Dutch flower.

Rather Pastors Gill and Brine took Calvinism further and additionally taught the tenet of eternal justification. This notion postulated the view that God from all eternity had justified the elect, based on their predestination to salvation, even before their conversion. It was an interesting bit of Scriptural inference at best, but lent itself to solidify Calvinistic soteriology. While not all English and Baptists supported Gill and Brine's stricter Calvinistic theology, almost all of them would have supported a strict view of church order that would fly in the face of the revival fervor and evangelistic zeal evidenced by the burgeoning awakening under the leadership of John Wesley, George Whitfield and many others. It was Baptist ecclesiology in addition to some of their soteriology that proved resistant to evangelistic enthusiasm.

Why or how did ecclesiology play a role in this development? First of all, remember that the revival was generally led by Non-Nonconformists or Anglicans. The personalities of George Whitefield, John and Charles Wesley, Howel Harris and many others, many of whom were Anglicans, many of whom were non-non Conformists (Moravians, in some instances, as in the case of Count Zinzendorf), were all at the vanguard of renewal. Baptist John Gill's book, *The Dissenters' Reasons for Separating from the Church of England*, 1760, which by 1839 had gone through five editions, argued extensively that the Anglican Church was illegitimate and owed its existence "by law established, man's not God's."

Additionally in the most widely read Baptist systematic theology of the period, Gill's *Body of Divinity*, it was argued adamantly that a New Testament Church was one where "the Laws of Christ" were observed - whose members, that is, were regenerate or/and their profession of faith were voiced, followed by baptism by immersion. They were received in the fellowship therefore, required to participate regularly in the Lord's Supper and worship and subjected themselves to all forms of church order and discipline under the leadership of a local church pastor and/or its elders. All of these obligations were taken extremely seriously. Later in the 18th century when evangelical missionary societies would emerge, the

pre-revival traditionalists, that is those who resisted revival, argued against these societies from the standpoint that they militated against the primacy of the church and its ordinances.

London Baptist Pastor, Benjamin Wallin, 1711-1782, considered it a travesty when, “a voluntary society of Christians, cemented by a few bylaws and inventions of their own and destitute of the special ordinances of Christ has equal authority with a church.”³ While the preaching of George Whitefield has been credited with the survival and eventual resurgence of the Baptist Movement, per Baptist pastor and historian, Joseph Iviney, nonetheless Whitefield, in his earlier days, with one or two exceptions, was resisted by London Baptist pastors. Baptist leaders earliest perception of Whitefield was that he was an “enthusiast” or a radical religionist who would disrupt and confuse the proper practice of church. His style of preaching was likely to substitute “the effects of mere passion or real religion,” while their “kindling into rapture,” “floods of tears” and “limbs trembling” had been produced only by the “loud voice and violent gesture” of an evangelist.⁴ By the way, the office of the evangelist was not even considered legitimate by pre-revivalists. It was considered as already having passed from the scene of importance and relevance at the end of the New Testament era.

Revival converts came to the false conclusion that the hearer believes that his “conversion is considered as instantaneous.” Baptist pastor, Samuel Stennett continued “that such an experience produces no real proof, but only the gay (his word, not mine) and splendid appearance of an external confession.”⁵ True conversion, pre-revival traditionalists believed, must take place only over time following the long process of the conviction of sin, dealing with bouts of uncertainty before actual faith and the reception of the assurance of salvation. Generally it was thought salvation would happen in the context of a local church and its worship. The catalyst would be the systematic expositional preaching of a pastor and would be marked by a gradual grasping of the essentials of the faith - a feeling of one’s own sinful condition, of their need for the Savior and of their actual embrasure of him as their Savior. “Light, vain, enthusiastic persons” it was sure “are strangers to such a process.”⁶ Cool, not hot, conversions, were the order of the day in pre-revival Baptist circles.

In the opinion of these pre-revival traditionalists, the old dissenters, the church should grow quietly and steadily by the gradual influence of Christian church worship, the preaching of the pastor, of the development of reasoned belief, teaching and the influences of a Christian society or church on the individual and not by “a sudden raid of evangelism” to quote a pre-revival traditionalist pastor.

Again, Benjamin Walin argued it was the pastor’s duty to seek the increase of the flock, but not “by the opening of the door of the fold beyond the limits prescribed or to any

³ Benjamin Wallin, *The Redeemer’s Charge Against His Declining Churches*, 1748, 59.

⁴ See *Continuity and Change*, 75 for the full quote of Baptist pastor Samuel Stennett.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ A quote of Samuel Stennett – see *Continuity and Change*, 76.

who are unmeet for the communion of the saints nor by giving countenance to weak and unstable professors, converts” particularly revival converts.⁷ Consequently, disciplinary action was taken against Baptists who exposed themselves to revival influence as Baptist church minutes of the time attest. The church at Prescott’s Street in 1742 warned five members against “eating bread and drinking water in a religious manner at a love feast.” Complaints were made against the church’s narrowness and a Sister Cheffield protested that “if she must forego her place in the tabernacle, (George Whitefield’s tabernacle where he preached regularly in London) or with us, she would leave us.” The Maze Pond Church called the desire of a Sister Fuller in 1742 to join the society of The Moravians an “evil step”. When the Devonshire Square Church called John Stephens as pastor in 1750, Stephens, being a former Calvinist Methodist itinerate, the Baptist Board, i.e. the London fraternity of Particular Baptist preachers, at first refused to receive him “relating to Mr. Stephens being publicly concerned at the tabernacle,” Whitefield’s tabernacle. Only after affirming “his total separation from the Methodist was he admitted.” Quoting a pre-revivalist traditionalist, a Baptist pastor stated, “...no Disorder is more prejudice to the welfare of Zion nor, indeed, to themselves, than that of a willful and allowed omission of Attendance in the Appointed Assemblies of the Churches to which they belonged.”⁸

Such an emphasis led to a later critic commenting “the evil I dreaded is *this* less while we are seeking to honor Christ by the conversion of men abroad we shall dishonor him by growing relax in the discipline or order of his churches at home.” Another stated, “There never was a season (apparently, looking on this point in time, about 1760) at least since the Reformation where incorruption of doctrine was more artful, violently and generally introduced into the churches than at this moment.” One further chronicle, of the age said, “The Lord’s day is profaned by the sale of tickets, hymn books, sermons and other religious publications. The appearance of evangelical societies rivaling the churches, the numerous societies that have been of late years have produced an unfavorable impression upon the ministerial character, pastoral duties are now out of fashion and the emergence of the overseas missionary enterprise, the immense sums that have been consumed in equipping missionaries to the South Seas would have civilized all of the inhabitants in the vast church of St. Gile’s.”⁹

So how did matters change? What was it that happened among London Baptists Calvinistic churches that changed the perspective of Baptist leaders? In large part, it occurred with the conversion of young revival converts who entered London churches and who brought with them, gradually in a temperate fashion, the spirit of the evangelical revival and of a forthright emphasis on evangelism and missions.

⁷Ibid., 64. This a quote from Wallin published in 1769.

⁸Ibid., 60.

⁹Ibid., 67.

All of the process cannot be addressed here. Neither can the chronicle of events be rehearsed, but a sweeping review is possible.

By 1760 the evangelical revival had begun to influence London Calvinistic Baptists in a dramatic fashion. The impact of the Awakening for the most part however, was subtle, as many of the revival's converts became first members and then often pastors of their own churches. The Baptist doctrine of the believers church or of a regenerate church membership allowed for the newly evangelized to enter the fellowship of Baptist churches and to become their leaders, to preach the Word so that by 1760 at least two London Baptist churches, Devonshire Square and the church at Eagle Street, had revival converts as pastors. Always, by the way, it seems with one exception, the converts of George Whitefield were chosen as pastors of these Particular Baptist churches. Most of the new leaders produced by the revival were first-generation Baptists, not the sons or grandsons of Baptists or Baptist pastors. They had left Anglican, Congregational or secular backgrounds and had become Baptists out of a genuine conviction that believers' baptism by immersion was scriptural. They also came mainly to embrace Calvinistic convictions. This transition occurred, ordering the course of their conversions, as they found themselves most comfortable, theologically, in the fellowship of orthodox-Calvinistic dissenters. From all contemporary appearances, it might seem that there was an unbroken continuum in theology and practice between them and their old dissenting predecessors. As history has shown, however, this was not the case. The revival converts affected a crucial change in values in terms of theology and ministry from that of their forerunners, the pre-revival traditionalists or the "Old Dissenters", as they were called. These revival converts, and their advocates, brought with them, along with their Baptist convictions, a clear appreciation for and an affinity with the Evangelical Awakening, plus a commitment to define evangelism as a priority in the life of the church if not, in some cases, the priority.

This dynamic would slowly introduce distinct changes among the churches while maintaining the appearance of continuity with Baptist tradition. Very interestingly in this area, you will find four types of pastors. One, as has been delineated, is the old dissenting pre-revival traditionalists who would be absolutely opposed to revival influence. Only two pastors, it seems made the transition from being an Old Dissenting pastor to embracing the revival.

The second category of preacher or pastor might be labeled the "transitionalist." One of them was Andrew Gifford, who actually began as a pre-revival traditionalist of sorts, but because of some previous illconduct on his part, was dismissed from the London Baptist Board. Consequently Gifford was befriended by George Whitefield personally and is the only pastor then to advocate revival influence.

The third category of pastor were revival converts themselves. They became members of churches, attended experience meetings, which were similar events in Baptist churches like John Wesley would have had in his movement, became lay preachers, exhorters and occasionally taught from the Word and then were often commissioned and ordained as pastors.

The fourth category throughout the 18th century were the successors of these revival converts, who followed in their interest and emphasis. This dynamic but often subtle

change in church life contrasted sharply with the concerns of their immediate pre-revival predecessors who would emphasize above evangelism and sometimes it seems to the exclusion of it, the defense and maintenance of the church and its doctrine. While church order and discipline were not jettisoned by the evangelicals, they were only seemingly equal in priority to the task of propagating the Gospel. The formal retention of strict church discipline and five-point Calvinism throughout much of the 19th century continued to leave the appearance of a much undisturbed continuum. Additionally, the evangelicals themselves, except for their castigation of high Calvinism, seem for the most part to have been oblivious to the substantial alteration of priorities.

In many senses of the word, the evangelical revival may be viewed as having rekindled some of the initial fervor of the early Baptists. A renewal of experiential religion, fervent preaching, itinerant evangelism as well as consequential church expansion mark both the middle 17th century Calvinistic Baptists and their new evangelical denominational brethren a century or more later. It would be unwise, however, to assume that there were no differences. The history of the denomination demonstrates that alterations occurred clearly in the 18th century. The shift among revival converts and their leaders to bring evangelism to the place of primary concern or the key priority, or at least an equal priority with the maintenance of proper Baptist church order, contributed to doctrinal and ecclesiological shifts. This may have contributed to further alterations within the denomination in the century that followed. And some of those results, I might add, we live with today.

In the course of 1760-1820 the shift in religious perspectives among Baptist pastors were significant. They included an appreciation of non-Baptist revivals – seen clearly in a tolerance of attendance at revivalists meetings and the early 19th century “declaration of George Whitefield by Joseph Iviney as savior of the Baptist movement.”¹⁰

These changes also included a renewed emphasis on experiential revivalistic lay involvement including lay preaching and teaching. As one looks through the church minute books for this era, it becomes clear that during the first half of the century, only the pastor taught and led in church services. As you move through the second half of the century revival converts and converts becoming pastors and preaching in Baptist churches, with lay preaching, lay exhorting - allowing a person to give forth their experience in a church service - were often included. These also seemingly developed a less autocratic form of leadership by the pastors. A new but limited involvement with interdenominational missions and societies ensued, and one tends to discover Baptists being a part of many of these missionary societies and organizations, some Baptist became societal leaders. Generally, however Baptists eschewed any society that had formal Anglican representation, from which Baptists would always withdraw.¹¹

The emergence of evangelistic agencies within the denomination, including the Particular Baptist Missionary Society, the introduction and increase of open communion among the churches, a decline in the presence of strict or high Calvinism, a renewed

¹⁰Ibid., 94.

¹¹ *Continuity and Change*, chapter 7.

denominational self-confidence along with new growth and increase of and membership among the churches, for instance, also marked the period. Up until the time between 1700 to 1760, there were approximately only 15 Baptist churches in London. Only two new churches were started and were actually the products of church splits. But from 1750-1760 to 1820 Baptist churches expanded to approximately 50 to 60 in number in the metropolitan area. All of these changes occurred in a large measure without major division within the denomination or the local London fraternity of churches. They also occurred in the midst of opposition to revival, especially in the period of 1760-1770.

Parallel to these events, there also had developed within London by 1800 the seed of what would later become the Strict and Particular Baptist denomination which held to a stricter Calvinism and closed communion. As far as the Calvinistic Baptists themselves were concerned, in spite of initial inhibitions, they developed into a denomination willing to change and so prepared to reap the fruits of the evangelical revival. With a renewed emphasis on individual conversion, which the revival precipitated, the ideal of a believer's church and baptism fitted most naturally. A movement whose churches were already governed congregationally was able to allow lay initiative in the establishment of education and mission agencies as well in future leadership in the churches. With a generation of converts awakened and often uncomfortable in a more structured, hierarchical environment, Baptist congregations frequently provided a welcome home. Many of the Baptist churches were populated by people who were saved in revival circles, Whitefield's Tabernacle, open air preaching, and experience meetings and found themselves attending Baptist churches.

Consequently, London Calvinistic Baptists in the period 1760 to 1820 reaffirmed much that was intrinsic to their historical self-understanding. Their concern for church discipline, their perception of the believers' church and baptism as well as in large measure their own theology did not radically alter. They had indeed been put on the offensive, however, by the revival. Much of their earlier defensiveness had been lost. Not only were they more aligned with much of their original spirit, if not thought, but missionary evangelistic activity developed among them to a degree not previously known. They were now poised, so it seems, to play a significant part in the missionary enterprise that followed. Simultaneously, a shift in priorities and self identity would raise many new questions for them in the centuries ahead.

What lessons emerge from this study? First, we can learn how easily and subtly we can be influenced by the spirit of the age in which we live, even in the church and sometimes because we're in it. In this case the myopic view and vision of many of the early 18th century Baptists, it might be argued, was influenced by the decline of the church generally, the rise of Deism in those periods of the late 1600s and early 1700s and by what helped to precipitate a defensive reaction against it. As one historian expressed it, Dissenting churches were considered "gardens walled around," set off from the world itself.

Second, we can learn the importance of maintaining Biblical values. Which should be the priority - church order and discipline and the healthy life of congregational fellowship or evangelism? Should discipline be juxtaposed to missions? In fact, they should be held in balance. Often, it seems, in Baptist life that evangelism is offered as a panacea for all church ills. But is this the biblical perspective? Or is the challenge of church life an attempt to balance the two as much of the New Testament reveals?

Thirdly, these issues teach us the value of being a Baptist, particularly in changing times. The Baptist movement, I think, evidences to us that it often is self-correcting. Why? Number one, we don't have a centralized authority. No one can tell us this is the way, talking in terms of a human authority who has all the answers for all the problems and issues that we face. Secondly, congregational order, the influence of a regenerate laity helping to govern and guide the church, along with "preaching brethren" – the pastors, all who should be submitted to biblical authority provides for a delicate balance. When we realize, however, that like snowflakes, no two Baptist churches are alike, but that every church under the leadership of the Holy Spirit is to follow Christ in obedience to His Word and commission, we all should have great hope.

THE EMERGING MISSIONAL CHURCHES OF THE WEST: FORM OR NORM FOR BAPTIST ECCLESIOLOGY?¹

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TWO ASSUMPTIONS

First, my presentation will focus more on **the emerging churches** of the mission as opposed to **the mission of** today's churches. If missiology in any way begets ecclesiology, then it is valuable to look at the churches that our mission is begetting. My second assumption relates to the decision to state that mission in Baptist terms. I am using the simple church covenant out of which immersion of believers was recovered as the normative practice amongst what has come to be called Particular Baptists in England in the seventeenth century. Returning to England in 1609, Henry Jacob held many meetings with people known for their "Godliness and Learning." With these people, he weighed the consequences of following God's call to form a community of faith committed to following closely the ways of Christ according to the Scriptures. Finally, Jacob determined that, "I am 'willing to adventure' myself for this Kingdom for Christ's sake."² According to the Jessey Records, the group gathered by Jacob was equally convinced that they should covenant together as a church. They joined hands together and made a circle. Beginning with Jacob, they each made a profession of faith and repentance. Some people spoke longer and others were briefer. Then they covenanted together "to walk in all God's ways as he had made known or should make known to them."³ This believers covenant together to follow Jesus on adventures in obedience to the plain sense of the Scriptures no matter the trouble is the basic understanding of Baptist church used in this paper.

¹The *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* expresses appreciation to *The South African Baptist Journal of Theology* for permission to publish this article, a slightly revised version of which was published under the title, "Ecclesiology as Stewardship of the Gospel of Grace" (vol. 16, 2007).

²*The Records of the Ancient Congregation* [the Jessey Records]; *A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage*, H. Leon McBeth, ed., 22. The document itself purports to be from a manuscript from Henry Jessup. William H. Brackney in his editorial remarks in *Baptist Life and Thought: A Source Book*, rev. ed. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1998), 29, identifies this document as being from Benjamin Stinton, "A repository of Diverse Historical Matters relating to English Anti-pedobaptists, Collected from Original Papers or Faithful Extracts," 1712, an unpublished manuscript, Angus Library, Regents Park College, Oxford.

³*Ibid.*, 23.

By emerging churches, I mean to develop a Typology of the forms of Baptist ecclesiology, which have emerged and are now emerging in the western US and are seeking to affiliate with local Baptist associations and conventions through the credentials committees of those entities. I assert that congregational maturity can to some degree be measured by the capacity of a local gathered group of believers to self-identify as a church **and** to take the additional step of presenting itself as such to a recognized body of Baptist churches. I also am very interested in the capacity of Baptist ecclesiology, and the local interpretation of that ecclesiology and polity, to receive or reject new forms of church as vital or viral representations of the Baptist movement.⁴

DEFINITIONS

1. By **“missional church”** I mean the growing ethos and pathos amongst the emerging Baptist churches of the western US that their church is both *sent and sending*. This vision of the missional church is infused by the Johannine version of the Great Commission, “As the Father has sent me into the world, so send I you.” [John 20:21] These churches seek fulfillment of a context specific vision to live and speak the gospel to the peoples of that context. Equally, these churches often are open to missional restructure of staff and membership by sending out gospel mission teams and church planting teams, many with one-way tickets.⁵ This shift means that the leadership and membership of these churches have begun to think of mission not as a department of the church or even merely as something done. Rather these people think of mission more as who they are. They define themselves as mission. These churches seek to be what Reggie McNeal describes as the “church that only God can get credit for.”⁶ McNeal asserts that, “The first reformation was about freeing church. The new Reformation is about freeing God's people from the church (the institution)... [as] we turn members into missionaries.” In McNeal's inimitable style, he indicts the non-missional churches with, “We have failed to call people out to their true potential as God's priests *in the world*.” [Italics are McNeal's.]⁷ **As will be explored in the following research, this ruthless self-definition of missional is testing the capacity of Baptist ecclesiology and polity to be the missional vehicle for rapid multiplication of indigenous, self-governing, self-reproducing communities of faith.**

⁴See Durst's paper presented at the first conference, “To answer or not to answer: A Case Study on the Emergence of the Stone-Campbell Movement amongst the Baptist Churches of Kentucky in the 1820s.”

⁵See Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: a Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), and also David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991).

⁶Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future Church: Six Tough Questions for the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 23.

⁷*Ibid.*, 43, 48ff.

In the significant book *The Missional Church* (1998), edited by Darrel Guder, the historical development of the understanding of the church moved according to South African missiologist David Bosch for the *place where* to *the people who*.⁸ “The church exists as a community, servant, and message of the reign of God in the midst of other kingdoms, communities, and powers that attempt to shape our understanding of reality.”⁹ Thinkers such as David Bosch, Leslie Newbigin and Vincent Donovan “... rather than seeing missiology as a study within theology, theology is actually a discipline within Christian mission. Theology is the church on a mission reflecting on its mission, its identity, and its meaning.” In a chapter entitled “Why I am missional,” emergent theologian Brian McLaren refines the purpose of the church as “To be and make disciples of Jesus Christ in authentic community for the good of the world.”¹⁰ McLaren seeks to be missional by obeying the “outward thrust of Christianity from me to my Neighbour to stranger to enemy to all tribes and nations of the earth.”¹¹ For the emerging missional churches of the west, the gospel is to be lived and spoken that people might receive and enter the kingdom and to still love and serve those who do not receive and enter. In other words the struggle is to think kingdom and not merely the church.

By “**emerging churches**,” I do not mean the “emerging church movement,” which is a phenomenon of the postmodern exploration of incorporation of the sensual and the so-called ancient-future into worship.¹² I do not here mean to be affirming or critical of that movement. By emerging, I mean the notion that there is a traceable, analyzable development amongst newer churches in the west that has significance for those wishing to be faithful to the movements of the Spirit called Baptists.

By “**Baptist ecclesiology**,” I mean both the little “b” Baptist in the sense of James McClendon's believers church operating out of the plain sense of the Scriptures and the classical Baptist litmus described by Mark Dever as where the gospel is rightly preached and taught, the ordinances of are rightly practiced, and mutual admonition is consistently practiced.¹³ It is striking that all three of these marks of the church are found among the

⁸Darrel Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 80; Brian McLaren in *A Generous Orthodoxy*, (El Cajon, CA: Youth Specialties, 2004), 105, attributes the popularizing of the term *missional church* to the Guder book.

⁹McLaren, 110. In this chapter entitled “Missional Witness,” the church is seen as apostle to the world.

¹⁰Ibid., 107. McLaren recalls a mentors advocacy “to remember, in a pluralistic world, a religion is valued based on the benefits it brings to its nonadherents;” *ibid.*, 111.

¹¹Ibid., 105, 110.

¹²See “The Emergent Mystique,” *Christianity Today*, Nov. 2004, vol. 48, No. 11: 36ff.

twelve empirical indicators of the missional church listed by Eddie Gibbs in *ChurchNext*.¹⁴ With these preliminary clarifications, a Typology of the types of Baptist missional churches can be developed.

A TYPOLOGY OF EMERGING BAPTIST MISSIONAL CHURCHES

Many of us are indebted to the incipient Typology of early eighteenth century American Baptist churches as presented in the lectures and later text of Leon McBeth.¹⁵ His sociological dichotomy of emerging Baptist churches was named as the **Charleston (Regular Baptists)** and the **Sandy Creek (Separate Baptists) models**. While doctrine amongst the models was similarly Calvinistic with the Sandy Creek model shifting to a modified Calvinism which McBeth interpreted as enabling the Sandy Creek churches emphasis on evangelistic practices such as the public invitation to express ones faith. In Charleston churches worship had educated leadership as the norm and orderly services of worship as befitting to a more developed township population. The Sandy Creek churches emphasized the call to ministry over against trained competence and enjoyed ardor over order in their worship as befitted the early American frontier mindset.

I would suggest that emerging or at least thriving in the Western U.S. are two immigrant versions of these eastern models: a **Contemporary Charleston model** and a **High Tech Sandy Creek model**. Expository preaching would be welcome in both models' churches, although it would be vastly more prevalent in the High Tech Sandy Creek Model church, as would evangelistic public invitations. Both models exhibit significant traditional graded music and education programs, but the Contemporary Charleston model would reflect much more classical music in the Sunday morning services. Both models are heavily invested in traditional, Sunday morning Bible teaching programs meeting on church owned property. Typically, the top fifty California SBC churches who give to the Cooperative Missions Program, the High Tech Sandy Creek Churches outnumber the Contemporary Charleston churches about ten to one. As with its earlier eastern predecessor, order and contemplation would be more at home in the Contemporary Charleston orders of service and ardor and action in those of the High Tech Sandy Creek Model. The High Tech Sandy Creek churches favor evangelism as a core strategy, while the Contemporary Charleston tradition favors missions, particularly international missions, as core to their strategy.

Ralph Neighbour would categorize both of the above models of churches as **PBDs, "Program Based Design,"** as opposed to the cell-based or **People-Based Churches** for which he argues. By Program, Neighbour refers to the Bible Teaching, Music and Missions Education programs characteristic of the PBD churches, which programs necessarily require significant staff and funding to sustain. His critique of the PBD churches is that, "In every

¹³Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, (Wheaton, ILL.: Crossways, 2000), 9-10.

¹⁴Eddie Gibbs, *ChurchNext: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry*, (200): 52.

¹⁵H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman, 1987), 228-232.

case they [the staff] have a vertical vision of church life.”¹⁶ I would add the following perspective to that of Neighbour. Both of the above models or traditions are **FBDs, Facility Based Designs**. This design value is so prevalent in most western Baptist churches that it operates at the uncritical, assumption level. “We are not really a church until we have our own building.” Note that in church “plantologist” Ed Stetzer’s comprehensive and valuable *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age* (2003), he lists “secure the facilities” in the top nine steps for churches planting churches.¹⁷ This observation suggests that the Facility-Based Design will continue to be a significant design in use in the west.

Beyond these “Southern immigrant” models for Baptist churches, a third church model has emerged in the west with the starting of Saddleback Valley Community Church in Orange County in 1979. I am calling this model the **West Coast Model or the Seeker Sensitive/Purpose-Driven Church model**. Many of these churches were begun as church plants while others have sought to transition from the Charleston or Sandy Creek models to the West Coast model. This West Coast/Seeker Sensitive/ Purpose Driven Model” is **still largely a Facility Driven Model**. Its worship seeks to reflect the cultural preferences of its target groups. Saddlebacks worship services are characterized by the rock and roll sound preferred by most Southern California baby boomers and the fast growing Clovis Hills Community Church of Fresno reflects the more Country and Western preferences of the central California context.

The West Coast Model shifted its church structure toward an executive leadership-looking model, which meant that church decision-making meetings were limited to a quarterly or annual basis. The assumption was that minimal congregational polity required a congregational vote 1.) to call the pastor, who then had delegated to him authority to “hire and fire” staff, and 2.) to present annually an operations budget. The strategy presented in the Saddleback Church growth conferences advocates growing big by growing smaller, namely, the large worship celebrations are balanced with congregational involvement in small groups.¹⁸ Many of the emerging West Coast model churches are “elder led and staff run.” The most successful of the West Coast Model churches are what Thom Rainier identifies as **“high expectation churches,”** which apply a hierarchy of member covenants leading to greater spiritual responsibility.¹⁹ Topical sermons, rich in textual proofs, present how-to’s for spiritual formation as opposed to the predominant verse-by-verse expository preaching found in the Contemporary Charleston and High Tech Sandy Creek models.

¹⁶Neighbour, 49.

¹⁷Ed Stetzer, *Planting Churches in a Postmodern Age* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 325. Stetzer imparts some tested wisdom for this FBD church plants, “Ill-advised decisions can send wrong messages to the community if the sociological values reflected in the facility are out of step with the tastes of the community.” He cautions against high financial overheads and against the size of the space dictating the growth of the church; Ibid.

¹⁸Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

¹⁹Thomas Ranier, *High Expectations* (Nashville: Broadman, 1999).

These topical messages connect well with the boomer generation desire for application steps to every domain of life. Achievement and progress are high values in these churches and members.

The Canadian House Church leader, Rad Zdero, has cast a helpful distinction toward this developing Typology of emerging churches. Relative to the structures implemented by western churches for evangelism and discipleship multiplication **in small groups**, in *The Global House Church Movement* (2004), Zdero charts three models prevalent amongst churches today: **Traditional Church... WITH small groups**, **Cell Church... OF small groups**, and **House Churches... IS small groups**.²⁰ Zdero would likely characterize most West Coast model churches as traditional, vertically-focused in staff, facilities-based churches with small groups for fellowship, evangelism, ministry and discipleship. Before entering into examination of the emerging **Cell and House Church models** in the west, reference to the common trichotomy of church models characteristic of many contemporary church studies is helpful.

Larry Kreider in *House Church Networks* (2001) and Reggie McNeal in *The Present Future Church* (2003) identify three kinds of churches:

1. **Community Churches**, which Kreider likens to “Mom and Pop” stores.
2. **House Church Networks**, which is likened to a shopping mall.²¹
3. **Mega Churches**, which Kreider and McNeal liken to supercenters like Wal-Mart.²²

To this trichotomy, Kreider adds a comprehensive fourth model,

4. **The Regional Church**, which includes all three kinds of the above churches in a geographical area.²³

This notion of a *regional church* incorporating all types of churches in the region is similar to the church planting strategy developing in the Colorado Baptist Convention (SBC). The emerging strategy there is to link “stackpole” churches to churches that meet in houses. This approach appears intentionally more organic or pragmatically connectional than the

²⁰Rad Zdero, *The Global House Church Movement*, (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2004), 127.

²¹Kreider, 28.

²²McNeal, 22. According to McNeal, a new mega church starts every two days. The description of a mega church plant, the Fellowship of the Rockies in Pueblo, CO, in which 800 attended the first Easter, and two years later 2000 attended, is narrated in Curt Dodd, “Following God's Vision from a Mega Church to a Church Plant,” in *Reaching a Nation Through Church Planting*, compiled by Richard Harris (Alpharetta, GA: North American Mission Board, 2003), 36-37. This book presents multiple models of emerging churches from the microscopic view of the individuals often responsible for initiating that churches start. More of these case study collections are needed.

²³Kreider, 20-21, 35.

mere geographic framework developed by Kreider, although Kreider certainly hopes for a vital, shared strategy within the regions he describes.

Two additional church models are emerging in the west. These distinctive models emerge, when either a mega church (seating of 400-800) of the Charleston, Sandy Creek or West Coast variety is in significant decline due to adjacent community transition or when the church has become land-locked due to property costs. When the former happens, the declining church may invite new ethnic churches to start within their empty spaces. Such churches then move to become a **Multi-Cultures Campus Church**. The Multi-Cultures Campus Church may not attempt to become a blended **Multi-Cultural Church**, which is another emerging western model. Rather, a Multi-Cultures Campus Church has distinct homogeneous congregations operating as distinct churches within one facility under a stewardship agreement.²⁴ When the latter happens and expansion becomes impossible, a second church model is observed, that of the **Meta Church or Multi-Campus Church Model**. In this model, one church worships on multiple campuses or locations throughout a metropolis. In *Reaching a Nation Through Church Planting*, Rick Ferguson presents a narrative ecclesiology of the Meta Church Model that grew out of Riverside Baptist Church in Denver, CO.²⁵

Closely akin to the Meta Church Model is a newer **Rapid Multiplication Church** model. Paul Kim, founding pastor of Berkland Korean Baptist Church, Berkeley, California, calls this model the **Team Church Model**. This church has developed into a small church planting movement of now twenty-one churches in twenty years across the US and in Eurasia.²⁶ Members of a TEAM Church understand that the mission of the church is to start new churches and that the method is for members of the existing church to be relocated as a team to the new church start location. In 1991, a team of fourteen members of the Berkeley congregation including founding pastor Kim, relocated to Cambridge, Massachusetts, relocated to start Berkland Korean Baptist Church East. Kim asserts that the team is already a church, and carries out all of the basic functions of a church.²⁷ In 1992,

²⁴At a January 2004, training conference hosted by NAMB and GGBTS in San Francisco, Ray Bakke was asked, “Which is right, focusing on people groups or multi-cultural churches? Both/and was his the answer. Missiologist looks at the broader picture while evangelists are reapers using a laser approach in a responsive group. Very few people can conduct an orchestra or coach a pro team as there are very few pastors who can “pull off” a multi-cultural church. We need a variety of churches to meet the diverse needs of an urban populace. We as Southern Baptists need to understand and appreciate our niche and be willing to celebrate the strengths of other denominational groups.

²⁵See “Reaching Your City through Church Planting,” in *Reaching a Nation Through Church Planting*, 82-83. Ferguson credits the term **Meta Church** to Carl George in *Preparing Your Church for the Future*

²⁶Paul Kim, “Team Church Planting,” in *Reaching a Nation Through Church Planting*, 92.

²⁷Ibid.

John Worcester launched a Team Church in the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolis at the invitation of the area Baptist association. TEAM Church meets on Sunday evenings so that its members can go out on Sunday mornings to satellite locations to start new churches. This TEAM church functions as a church when it exercises its ministry to start other churches.²⁸ The church documents and published strategy indicate that this model blends the Purpose-Driven Model of Rick Warren at Saddleback (West Coast Model) with principles derived internationally from missiological studies of church planting movements.²⁹ A church planting movement is defined as “a rapid multiplication of indigenous churches planting churches that sweeps through a people group or population segment.”³⁰ These churches may eventually define themselves as the **Scattered Church Model**, in the sense that the Pentecost event of Acts two was the empowering of the believers in the community to scatter to the uttermost parts of the earth to present the gospel in the languages of the hearers even as each heard the praise of God in Christ at Pentecost in his or her own language. Thus the mindset of the Scattered Church is not to gather but to pour out the church and scatter it in apostolic witness. In this instance, while a Mega Church is within reach of some of these western churches, the intentional decision is to send out key teams of people and key amounts of funds in order to reach more people in more places.³¹

The **Multi-Cultural Church** model seeks to blend any number of resident cultural groups into a heterogeneous Baptist community. First Baptist Church of Vacaville, CA, has become a Mega Multi-Cultural Church following the call of Dr. Leroy Gainey, an African-American professor at Golden Gate Seminary, as its first non-Caucasian lead pastor. These churches appear to use a traditional approach to Baptist polity including a High Tech Sandy Creek approach to worship with graded Bible teaching and music programs meeting on Sundays in church owned property.

With the tremendously successful **Cell Church Model** of the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea, with its membership at 750,000, and promotion of the cell church movement through the In Touch Ministries of cell church movement of Baptist Ralph Neighbour, Jr., other Baptists began to explore and develop Baptist Cell Church Models, or as Neighbour prefers, People Based Design churches. Natural cell division and multiplication has been the most difficult problem to solve in churches seeking to apply this

²⁸Data found in a copyrighted CD, John Worcester, Church Planting Leadership Resources, 2003.

²⁹David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements: How God is Redeeming a Lost World* (Midlothian, VA: WIGTake Resources, 2004), 259, 257-8. David Garrison has identified the ministry of Shubal and Martha Stearns through the 17th century North Carolina, Sandy Creek Church as a church planting movement. “Viewed through the lens of Modern day Church Planting Movements, it is easy to add the Sandy Creek tradition to the list.”

³⁰Ibid., 21.

³¹This “**Scattered Church Model**” is **not** what Edward Hammett has in mind in his book entitled *The Gathered and Scattered Church* (Atlanta: Smyth and Helwys, 1999).

model. Saddleback Valley Church could be categorized as a cell church with its heavy emphasis of involvement in small groups off church property and with its authorizing pastoral roles to leaders of those groups. However, Saddleback is best understood along Zdero's notion of a church *with small groups*, since the large worship services are so significant in the church's strategy, budget and staff.³² Strictly speaking the Cell Church Model is a church *of cell groups* who come together regularly for celebration services, but clearly the center of gravity for the Cell Church is in the cell. Most staff members in Cell Churches equip and oversee volunteer cell leaders.

The central book in this Cell Church Model movement is *Where Do We Go from Here?* and was written by Neighbour in 1990. The book is very practical but its ecclesiology is framed in a caustic criticism on traditional Building Based design of Baptist Churches. Wolfgang Simson is equally critical of the traditional Building Based Design. What Neighbour's book has done for the cell church model, Simson's book is doing for the **House Church Model**. In his book, Simson gives twelve reasons the house churches are preferable to the traditional church.³³ Among those twelve are “1.) Disciplined multiplication... 3.) Freedom from church growth barriers... 4.) Involvement of many more people more efficiently... 10.) It is more biblical... and 12.) It is undeniably cheaper.”³⁴ Rad Zdero defines the **House Church Model** as

fully functioning churches in themselves, with the freedom to partake of the Lord's Supper, to baptize, marry, bury, exercise discipline, and chart their own course. They are volunteer-led and meet in house-sized groups for participatory and interactive meetings involving prayer and worship, Bible study and discussion, mentoring and outreach, as well as food and fun. Because they are typically autonomous, they more easily adapt to persecution, growth and change, but are also more vulnerable to bad theology and behavior. So, house churches become part of peer networks for health and growth, like a spider web of interlocking strands.³⁵

According to Kreider, “Cell groups have opened the door for house churches to emerge.”³⁶ David Garrison makes the distinction between cell churches and house churches relative to their capacity to multiply rapidly, “while cell churches enjoy many of the initial qualities of church planting movements, they tend to reach a plateau owing to the internal controls associated with centralized leadership.”³⁷

³²Zdero, 127.

³³Wolfgang Simson, *Houses That Change the World: The Return of the House Churches* (Emmelsbull, Germany: C & P Publishing, 1999), 32-37.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Zdero, 4.

³⁶Kreider, 46.

In this developing Typology of emerging Baptist churches in the west, the House Church Model and the Cell Church Model have some distinct characteristics from the models identified above. Both models are non-Building Base Designs or put positively using Neighbour's construct, **House Churches and Cell Churches are People Based Designs**. Both models are critically dependent on volunteer leadership in pastor-like roles, with that being even more significant in the House Church Model. All of the other models are heavily dependent on paid, pastoral leadership. Sarcastically, someone has said that House Churches avoid the three biggest barriers to rapid multiplication of new churches and believers; buildings, budgets and "bigshots." The hope for orthodoxy and orthopraxy in the House Church Model is in the voluntary network of sister House Churches, somewhat like a Baptist association of churches. Some of the leaders of the House Church movement in Southern California are Neil Cole and Paul Kaak.

In a conference in San Francisco in January, 2004, Cole indicated that he preferred **Simple or Organic Church** to House Church for three reasons: 1.) a house is a building and the church is not a house; 2.) in some instances, a house is not the best option, and 3.) historically, the "house church" concept has been inwardly focused and not overtly committed to multiplication.³⁸ He went on to define church as "A group of believers gathered together regularly...That consider themselves a church...That have qualified leaders...That regularly practice the ordinances or sacraments...That have an agreed upon doctrinal base and evangelistic purpose." There are currently three house church networks amongst Baptists in the Rocky Mountain region. One of these has sought and received admission to a local Baptist association and one has thus far been refused.

REVIEW OF THE EMERGING TYPOLOGY

The result has identified eight models of emerging Baptist churches in the western states: 1) The Contemporary Charleston Model; 2) The High Tech Sandy Creek Model; 3) The West Coast or Seeker Sensitive/Purpose Driven Model; 4) The Multicultural Church Model; 5) The Multi-Cultures Campus Church Model; 6) The Meta and/or Team Church Model; 7) The Cell Church Model; and 8) The House Church Network Model (also called Simple and Organic Church Models). The first six models tend to be Program Based or Facility Based designs. They are heavily reliant upon paid pastoral staff to achieve those designs. Buildings, budgets, staff and baptisms are key entries on their ministry success scorecards. These churches tend to have significant endurance, low heterodoxy, and to serve as stackpole churches for the more experimental, short-lived models. Two of the models are People Based Design not limited by buildings or paid ministerial staff in the growth: the Cell Church and the House Church Network. There is no reason that the small group multiplication within the West Coast Model or the Sunday School class multiplication within the Contemporary Charleston, High Tech Sandy Creek, or Multicultural Church

³⁷Garrison, 271

³⁸This latter question has been asked of Robert and Julia Banks in their advocacy of the inward focused House Church model in *The Church Comes Home* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1998).

models needs to be limited to church owned property provided that multiplication is encouraged by the pastoral staff through lay leaders and teachers. Four of the models have significant capacity to be Rapid Church Multiplication vehicles: the House Church Network, Cell Church, West Coast and Meta or Team church models. With these preliminary analyses stated, some questions begin to surface about what is normative or merely cultural/traditional relative to being Baptist in the various models.

1. In the U.S. context, it is uncritically assumed that to be a self-identifying church, that church must be sufficiently constituted to achieve IRS 501C-3 status as a non-profit religious corporation. Furthermore, it is also assumed that to be a church, it must have ordained, paid pastoral staff and have its own building, whether owned or rented. These assumptions have brought stability and viability to Baptist churches, associations and conventions. Clearly in other parts of the world, due to poverty, persecution and culture, Baptists churches exist and thrive without dependence on these assumptions. If these assumptions are not direct statements or implications of Scripture, what prices are Baptists paying to achieve these marks of incorporation? I do not recommend an alternative. I only want to receive this practice with careful thought and reflection, knowing that all practices need to be evaluated for their capacity to facilitate incarnating and communicating the gospel to the nations.
2. The Baptist missiologists and church strategists leading the Rapid Church Multiplication models described above have all explored the meaning of the so-called five-fold office of the church found in Ephesians 4:10-11. This exploration appears to challenge the traditional two-fold office of pastors and deacons found in Paul's letter to Timothy and stated in the Baptist Faith and Message 2000. Neighbour, Zdero, Frost, Hirsch, and Kreider discuss the problem of the two-fold versus five-fold office for the church.³⁹ These authors suggest that the five-fold office was the model of the early church organization for world mission.⁴⁰ Kreider refers to this five-fold office of the church as “Fivefold **Translocal** Ministry” [bold is mine].⁴¹

³⁹Neighbour, 47; Zdero, 129; Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2003), 169; Kreider, 114.

⁴⁰“Reflecting on Ephesians 4:7,11, Frost and Hirsch observe that, “These verses seem to underscore the fact that the church's ministry is *fundamentally* charismatic by nature. This is important to recognize because it allows us to move away from the notion of APEPT [apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers] ministry as *office* to that of *function*. Jesus' gracing of his church cannot be institutionalized into office. Frost & Hirsch, 168. “Not necessarily in terms defined by the sociological phenomenon called the “charismatic movement,” but mainly in terms of its theological implications; ie. of God's enabling/empowering grace for ministry.” Frost & Hirsch, N. 4, 168. Note 5 on that same page indicates that apostolic here is meant to avoid the “unhelpful historic controversy” re. the uniqueness of the original apostolic twelve which of course can not and should not be replicated.

⁴¹Kreider, 114.

- Could the two-fold office apply be *in* the church and the three other offices (apostle, prophet and evangelist) be meta or tarns local, much like the current associational directors of missions function apostolically in strategy and encouragement of new churches? Baptist will want to integrate the plain sense of both these “office” passages in order to live out the plain sense of the scriptures. It maybe that we discover that this has actually been the Baptist practice but has not been named in this manner.
3. New Testament scholars have for some time debated whether a hierarchy of church offices can be found within the New Testament or whether it is an early church development. Related to this debate is whether church leadership within the New Testament was organized on the basis of charismatic, gifted leaders, or around official positions in which the church installed persons as their leaders. Benjamin Merkle has done a helpful study of this issue. He concludes that “the hierarchical structure of the early church” is a later addition and, even a corruption.”⁴² For Baptists, the tension between the recognition of giftedness for leadership and installation into leadership offices continues to need conversation in order to maintain a healthy and humble perspective of both.
 4. The problem of a full understanding of church unity, priesthood of the believers and pastoral authority also needs further conversation. Gerald Cowen's new book, *Who Rules the Church? Examining Congregational Leadership and Church Government* (2003), astutely addresses the Baptist doctrine of the priesthood of believers in the context of pastoral authority. His discussion emphasizes the historic precipitant for this Baptist doctrine, namely that in contradiction to traditional Catholic doctrine, “believers are qualified to come to God directly without aid of an intermediary”⁴³ Cowen goes on to state that the believers’ priesthood asserts the individual believer's shared responsibility for evangelism and discipleship of others. He does insist, perhaps over against what he sees as a Presbyterian intrusion, that “since [believers] are all indwelt by the Holy Spirit... which makes them capable of understanding God's Word... why should not every believer who is in right fellowship with God be able to have a voice in the business of the church?”⁴⁴ This understanding of the priesthood of the believers falls far short of the present discussion of member capacity from the very beginning to take leadership roles with reference to the mission of the church. Simson contrasts the minimization of the believers’

⁴²Benjamin L. Merkle, “Elder and Overseer: One Office in the Early Church,” Vol. 57 in *Studies in Biblical Literature* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 67-89, 89-90.

⁴³Gerald P. Cowen, *Who Rules the Church? Examining Congregational Leadership and Church Government* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003), 92.

⁴⁴Ibid., see also his discussion of the Presbyterian distinction between ruling and teaching elders, 81-82. See also the appended article appended to Cowen's work, “Ecclesiology Among Baptists in American and Great Britain (1609-Present)” by Stephen Scott. Scott sees an adoption of Presbyterian Polity into Baptist churches re: ruling and teaching elders to be a cause of some of what he calls “The Current Ecclesiological Confusion;” Ibid. 142-143.

priesthood in non-House Church models versus that of magnifying that priesthood in the House Church Network model.

HOW TO EMPOWER OTHERS

let them function
believe in them
delegate authority
further God's plan for them
invest in them
love them and say so
give them what you have
discuss with them
spend time freely with them
give them the keys now
serve them
praise them
transfer masterhood to them

HOW TO EXPLOIT OTHERS

give them functions
make them believe in you
require submission
make them part of your plans
use them
love the task more than the people
take what they have
preach at them
require appointments
hold back until you retire
let them serve you
accept their praise graciously
demonstrate masterhood to them⁴⁵

This the discussion of a magnified perspective of the priesthood of the believers will need to take place in connection with a discussion to the pastor-teacher role in the local church.

5. Finally, a discussion needs to take place concerning contextualization and the forms or models a Baptist church can implement in a given context. In *Perimeters of Light*, Elmer Towns and Ed Stetzer present a powerful target diagram of how people and churches can leave the center of "our best understanding of Scripture" and edge out of truth in sequential stages: "churches who misunderstand some of the issues but are still orthodox," to "Unorthodox churches Christian can be found," and then to "Heretical groups by doctrine and immorality."⁴⁶ The authors seek a right biblical faithfulness between syncretism brought by compromise with the truth versus a traditionalism, which begets obscurantism. They call the church to high biblical content with high cultural content. The eight types of Baptist churches identified in the paper need to be analyzed for their relative capacity to deliver such high biblical and cultural contents. Then a correlation needs to be made between those contents and effectiveness in evangelism and member leadership development and deployment.

⁴⁵Simson, 208. "If the traditional model does not empower and disciple, what does it do?"

⁴⁶Elmer Towns and Ed Stetzer, *Perimeters of Light: Biblical Boundaries for the Emerging Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2004), 28, 35, and 52.

CONCLUSION

Having come this far in this study of the emerging Baptist churches of the west, I take delight in our future as Baptists. I am more convinced than ever that the Baptist way is excellent stewardship of the gospel of grace.

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH AS A MARK OF THE CHURCH

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This paper attempts to bring together the theme of this conference, the mission of the church, and an important theme in the history of ecclesiology, the marks of a true church. It will begin by surveying and evaluating three important formulations of the marks of the church that have been developed over the years. It will then argue that there is a need for a fourth formulation today, and that such a formulation centers around the mission of the church, understood as the church's mandate to provide certain ministries to bodies of believers.

THE PATRISTIC FORMULATION: “WE BELIEVE IN ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC, AND APOSTOLIC CHURCH.”

The single most influential statement concerning the church from history comes in the line from the Nicene Creed¹ quoted above giving the four classical *notae* of the church: unity or oneness, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity. These four marks are the starting point for many discussions of the church, and are widely accepted by both Protestants and Catholics.² We note that this confessional formula emerged in the context of the church's struggle to define itself against a variety of challengers.³ This origin raises some questions.

¹ This line is taken from what is usually referred to as the Nicene Creed, though this line was not in the creed developed at Nicaea in 325, but from an addition to the creed attributed to the Council of Constantinople in 381. Some therefore want to call this form of the creed the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, but the shorter title has prevailed in popular usage.

² See for example the recent affirmation by three evangelicals, including one Baptist, in Richard D. Phillips, Philip G. Ryken and Mark E. Dever, *The Church: One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2004), and the utilization of the four marks in Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 114-126. Interestingly, Catholic Richard McBrien only notes the four marks in connection with pre-Vatican II Catholic ecclesiology, suggesting a de-emphasis of the marks in contemporary Catholic ecclesiology. See Richard McBrien, *Catholicism*, new ed. (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), 659.

³ Glenn Hinson says, “This formula took shape chiefly in efforts of the churches to define themselves in relation to the Montanist, Novatianist, and Donatist schisms.” E. Glenn Hinson, “Introduction” to *Understandings of the Church*, trans. and ed. E. Glenn Hinson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 4.

Are these four marks as prominent in Scripture as they are in the creed? In other words, did the historical circumstances lead the early church to emphasize the importance of these four adjectives (one, holy, catholic, apostolic) beyond their importance in Scripture? How sufficient or comprehensive are these marks in identifying a true and valid church? Are there other marks that need to be added?

While a full investigation of these four marks is beyond the purpose of this paper, a few evaluative comments by way of response to the questions just raised will be offered. First, I do think the historical circumstances materially affected the elevation of these four marks to the status of identifying marks. While unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity all have some importance for churches, there seems no biblical warrant for seeing them as indispensable to the validity or ecclesiality of a church. In fact, in spite of their widespread acceptance throughout the history of the church, the four classical marks, while helpful, do not seem to be comprehensive or definitive in understanding what the church is, for a number of reasons.

First, the bare words themselves are quite ambiguous. That is why both Protestants and Catholics have been able to affirm them; they fill them with quite different meaning. Yet even when viewed in ways that seem to mesh to some degree with biblical teaching, these four marks do not seem to highlight all of the aspects of the church that are most central in biblical teaching. Howard Snyder echoes these criticisms and advocates adding “many, charismatic, local and prophetic” as supplements to “one, holy, catholic (or universal), and apostolic.”⁴

Furthermore, the marks all seem to be related at least as much to the gospel as to the church. The doctrinal truths inherent in the gospel set at least a minimal boundary of the church’s **unity**. The gift of imputed righteousness received through the gospel gives the church its **holiness** as part of the gift of salvation. The universal scope of the gospel to “whosoever will” gives the church its **catholicity**, and the gospel is the heart of the **apostolic** teaching that the church is to preserve.⁵ Thus, perhaps it is more accurate to see the gospel as marking the church more than unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity. Millard Erickson says the gospel is “the one factor that gives basic shape to everything the church does, the element that lies at the heart of all its functions.”⁶

In addition, the classical marks seem less clearly applicable to the local church than to the universal, but the local church is more the emphasis of Scripture and is how believers experience the church. Even in terms of the universal church, the church is not yet fully catholic. These four marks are possessed today only partially by local churches, yet such

⁴ Howard Snyder, “The Marks of Evangelical Ecclesiology,” in *Evangelical Ecclesiology: Reality or Illusion?*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic), 81-88.

⁵ This seems to be the underlying theme throughout Phillips, Ryken, and Dever, *The Church: One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic*.

⁶ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 1069.

bodies are still churches, even though not yet perfected in unity, holiness, catholicity, or apostolicity.

THE REFORMATION FORMULATION: THE WORD AND THE SACRAMENTS

The Reformation precipitated the division of the church into various groups, and with that prompted the question, How may I find a true church? This was more than an academic exercise for believers of that era; it was a matter of the utmost practical importance. Many assumed that there could only be one true church and that outside that church there was no salvation. Thus, there could be no appeal to marks that only identified some invisible or universal church. These people needed to know if the church in their neighborhood was aligned with the one true church in which they might find salvation.

On this question, the magisterial Reformers (Luther, Zwingli and Calvin) gave much the same answer. Calvin's response is often quoted: "Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists."⁷ At times, Calvin adds a third mark, that of church discipline, and Luther in one place lists seven marks of a true church, but Luther also says that all the marks boil down to the one mark of the Word: "even if there were no other sign than this alone, it would still suffice to prove that a Christian, holy people must exist there, for God's word cannot be without God's people, and conversely, God's people cannot be without God's word."⁸

These signs relate directly to the struggle the Reformers had with the Catholic Church of their day. The identifying slogans of the Reformation (*sola Scriptura*, *sola gratia*, *sola fide*), are all encompassed in their marks. The **pure** word must be preached, Scripture alone. For the Reformers, the preaching of the word was almost synonymous with the preaching of the gospel. The gospel message found in the word of God was salvation by grace alone, not grace plus one's best efforts. And that saving grace was received by faith alone, not via the sacraments as understood by the Catholic Church.

This first Reformation mark, the pure preaching of the word, is close to the classical mark of apostolicity, as it has been understood by Protestants. The church is apostolic when it listens to the apostolic teaching, found in the written word of God. That mark is fully true only of the church in heaven, for on earth the church is still struggling to understand and

⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics, vol. 21 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1023 (4.1.9).

⁸ Martin Luther, "On the Councils and the Church," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy Lull (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), 547. The complete list of seven signs is the Word, baptism, the Lord's Supper, church discipline, called and consecrated ministers, public praise and thanksgiving, and the sacred cross of suffering.

rightly preach all of God's pure word. Here the narrower meaning of the word as the gospel is important. Calvin was willing to call a group a true church, even if they did not understand all of God's word aright, as long as they preserved and preached the pure gospel message.

Here I think we encounter a true *sine qua non* of the church. If it loses the gospel message, a group of people is no longer a true church. It may be a religious society or a club, but it is not a church, for God's called out people are called out by the gospel and come in response to the gospel. The power of the gospel is what reconciles them to God, unites them to Christ and allows them to be indwelt by the Spirit. There can be no people of God, body of Christ, or temple of the Spirit without the gospel.

The second mark, the proper administration of the sacraments, is more problematic. Can a true church exist if the sacraments are not rightly observed? The Reformers saw the Catholic observance of the mass, involving the claims that Christ was re-crucified, that it was necessary for salvation, and that it conferred grace apart from faith, as a repudiation of the gospel. But what of the differences raised by the Anabaptists and later, the Baptists, over baptism? Does the baptism of infants, which Baptists say is not according to the institution of Christ, sufficient to make a group no longer a true or valid church? In nineteenth century America, some Baptists thought so. The Landmark Baptists took the Reformation marks, measured the neighboring Methodists and Presbyterians, and found them wanting. They termed their assemblies religious societies but not gospel churches, because these groups did not practice the ordinances as Jesus had instructed. They would not practice pulpit exchange with the ministers of such groups, nor do anything that could be construed as a tacit acceptance of them as true churches.

The claims of the Landmark Baptists are open to question on a number of points, but their most basic problem, I think, is a failure to make a distinction between what is essential to a church's nature, and what is important but not essential. In other words, they fail to distinguish between issues of being and well-being. The gospel itself does pertain to the essential nature of the church, but ordinances are, in Baptist life, seen as symbols of the gospel. In fact, one of the criteria by which we have deemed an act to qualify as an ordinance has been its appropriateness as a symbol of the gospel.⁹ Thus, Miroslav Volf suggests that baptism and the Lord's Supper "belong to the essence of the church, for they have to do with faith and its confession. . . . But the sacraments are an indispensable condition of ecclesiality *only if they are a form of the confession of faith and an expression of faith.*"¹⁰ It seems

⁹ Stanley Grenz says that an ordinance, or sacrament, "must be so closely linked to the gospel message . . . that it becomes a symbol for the truth of the good news it embodies." Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 676.

¹⁰ Miroslav Volf, "Community Formation as an Image of the Triune God," in *Community Formation in the Early Church and in the Church Today*, ed. Richard Longenecker (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 217-18. Emphasis added. Elmer Towns and Ed Stetzer, *Perimeters of Light: Biblical Boundaries for the Emerging Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2004), 68, also say that baptism and the Lord's Supper are "essential elements without which a true

therefore that if a church's theology or practice of the sacraments (or ordinances) amounts to a repudiation of the gospel or an expression of a false faith, then it would strike at the being of the church. But if an observance of baptism is not as Jesus instituted, but is not a threat to the gospel, the practice may hinder the well-being of the church, but not constitute a threat to its being. It may be a valid church, but, like all churches on earth, imperfect in some respects.

I think this corresponds with the nature of biblical teaching on baptism and the Lord's Supper. They are clearly an important part of the church's life, but they do not go to the heart of its being, for they are symbols of the gospel and not the gospel itself. In fact, there is surprisingly little biblical teaching regarding the ordinances, much less than their prominence in ecclesiological discussions would suggest. I believe the Reformers included proper administration of the sacraments in their marks of the church due to the seriousness of their disagreement with Catholic teaching on the mass. The Catholic view of the mass did amount to a repudiation of the gospel. But the sacraments *per se* are not as prominent in biblical teaching as are other elements that do belong to the very being of the church. An improper administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper will hinder a church's health and weaken its ministry. Thus I think Baptist distinctives concerning the ordinances are important and worth preserving. But improper observance of the ordinances does not necessarily invalidate a church, unless the impropriety compromises the message of the gospel.

THE BAPTIST MARK: REGENERATE CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

While not as well known as the classical or Reformation formulation of the marks of the church, I think it can be argued that regenerate church membership has been a mark of the church for Baptists, in at least a limited sense. By this, I mean that while human weakness and fallibility of judgment may lead to the inadvertent admission of some unregenerate persons into the membership of the church, biblical teaching throughout the New Testament assumes that the church is composed of believers. Baptists originated out of a desire to make that assumption a reality as far as humanly possible. Central to the Baptist vision of the church is the insistence that the church must be composed of believers only. That is the distinctive mark of the church for Baptists and others who fall within the stream of those who advocate what is sometimes called the gathered church, or more often today, the believers' church.¹¹ This mark may also be called the principle of regenerate

church cannot exist," but they do not comment on whether a particular view of baptism and the Lord's Supper is also requisite.

¹¹ Donald Durnbaugh, *The Believers' Church: The History and Character of Radical Protestantism* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968), ix, traces the origin of the phrase to Max Weber's classic work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, in which he used it to describe the Anabaptists and Quakers. It gained more currency with the revival of Anabaptist studies about fifty years ago, and in two conferences that organized around the phrase. The first was held in 1955, the Study Conference on the Believers' Church held by Mennonites. The second was larger and more broadly based, with 150 participants from seven denominational families, and was held at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in

church membership. At the first Baptist World Congress in 1905, J. D. Freeman said of Baptists, “This principle of a regenerated Church membership, more than anything else, marks our distinctiveness in the Christian world today.”¹² More recently, Justice Anderson has affirmed its centrality for the Baptist doctrine of the church: “The cardinal principle of Baptist ecclesiology, and logically, the point of departure for church polity, is the insistence on a regenerate membership in the local congregation.”¹³ This ideal of regenerate membership has been central to Baptist ecclesiology.¹⁴

Charles Deweese argues that the importance of regenerate church membership for Baptist ecclesiology is even more far-reaching: “A direct relationship exists between a regenerate church membership and five other areas of Baptist life – church covenants, the ordinances, church discipline, evangelism, and small groups.”¹⁵

The following table attempts to summarize and make evident the connection between regenerate church membership and other major components of a Baptist doctrine of the church, and so justify regarding regenerate church membership as the central Baptist mark of the church.¹⁶

Louisville, Kentucky in 1967. The papers from that conference were published in James Leo Garrett, Jr., ed., *The Concept of the Believers' Church: Addresses from the 1967 Louisville Conference* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1969). There have been seven additional such conferences since 1967, with the most recent in 1990, on the campus of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Ft. Worth, Texas.

¹² J. D. Freeman, “The Place of Baptists in the Christian Church,” in *The Baptist World Congress. London, July 11-19, 1905. Authorised Record of Proceedings* (London: Baptist Union Publication Department, 1905), 27.

¹³ Justice C. Anderson, “Old Baptist Principles Reset,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 31 (Spring 1989): 5-12.

¹⁴ For a fuller discussion of regenerate church membership and Baptist ecclesiology, see John Hammett, *The Doctrine of the Church: A Baptist Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), chs. 4-5.

¹⁵ Deweese, *A Community of Believers*, 13.

¹⁶ The linkage between regenerate church membership and these aspects of Baptist ecclesiology are found in numerous historic discussions of Baptist ecclesiology. See J. L. Dagg, *Manual of Theology. Second Part. A Treatise on Church Order* (Charleston, SC: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1858; reprint edition, Harrisonburg, VA: Gano Books, 1982); A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: Griffith and Rowland Press, 1909); and many of the “historic Baptist documents” included in Mark Dever, ed., *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Church Reform, 2001).

Regenerate Church Membership as Central to Baptist Ecclesiology

Regenerate Church Membership . . . is preceded and safeguarded by believer's baptism.

is the basis for congregational church government.

is reflected and preserved in the Baptist practice of closed communion.

is a prerequisite for effective church discipline and is protected by church discipline.

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH AS A MARK OF THE CHURCH

All three formulations of the marks of the church from the past seem to have been formulated in a more or less polemic situation, and served to distinguish the true church from false or, at least, less biblical churches. The classical marks enabled one to distinguish between the true church and heretical or schismatic groups. The Reformation marks separated true gospel churches from those who had perverted or distorted the gospel. Baptists emerged among those who followed the premise of *sola Scriptura* to its logical conclusion and saw Scripture as teaching the gathered church or believers church model. They thus sought pure churches of believers only.

Today, however, there is a need for distinction not between different denominations of churches, but between churches and parachurch groups. Parachurch groups number in the thousands and form one of the most pervasive features of American Christianity in the post World War II period. Groups such as Focus on the Family, Campus Crusade for Christ, and World Vision International have staffs numbering in the thousands, with budgets in the millions of dollars, and are well known to millions of American church members. And while not rivals of the church, parachurch groups have existed in some tension with churches.¹⁷ On the side of the churches, the tensions are often associated with the

¹⁷ See for example, the title of the study of this topic by Jerry White, *Church and Parachurch: An Uneasy Marriage* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1983). For a more detailed treatment of the relationship of church and parachurch, see John Hammett, "Selected Parachurch Groups and Southern Baptists: An Ecclesiological Debate" (Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1991). For two varying assessments of the relationship of church and parachurch, see Philip Jensen and Tony Payne, "Church/Campus Connections: Model 1" and Mark Gauthier, "Church/Campus Connections: Model 2," in *Telling the Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 199-213. Jensen and Payne think parachurch groups are churches, if they gather to proclaim God's word to a group of God's people; Gauthier advocates a partnership between churches and parachurch groups.

perception that parachurch organizations take money and workers away from churches; on the side of the parachurch groups, the charge is sometimes made that churches are dead and that there would be no need for parachurch groups if churches did their ministries as they should.¹⁸

At least in the case of evangelical churches and parachurch groups, both share a commitment to the same gospel. What then distinguishes the two? I think the answer lies in the mission of the church, seen as a distinguishing mark of the church. The church possesses a mandate to provide certain crucial ministries to all types of believers. That is how I am defining the mission of the church for the purposes of this paper. As they fulfill their mandate to provide all the ministries entrusted to them to all types of believers, churches distinguish themselves from parachurch groups.

Basically, the distinction between the church and the parachurch organization is that of generalist and specialist. The church has an assignment from God to provide teaching, fellowship, worship, service and evangelism to people of all ages, sexes and races. I see these five ministries as constitutive of the church, and draw them from the intentionally paradigmatic description of the life of the early church in Acts 2:42-47.¹⁹ A church cannot just do teaching, or just do missions, or just work with prisoners, or just work with college students. A distinguishing mark of the church, especially *vis a vis* parachurch groups, is its mission to minister in a holistic way to all types of believers. The church is called to be a generalist. The parachurch has the luxury of specializing in a particular type of ministry to a selected group of people. As Rick Warren observes, “most of the parachurch movements begun in the past forty years tend to specialize in one of the purposes of the church. . . . I believe it is valid, and even helpful to the church, for parachurch organizations to focus on a single purpose. It allows their emphasis to have greater impact on the church.”²⁰

The church should not envy the parachurch their ability to specialize nor feel inferior if they cannot do a ministry as well as the parachurch group. Specialization does allow a

¹⁸ See the discussions in Wesley Willmer, J. David Schmidt with Martyn Smith, *The Prospering Parachurch: Enlarging the Boundaries of God's Kingdom* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 170-180, and International Commission on Evangelical Co-operation, *Co-operating in World Evangelization: A Handbook on Church/Para-church Relationships*, Lausanne Occasional Paper no. 24 (Wheaton, IL: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1982.)

¹⁹ I find it interesting that what I see as the church's five constitutive ministries are essentially the same as the five purposes identified by Rick Warren in *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), though our views developed independently. Warren initially derives his five purposes from the Great Commandment (Matt. 22:36-40) and the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20), but sees them as reflected in Acts 2:42-47 as well. I think the Acts 2 passage is a better basis, as it seems specifically intended as a pattern for churches.

²⁰ Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 126.

higher degree of proficiency, but requires a narrower breadth of ministry. A medical general practitioner is not threatened by the heart specialist. On the contrary, she is happy to be able to refer a patient with a heart problem to him. The heart specialist, on the other hand, should not look down on the general practitioner nor think that he is able to care for all the needs of the patient. Rather, he should send the patient back to the general practitioner for ongoing care. Both cooperate for the health of the patient.

I think this supplies a helpful metaphor for the relationship of church and parachurch. A pastor need not feel threatened if his men get more excited about going to a Promise Keepers conference than going to the men's prayer breakfast; the parachurch group has the benefit of specialization. But neither should the college student in Campus Crusade conclude that the church is dead and that the Campus Crusade meeting is where real spiritual life is found. If that is so, why are there no senior adults or families with pre-schoolers there? No, Campus Crusade has the luxury of catering to the type of worship college students enjoy. Churches are called upon to minister to all types of people with all types of needs. Where possible, churches should freely take advantage of the specialized services offered by parachurch groups, and even seek to recognize church members who work for such groups as extensions of their church's ministry. At the same time, the church cannot abdicate any ministry to a parachurch group, for Christ has entrusted it to the church. For their part, parachurch groups should "understand the primacy of the church in the day-to-day spiritual lives of most Christians,"²¹ and thus seek to operate as genuine arms of the church. John Stott has said we may grade parachurch groups on this basis: "independence of the church is bad, co-operation with the church is better, service as an arm of the church is best."²² The ideal would be for parachurch groups to operate consciously in a servant partnership with churches.²³

For the purposes of this paper and this conference, the most important point to make is that churches must provide all these ministries to all types of believers. That is their mission, and an essential aspect of their being. A church that has no teaching ministry, or that has no evangelistic impact, or whose members never experience fellowship, is an

²¹ Willmer, et al., 178.

²² John Stott, "Theological Preamble," to *Co-operating in World Evangelization: A Handbook on Church/Para-church Relationships*, by International Commission on Evangelical Co-operation, Lausanne Occasional Paper no. 24 (Wheaton, IL: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1982), 13.

²³ For more detail on what such a model would involve, see Hammett, "Selected Parachurch Groups," 235-240, or John S. Hammett, "How Church and Parachurch Should Relate: Arguments for a Servant-Partnership Model," *Missiology: An International Review* 28, no. 2 (2000): 199-207.

unhealthy church, one whose well being is severely damaged, and one whose very being as a church is called into question. As Elmer Towns and Ed Stetzer have said, “a church is no longer a true church when it abandons the functions of a church.”²⁴

Moreover, churches are called to provide such ministries to all types of people. The only qualifications a church can make for membership is regeneration and a life lived in conformity with a profession of faith in Christ.²⁵ Beyond that, churches are called to welcome all types of people. Students of church growth tell us that churches grow most rapidly when they attract people who are like those already members. That may well be so, but if it is, it is a mark of our fallenness, for in Christ there “is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female” (Gal. 3:28). A distinguishing mark of the church in the world today is its mission to minister to all types of believers, and its provision of the whole broad variety of ministries these believers need. That is the mission Christ has entrusted to churches.

²⁴ Elmer Towns and Ed Stetzer, *Perimeters of Light: Biblical Boundaries for the Emerging Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2004), 70. They specifically mention preaching and observing the ordinances as mandatory biblical functions of the church.

²⁵ For Baptists, a life lived in conformity with a profession of faith in Christ would include baptism in obedience to Christ’s command, and thus is typically a requirement for membership in a Baptist church.

AN EXAMINATION OF TENTMAKER MINISTERS IN MISSOURI: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES¹

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ABSTRACT

Bivocational ministers, often referred to as tentmakers, are a growing population in today's churches. The needs of these tentmakers may present an opportunity for churches, universities and seminaries, as well as associations and conventions to provide additional support and training. This exploratory study attempted to investigate the needs and challenges of bivocational ministers. The sample for the study was bivocational ministers as identified by the Missouri Baptist Convention. Using random sampling techniques, 254 surveys were distributed to bivocational Baptist ministers in Missouri with a return rate of 50 percent (127). The survey asked respondents to identify basic biographic information and needs and challenges facing them as tentmakers. Data indicated the primary challenges to include time management, sermon preparation, witnessing and evangelism, counseling, and physical health and well being. Finally, the study suggests ways to better equip and support these ministers.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study attempts to provide a picture of the unique challenges and opportunities faced by bivocational ministers, sometimes referred to as tentmakers. Specifically, areas of encouragement, training or education are explored as they relate to ministers who serve churches and also are employed in non-church positions. For the purposes of this study, the scope is limited to bivocational ministers in Missouri, as designated by the Missouri Baptist Convention, and bivocational ministry is understood to refer to a person who has been called to the ministry but whose major source of income is generated from outside the church. As Bickers noted in his oft-referenced book on tentmaking pastors, "A bivocational minister is one who has a secular job as well as a paid ministry position in a church. Bivocational ministry is sometimes referred to as tentmaking ministry because our biblical example for bivocational ministry is the apostle Paul, who supported himself financially by making tents. In Acts 18:2-4, Paul stayed with Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth

¹This research project was funded through the M. Michael Award Scholarship Activity Fund of Southwest Baptist University.

because they were also tentmakers. 'The three of them worked together during the week, and Paul would then minister in the synagogue every Sabbath.'"²

BACKGROUND

Tentmaker or bivocational ministers are a vital part of Christian church leadership. Jim Swedenburg of the Alabama Baptist State Convention is quoted in a Baptist Press article by Jason Skinner as saying, "All would agree, pastoring in addition to being employed in another vocation is no job for the lazy or undisciplined. And were it not for the pastors in the state who feel called to minister in this capacity, many hungry congregations would go spiritually unfed."³ Indeed, Philip Yang, speaking at the Southern Baptist Convention Bivocational Pastors Annual Celebration in 1999, spoke of bivocational ministry as a "second reformation." "Many people are talking about the coming of the second reformation. Some said that it is the small groups ministry. Yet I think the second reformation is the popularization of the bivocational ministry. . . . The first reformation gave the Bible back to the people. [This] second reformation gives ministry back to the people."⁴

Bivocational ministry is a growing phenomenon. "If present trends continue, bivocational Southern Baptist pastors will outnumber full-time pastors within 10 years."⁵ Carl Barrington, national missionary for tentmaking ministries for the Southern Baptist North American Mission Board noted that there are 2.6 persons graduating from seminaries today for every one existing full-time ministry position.⁶

Only since 1948 has full-time ministry been the dominant Southern Baptist model, Barrington said. In 1972, only 32 percent of Southern Baptist pastors were tentmakers, but in 1999 it has risen to 39 percent and is still climbing. By 2008, he predicted more than half of pastors serving Southern Baptist churches will be supporting themselves and their families through a marketplace vocation.⁷

²Dennis W. Bickers, *The Tentmaking Pastor: The Joy of Bivocational Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 10.

³Jason Skinner, "Bivocational Ministers' Role Crucial in Many Southern Baptist Churches," *Baptist Press*, November 23 1998, [on-line new paper article]; available at <http://www.sbc Baptist Press.org/bpnews.asp?ID=4891>; accessed 1 February 2007.

⁴Philip Yang, "On the Bivocational Ministry," *The Bivocational Beacon*, Vol. IX, No. 2 (1999): 2.

⁵Linda Lawson. "Tentmaking' Ministers Predicted to Become Southern Baptist Norm," *Baptist Press*, Aug 11, 1999.

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷*Ibid.*

According to the website, BivocationalMinistries.com, managed by bivocational expert Dennis Bickers, approximately 12 percent of Protestant pastors in the United States are bivocational ministers.⁸ The Missouri Baptist Convention reports that approximately 33 percent (610) of Southern Baptist churches in Missouri are served by a bivocational pastor.⁹ Additionally, in a 2004 publication of *The Parsonage*, *How do I develop balance as a bivocational pastor?* states that 30 to 40 percent of pastors may be bivocational.¹⁰ Quoting George Barna, Bickers writes that approximately 12 percent of all Protestant pastors in the United States are bivocational.¹¹ And using data provided by Donald Barnhouse, well-known Baptist preacher, W. A. Criswell, and Ronald Kalssen and John Koessler, Bickers writes: “The Southern Baptist Convention has approximately 13,000 bivocational pastors, which means that roughly 30 percent of its churches are led by such pastors. Some believe that out of all the Baptist churches in America, over 73 percent are lead by bivocational ministers. . . . These numbers were much higher than I had anticipated, but I also believe we will see the percentage increase even more in the years to come.”¹² Though many in full-time ministry will privately express concerns about bivocational models of ministry, the Bible is replete with scriptural support—Paul the Apostle most famously known as a tentmaker often referred to his bivocational role.¹³

⁸“Bivocational Ministries,” *Welcome page*, [on-line ministry page]; available at www.bivocationalministries.com; accessed 1 February 2007.

⁹Missouri Baptist Convention. “Bivocational Ministry: Is it right for You?” *Missouri Baptist Bivocational Ministers Association Brochure* (Missouri Baptist Convention, 2004).

¹⁰“Focus on the Family,” *The Parsonage*, “How Do I Develop Balance As A Bivocational Pastor?” [on-line ministry page]; available at www.parsonage.org; accessed 1 February 2007.

¹¹Bickers, 26.

¹²Ibid.

¹³“Surely you remember brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.” (1 Thessalonians 2.9).

“For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone’s food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow.” (2 Thessalonians 3.7-9).

“You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘it is more blessed to give than to receive.’” (Acts 20.34-35).

CURRENT RESEARCH AND DATA

While there is a multitude of articles and anecdotal narratives regarding bivocational ministry, very little formal research is available through academic publications. In fact, the statistical data and research that has been done is gathered and published through denominational entities, affinity groups and interest magazines, and not through formal academic research. Also, while the significance of bivocational ministers is publicly acknowledged, there has not been sufficient research to better understand the challenges and opportunities faced by those who have two callings. Understanding the needs and challenges of bivocational minister is critical.

The Southern Baptist Convention's 2002 Compensation Study provides an excellent data set for comparison between bivocational pastors' compensation packages. In an analysis of Missouri Baptist Convention bivocational ministers, those with 10 or more years of education averaged \$17,364 salary packages. Salary packages for those with 1-3 years education averaged \$15,233; while those with 4-6 and 6-9 years of education had pay packages of \$12,053 and \$12,858 respectively. Bivocational ministers' pay packages ranged from \$3,900 to \$36,000. The overall average bivocational pastor in Missouri earned \$12,236 with a total pay package of \$13,188. This is compared to full-time Missouri pastors earning an average \$39,569 with a total pay package of \$48,010. Other bivocational staff members reported average pay packages of \$11,703 compared to full-time staff minister's \$47,697.¹⁴

This same study indicated that the average number of years a bivocational pastor had served at the current church was 7.1 years, well over the average tenure of all pastors. Of the 75 responses to vacation time, nine churches provided one week of vacation per year, 59 provided two weeks vacation, three provided three weeks, three provided four weeks, and one church provided five or more weeks of vacation per year. The average pay package peaks for churches with memberships of 151-200 (\$19,895). The second highest bivocational pay package is for those serving churches of with over 200 (\$16,780), followed by churches with 101-150 (\$14,634) and 51-100 (\$12,867). Interestingly, the size of churches served by bivocational ministries might surprise some. While 17 bivocational pastors reported serving churches with memberships of 1-50, and 29 pastors served churches of memberships of 51-100, nineteen pastors served churches with memberships of 101-150. Four pastors serving bivocationally pastured churches with memberships of 151-200, and twelve bivocational pastors served memberships of over 200.¹⁵

Two interesting studies were conducted. The first was reported in the book, *Pastors at Risk*, by H.B. London and Neil Wiseman in 1993. The survey addressed ten areas. Eighty percent of the pastors believed that their ministry affected their families negatively. Ninety percent indicated they felt inadequately trained to cope with the demands of the ministry, and seventy percent said they have a lower self-esteem now than when they began their

¹⁴Southern Baptist Convention, *SBC Compensation Study* (Nashville, TN: SBC, 2002).

¹⁵Ibid.

ministry.¹⁶ In another study, the data from the Louisiana Baptist Convention, updated December 2003, revealed similar findings about bivocational ministers. Bivocational pastors have less than healthy images of themselves and have guilt feelings about the amount of time spent with their families.¹⁷ Of particular interest to this study is data provided by the Louisiana Baptist Convention (LBC).¹⁸ According to its website, the typical bivocational pastor, while active in lay church leadership prior to entering ministry, is not necessarily trained in pastoral ministry. They report that 30 percent have never had a course designed for pastors and that nearly 30 percent have no more than a high school education. Furthermore, only 34 percent have had 17 years or more of formal education though many (26.4 percent) attended, but did not finish college.¹⁹

These factors also may affect the bivocational ministers' lack of a healthy self-image, as reported by the same study. According to the LBC, bivocational ministers also report a sense of isolation from their denomination, as well as a sense of a lack of concern for their ministries from the denomination and a lack of acceptance from fully supported pastors.²⁰ Bivocational pastors often report that they feel that fully-funded pastors do not regard them as real pastors. One fully-funded pastor, despite having pastored or worked in ministerial staff positions that were bivocational, referred to his first full-time, fully-funded position as his first "real" pastorate.

In his book, *The Bivocational Pastor*, Luther M. Dorr shares several vignettes supporting the tentmaker's the lack of acceptance. He presents Reverend Granville Watson, the owner and president of Water Quality Science, Inc., who was serving as an interim pastor in Mississippi: "What needs does he (Watson) have as a bivocational? He mentions acceptance first: acceptance and understanding by church people and fellow ministers. He also mentions 'philosophy of ministry' as an area of interest and desire for greater understanding."²¹

¹⁶H.B. London and Neil Wiseman, *Pastors at Risk* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993).

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸The Louisiana Baptist Convention (LBC) is widely perceived to be a leader within the Southern Baptist Convention relative to its bivocational ministry support. The LBC was often cited to the researchers in this study as having exemplary programs in support of bivocational ministries and specifically, bivocational ministers.

¹⁹"Louisiana Baptist Convention," *Typical Bivocational Pastor*, [on-line article]; available at <http://www.startelco.net/~wgm/BIVO/index.html>.

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹Luther M. Dorr, *The Bivocational Pastor* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1988), 51-52.

This same tendency is mentioned by Clapp, et. al.:

Protestant and Anabaptist congregations affirm a view of the church which includes the concept of “the priesthood of all believers.” We believe that all people are called to ministry and that all people have received gifts from God for use in the ministry...The word ministry is sometimes used in a narrowly defined sense to designate a person trained and employed by the church for set-apart work, but almost all denominations also see ministry as service in Christ’s name and as work for which the entire church has responsibility. Although most of us would not put it so crassly, the reality is that we are often tempted to see ministry as a three-tiered kind of enterprise. Those at the top are the full time, seminary trained, set-apart clergy. Bivocational ministers are the next level, followed by laypersons in the congregation.²²

Despite the biblical evidence, many view bivocational ministry as a lesser ministry.

The Louisiana study indicates how the bivocational minister rates his own skills. While, over 81 percent ranked their sermon preparation as moderate or very well, nearly 16 percent also indicated the need for more training. Those who ranked their preaching and witnessing skills as moderate or very well accounted for 91 percent and over 84 percent respectively. The highest percentage, 94.8, was in the area of people skills.²³ Finally, the study reported that 61.8 percent of bivocational ministers ranked their church administration skills as moderate or very well, while nearly 33 percent reported the need for more training.²⁴

An earlier study, 1980, reported by Dorr concluded the following as self-perceived strengths by bivocational pastors:

Preaching
Relations with deacons and church members
Relations with other staff members/usually volunteers
Efficient use of building space

²²Steve Clapp, Ron Finney and Angela Zimmerman, *Preaching, Planning, and Plumbing: The Implications of Bivocational Ministry for the Church and for You—Discovering God’s Call to Service and Joy* (Richmond, IN: Brethren Academy and LifeQuest, 1999), 18.

²³*Ibid.*; Warren Wiersbe, well-known preacher and perhaps now more famous as a “pastor’s pastor,” has written numerous commentaries and books specifically aimed at pastors. At a pastor’s conference, years ago at Samford University’s Beeson Divinity School, Wiersbe was greeting pastors after a class he had just finished, and asking each one briefly about their personal ministry. When one pastor stated he was a bivocational pastor, Wiersbe paused and smiled and held his grip on the man’s hand. “Your people love you,” he stated firmly. “They love you because when they hear you preach a Word from God, they know you’ve been out in the trenches with them all week long.”

²⁴Louisiana Baptist Convention.

Relationship to associational program²⁵

Dorr also found that the study repeated several weaknesses or “needs” amongst the pastors. In descending order of importance, these weaknesses included:

Christian social ministries	Methods of evangelism
Religious education	Relationship to denominational agencies
Skill in counseling	Relationship to the Home Mission Board
Leadership training	Evaluating church needs
Knowledge of other faiths	Evaluating community needs
Mission outreach	Time management
Leadership enlistment	Relationship to state program
Program planning	Developing efficient church organizational structures ²⁶

The Brethren also surveyed their bivocational ministers, asking about secular employment. This study reported about 33 percent of bivocational pastors were also employed in business or in self-owned farming, and indicated that 60 percent were employed in a professional field. Examples of secular occupations and fields found in their survey included:

social work	plumber	doctor	principal
government work	banking	clerk	physician
journalism	teacher	electrician	coaching
real estate	business owner	computers ²⁷	

Their study further attempted to identify education and training for bivocational pastors and reported that 35 percent of those surveyed had earned a seminary degree, and one-third had earned a graduate degree in their non-ministerial field. While they reported spending an average of 4 years in ministerial training, they also reported 3.45 years on average training for their non-ministerial position.²⁸

The application of the Brethren survey to Southern Baptists may be limited due to denominational differences. Also, since the number of pastors surveyed was not reported, the statistical significance of these findings cannot be determined.

²⁵Dorr, 103.

²⁶Ibid., 103-04.

²⁷Clapp, et al., 50.

²⁸Ibid., 51.

METHODOLOGY OF THE MISSOURI BAPTIST CONVENTION SURVEY

Survey instruments were developed and provided to a select group of research experts to check for validity and appropriateness. The Missouri Baptist Convention (MBC), through Monty Hale, Small Church Ministries/Bivocational Consultant, provided a list of all MBC bivocational ministers. This list defined the survey population. A random sample of all Missouri bivocational ministers, registered with the Missouri Baptist Convention, (254) served as the sample for this project. All individuals in the defined population had an equal and independent chance of being selected for the sample. The sample size required for the given population was based on the work of Krejcie and Morgan, *Educational and Psychological Measurement*.²⁹ Surveys were mailed with a cover letter explaining the research project. A total of 127 surveys were returned (50%). Responses were tabulated and correlations calculated to determine those with statistical significance.

FINDINGS

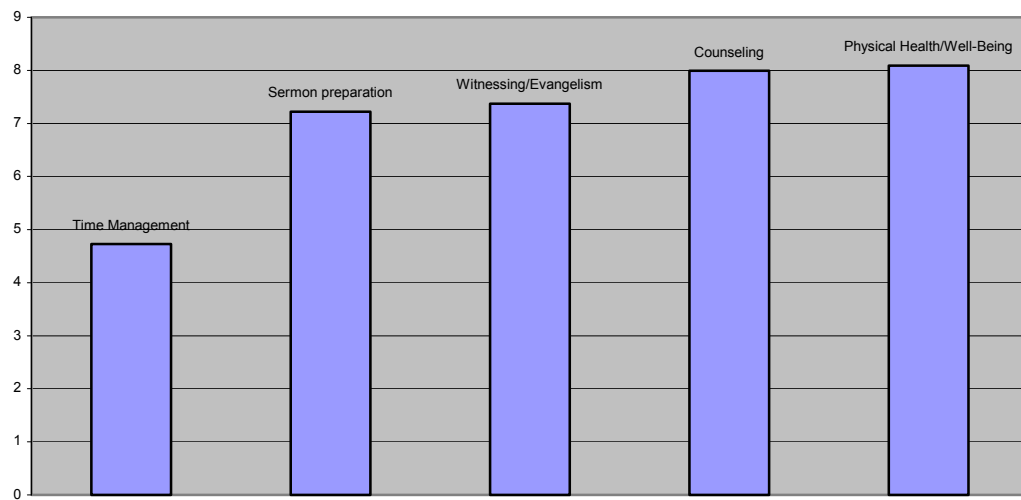
The study asked the respondents to identify themselves by age, education and their other vocation. Forty-nine (38.5 percent) of the Bivocational pastors in Missouri reported themselves as 60 years old or older. One hundred and six (83.4 percent) were 46 years or older. One hundred seventeen (92.1 percent) reported themselves as senior pastor indicating that very few were involved in non-pastoral ministries. One hundred twenty-one (95 percent) reported themselves as married. Educational backgrounds varied among respondents. While, sixty-four (over 50 percent) had earned a graduate degree/seminary, thirty-nine (just over 31 percent) had only a high school diploma.

No secular vocation was common among those surveyed, although a large number support themselves through blue-collar, skilled labor positions. This fact seems particularly interesting, given the average level of education.

Pastors were asked to rank their most significant ministry-related challenges. The top five challenges of all respondents (as shown in the following table) are listed in descending order: Time Management; Sermon Preparation; Witnessing/Evangelism; Counseling; and Physical Health/Well Being.

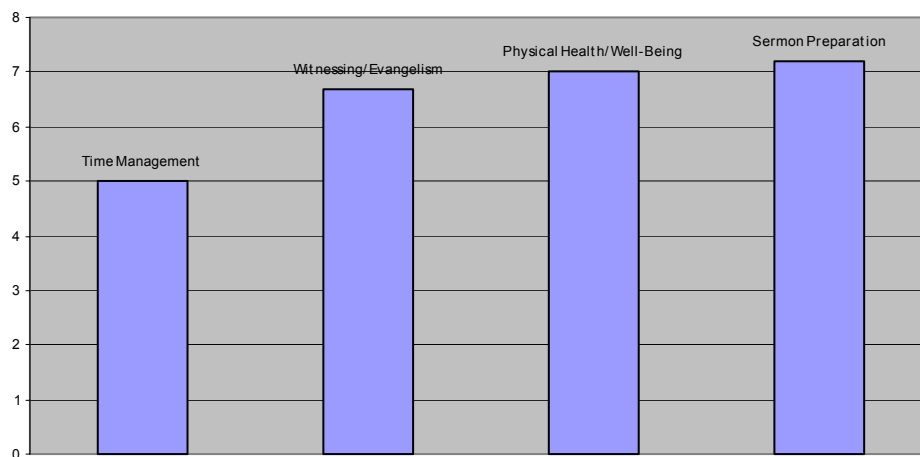
²⁹Krejcie and Morgan, *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, (1970), 30, 608.

Average Rating of Top Five Challenges by All Respondents (Lower Rating Indicates Higher Concern)



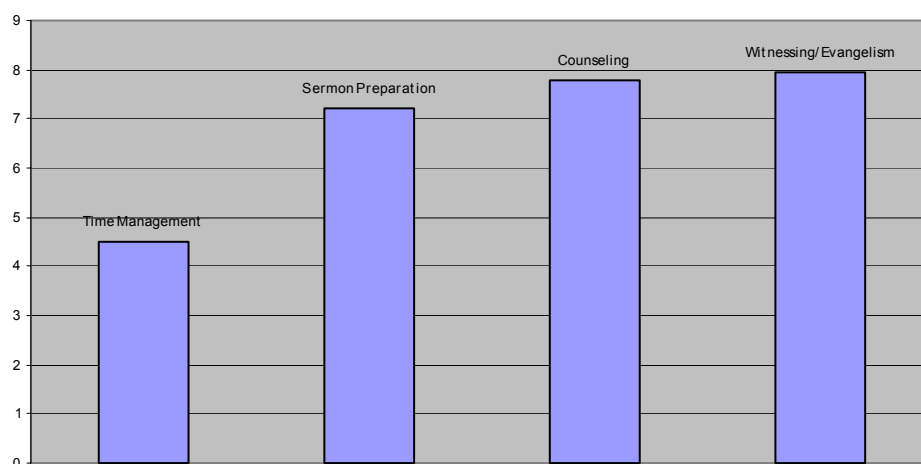
The top four ministry-related challenges for those 56 or older are listed in descending order: Time Management; Witnessing/Evangelism; Physical Health/Well Being; and Sermon Preparation.

Average Rating of Top Four Challenges by Respondents Age 56 or Greater



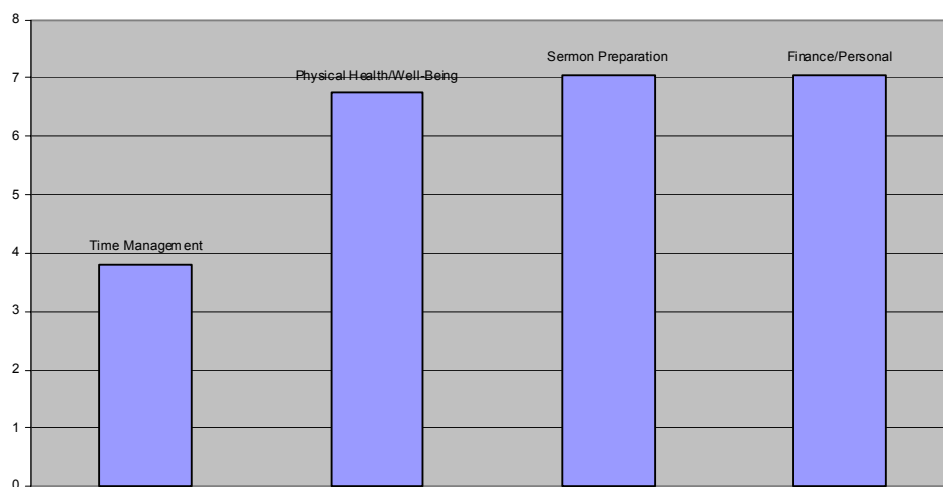
The top four ministry-related challenges for those 55 or younger are listed in descending order: Time Management; Sermon Preparation; and Counseling; Witnessing/Evangelism.

Average Rating of Top Four Challenges by Respondents Age 55 or Less (Lower Rating Indicates Higher Concern)



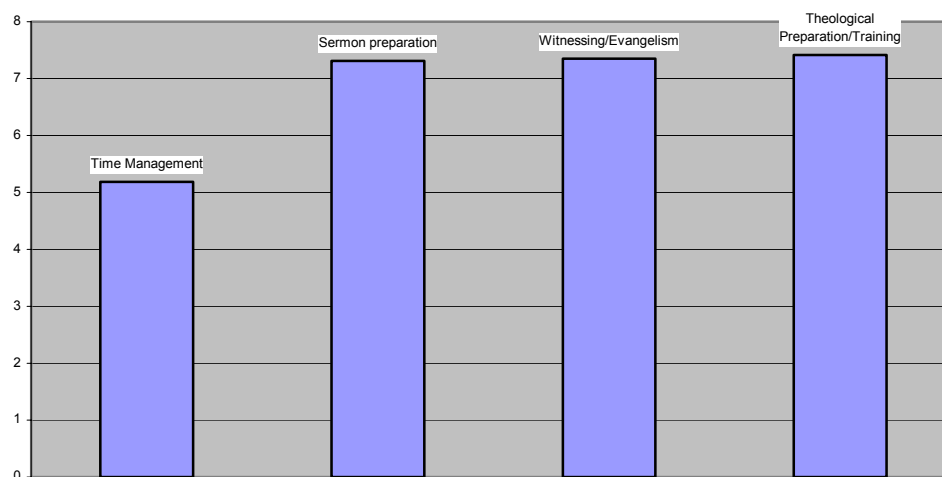
The top four ministry-related challenges for those with a seminary degree are listed in descending order: Time Management; Physical Health/Well Being; Sermon Preparation; and Personal Financial Planning.

Average Rating of Top Four Challenges by Respondents Reporting Seminary (Lower Rating Indicates Higher Concern)



The top four ministry-related challenges for those with no seminary degree are listed in descending order: Time Management; Sermon Preparation; Witnessing/Evangelism; and Theological Preparation/Training.

Average Rating of Top Four Challenges by Respondents not Reporting Seminary (Lower Rating Indicates Higher Concern)



IMPLICATIONS/CONCLUSION

Obviously, among the many challenges bivocational pastors face, the most significant include: Time Management, Sermon Preparation, Witnessing/Evangelism, Counseling, Physical Health/Well Being, Theological Preparation/Training and Personal Financial Planning. There are several ways of analyzing the data in regard to age and educational background. For instance those without seminary backgrounds are most likely to indicate a greater need for theological training and preparation. Those who have seminary backgrounds may fall into two broad categories. They may be former fully-funded ministers who now are bivocational in the sense that they support themselves through retirement—this may indicate why some with seminary backgrounds reported physical health/well being as a primary concern. Others may be seminary-educated ministers who are working with churches too small or too financially strapped to fully fund a pastor's salary and benefits.

However, the primary findings in this study do indicate that regardless of age or educational preparation, there are some commonalities reported among those classified as bivocational ministers. Therefore, it is incumbent upon Baptist institutions including churches, associations, conventions, colleges, universities and seminaries to recognize these challenges. Local churches should provide necessary release time and financial support for the development of their bivocational pastor and ministers. Associations and conventions should continue their efforts toward ministering to these pastors and explore new avenues and creative partnerships with other institutions such as Baptist colleges, universities and seminaries.

A major implication of this study suggests that there is potential to better meet the needs of bivocational ministers by Baptist colleges, universities and seminaries. These institutions are uniquely equipped to meet the particular needs cited by the ministers in this study. The burden, therefore, rests on the Baptist institutions of higher learning to provide resources to the tentmaker. From focused institutes, to weekend seminars, to formal degree

offerings based on the needs and schedules of bivocational ministers, multiple opportunities exist for these institutions to support this vital ministry in kingdom work. In fact, this is not merely an opportunity; it is a sacred responsibility.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

While the findings of this study point out many of the challenges and opportunities faced by bivocational ministers, as well as the opportunities and responsibilities of Baptist institutions, additional study is warranted. For instance, greater correlations between demographics and specific needs and challenges could prove helpful for better understanding bivocational ministers; therefore, a more focused effort on meeting those needs would be possible. More specific data regarding the differences between pastors, worship leaders, youth ministers and other leadership positions would also prove beneficial for analyzing specific needs and means to address those needs.

THE WAY OF THE DISCIPLE IN CHURCH PLANTING

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INTRODUCTION

We have a number of arguments flaring in Southern Baptist life today. It's nothing new, and it's not necessarily bad. We are people of strong convictions that we zealously defend for the sake of reaching people for Christ more effectively.

An important argument—to me anyway—concerns the starting of new SBC churches. The argument long since passed the point of whether or not to start churches; new churches are the bones of the Southern Baptist Convention. Church planting represents one of the hottest topics in Southern Baptist life today. Many of our leaders know that the future of our denomination depends on starting healthy, multiplying churches. Perhaps the question of when to start something gets hung up on what kind of church to start or how to get new churches to multiply.¹

If so, the SBC is hung up on the wrong question. A better question concerns how to develop the type of men and women who make disciples rapidly enough to make a new church thrive.

It is my position that well-formed Christian disciples make other disciples faster than their spiritually immature peers even if the latter excel at entrepreneurial skill or raise more money. I hope to advance the argument beyond the mechanics of church planting—the *doing* end of things—and onto the spiritual development of the church planter—the *being* end.

¹Two key facts lead to growth of the SBC: (1) new churches offer an extraordinarily effective way to lead lost people to Christ, and (2) churches that sponsor new churches also grow. Neither of those realities can be seriously doubted, but still we see only about five percent of Southern Baptist churches sponsoring new churches. Ed Stetzer and Philip Conner, "Church Plant Survivability and Health Study 2007," Center for Missional Resurgence February 2007 [report on-line]; available from http://www.namb.net/atf/cf/%7BCDA250E8-8866-4236-9A0CC646DE153446%7D/RESEARCH_REPORT_SURVIVABILITY_HEALTH.PDF?tr=y&auid=2440992; Internet; accessed 21 January 2008; and Jeffrey C. Farmer, "Church Planting Sponsorship: A Statistical Analysis of Sponsoring a Church Plant as a Means of Revitalization of the Sponsor Church" (Ph.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary).

The equipping and support of church planters is a Southern Baptist initiative that keeps its promise. Nevertheless, our program is not perfect—efforts to do better reward us. I feel ill over stories of failed church plants and disingenuous church planters. Every Baptist Association Director can recount his experience with a church plant that failed even though he picked a skillful young man to lead it and gave him plenty of money.

I want to help my partners in the field find godly men to plant healthy, multiplying churches. This paper sets out some objective criteria by which one might evaluate disciples and disciple making in local churches.

Can one find objective measurements for what it means to be a spiritually formed disciple of Jesus Christ? Does a system exist to measure disciples for church planting fitness? One hopes so. Such a system offers a gold coin of promise. One side pays the potential planter by increasing his readiness for the field. The flip side pays equippers of church planters by adding to our knowledge of what traits to assess and teach. Ultimately, if the hypothesis proves true, *all* churches benefit because all churches want to make disciples that multiply themselves by making more disciples.

Painting an objective portrait of a disciple seems easy enough, does it not? The New Testament tells us the kinds of things disciples do; perhaps they can be measured. Disciples pray, learn the Apostles' teaching (Bible), develop friendships with other disciples, tell people about Jesus, perform good works, and worship God. They also lie, cheat, and steal, and sometimes receive correction, repent, and get back to walking with Christ.

Baptists tend to measure worship attendance, baptisms, and money in the collection plate, all of which are easy to enumerate but not necessarily indicative of discipleship. Most believers agree that nothing seems more complicated than trying to figure out if someone is keeping up with Jesus on a long walk.

Perhaps one place upon which we can agree to find measurements is within the Bible. But where does one go in the Bible, and how does he rightly apply ancient measurements to the contemporary church? Years ago, Southern Baptists had a Yale-educated, sage; a biblicist known as the conscience of Southern Baptists, T. B. Maston. He served as Professor of Christian Ethics at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary for forty-two years, retiring in 1985. He published extensively on race relations, social justice, ecology, marriage, sexuality, gender roles, politics, church and state relations, war, and biblical ethics in general. He walked with Christ for a very long time and taught thousands of ministers to join in the way of the disciple. Maston based all his teaching on biblical principles observed through his ethical lens.² Not all Southern Baptists agree with Maston's

²William M. Tillman, Jr., ed., *Perspectives on Applied Christianity: Essays in Honor of Thomas Buford Maston* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986), 5-6; and Jimmy R. Allen, "Thomas Buford Maston: Baptist Apostle of Biblical Ethics" *Christian Ethics Today: Journal of Christian Ethics* 47:9 5 December 2003 [journal on-line]; available from <http://www.christianethicstoday.com/Issue/047/Thomas%20Buford%20Maston->

hermeneutics on every issue—nor do I. As for his view of Scripture, however, I cannot quarrel. Maston felt that “the Bible is the most important possession of the Christian churches, far more important than all of their buildings, institutions, and endowments.”³ To guide the search through the Scriptures, this paper makes use of Maston’s section on “The Way of the Disciple,” in his textbook *Biblical Ethics*.⁴ Maston’s body of work, enormous in scope and depth, demonstrates his conviction that it is the job of local churches to make disciples.

IS “MAKING DISCIPLES” THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH?

How can anyone dispute that the purpose of the local church is to make disciples? Jesus gave his followers a simple, easily remembered statement to guide us to productive lives. It is known as The Great Commission, and its heart is Christ’s statement to, “make disciples.”⁵ The statement is simple but not simplistic, memorable but overlooked. Preachers sermonize over it, children memorize it, and cornerstones memorialize it, but do we do it? Christ’s statement offers a guaranteed key to locking up arguments and anxiety while opening the door to joy and productivity. It promises an open-ended *more* for our lives, our churches, and our training centers.

Jesus told His followers to make disciples and new churches do so far more effectively than do older churches—at least that is what the math says. That math, however, is based on baptism rates, which do not seem to be a very comprehensive measure of a disciple. We are offered one, single, most-likely-to-succeed idea that will draw the heat out of the majority of the arguments in the Southern Baptist Convention, increase our baptisms well over one million souls per year, and provide a fat pot of gold on which we may draw resources to spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth. One thing: start churches. Church planting is the single most effective answer to what ails the Southern Baptist Convention, but church planting can become a mechanized *start something at all cost* strategy. When that happens, church planting is the *wrong* strategy for us to adopt.

Church plants are not technological products cranked out from assembly lines; they are spiritual and living organisms. We are in the business of spiritually developing people.

As long as there have been Southern Baptists, we have talked (fussed, fumed, argued, yelled, debated, and had a few cordial exchanges) about the best ways to plant churches. Our tribe began and increased on the backs of courageous missionary preachers who left the comfortable east for the western frontier—once in the field, they started churches. Then

%20Baptist%20Apostle%20of%20Biblical%20Ethics%20By%20Jimmy%20R.%20Allen_047_06_.htm; Internet; accessed 16 January 2008.

³T. B. Maston, *Biblical Ethics: A Survey* (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1967), v.

⁴Maston, *Biblical Ethics*, 158-64.

⁵Matt. 28:19.

they gathered in Associations and Conventions and discussed—what else?—starting churches.⁶

I enjoy dozens of these same conversations every week. Generally, people like to tell me about the right funding for church plants, the right model of church to plant, and the right skills a church planter needs. Three rights make one flaming wrong. Not that the big three are wrongheaded by themselves; simply that they do not represent the first issue. What is missing is that if the planter is trying to make disciples, it helps if he or she *is* a disciple. None of those three alone offers a way through the morass of contemporary North American hedonism apart from it being carried on by a disciple of Jesus Christ.

The command to *make disciples* is a fat request. While it is easy on the memory, it weighs hard on the mind. What, exactly, *is* a disciple? One can use a dictionary to find the basic meaning of the word, but churches need more meat out of it than that.⁷ If Jesus thought making disciples was important enough to commission us to the task, perhaps we should know what exactly that means; i.e., what are we to make and how do we make it? A successful definition of *disciple* should lead us to better ways for selecting those upon whom to spend church planting resources.

Today's unchurched, dechurched, and increasingly *Pagan* North America requires that church leaders spend more energy on the planter than the plant. The focus should be on *the way of the disciple*. Maston used six categories, labeled the way of . . . humility, forgiveness, service, fruit-bearing, the cross, and the way of the Lord.⁸ Over the next several pages, we will briefly examine the content of each category and offer a prescription for assessing and equipping disciples as church planters. We start at the point of our anemia: humility.

THE WAY OF HUMILITY

I had a business partner once who was the first man I knew who openly wanted nothing to do with churches while confessing to being a Christian—he did not much like churches or other Christians. He saw no hypocrisy in his opinion, having come by it as he described, through experience.

As a boy, Roger had been something of a star on the basketball court. His problem with Christianity was that his father—a church leader—upbraided him regularly and thoroughly for his lack of humility regarding his athleticism. Roger was not my partner

⁶Granted, the conversations were on the topic of missions, but the historical record indicates (and any missionary will tell you) that “missions” concerns itself with starting churches.

⁷A disciple is one who accepts and assists in spreading the doctrines of another. Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, s.v. “Disciple,” available from <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/disciple>.

⁸Maston, *Biblical Ethics*, 158-64.

long—I found that he took his father’s criticism as a license to become exactly what his father warned against—he acted like an arrogant jerk.

I do not pretend to be an expert on the intricacies of the human mind, but I think that neither Roger nor his father understood humility. They also did not understand the church as Jesus intended it. Roger was a risk taker and courageous, and those two traits led him to success on the basketball court. It did not hurt him much in the business world until his attitude wrecked his relationships.

Normally, the men willing to start churches are men with great courage and confidence—men like Roger. Church planters lean toward arrogance like a politician leans toward a handshake. They tend to be high-capacity men with records of high achievement. Their achievements, however, lead them to often thinking too highly of their opinions and abilities.

One of my friends defines humility “not as thinking too lowly of yourself, but not thinking of yourself at all.” I like his slogan, but it leaves me with a dilemma. The moment I think it, my next thought is of myself and whether or not I measure up to the standard. Sort of self-defeating, is it not? A humble man might do a bit of self-examination and realize his attitude is fine. An arrogant man’s introspection will *always* result in the conclusion that he is doing just fine, and thus he will fight for a high opinion of himself. Such subjectivity will not do for our purposes.

Maston defined Christian humility less subjectively and more as a series of actions. He found, “a close connection between humility and the spirit of service.”⁹ Using Christ’s condemnation of the Pharisees as an example, we can see that as one grows more concerned with his religious appearance than how his religion acts itself out in public, he or she grows arrogant and, by extension, becomes useless as a disciple. James referred to the arrogant man as the one who hears the Word but does not act on it, and therefore deceives himself into thinking he is practicing Christianity.¹⁰

Church planters are tasked with receiving a vision from God and communicating it to others in a way that helps a new church form. Heady stuff, don’t you agree? By its nature, such divine-human communication carries the temptation to let all within earshot know what “God told me” in a tone that can carry underlying messages like, “and therefore I am better than you,” “you need to do what I say,” or “hand over your money.”

Moreover, because church planters are often young men, and because they often lead many adults to Christ, it can appear that they are successful without the necessary long walk in the same direction. The body of biblical wisdom literature indicates that real success is only measured over a significant period of time (one may think decades instead of years at this point).

⁹Maston, *Biblical Ethics*, 158.

¹⁰Jas. 1:22.

Denomination officials, hungry for a good story to tell member churches, often give unproven men status too early. We all know what usually happens when a young man or woman receives too much publicity—they become overconfident and often arrogant. Better to offer help, encouragement, support, instruction, and very little status.

Fortunately, God remains interested in the spiritual health of his children. He will not allow arrogance to go unchallenged. He assures disciples that wisdom follows humility; arrogance is a scary type of foolishness that pays negative dividends. One of the ways God humbles people is by putting them in the hands of someone who takes advantage of them—someone who *out-arrogants* them.¹¹ Once the disciple has been hurt; he (hopefully) learns his lesson. He has a new task to learn: forgiveness of the one who hurt him.

THE WAY OF FORGIVENESS

Every church planter finds himself either forgiving people who think it is their spiritual gift to offend him or quitting the field feeling bitter and broken. Stories among church planters and their wives are eerily consistent when one asks about what it feels like to be betrayed, slandered, or cursed, and often by the leaders of sister churches in their area.

It is *normal* for leaders of non-growing churches to try to prevent a new church from starting or growing. Normal offenses tend to consume enormous amounts of time and energy fighting and defending one's vision. In reality, all the planter usually accomplishes by trying to defend himself is to take time away from doing what he was called to do (make disciples). Jesus told his followers to forgive others just as God forgave us. Forgive them quickly and move on to something productive.

Church planters seem to have more than their share of opportunities to practice the discipline of forgiveness. Therefore, it seems important that potential church planters be trained to forgive. It seems even more important to seek men with a painful story, or a life that required them to develop a habit of forgiving offenders. We might think it too much to require people to forgive an offender before the offender has repented. After all, does not the lack of repentance free Christians to hold a grudge? When I put it that way, most people agree that God wants Christians to forgive people anyway.

God offers forgiveness, but it must accompany man's repentance in order to be effectual. "The act of forgiveness is incomplete without repentance."¹² The problem is that *all* church planters (and their wives) hear baseless accusations against their ministries. *All* church planters receive news of broken promises—usually involving funding cuts or facilities that will not be available after all. Accusers and promise-breakers believe in the rightness of their decisions and almost never budge. Repentance is not coming. If the planter chooses to fight every offense, he wastes so much time that he endangers the growth of the church. In reality, all he can do is forgive the offense and pray that God will help him

¹¹Joseph offers a prime example. His arrogance made him a slave, and it almost cost him his life (Gen. 37).

¹²Maston, *Biblical Ethics*, 160.

grow his church beyond the reach of offensive people. In a sense, the church is like a tree that the planter can climb when predators hunt him.

Lack of repentance matters not one whit—church planters benefit only when they learn to forgive people who will *not* repent. “One can have the willingness to forgive . . . regardless of the attitude of others.”¹³ If the victim holds a grudge, he will become a bitter and ineffective hand for Christ.

Lindsey’s husband Pete did all he could to grow a new church. The first ten months he led twelve people to Christ and gathered a group about triple that size for weekly worship and Bible study. When the letter came telling Pete that his salary was to be reduced by half, Lindsey was the first to read it. “What do they expect? We did more than they asked!” she cried on the phone.

I confess that I was mad too, but it did not matter. The decision was in concrete. When Pete found out that money he was promised had been diverted to cover road maintenance at a Christian camp, he bounced off the walls, but Lindsey went right through the roof. She threatened to call a lawyer, then she threatened to quit, then she got very, very quiet.

Pete eventually returned to winning people to Christ, and Christ kept on bringing people to Pete. By the end of the second year, enough people joined the church to cover the earlier loss of funds. During the next two years, though, the church stopped growing and started to decline. By the end of the sixth year, Pete and Lindsey packed up the dishes and moved two states away. The church died.

What happened? Lindsey drank an unforgiving spirit and told everyone within earshot about the broken promises. She even went to the camp and made sure the director heard that his road cost her family a badly needed vacation. It did not take much of that kind of talk for people to start looking for a new church. Lindsey’s weak discipleship cost her husband his ministry—she would not forgive the offense.

Perhaps someone could have intervened. Did anyone see the sign that something was wrong when Lindsey stopped serving others? I cannot help but feel that we should have known something and helped her get back on track. Lindsey’s focus turned inward to her needs. Service demands that we look outward to help others with their needs.

THE WAY OF SERVICE

In some ways new churches may offer a more measurable proving ground for service than established churches simply because the needs are more obvious. Newer churches do not have many disciples who know what to do. Fewer hands do the ministry because most of the people are still learning how the Christian life works. Most people seem to think that service requires a great deal of religious training. Biblically speaking, however, serving the

¹³Ibid.

needs of others do not mean offering religious experiences, therapy, or even evangelistic visitation. Those are all excellent things to offer, and to some degree they do entail service, but Christ defined the general service offered by his disciples as something far more practical. He told us to give people food, water, hospitality, and clothing. His only command regarding visitation was to go see people who were either sick or in prison.¹⁴ He requires no special training.

The meaning of service in most churches (even new ones) usually refers to the Sunday gathering for worship and preaching. As a result, the members of churches rarely know how to serve the needs of others in their community. Because so little that happens in the name of *service* actually involves serving others, the unchurched react with skepticism to any church's promise of relevance.

I was helping a church planter by surveying a neighborhood in Nashville, asking people what they might look for in a new church. One guy bluntly told me that he wanted a church that was more concerned with handing out cold water on a hot day than getting in his wallet. I said it sounded like he had a bad experience in church. He told me that he attended church for many years, but quit after a business meeting where his church decided to care more about the look of their campus block than the people who lived a block over.

New churches may find a rich vein of dissatisfied saints waiting to join someone who cares about serving people. It is likely that most church planters find little time to spend doing tangible acts of service. Time spent feeding hungry people means time lost recruiting people who can feed themselves, and pay for the salaries, insurance, rent, sound system, or invitation postcards.

Jesus never said to spend all our time doing community service ministry, but he did say to spend some time in community service. He seems to have united serving and witnessing into concurrent actions. Moreover, he made it clear that whenever disciples perform acts of service, they are treating *him* well—Jesus took service personally. He “identified himself [with people in need].”¹⁵ When a guy's bills need paying, it requires an enormous amount of faith for him to leave work early so he can spend time visiting prisoners. Yet, do we not think that that the faith required to put our needs aside to help out “the least of these” is exactly the kind of faith that Jesus asks his disciples to exhibit?¹⁶ Of course it is! Faithful service gets results, and we find a close relationship exists between the disciplines of service and fruit-bearing.

THE WAY OF FRUIT-BEARING

Donnie Bullmann (not his real name) was a walking cliché. He was six feet tall, two hundred forty pounds (most of it in his chest), and loud as a sportscaster's blazer. I met him

¹⁴Matt. 25:35-36.

¹⁵Maston, *Biblical Ethics*, 161.

¹⁶Matt. 25:40.

at a conference in the 90s. True to his name in every way, Bullmann sported slick hair, an expensive, Western-cut suit complete with a matching boots and belt ensemble, and a thick, gold wristwatch. He was the first person I remember meeting who displayed Christian bling. He had a Bible that doubled as a car-jack, and he could lead a fire hydrant to faith in Christ.

Bullmann was a real, live evangelist. He got on a city bus and led a guy to the Lord two stops later. He always flew on Southwest Airlines so he could change seats and lead more people to Christ. I think he led an entire tramcar to Christ in the Atlanta Airport between Gate B and baggage claim. He spent at least two days every week knocking on doors and *always* procured names of people who prayed to know Christ. I asked him how he did all that, and I remember his answer: “Jesus sends us out to bear fruit, brother!”

Donnie preached a sermon that equated fruit-bearing with convert-making. He used John 15:5 and over a dozen stories to make his point. The biblical passage likens Jesus to the vine and disciples to the branches. (I am quoting Donnie from memory, so this may not be exact, but it is close):

Healthy branches produce grapes and people can see if a vine has any grapes on it from a long way off. So, the fruit the Lord is telling us about must be something big enough to see at a distance. People are big enough to see. New Christians are big enough to see! If you're connected to Jesus, everyone will know because you'll have a bunch of new Christians hanging around you.

I liked Donnie immediately—he motivated me.

Donnie led an obnoxiously bold life for Christ. He really believed that everyone could do what he did with the same results. I adopted his bold style. I liked his sermon so much that I made it my own. I stole it. I wondered why my version had no effect on my listeners and why my one-man, loud, door knocking, witnessing campaign had no effect on people who expressed fondness for Jesus as I was telling them to repent. People cursed me, slammed doors in my face. One guy threw a beer on me and another guy sent his dog after my hide—and these were my church members! (OK, they were not really my church members.)

Bullmann did not receive much appreciation from other Pastors. I wondered why until I worked at a homeless shelter with him one day. We were supposed to be serving lunch. They put us behind a stainless steel counter, in front of a huge pot of tongue-scalding soup, and gave us plastic shower caps (why I do not have a picture of that moment is evidence of God's grace). I started sweating immediately, but not nearly as much as Donnie. He was wearing a powder blue shirt that was so starched it looked like it was made of wood. In about five minutes that shirt started changing color under the arms, then around the collar, then in a line down his back. He was wearing an apron, but you know he had to have two of those half-moons that big, sweaty guys get on their chests—*real attractive*.

Anyway, they handed us big steel ladles and told us they were opening the door. Our instructions were simple: “smile, be nice, serve soup, and keep the line moving,” but Bullmann had another plan. About the time a sweat drop laced with Final Net attempted a half gainer from the end of his nose to the lip of the big, steel pot, he announced: “Jack, you

stay here and serve soup. I'm going to do the *Lord's* work." He popped off his shower cap and emphasized the word *Lord's* as if it were a cue.

It occurred to me at that moment that soup-ladling looked pretty lame, so I asked the lady running the line if I could go do the *Lord's* work too. She patted my hand and said, "Some of God's children are too big to just smile and serve soup." I put my shower cap back on.

It turned out that Bullmann did not like to serve soup or much of anything else, and his attitude corroded a hole in his ministry. He made converts, but evidently not too many disciples. I still see him every couple years. He generally has a new job and his resume in his pocket. He has very little fruit. Disciples walk in the way of fruit-bearing, and the fruit is two, intertwined and inseparable varieties: saved souls and good deeds.

Every year, when I read John 15, I remember that a disciple who bears fruit introduces people to Christ and performs good deeds. A thorough interpretation of fruit-bearing includes the good works a disciple spontaneously does because he or she loves Christ.¹⁷

Charles Roesel built a huge church outside Orlando by ministering to the needs of people in his community. His church members run a school, a laundry, a carwash, feed people and house homeless men and women, care for children, and operate a medical clinic. They use it all to make it easy for people to know Christ personally. They help people and they talk about Jesus a lot, and thousands come. That's bearing fruit. Roesel told me that the main reason churches do not grow is that, "People give first class loyalty to third class causes. Evangelism is not our priority [in the SBC]."¹⁸ That's from a guy who sacrificed his time and ambitions building a big church in a small town by doing community service projects.

Church planters also make sacrifices in order to bear fruit. They have to pick up a cross.

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

When Jesus told his followers to pick up a cross and bear it, he knew what he was saying, and believers have stumped their toes on his words ever since.¹⁹ Cross-bearing is not fun; it is painful. It means dying to sin and rising to redemption, to be sure, but it does not stop there. The way of the cross means hosting my own "white funeral;" laying me down to

¹⁷George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary, (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 273. Hans Windisch, *The Meaning of the Sermon on the Mount*, 71, quoted in Maston, *Biblical Ethics*, 161.

¹⁸Personal conversation with Charles Roesel, Atlanta, GA, July 30, 2007. Dr. Roesel is the former Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Leesburg, FL.

¹⁹Luke 9:23.

die to everything in me that is not of Christ. The way of the cross is dying to oneself in faith that people will find Jesus alive in him.²⁰

People talk of their rebirth as though they just witnessed their own deaths, when often they merely witnessed the death of an idea that life was good enough without Jesus in it. There is nothing light or small in admitting that one needs Christ, but bearing one's cross (voluntarily ceasing to be self-directed) weighs more heavily. The former weighs on our mind, but the latter weighs down our soul and is crushing. The way of the cross crushes the strongest, most confident man or woman. It crushed Jesus.

The crushing weight of the cross is the Potter's hands mashing clay into something useful to his purposes. People—I, anyway—hold wickedly selfish thoughts and ambitions inside themselves like so many clods of dirt, pebbles, and sticks in a hunk of clay fresh from the riverbank. God says, "Carry the cross," so that he may use it to mash all that junk out. He is looking for men and women willing to "be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."²¹ The cross presses selfishness out of a person until "selfish motives and purposes . . . will no longer be the center around which one builds his life."²²

What on earth does all this have to do with church planters? It seems to be relevant to all disciples. Church planting, however, tends to test one a bit more intensely than other kingdom tasks (indicated by the high failure rates among church planters). God tends to allow a good bit of the harshness of life to fall on the backs of church planters. Planters constantly battle to defeat the natural human tendency toward placing themselves at the center of the work. Disciples walk the way of the cross, and church planters seem to need to learn the way of the cross early. The cross represents a close kin to obedience in the way of the Lord, which is our final category.

THE WAY OF THE LORD

The way of the Lord is simple obedience. Just as Christ, the Word of God incarnate, obeyed the Father, the disciple obeys the Word of God. If God calls one to plant a church, he should get about the business. If God calls him to another area, then he should make disciples as best as he can there. Either way, Christ's "follow me" is an ongoing invitation offering no options other than to follow him without grumbling or questioning.²³

Why would a believer want to do anything other than follow Christ joyfully? Jesus came to the world to reveal God to us. Following him opens a person up to his revelation of himself. Once we have received Christ, he goes to the world to reveal Christ to them.

²⁰Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, entry for January 15.

²¹Matt. 5:48.

²²Maston, *Biblical Ethics*, 162-63.

²³*Ibid.*, 164; Matt. 4:19, 8:22, 10:38; Phil. 2:14.

Believers walk through life as God's incarnate ambassadors if they walk in the way of the Lord.²⁴

How does one follow Christ today? Does he merely read the Bible and do precisely what it says? If it were that simple, every believer would harass the Jews first, the wander around the Middle East for a few years, and some have tried that route. More likely, walking in the way of the Lord means taking steps to obey the principles Christ laid down, following the leading of the Holy Spirit, and respecting the instruction of wise teachers in the faith.²⁵

Of first importance is the principle of giving up what one thinks is his. "For the chosen few that gathered around [Christ, the way of the Lord] meant abandonment to everything."²⁶ A disciple today follows Christ when he willingly abandons personal ownership of all things, accepts the role of a bondservant-steward over all that Christ has given him, and lives in a way that reflects his decision.

Giving up ownership of a car or house while being allowed complete control over its use seems easy. A rougher road involves separation from the security of high-paying jobs, loving parents and siblings, and the culture with which someone is familiar and comfortable—and this all to plant a church that will likely fail in five years. The way of the Lord is not normally a parade up Easy Street. It is often a lonely path with few companions, especially for church planters. A feeling of loneliness does not, however, mean one is actually alone. Christ promises that he has gone before and will continue alongside his disciple.²⁷

Moreover, the command to follow Christ is not a threat backed up with a will-bending hammer. Rather than demanding conformity, God's call protects the disciple's freedom. At the same time, the Lord gives his disciple the necessary faith, direction, and courage to follow.²⁸

CONCLUSION

While he did not speak directly to the training of church planters, Maston's work provides our discipline with a good place to start. Discipleship can be measured. The Lord left church leaders with a series of objective criteria to assess and equip candidates for missionary work. This is ripe for additional research, and will yield helpful insights for future generations.

²⁴Maston, *Biblical Ethics*, 163.

²⁵Heb. 13:17.

²⁶Maston, *Biblical Ethics*, 164.

²⁷Matt. 28:20.

²⁸ Maston, *Biblical Ethics*, 164.

Assessment in humility can only come from someone who has known a candidate for several years and in a variety of situations. All of us want to think that references can be trusted, but we know better. We can find no substitute for the honest appraisal of people who spent time together. On the field, humility can be measured whenever a church planter meets with his field supervisor. Either the candidate takes instruction or he does not.

Forgiveness can be measured by carefully listen to a person recount his painful memories and experiences of forgiving others. Simple questions on an assessment form can reveal whether or not a man willingly serves others, but more reliable data come from working alongside a person making the call on whom to support. Real knowledge in a man's qualifications will require denominational directors and equippers (including me) to know someone well enough to *see* him forgive others, and to do community service projects alongside candidates for church planting funding *before* signing off.

Similarly, ministry partners can give insight on whether a man is a soul-winner or timid in sharing his faith. There is no reason to place church planting resources in the hands of a timid witness.

Walking under the cross takes years of practice as does walking in the way of the Lord. Nothing beats expressions of obedience better than experiences of obedience. It makes sense to start churches only with men for whom starting things by sacrificing their agendas and obeying Christ through tough times has become the norm. Until a man *and his wife* establish a record of personal sacrifice and obedience, no one can know if they have ordered their lives around Christ. A legitimate church planter will have a track record of following Christ's call. Assessors will want examples of times when the candidate exercised faith to continue along a significant path with nothing more than a prayerful leading and one or two Scriptures keeping him or her going.

Church planter assessment and training requires time and personal contact to implement and measure. Equippers can offer a series of assignments in the areas of evangelism and the development of at least one small, discipleship groups composed of new or near-believers recruited by the student. Ultimately, the path suggested by this study is one of year-long internships supervised by experienced disciples. As leaders give assignments, the degree to which the intern follows his or her assignment and the attitude displayed gives a reliable reading on his potential for multiplying disciples in the future.

Did Jesus die on the cross for every person? Are believers eternally secure? Can grace be resisted?

These and many other questions will be addressed.

Sessions presented by the following distinguished guests:



Jerry Vines,

Pastor Emeritus, FBC Jacksonville
Bachelor of Arts, Mercer University
Bachelor of Divinity, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary
Doctor of Theology, Luther Rice Seminary



Paige Patterson,

President, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
Bachelor of Arts, Hardin-Simmons University
Master of Theology, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary
Doctor of Philosophy, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary



Richard Land

President, The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission
Bachelor of Arts (magna cum laude), Princeton University
Master of Theology, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary
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David L. Allen

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Bachelor of Arts, Criswell College, Dallas, TX
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Steve Lemke

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Master of Divinity, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
Master of Arts in Philosophy, Texas A&M University
Doctor of Philosophy, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary



Kenneth Keathley

Senior Associate Dean and Professor of Theology,
Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary
Master of Divinity, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary
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Charles Stanley

Pastor, First Baptist Church of Atlanta and founder of In Touch Ministries
Bachelor of Arts, University of Richmond
Bachelor of Divinity, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
Master's and Doctor's degrees, Luther Rice Seminary

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ECCLESIOLOGICAL GUIDELINES TO INFORM SOUTHERN BAPTIST CHURCH PLANTERS¹

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INTRODUCTION

Southern Baptist mission agencies assist Southern Baptist churches in the task of church planting. In this church planting ministry, Southern Baptist church planters must have and work with an ecclesiology that is both biblical and Baptist. Church planting strategies and endeavors must be conducted in such a way that they are obedient and submitted to the New Testament for faith and practice as well as committed to Baptist ecclesiology as stated in the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000*. In other words, these church plants exist and function as Baptist churches in accordance with the confessional statement of the Southern Baptist Convention. The following guidelines and discussion will assist the North American Mission Board to know the type of churches it affirms and will direct its church planting ministry.

The Baptist Faith and Message 2000

The article “The Church” as contained in the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* describes a Baptist church in the following way:

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its scriptural officers are

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pastors and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture. The New Testament speaks also of the church as the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.

The following material will provide a theological commentary on the significance of the BFM article for a Baptist understanding of the nature and purpose of the church.

BIBLICAL AUTHORITY: THE AUTHORITY OF A BAPTIST CHURCH

Baptists classically affirm the inspiration and authority of both Old and New Testaments. Doctrines such as the nature and personhood of God, creation, and sin require the authoritative and inspired voice of the Old Testament for theological construction. No credible Baptist would ever discount the value and status of the Old Testament as the revelation of God, its vital place in the canon, and its necessity for theological development. The Old Testament has been and must continue to be included for many of the beliefs that are crucial to the Christian faith.

The Authority of the Entire Bible

Baptists express their distinctive commitment to biblical authority best in their belief and practice of the church. The early Baptists viewed themselves as the logical outcome to the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura*, the idea that Bible is the sole authority for faith and practice. These Baptists made this assertion because they believed that no other Christian denomination was as consistent or committed in their appeal to and application of the teachings of the Bible for ecclesiastical practice as the Baptists were. Although all Christians in theory acknowledge that the “Bible alone” is the Word of God, Baptists have historically believed that their strict adherence and submission to biblical teaching is what distinguishes them and their churches from other Christian denominations. Baptists assert that their belief in the absolute authority of the Bible is logical and practical outcome of their attempt to apply biblical teaching to all realms of life, particularly the church.

As far as Baptists are concerned, a complete submission to the Bible results in the rise and existence of a New Testament church. Baptists further believe that the restoration and function of the New Testament church is in part their mission. That is, an unswerving commitment to biblical authority and practice should result in the existence of churches that are Baptist in nature and purpose. Baptists have historically rejected religious tradition as a supplement to the teaching of the Bible. Baptists instead contend that their absolute commitment to biblical authority must determine their beliefs and practices regarding all aspects of church life. Baptists believe what they do about the nature of the Church, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, congregational polity, etc. because their convictions on these matters are determined by the Bible.³

³R. Stanton Norman, *More Than Just a Name: Preserving Our Baptist Identity* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 67-72.

The Authority of the New Testament

With regard to the Baptist doctrine of the church, the New Testament provides fuller and clearer revelation. The New Testament gives revelation on the nature and purpose of the Church not found in the Old Testament. As New Testament believers, beliefs and practices regarding the Church must be constructed upon New Testament teaching. Deviant practices and beliefs arise when Christians attempt to develop their doctrine of the church primarily upon Old Testament revelation or when Christians subordinate New Testament teachings to Old Testament teachings. Some of the beliefs regarded as unbiblical by Baptists found in other churches include infant baptism, a distinct or special priesthood, and state-established churches. Baptists are united in their conviction that the New Testament is the standard for our belief about the nature of the church. The reliance upon the New Testament for faith and practice is what safeguards and ensures the proper function of a New Testament church. The Baptist understanding of the church therefore is the attempt of Baptists to reflect their obedience and submission to biblical authority in general and the teachings of the New Testament in particular. To state it another way, a Baptist church is the visible manifestation of the Baptist commitment to *sola scriptura*.⁴

THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST

The current BFM article on the church contains several statements that relate the doctrine of the Lordship of Christ with the Baptist understanding of the Church. The article connects “a New Testament church” to “the Lord Jesus Christ.” Each congregation is “governed by His laws” and operates under His Lordship through democratic processes and congregational polity. In addition, each member of a congregation is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. These statements demonstrate the importance of this doctrine for the existence and function of a Baptist church.

The Lordship of Christ is foremost an objective truth. Christ rules sovereignly over all things. His rule is absolute. We commonly hear some Christians say something like, “we need to make Jesus Lord.” We do not make Him Lord; He is Lord by virtue of His person. There is only one Lord, God the Son, through whom, in whom, and to whom are all things (Col. 1:15-20). All things were made by Him and will be summed up in Him. Through His incarnation, the Lord became one with humanity in order to be its Savior. By virtue of His atonement, He reigns over mankind as Redeemer and Judge (cf. Acts 17:31). Christ has authority and achieved authority by His saving death and victorious resurrection. The ascended Christ now sits at the right hand of the Father, continually making intercession for those who are His. The result of His completed work of atonement is a fuller assertion of His Lordship over all things. Whether or not an individual personally experiences Christ’s lordship in no way affects the objectivity of His rule.

⁴Ibid., 72-75.

Jesus Christ is Lord over all creation and declares His Lordship in the Great Commission: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18). The Lordship of Christ is secondarily a subjective truth. The Lordship of Christ is crucially important for our understanding of salvation. The confession of the Christian faith from its inception has been “Jesus is Lord!” The Bible indicates that this profession is possible only by the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer (1 Cor. 12:3). The subjective element is experienced in the personal appropriation of Christ’s rule in the hearts and lives of individual believers in their salvation experience. The Christian faith is essentially the vital union between God and man through Jesus Christ. The Lordship of Christ asserts that no person or human institution can mediate or interfere with the relationship between the King and His subjects. Religious systems, ceremonies, or external practices must not be permitted to come between the believer and the Master.

The doctrine of the Lordship of Christ was present in Baptist life almost from its inception. The classic statement by John Smyth in 1610 gives evidence of the early presence of this belief among Baptists: “Christ only is king and lawgiver of the church and conscience.” Thomas Armitage stated in 1890: “The living and underlying principles of Baptist Churches, relate to the sovereign and absolute headship of Christ in his Churches.”⁵ Another Baptist leader noted that “Baptists have always held this doctrine of Christ’s supreme headship as one of their most spiritual possessions. It lies at the basis of their polity and furnishes the keynote of their history.”⁶ Baptists have always claimed as part of their theological heritage the notion of the sovereignty of Christ and a determination to ensure a full and consistent recognition of His personal and direct authority over the souls of men.⁷ The Lordship of Christ is personally apprehended through the revelation of Scripture and the internal witness of the Holy Spirit.

Christ’s sovereignty has direct bearing upon the Baptist understanding of the church. The statement “in such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord” suggests that this doctrine has both individual and corporate implications. Individual believers who are not rightly related to a local congregation are not fully submitted to Christ’s Lordship. In addition, each member is responsible to participate in ministry in the context of a local church. The Lordship of Christ is also a declaration of His ownership and rulership over the Church. He purchased the Church with His blood. He

⁵Thomas Armitage, *A History of the Baptists* (New York: Bryan, Taylor, & Co., 1887), 150.

⁶S. F. Skevington, *The Distinctive Principle of Baptists* (n.p., 1914), 37.

⁷John D. Freeman, “The Place of Baptists in the Christian Church,” in *Baptist World Congress, London, July 11-19, 1905. Authorised Record of Proceedings* (London: Baptist Union Publication Department, 1905), 22.

owns the church; the members of the congregation are the stewards of His possession. Further, the Lordship of Christ underscores His leadership and direction of His people. Through the witness of the Word and the Spirit, Jesus provides direct guidance for the Church as it functions in its mission. Each local congregation should always endeavor to define its purpose and ministry in light of and in submission to the King of Kings. Since the Lordship of Christ provides the reason for the existence of the Church, all that a church is and does should ultimately point to the Lord of the Church.

CLASSIC MARKS OF A TRUE CHURCH

During the patristic period, certain characteristics were developed to identify the true church. These “marks” were considered necessary to distinguish the true Christian church from heretical or schismatic groups. These traits were unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity. The Roman Catholic Church has used these marks for centuries as a means to define and distinguish itself from other Christian groups.

Baptists and other Protestant groups have sought to utilize these marks with alternative interpretations. Unity of the church is defined in terms of oneness of fellowship in joint submission to Christ and joined by the bond of the Spirit. Holiness points to the set-apartness for service and worship as opposed to the sinless perfection of the church members. Catholicity refers to the ultimate oneness of all God’s children in the final state. Apostolicity underscores the commitment of a church to the witness of and submission to the teachings of the apostles as contained in the Scriptures.⁸

During the Reformation, the question of what were the marks of a true church arose again. In particular, Protestants began to ask whether or not the Roman Catholic Church was a true church. The focus shifted from an emphasis upon institution to a vital relationship with Christ. In an effort to reclaim the emphasis of union with Christ, the Baptists along with the Reformers began to point to the right preaching of the Word of God and the right administration of the ordinances as evidences of a genuine church of God. In addition, the Baptist concern for church purity gave rise to the right administration of church discipline as a mark of a true church. We can summarize the previous discussion as follows. A true church is united in fellowship and the bonds of the Holy Spirit with a congregation set apart from the world in pursuit of holiness in worship and service. A true church is the unity of all the redeemed of all the ages as will ultimately be revealed and enjoyed in the final state. A true church is committed and submitted absolutely to the revelation of Jesus Christ as given by the apostles. A true church manifests its authenticity in the right preaching of the Word of God, the right administration of the ordinances, and the right administration of church discipline.

LOCAL AND UNIVERSAL CHURCH

⁸James Leo Garrett, Jr. *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 478-80.

In the New Testament the word “church” is used to refer to believers at any level, ranging from a very small group meeting in a private home to the group of all true believers in the universal church. A “house church” is called a “church” in Romans 16:5 (“greet also the church in their house”) and 1 Corinthians 16:19 (“Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house”). The church in an entire city is also called a “church” (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; and 1 Thess. 1:1). The church in a region is referred to as a “church” in Acts 9:31: “So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was built up.” The church throughout the entire world can be referred to as “the church.” Paul says, “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Eph. 5:25) and says, “God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers . . .” (1 Cor. 12:28). In this latter verse the mention of “apostles,” who were not given to any individual church, is a clear reference to the church universal.

The BFM 2000 describes the church as both local (“an autonomous local congregation”) and as universal (“the church . . . includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation”). In most New Testament passages, the church is depicted as a local assembly of Christians who meet, worship, and minister in the name of Jesus Christ. Each local church is a tangible expression of the universal church. The concept of the universal church is biblical and important, but the reality of church life can only be experienced on the local level. The blessings, ministries, ordinances, and discipline of a church are only to be realized, appropriated, and practiced tangibly in a local congregation. Although the typical use of church refers to a local assembly, the word is also used in the universal sense. The church for which Jesus gave Himself is bigger than a single local congregation. The concept of the universal church reminds us that our fellowship in Christ and our bond in the Spirit transcend barriers of race, geography, time, tradition, and denomination.

A COVENANT COMMUNITY

The current BFM states that a New Testament church is a group of believers “associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel.” Part of our Baptist ecclesiology is that a true church is a group of people joined together in voluntary covenant with God. The early Baptists believed that a church should be a group of saved people gathered from the world at large. The church exists as a group of believers united for the purpose of serving together as the people of God under the Lordship of Christ.

The idea of covenant underscores that individual believers through the act of regeneration are moved by the Spirit to unite together as a corporate whole called the church. The Baptist concept of a covenant community asserts that the church is the result of the free activity of God in the lives of individual believers. Our “association by covenant in the faith and fellowship” stands in sharp contrast to the notion that the church is an organization created by coercive governmental authority or institutional/territorial, ecclesiastical manipulation.

The idea of covenant implies that church life must be experienced in local congregations. The covenant community is by nature local, the result of a particular, visible

group of believers united in confession. For Baptists, the covenant that joins believers together in the church of Jesus Christ is sealed in believer's baptism.⁹

The notion of covenant therefore points to the truth that a church is a group of people united together in their joint confession of Jesus Christ as Lord. The church consists of those called out by the preaching of the gospel to live in union with God and other believers. Because all members of a congregation confess allegiance to Christ, they are a people joined together in corporate confession of and submission to God through Christ. This idea is expressed in the BFM 2000 statement: "In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord." Their mutual confession of Jesus as Christ also means that the believers are united to one another in fellowship and service; they are committed as disciples of Christ to one another. Christians within a covenant community mutually agree to walk together as the people of God. Each individual believer should have a sense of belonging to God and to one another.¹⁰

The idea of covenant extends beyond the immediate membership of a local church to address the relationship among Southern Baptist churches. Southern Baptist churches have historically related to one another to cooperate together in evangelistic, missionary, educational, social, and benevolent causes. This cooperative relationship is described in article XIV ("Cooperation") of the BFM 2000. Christ's people should, as occasion requires, organize such associations and conventions as may best secure cooperation for the great objects of the Kingdom of God. Such organizations have no authority over one another or over the churches. They are voluntary and advisory bodies designed to elicit, combine, and direct the energies of our people in the most effective manner. Members of New Testament churches should cooperate with one another in carrying forward the missionary, educational, and benevolent ministries for the extension of Christ's Kingdom. Christian unity in the New Testament sense is spiritual harmony and voluntary cooperation for common ends by various groups of Christ's people. Cooperation is desirable between the various Christian denominations, when the end to be attained is itself justified, and when such cooperation involves no violation of conscience or compromise of loyalty to Christ and His Word as revealed in the New Testament.

Baptist churches or mission points/efforts that are Southern Baptist are recognized to be in association with, cooperation with, and of like faith and order with other Southern Baptist churches, associations, or conventions.

⁹Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Pub., 1994), 611-12. Although much about Grenz's theological method and constructions in this work are problematic, his observations about the importance and role of covenant for a local church are helpful and instructive.

¹⁰Robert T. Handy, "The Philadelphia Tradition," in *Baptist Concepts of the Church*, ed. Winthrop S. Hudson (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1959), 36.

Whether a church is a new work or an existing, well-established congregation, each Baptist church should have a covenant. Church covenants are usually written, and each person must agree to the covenant as a condition of membership into a local congregation. Covenants are based upon and must reflect biblical principles. Although they may state the various beliefs and convictions of the congregation, the covenant of a Baptist church must minimally affirm three things: the Lordship of Jesus Christ over the church and its members; the divine inspiration, inerrancy, and authority of the Bible; and the membership of the church consisting only of regenerate persons who have professed their faith in believer's baptism by immersion.¹¹

CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Historically speaking, one of the convictions of early Baptists was their pledge to separate themselves from the world and to submit themselves to Christ and to each other. Church discipline was considered as one means of achieving this distinction. Baptists regarded this matter as so important that they defined church discipline as a mark of a true church and practiced it accordingly.¹² Church discipline was considered first and foremost an act of obedience of to the teachings of Christ (Matt. 18:15-20). Discipline was also regarded as the means of preserving and facilitating fidelity to right doctrine, purity of life (holiness), and unity of fellowship.¹³ Baptists believed that church discipline was the prerogative of a

¹¹“Seven Guidelines for Church Planting which Reflect Baptist Ecclesiology,” the Theological Studies Division, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Ft. Worth, Texas, September, 2004.

¹²The identification of proper church discipline as a mark of a New Testament church dates back as far as the Belgic Confession [1561]: “The marks by which the true Church is known are these: If the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin; in short, if all things are managed according to the Word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the Church. Hereby the true Church may certainly be known, from which no man has a right to separate himself.” “The Belgic Confession,” in *The Creeds of Christendom*, ed. Philip Schaff, rev. David S. Schaff, vol. 3 (New York: Harper and Row, 1931), 419-420. Also, the *Abstract of Principles of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary* (1858) identifies the three essential marks of a New Testament church as order, discipline, and worship: “The Lord Jesus is the head of the Church, which is composed of all His true disciples, and in Him is invested supremely all power for its government. According to His commandment, Christians are to associate themselves into particular societies or churches; and to each of these churches He hath given needful authority for administering that order, discipline and worship which He hath appointed. The regular officers of a Church are Bishops or Elders, and Deacons.

¹³R. Albert Mohler, Jr. “Church Discipline: The Missing Mark,” in *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How To Conduct Church Life*, ed. Mark E. Dever (Washington, D.C.: Center for Church Reform, 2001), 53-56.

local church. They also contended that the diligent practice of discipline preserved the integrity of the Lord's Supper.¹⁴

Baptists sought to maintain a clear distinction between those that belonged to Christ and those that belonged to the world. Those desiring to join a Baptist church knew that their membership included accountability to the authority of that congregation. In addition, membership in a Baptist church required the voluntary submission of their beliefs and conduct to the judgment of the church. Baptists believed that the gospel message lost its integrity and power if the church did not remain distinct from the world. They also believed that church discipline was one means of preserving the integrity of the message and ministry of the local church.¹⁵

REGENERATE CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

The doctrine of a regenerate church for Baptists is the belief that local congregations of Baptists are ideally to be composed only of those who have and continue to give evidence of the new birth that comes from the Holy Spirit. In other words, the membership of visible, local congregations is to consist ideally only of persons who have received spiritual life and who live in fellowship with Christ and with Christian brothers and sisters. Although unregenerate people may be included in various meetings and ministries of a local church, the membership of the congregation is to be regenerate by definition. This doctrine impacts both the admission of members to a congregation and the proper maintenance of the church membership.

The doctrine of a regenerate church is foremost the attempt of Baptists to construct their local churches in submission to the authority of the New Testament. The concept of a regenerate church membership embodies Jesus' teachings on the necessity of the new birth (John 3:3, 7). Paul also alludes to the idea in his statements about "baptism into death" (Rom. 6:3) and "a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17). The apostle Peter speaks of a "new birth" and being "born again" (1 Pet. 1:3, 23). The apostle John exhorts the believers, "let us love one another because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God" (1 John 4:7). John also notes that "everyone who has been born of God does not sin, because His seed remains in him; he is not able to sin, because he has been born of God" (1 John 3:9). As a spiritual organization that is distinct from the world, none should be admitted to the membership or the spiritual privileges except those who have experienced the gift of spiritual life.

¹⁴Greg Wills, "The Church: Baptists and Their Churches in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," in *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How To Conduct Church Life*, ed. Mark E. Dever (Washington, D.C.: Center for Church Reform, 2001), 26-27.

¹⁵Wills, 28.

A regenerate church membership points to the personal nature of salvation. Regeneration implies repentance of sin, a changed nature, a new heart, and a surrendered will. A regenerate church membership also points to the voluntary surrender of an individual and the corporate body to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The outward act of believer's baptism signifies the inner and personal transformation of regeneration. In this sense, the doctrine of a regenerate church membership encapsulates all that a church is to do and to be. Belief in a regenerate church membership affirms the necessity of the moral purity of a church. The quest to have a church that follows the biblical model is a commitment to retain the distinction between the world and the covenant community of God. Failing to emphasize regeneration as a prerequisite for church membership has historically resulted in the loss of an emphasis upon the church as a holy community and has given rise to moral corruption and heretical teachings within the fellowship. The distinctions between the redeemed and unredeemed are eventually blurred, if not lost altogether.

A regenerate church underscores the spiritual vitality of its members and the spiritual work of God. The integrity of the gospel message is protected and enhanced by a people who reflect the holy character of God. Further, the ability to function within a spiritual community presupposes the new birth. In addition, the church as represented in the New Testament necessitates spiritual birth in order to function within a spiritual community. No unregenerate person could appropriately relate to believers or credibly practice the spiritual disciplines or rightly participate in the spiritual ministry. All aspects of church life demand the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit in order to become a part and participant in a community of born again believers.

CONGREGATIONAL POLITY

Congregational polity may be defined as “that form of church governance in which final human authority rests with the local or particular congregation when it gathers for decision making. This means that decisions about membership, leadership, doctrine, worship, conduct, missions, finances, property, relationships, and the like are to be made by the gathered congregation except when such decisions have been delegated by the congregation to individual members or groups of members.”¹⁶

The intention of congregational polity is that the congregation governs itself under the lordship of Jesus Christ and the leadership of the Holy Spirit, under the delegated authority of pastors and deacons, but with no governing ecclesialbodies exerting authority over the church. All members participate in the decision-making process.¹⁷ The

¹⁶James Leo Garrett, “The Congregation-led Church: Congregational Polity,” in *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity*, eds. Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton Norman (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 157.

¹⁷James Leo Garrett, *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical*, vol. 2. (2d. ed.: North Richland Hills, TX.: BIBAL Press, 2001), 644.

congregational polity of a church must embody democratic processes, be responsible to the lordship of Jesus Christ, and be guided by His authoritative word, the inerrant Scriptures.¹⁸

AUTONOMY

The BFM 2000 describes local churches as “autonomous” because this principle is believed to reflect the basic New Testament position on church government. The primary focus in Acts and the Epistles is the local church. The Bible makes no reference to any entity exerting authority above or beyond the local church. No instance of control over a local church by outside organizations or individuals is found. The apostles made recommendations and gave advice, but exercised no real rulership or control. Even Paul had to argue for his apostolic authority and beseech his readers to follow his teachings (Gal. 1:11-24).¹⁹

Autonomy means that each local church is self-governing. Each congregation makes its own decisions regarding all facets of church life, including personnel, fiscal, building/grounds, and other matter. A local congregation may freely choose to seek counsel from other churches and denominational officials, but the membership is not required or bound to follow that advice.

The decisions of a local church do not require outside ratification or approval.²⁰ The autonomy of the local church means that each congregation can choose for itself how to relate to other congregations. A church may practice “independent congregational polity” in which it chooses “not to associate on a sustained basis with other congregations or to affiliate with and support denominational . . . bodies for missionary, educational, benevolent, or other purposes.” A congregation may practice “cooperative congregational polity” by freely associating “with other congregations ‘of like faith and order’ and to support denominational bodies for missionary, educational, benevolent, or other purposes.”²¹ Autonomy also shapes the internal structures of a congregation. Churches may choose to organize themselves in structures such as the pastor and deacons, the pastor-deacons-committees, or the pastor-deacons-committees-church council. Some Baptists contend that

¹⁸“Seven Guidelines for Church Planting which Reflect Baptist Ecclesiology,” the Theological Studies Division, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Ft. Worth, Texas, September, 2004.

¹⁹Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, unabridged, 1 vol. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 1079.

²⁰*Ibid.*, *Christian Theology*, 1079.

²¹Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, 644-45.

congregational polity permits a plural elder-led structure.²² In each of these cases, the internal structures are subject to the final authority of the congregation.

THE GOAL OF CONGREGATIONAL POLITY

The ultimate goal of congregation polity is for each church to discern and follow the will of the Lord of the Church. With this in mind, certain qualifications of congregational polity should preclude some of the abuses often associated with this form of church governance. First, congregational polity does not mean that the church votes on the will of God. The goal is to ascertain what is the will of God and then to obey Him. Congregational polity ideally is to mature the believers as they corporately participate in the process. Second, congregational polity does not mean that the majority rules. While there may be a majority, if that vote is contrary to the will of God, the congregation walks in disobedience. Rather, the goal is for the direct rule of Christ to be manifested within the congregation. Congregational polity is the attempt of Baptist churches to realize this Christocracy and submit themselves to His rule.

OFFICES OF THE CHURCH

Baptist ecclesiology has historically affirmed two Scriptural officers of a New Testament church. These officers are pastors and deacons.

Pastor/Elder/Overseer

The words pastor and elder are used in the New Testament to describe the same office. The concept “elder” focuses more upon the character of the man whereas the term “overseer” emphasizes more the function. These two terms came to be used interchangeably as they both referred to the leaders of the congregation. *Presbuteros* conveys the idea of a wise, mature leader who is honored and respected by those of the community by virtue of the integrity of his life. *Episkopos* looks more to the work of the individual whose duty it is to provide “oversight” over the congregation.²³

Daniel Akin identifies eight functions given in the New Testament for the office of pastor/elder. First, the pastor has overall responsibility for the oversight and direction of the church (1 Peter 5:2; Heb. 13:17). Second, the pastor is responsible to seek in all matters the

²²“Elder” is not an additional church office. The term “elder” is synonymous with the word “pastor.” The polity would thus be a plurality of pastors providing spiritual leadership and direction for a local church.

²³Daniel Akin, “The Single-Elder-Led Church: The Bible’s Witness to a Congregational/Single-Elder-Led Polity,” in *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity*, eds. Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton Norman (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Pub., 2004), 53-54.

mind of Christ (who is the Head of the Church) through the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God (Eph. 1:22; Col. 1:18; 1 Pet. 5:2). Third, the pastor must be apt to teach, able to exhort the church in sound doctrine and be ready to refute those who contradict the truth (Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:9). Fourth, the pastor shall provide instruction for the maintenance of healthy relationships within the church (Gal. 6:1; 1 Thess. 5:12; 2 Thess. 3:14-15). Fifth, the pastor shall exercise at least general oversight of the financial matters of the church (Acts 11:30). Sixth, the pastor should lead (with appropriate congregational input) in the appointing of deacons as necessary to accomplish the mission of the church (Acts 6:1-6). Seventh, the pastor is to lead by *example* (Heb. 13:7; 1 Pet. 5:2-3). Finally, the pastor is to lead in the exercise of church discipline (Gal. 6:1), but not to the exclusion of the entire body when warranted (Matt. 18; 1 Cor. 5; 2 Cor. 2).²⁴

Deacons

Deacons have played a significant role in Baptist churches throughout their existence. Early American Baptists identified three “tables” of service for deaconate. Deacons were to care for the table of the Lord’s Supper, a ministry of administration over the ordinance. Deacons were also charged with the table for the poor, a ministry of benevolence and mercy. Finally, deacons were to exercise care for the table of the pastor, referring to their support and service in some aspects of pastoral ministry.²⁵

The office of deacon is not one of rule but of service, both to the physical and spiritual needs of the congregation. Just as the Lord became a “servant” (*diakonos*) (Rom. 15:8; see also Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45; John 13:1-17), so also deacons are to serve the congregation under the supervision of the pastor. Diaconal service should enable the pastor to devote himself to prayer for the congregation and to oversight of the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4). Deacons are to discharge their duties to the spiritual and material needs of the congregation and, as service permits, to the spiritual and material needs of the world. Inferences drawn from the qualifications for deacons (1 Tim. 3:8-13) suggest that deacons could have some oversight for the church’s finances and other administrative related responsibilities. In general, the office of deacon is one of “sympathy and service,” after the example of the Lord Jesus, especially in their helping one another in time of need.

The BFM 2000 leaves open the issue of whether or not women can serve as deaconesses in SBC churches. My position is that, if a local church ordains its deacons, then women cannot serve in this capacity. In SBC life, ordination carries with it implications of authority and oversight, and I believe the Bible relegates authority and oversight to men (1 Timothy 2:12-15.). If a church, however, does not ordain its deacons, then the authority-oversight prohibitions would not apply. In that case, the generic meaning of the term ‘deacon’ (Greek: *diakonia*) is that of a servant or a table waiter. Thus, any member of the

²⁴Akin, “Single-Elder-Led Church,” 54-55.

²⁵Garrett, “The Congregation-Led Church,” 188.

congregation is qualified to serve. Since there is no clear instance recorded in Scripture of the presence of female deacons, I will use masculine language in my references to deacons.

Function versus Office

Are “pastor” and “deacon” offices mandated in the New Testament, or are oversight and service functions that a church simply needs to ensure occur? To ask the question another way, can a group of believers be a “church” without the official presence of “pastor” and “deacon?” Does the New Testament require that a local church have pastor(s) and deacons?

Churches must ensure that their ministries are biblically faithful and appropriately functional. Certain scriptural passages indicate, however, that having the right person to perform those duties is as equally significant. For example, in Acts 13:1-3, the Holy Spirit leads the believers at Antioch to set apart Barnabas and Saul for a particular mission endeavor. This passage indicates that God had a unique calling for these two men; not just anyone would do. Only Saul and Barnabas were consecrated by the Spirit for the particular task. If ministry function were the only consideration, then the matter of who would perform the particular ministry-function would be relatively inconsequential. Yet, these verses suggest that God called Barnabas and Saul because they were the most suitable and appropriately gifted for the task at hand. In addition, the church at Antioch affirmed the call of these two men by the laying on of hands, publicly recognizing the Spirit’s missionary call of these men. The emphasis in Acts 13 is both upon the ministry need and upon those uniquely called and qualified to fulfill the particular ministry.

The passages that list the qualifications for overseers (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9) and for deacons (1 Tim. 3:8-14) are even clearer. Paul’s discussion focuses on qualifications for overseers and deacons, not upon their duties. Although Paul does mention that the overseer must be able to teach, he does not give a list of responsibilities; these must be inferred from the names of the offices, the qualifications themselves, and other passages of Scripture (cf. 1 Tim. 5:17).²⁶

The list of qualifications indicates that certain individuals would be qualified to serve and others would not. Paul places as much importance on the quality of character as he does upon the nature of the duty. If the emphasis was only upon function, qualifications would be of secondary importance; the point would be getting the job done, not the character of the man who performs the duty. These and similar passages (cf. Acts 6:36) suggest, however, that certain ministries of a church can only be performed by those who meet the biblical qualifications. If no qualified, God-called men were found to serve as overseer or deacon, the implication is that these duties would be left unattended. A person who attempts to serve as overseer or deacon and who does not meet the biblical qualifications is disobedient to the Word of God. Ministry-function is not the only concern for the ministry of a church; the

²⁶Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr. *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman Press., 1992), 105-06.

right man to perform the duties is equally as important. These considerations indicate that pastor and deacon are not simply “teaching and serving” functions but rather offices that require a qualified man to serve in these roles.

Another issue on the matter of church officers is the matter of definition; that is, can a church be a church without these offices? Can a group of believers be regarded as a church as long as they have “teaching and serving” functions, or must they have clearly identified men serving in publicly recognized roles as pastor and deacon? Two considerations suggest that these officers are essential and definitive for a group to be and function as a New Testament church.

First, as the early church developed, where clear evidence exists on the subject, the Bible indicates that qualified men served as deacons (Acts 6) and overseers (Acts 20). By the time that Paul wrote the Pastoral epistles, the expectation was that elders and deacons were essential for the proper function of a church. Paul wrote to Titus in part to instruct him to “set right what was left undone and . . . to appoint elders in every town” (Titus 1:5). The well-being and vitality of the churches in Crete necessitated the right men serving in offices. In addition, the implications of 1 Timothy 3:1-13 is that both overseer and deacon are necessary and definitive for a group of believers to function as a church and to be obedient to the instruction of God. Where the Bible speaks on the matter, qualified men perform the ministry of the Word and the ministry of service.

A second consideration is the need for order within the life of a church. A church officer is a man who has been God-called and God-equipped and who has been publicly recognized by the church to perform certain functions for the benefit of the whole church. In Baptist life, pastors and deacons are recognized as officers of a New Testament church. The men who assume these responsibilities are publicly recognized (usually by ordination) by a church as qualified to serve in these roles. Public recognition is important in order to fulfill their responsibilities in an orderly manner. If public recognition and affirmation of church officers were absent, then the congregation would not know from week to week who would fulfill or perform the duties associated with these ministries. Several people could show up on any given Sunday ready to give the sermon. Conversely, no one could come prepared to bring a message from God’s word. Further, those who do not meet the biblical qualifications could attempt to assume these ministry responsibilities. The orderly function of a church necessitates that those men called of God to serve in these capacities be formally recognized by a church as qualified to be an overseer or a deacon. Public recognition of these offices is important because of the leadership roles attached to these duties. The people need to know and affirm who their leaders are. Certain ministries do not require public affirmation, but because of the importance and leadership biblically attached to pastor and deacon, the orderly leadership of a congregation requires the public recognition of pastor and deacon as offices of a New Testament church.²⁷

²⁷Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 905.

The aforementioned passages regarding pastors and deacons are both descriptive *and* prescriptive. It is incorrect to say, however, that a church without these biblical offices is automatically invalid. The offices of pastor and deacon should be present, but situations or occasions may occur when churches may find themselves without pastors and deacons. On such occasions, these congregations can still function as a church (else why would Paul appoint or instruct others to appoint elders if there was no church, and why would the apostles appoint deacons to serve the needs of the church?). Diligent effort should be made by the congregation, however, to secure pastoral leadership and diaconal service when the offices are vacant. These offices are normative, and New Testament churches should seek as expeditiously as possible to raise up qualified men to serve in these biblically mandated roles.

ORDINANCES OF A BAPTIST CHURCH

The BFM 2000 states that a Baptist church observes “the two ordinances of Christ.” An ordinance is a practice established by Jesus Christ that commemorates and symbolizes some aspect of His atoning sacrifice or redeeming work. An ordinance differs from a sacrament in that the latter is believed to bring the participant somehow within the sphere of grace. Ordinances are not considered to impart any type of grace. Most Baptists traditionally advocate two ordinances: baptism and the Lord’s Supper. In most Christian denominations, the beliefs about the nature of one ordinance or sacrament are often the same for the other ordinances or sacraments. Baptists hold to a commemorative/symbolic view of both of the ordinance of baptism and the Lord’s Supper.²⁸

Believer’s Baptism by Immersion

Baptists believe that they are following the biblical pattern and teaching when they practice the immersion of believers in water as baptism. Baptists believe that the New Testament teaches that only baptized believers were admitted into the membership of their congregations. An “unbaptized believer” is a foreign concept to the New Testament and is considered antithetical to the teachings of the Bible. “All who became members of the primitive churches were admitted by immersion; and as none were admitted but believers, none but believers were immersed.”²⁹ “Baptism occupied an important place in the witness and practice of the New Testament church. It was regarded as the inevitable concomitant of Church membership, and it is unlikely that anyone was admitted into the Church’s fellowship without it.”³⁰

²⁸Norman, *More Than Just a Name*, 101-02.

²⁹John Quincy Adams, *Baptists the Only Thorough Religious Reformers*, rev. ed. (New York: Sheldon & Co., 1876), 152.

³⁰Henry Cook, *What Baptists Stand For* (London: Kingsgate Press, 1947), 135.

Baptists have always attempted to follow biblical prescriptions for the practice of baptism. With regard to the mode, Baptists contend that the rite of baptism is by immersion. They assert that the New Testament mode is by immersion. No biblical evidence exists for baptism by sprinkling or pouring. To practice another mode for the ordinance of baptism would be to disobey the Bible's teachings on the manner and destroy the meaning of the rite.³¹ With regard to the subject, Baptists believe that a saving experience with Christ is the prerequisite for baptism. Baptism without a conscious, willful decision to follow Christ is nonsensical. Because baptism symbolizes faith, repentance, surrender, purity, etc., Baptists believe that the only subjects of baptism are believers who are capable of professing their own faith. Baptists have almost universally discounted infant baptism, believing that the practice is a violation of the teachings of the New Testament and the essence of the salvation of the individual. Baptists have classically understood infant baptism to rest upon human tradition rather than biblical teaching.

Baptism is thus the symbolic expression of a person's conversion. "The only question involved is the candidate's personal profession of faith in Christ, of which Baptism is intended to be the outward and visible sign. Baptism, as Baptists see it, is meant for believers and believers only, and they are convinced that the New Testament speaks with one voice on the point."³² Contrary to popular perception, Baptists do not assert the baptism of adults; rather, Baptists contend for the baptism of believers.

The baptism of believers by immersion conveys several important theological truths. Baptism expresses that the believer has entered into a new spiritual relationship with God. Baptism symbolizes the purification of the believer from sin and regeneration by the power of the Holy Spirit. Baptism points to the union of the believer with Christ; the person now identifies with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (dying to self and sin and living for Christ). Baptism also points to the hope of the resurrection of the body from the dead. Baptists reject any interpretations that suggest that baptism has regenerative power. Baptism is not "magical;" the water does not wash away sin nor does it dispense grace. Baptism is the immersion in water of a person who is already born again and symbolizes death to sin and resurrection to a new life.³³ Baptism does not produce repentance or faith, but it does express these realities. Baptism is the first step of discipleship and is the believer's profession of faith in Jesus Christ.³⁴

³¹E. Y. Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion: A New Interpretation of the Baptist Faith* (Philadelphia: Griffith & Rowland, 1980), 166.

³²Cook, *What Baptists Stand For*, 135.

³³Robert A. Baker, *The Baptist March in History* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1958), 8.

³⁴*Baptist Why and Why Not* (Nashville: The Sunday School Boards of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1900), 183-84.

Lord's Supper

The second ordinance of a Baptist church is the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is a rite which Christ Himself established for the church to practice as a commemoration of His death and is closely linked with the Jewish Passover meal (Matt. 26:17-30; Mk. 14:12-26; Lk. 22:7-23). Within Christendom, the ritual with its diverse meanings is designated as Holy Communion, the Mass, and the Eucharist. The majority of Baptists refer to the observance as the Lord's Supper.

The Scriptural references state that Jesus told His disciples, as often and whenever they observed the rite, to remember His sacrificial death and to anticipate a future observance together with Him and all His followers.

Baptists believe that several themes are associated with and identified by the observance of the Lord's Supper. The first theme is remembrance and reenactment. Participants in the Lord's Supper are to remember Jesus, especially His sacrificial death on the cross. As the partakers "remember" what Christ has done, they also commemoratively re-enact the events of the crucifixion. A second motif is thanksgiving. Believers are not only to thank God for the elements of the Supper of which they partake but also to thank God for the sacrifice of Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. A third tenet of the Lord's Supper is communion, or fellowship.

Baptists believe that those who participate in the Supper in a local church declare their personal and corporate union with Christ as well as their fellowship with one another. All figuratively partake of the single body and blood of Christ. The sharing of the cup and the bread underscores that the many have become one in Christ. Finally, the Lord's Supper anticipates and proclaims the Lord's second coming. The meal is a visible proclamation of the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ. The supper also proclaims that the same Lord who died, was raised, and ascended to the Father will return in triumph, blessing, and judgment.³⁵

Baptist churches are not uniform on the elements used in or the frequency of the observance of the Lord's Supper. Because of the strong temperance convictions in Baptist life, most Baptist churches use unfermented grape juice for the cup. Some Baptists insist that the bread be unleavened, other Baptists use some form of leavened bread, and some use broken crackers. Some Baptists use a single loaf of bread, from which each participant tears a piece, as a means of symbolizing their union. Some Baptists observe the Lord's Supper monthly, other Baptist churches have the Supper once a quarter.

Baptists restrict participation in the Lord's Supper to Christians who have been biblically baptized and are in right fellowship with their local churches. Those who come to the Lord's Table must have professed their faith in baptism. The baptism is of believer's only and must be by immersion. In addition, church discipline has been tied to the Lord's

³⁵Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 611-12.

Supper. Only those who are in right fellowship with their local churches are invited to participate in the ritual. Those who are subject to the disciplinary act of a local church are not to partake of the Lord's Table. Upon repentance and restoration, those who had previously been denied access to the Lord's Table may return.

MISSION OF THE CHURCH

The BFM 2000 states that a Baptist church should seek "to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth," that is, "to make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19). The task of extending the gospel (or making disciples) is achieved through *worship*, *proclamation* and *witness*, *nurture* and *education*, and *ministry*.³⁶ These purposes are not only for the benefit of the membership of the church, but also to reach the greater community—"unto all the world." The purpose of the church is to be implemented with a sense of mission according to the calling of God. Extending the gospel is the ministry of the Church to the world. The declaration that Jesus Christ is the risen Savior and reigning Lord is central to all endeavors.³⁷

Worship is encountering God in experiences that deepen a Christian's faith and strengthen his service and response to mission. Worship is preparatory and foundational to and inherent in the functions of proclamation and witnessing, nurturing and educating, and ministry. The worship of the Triune God is not, however, simply a means to an end; worship is in itself an essential aspect of the purpose of the church.³⁸ The church is to worship the Living God. God has destined and appointed believers in Christ "to live for the praise of His glory" (Eph. 1:12).

Another purpose of the church is proclamation and witness. Jesus came preaching, calling for repentance and obedience to God's kingly rule (Mark 1:14). One of His first acts was to call out followers who would share this mission (Mark 1:16-20). He not only taught His disciples essential truths but He sent them out on mission to proclaim the kingdom of God and to give witness to the compassion and power of the Father (Matt. 10:5-15; Mark 6:7-13; Luke 9:1-6; 10:1-18). After His resurrection, He commissioned them to be witnesses of the good news of God's saving act of redemption through Jesus Christ, to make disciples everywhere, and to ground new converts in His teaching (Luke 24:46-48; Matt. 28:18-20; John 20:21). The church is to communicate the gospel not only to persons nearby, but also to persons wherever they are, to the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8). Proclamation and witness, therefore, will carry the church beyond geographic boundaries and the members of

³⁶Southern Baptist Inter-Agency Council, "Denominational Definition of a Church" (Nashville: The Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1986), 11. The following summary of the purposes of a Baptist church are excerpted from this document. In this document, evangelism and missions were included in the definitions of proclamation and witness.

³⁷Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 868.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 867.

the local church body. Implementation of Jesus' commission includes penetrating new frontiers with the gospel, acting out of a belief that the field is the whole world.³⁹

Nurture and education are also primary tasks of a Baptist church. Nurture and education includes the whole process by which the church prepared persons for the acceptance of Christ, and following that, guided their development toward the goal of Christian maturity. Believers and congregations were expected to grow in grace and knowledge toward full maturity in Christ (2 Pet. 3:18; Eph. 4:11-13). Although individuals were responsible for their Christian growth and action (2 Tim. 2:15; 2 Pet. 1:5-11), the church was enjoined to facilitate these. Church leaders had the express task of feeding the flock (John 21:15-17; 1 Pet. 5:2; Acts 20:28), and the pastor-teacher had heavy responsibility for "equipping the saints for ministry" (Eph. 4:11-13). Nurture and education are the two sides of one coin. Nurture is the sum of experiences that nourish, modify, and develop individuals within a fellowship. Education involves the means provided for growth in knowledge, wisdom, moral righteousness, and performance. Nurture and education are concerned for the development of competent, full grown Christians who can likewise share in the missional purposes of the church.⁴⁰

A final purpose of the church is ministry. The church receives its ministry from Jesus Christ. He is forever the example of sacrificial, self-giving love. He "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38), ministering to human needs, challenging abuses of power, instructing His followers to forget themselves and give themselves in a gracious service to others (Matt. 20:25-28; John 13:15). The ministry to which Christ calls His followers takes many forms (Matt. 25:34-40), but its distinctiveness rests in the fact that it is done in His name and for His glory. The ministry of God's people (*diakonia*) is always by the mercy of God (2 Cor. 4:1), and it must reflect the spirit of Christ.⁴¹

Every believer is called and equipped by God to share in the ministry of the Church. The believer's ministry involves an understanding of calling, vocation, giftedness, and the importance of daily work. Each person's ministry involves practical acts, Christians helping Christians who are in need. It also involves the church, individually and collectively, in doing good to all persons (see Gal. 6:10) both through direct efforts and through cooperative efforts with other churches. Following Jesus' example, a church seeks to minister to the whole person. This means a concern for the spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical welfare of persons, both within and without the church (Acts 3:6; 6:1-6; 16:16-18; 19:11-12; Rom. 15:25-27). "Faith working through love" makes us "servants of one another" (Gal. 5:6,

³⁹Southern Baptist Inter-Agency Council, "Denominational Definition of a Church," 9.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid., 11.

13). This spirit in us leads to “good works and acts of charity” (Acts 9:36). True ministry in Christ’s name calls for positive action, not mere verbal exercises (Jas. 2:14-17).⁴²

These ecclesiological purposes are to be a regular part of the life and practice of a local Baptist church. The regular activities of a church should include: 1) the worship of God, involving prayer, hymns and spiritual songs, the reading of Scripture, the preaching of Scripture, and the observance of baptism and the Lord’s Supper; 2) the edification of believers through corporate worship, regular preaching and teaching of Scripture, and varieties of service through which the commandments of Christ are fulfilled and the gifts of church members are exercised; and 3) the evangelism of the lost and missional outreach to establish churches and build up believers around the world in cooperation with like-minded churches.⁴³

All endeavors of a Baptist church can be broadly categorized under one or more of these missional tasks. Each of these purposes is equally important and necessary. The task of a Baptist church is to keep these in balance in accordance with the Scriptural emphases placed upon each ministry and in accordance with the gifting of the Holy Spirit for each local church.

SUMMARY

Based upon the previous discussion, a Baptist church is defined by the following traits:

- Committed to the authority of Scripture for faith and practice while recognizing that all scripture is God-breathed
- Submitted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ
- Visible, local body that is independent and autonomous
- Composed of members who are regenerated by the Holy Spirit
- Members covenanted together voluntarily for worship of and service to God
- Observes the two ordinances of Christ
 - o Baptism of believers by immersion as profession of faith in Christ as initiatory

⁴²Ibid., 11.

⁴³“Seven Guidelines for Church Planting which Reflect Baptist Ecclesiology,” the Theological Studies Division, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Ft. Worth, Texas, September, 2004.

rite for membership

o Lord's Supper regularly observed by members in good standing as commemoration of the sacrifice of Christ

- Practices congregational polity
- Practices church discipline
- Scriptural officers are men who serve as pastors and deacons
- Invisible, universal body that includes all the redeemed of all the ages

THE GENIUS OF BAPTIST ECCLESIOLOGY

The distinctive theological identity of Baptists is enmeshed in their doctrine of the church. Baptists have always been concerned that the church should reflect God's intentions as much as possible. The conviction that a church should rest upon the authority of the New Testament and not upon human tradition is what led those early Baptists to separate from other Christian denominations and to form their own churches. Baptist ecclesiology is the attempt of Baptists to reflect their obedience and submission to biblical authority.

Throughout their history, Baptist churches have enjoyed both uniformity and diversity in expression. With regard to uniformity, Baptist churches normally share the theological distinctives mentioned and discussed herein. Baptists have common theological convictions, and these common convictions are typically found in most Baptist churches. With regard to diversity, each Baptist church is as unique as the individuals who constitute its membership.

Differing contexts and cultures have necessitated that Baptists adapt their methodologies and ministries in ways that best address the contextual concerns confronting them. This is the genius of Baptist ecclesiology. The distinctive identity of Baptists is dynamic enough to engage any culture or contextual challenge in thoughtful and meaningful ways. At the same time, the distinctive identity of Baptists as expressed in their ecclesiology is stable enough to ensure that all Baptists share the common theological identity that makes them Baptist. In a paradoxical sense, all Baptist churches are alike, yet all Baptist churches are different.

APPENDIX 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE ECCLESIOLOGY GUIDELINES

INTRODUCTION

The North American Mission Board and its partners assist Southern Baptist churches in fulfilling the Great Commission through the ministry of planting New Testament churches. To carry out this task, church planters and those that work with them must have and work with an ecclesiology that is both biblical and Baptist.

Church planting strategies and activities must be conducted in such a way that they are obedient and submitted to the New Testament for faith and practice as well as committed to Baptist ecclesiology as stated in the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000*. The following guidelines and discussion will assist potential church planters and partners in knowing the type of churches the North American Mission Board affirms and will support its carrying out its church planting assignment.

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 - o Baptism of believers by immersion as profession of faith in Christ as initiatory rite for membership
 - o Lord's Supper regularly observed by members in good standing as commemoration of the sacrifice of Christ
- Practices congregational polity
- Practices church discipline
- Scriptural officers are men who serve as pastors and deacons
- Invisible, universal body that includes all the redeemed of all the ages

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SECTION 2

INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS

“BUT YE SHALL RECEIVE POWER... AND YE SHALL
BE MY WITNESSES UNTO ME... IN SAMARIA,
AND UNTO THE UTTERMOST PART OF
THE EARTH...”

ACTS 1:8

INTERNATIONAL MISSION BOARD, DEFINITION OF A CHURCH¹

DEFINITION

The definition of a local church is given in the 2000 edition of the Baptist Faith and Message:

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scriptures.

GUIDELINES

We believe that every local church is autonomous under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of His inerrant word. This is as true overseas as it is in the United States. Some churches to which we relate overseas may make decisions in doctrine and practice which we would not choose. Nevertheless, we are accountable to God and to Southern Baptists for the foundation that we lay when we plant churches, for the teaching that we give when we train church leaders, and for the criteria that we use when we count churches. In our church planting and teaching ministries, we will seek to lay a foundation of beliefs and practices that are consistent with the Baptist Faith and Message 2000, although local churches overseas may express those beliefs and practices in different ways according to the needs of their cultural settings. Flowing from the definition of a church given above and from the Scriptures from which this definition is derived, we will observe the following guidelines in church planting, leadership training and statistical reporting.

1. A church is intentional about being a church. Members think of themselves as a church. They are committed to one another and to God (associated by covenant) in pursuing all that Scripture requires of a church.
2. A church has an identifiable membership of baptized believers in Jesus Christ.
3. A church practices the baptism of believers only by immersing them in water.
4. A church observes the Lord's Supper on a regular basis.

¹This definition was adopted by the International Mission Board on January 25, 2005

5. Under the authority of the local church and its leadership, members may be assigned to carry out the ordinances.
6. A church submits to the inerrant word of God as the ultimate authority for all that it believes and does.
7. A church meets regularly for worship, prayer, the study of God's word, and fellowship. Members of the church minister to one another's needs, hold each other accountable, and exercise church discipline as needed. Members encourage one another and build each other up in holiness, maturity in Christ, and love.
8. A church embraces its responsibility to fulfill the Great Commission, both locally and globally, from the beginning of its existence as a church.
9. A church is autonomous and self-governing under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of His Word.
10. A church has identifiable leaders, who are scrutinized and set apart according to the qualifications set forth in Scripture. A church recognizes two Biblical offices of church leadership: pastors/elders/overseers and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor/elder/overseer is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.

THE PRIORITY OF INCARNATIONAL MISSIONS: OR “IS THE TAIL OF VOLUNTEERISM WAGGING THE DOG?”

DR, STAN MAY
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF MISSIONS
MID-AMERICA BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the most notable trend in missions in the past quarter century has been the rise of volunteer mission teams. These teams travel overseas for brief periods (1-4 weeks)¹ and perform varied services. Some teams function strictly within the realm of humanitarian work (hunger relief, medical missions, agriculture); some teams combine humanitarian work with evangelism or other church-related functions; some teams minister to missionaries themselves; and, some teams focus exclusively on evangelism, church planting, and leadership training. Alone, Southern Baptist churches sent out more than 30,000 volunteers overseas last year,² and these figures reflect only those Southern Baptist churches that communicated with the International Mission Board—many do not. Missiologist Ralph Winter noted that “nearly 2 million short-termers leave the United States each year compared to 35,000 long-term missionaries.”³

Volunteer mission teams fulfill numerous positive roles: they provide needed medical care in regions where such care is limited or unavailable; they draw crowds simply by virtue of being exotic visitors; they serve alongside career missionaries and thus assist these missionaries to fulfill their strategies; they minister to missionaries and nationals by providing much-needed “shots in the arm” spiritually, strategically, physically, and emotionally; they expose many to overseas service and thus create a new interest in missions at home; and the list goes on.⁴ The multitude of volunteers fulfilling these functions causes many to rejoice in this trend.

¹Some groups use the term “short-term” to refer to this, but the IMB uses the term “volunteer.”

²“Volunteers in Missions,” available at <http://going.imb.org/vim/main/default.asp>; accessed 6 August 2007.

³Michelle Vu, “12 Mistakes Mission Agencies Should Avoid,” *The Christian Post*, available at <http://www.christianpost.com/article/20071105/29964.htm>; accessed 24 November 2007.

⁴For example, Stan May, “Short-Term Mission Trips Are Great If . . .,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 6 no 4 (October 2000): 444-49.

While these numbers seem to signal an unprecedented interest in overseas work, they also may awaken serious concerns. These concerns stem from a missiological appraisal of the volunteer situation. For the time being, volunteers will continue to go from churches across America, and volunteers are not necessarily bad. I applaud volunteers who fill any role that furthers the missionary's strategy and advances the kingdom. Volunteers complement the work of career missionaries, but the core strategy of every mission board must be built around and upon career missionaries—those who sense a call from God, leave family, friends, and familiarity, and plant their lives in another country with a commitment to learn the language and culture of a new people group in order to communicate a contextualized gospel message, plant indigenous churches, and train leaders so that the work survives. Evangelism that results in churches has been an International Mission Board thrust for 20 years, because churches are God's primary tools to disciple and perfect the nations.

Lest anyone think that this concern is simply peripheral, some now argue that the day of the career missionary is over—that volunteers are a better investment of time, money, and priorities. Kent Hall of Buckner International argued for a cessation of career missionaries, and to make his point, asked, "Is it the best use of our resources to train a handful of professionals to go in our place?" He argued that Paul "went on a series of relatively short-term missionary journeys," and then stated, "Career missionaries—by and large—are the exception to the biblical model, not the norm."⁵

This article addresses missiological concerns about volunteer missions. Key issues concern the fitness of volunteers to fulfill the ministry for which they travel, their functions overseas, and their focus. Finally, the article addresses the question, "Is the tail of volunteerism wagging the dog of missiology?" Are agencies making decisions about missionary work in light of the volunteer movement that might ultimately derail the career mission movement?

THE FITNESS OF VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers must be fit to serve in missions overseas. This fitness involves physical readiness to endure the difficulties of functioning in another climate, spiritual maturity to accomplish God's agenda for the trip, and actual usefulness for the assigned task. Physical readiness is perhaps the most obvious of these qualifications, and United States citizens seem to lag behind the world in this area. Stories abound of nationals who criticize volunteers because they cannot handle heat, terrain, food, and other discomforts of the host country. Physically unhealthy volunteers add stress to the team leader and may even bring reproach on the name of Christ.

Spiritual maturity matters even more in cross-cultural ministry trips. Volunteers must be ready to give a reason for the hope within them (1 Pet. 3:15), and this readiness includes the ability to address issues in the culture with which the gospel may clash. They

⁵Ken Camp, "The Great Commission: What is the Future of Missionaries?" available at <http://www.abpnews.com/2643.article>; accessed 27 December 2007.

need to be faithful witnesses at home before they ever go overseas; sadly, this is often not the case. Dan R. Crawford writes about those who travel overseas but do not witness at home:

That's one reason mission trips have been so popular. I can easily get a group of Christians to go across the country or to another country to share their faith in Christ. But getting them to share their faith where they live is tough. In the far away place, the non-Christian can't compare my verbal witness with my lifestyle, so it is easy to witness verbally. The closer one gets to home the harder it is to witness verbally if the lifestyle and the verbal witness do not harmonize.⁶

Spiritual maturity goes beyond evangelism. Volunteers must manifest a Christian lifestyle that qualifies them to speak to the nationals, or just to gain a hearing.

This Christian lifestyle means that the Bible is more than a mantelpiece decoration—volunteers must know the Bible well enough to use it as their teaching guide, and it must direct their thought processes so that they think biblically. Only as they breathe the air of Scripture will the nationals see a genuine love for the Lord Jesus. This love of the Word needs to be coupled with a passion for prayer that harnesses the believer to Christ for His power and love. Cross-cultural change-agents must be people of prayer, or they will fulfill Lesslie Newbigin's charge that "western Christian missions have been one of the greatest secularizing forces in history."⁷ Prayer—public, open prayer for individuals and groups—reflects genuine faith in a mighty God. Such prayer testifies eloquently to nationals, while many volunteer trips, even those dedicated to "prayer-walking," seem to emphasize little actual prayer.

Finally, volunteers must actually fulfill a useful role for their assigned task. Volunteers who teach must know their fields, must demonstrate competency, and must serve the nationals to help them move toward maturity in Christ or at least greater openness to His claims on their lives. Competency in a needed field counts as a "fitness" volunteers should possess before embarking on a volunteer trip.

FUNCTIONS OF VOLUNTEERS

As volunteers go, their fitness should prepare them to fulfill needed functions. In order to function effectively, they must understand their place in the framework of missiology. Volunteers are not missionaries, but they can be used by God to fulfill

⁶Dan R. Crawford, *Discipleshape: Twelve Weeks to Spiritual Fitness*, Calvin Miller (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 127.

⁷Quoted in Paul G. Hiebert, "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, 3d ed., ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library), 418.

missionary strategies, and they ought to return from their trips with the awareness that they need further training to fulfill God's calling on their lives.

Volunteers are not missionaries.

Often volunteers are called "missionaries" by their churches, and churches even adopt slogans such as "Every Member a Missionary." In truth, every member is not a missionary. All members should be mission-minded and involved in fulfilling the great commission; but all members are not missionaries, just as all members should be ministry-minded but all are not called to vocational ministry. While many churches boast, "Every Member a Minister," no church has the slogan, "Every Member a Pastor."

Career mission service is much like marriage. People leave their job, family, and friends to embark on a new life. This is not two weeks of "roughing it," but a radically different lifestyle that accepts new challenges and leaves old comforts behind. Just as marriage means that the couple wakes up every day, lives together, and works out differences in their relationship, so career missions service means that missionaries pay the price to serve overseas long-term. The real difference between volunteers and career missionaries is the return-trip ticket. Many who participate in volunteer trips are unwilling to make the sacrifices necessary to follow God's call in such a dramatic way.

Volunteers can assist missionaries.

Volunteers serve in a variety of roles, but all of these roles are complementary. Volunteers with proper training and skill sets can assist missionaries as they fulfill their strategies. They can open doors of ministry and further the cause of Christ. Untrained mission volunteers often cause so much trouble that missionaries choose to put them "where they will do the least harm." While no one would bring in untrained people to perform surgeries, teach in universities, or repair expensive equipment, churches routinely send people overseas without either training or extensive preliminary preparation for the trip itself. Such volunteers hurt the work and insult the nationals. Always, the best thing that volunteers can do is to assist the career missionary's strategy, to minister to the missionary, and to leave a positive impact for Christ in the minds and hearts of the nationals.

Volunteerism ought to lead to trained missionaries.

Those who travel overseas on volunteer trips should come back with a passion to give, pray, and go; they should also return home with a new realization about the need for the proper training for missionaries. Sadly, this is not always the case.

I recently counseled a couple who were hoping to enter missionary service. The husband was an aeronautical engineer for an overnight freight company, taught a Sunday school class at his church, and had participated in a volunteer trip. When I asked the husband about seminary preparation, the man stated that he did not have time to gain education, since he only had a year to finish out the paperwork and go. I asked him, "Who will take your position? Do you think I could?" He replied, "What is your degree?"

I answered, “History, but I’ve always wanted to be an engineer.” He responded, “You couldn’t do the job; you’re not trained.”

I answered, “That’s the same way I feel about you going to serve overseas and start churches without training. The decisions you make will affect churches and the work in that country for decades to come.” His willingness to go without training and preparation stemmed from a view of missions that had come from a volunteer trip.

FOCUS OF VOLUNTEERS

Is the tail of volunteerism wagging the dog of missiology? In other words, are the tried and true methods established over decades by valiant missionaries—such as John Nevius, Roland Allen, Donald McGavran, and others—now being degraded by the headlong flight to accommodate volunteers? While doing much good, volunteers may actually derail the work of mission agencies in at least four areas: volunteers take resources; volunteers hamper the call to career missions; volunteers redirect career missionary activity; and volunteers create dependency.

Volunteers Take Resources.

The recent devaluing of the US dollar strains every mission agency. Volunteer teams exacerbate this strain by siphoning off dollars that could be used for career missions. Ralph Winter lamented, “It costs at least five times more overall to send a short-timer than a long-term missionary—financial support that . . . would be better invested in a long-term missionary.”⁸ If Winter’s assessment of almost 2 million volunteers per year is correct, and the average cost is around \$2,000.00, then Americans spend almost \$4 billion dollars on volunteer trips!⁹

Volunteers Hamper the Call to Career Missions.

Mission agencies tout volunteer trips as one of the primary recruiting tools for career missions—and indeed some who go on volunteer trips do end up serving as career missionaries. The vast majority of volunteers, however, stay in America; even groups that tout volunteer trips as a way to gain career missionaries admit this. Short-Term Evangelical Missions (STEM) commissioned a 1999 research survey that polled 432 individuals who had taken one or more short-term trips. When asked about their opinions about serving as full-time/career missionaries, sixty responded that they had taken positive steps toward full-time service or were already serving. Of these 60, 32 had already been in these categories before going on a short-term trip.¹⁰ By STEM’s own statistics, approximately 6 percent of short-

⁸Winter, “12 Mistakes.”

⁹This writer has found no hard figures for the average cost of a mission trip, but most websites indicate a larger cost per person. The figure above may be conservative.

¹⁰Daniel P. McDonough and Roger P. Peterson, *CAN SHORT-TERM MISSION REALLY CREATE LONG-TERM MISSIONARIES?: Results of STEM’s Second Major*

term trip participants were moving toward or had moved toward career service. This small number may suggest that the trend is not as pronounced as some suggest.

Greater concern arises, however, when volunteers see their volunteer service as a replacement for career service. David Blackney listed as the number one danger of volunteer missions the idea that “short-term activities equal mission work.”¹¹ Missiologist Ed Stetzer, director of research for LifeWay Christian Resources, noted, “I praise God for the volunteer mission work that is taking place, but if we’re not careful, it can be a double-edged sword. Too often, it turns into tourist missions and not genuine mission engagement. . . . The reality is that in much of global missions, often engagement takes long-term incarnational missionaries living in context, understanding the language and culture, and planting biblical churches. You can’t do that when you have to go home on Thursday.”¹² Career missionaries are the *sine qua non* of mission strategy, and the competition from volunteerism slows down rather than increases missionary appointments. In fact, Bill Waldrop noted an actual decline of 16 percent in North American career missionary appointments between 1988 and 1992 (though Southern Baptists are reversing this trend).¹³

Volunteers redirect career activity.

Career missionaries form the centerpiece for any missions strategy for several reasons: they are “on the ground”; they know the language and culture; they have built relationships from which all true ministry flows; they know how to function in the host country; and they know what to do and what not to do. They build plans to reach their people, start churches, train leaders, and eventually see God produce multiplying churches that reach their own people and surrounding peoples with the gospel. They are the experts in their area. When volunteers come, these experts lay aside their role to facilitate the work of others who know none of the above. Volunteers may be highly motivated and have a genuine burden for this field, but highly motivated untrained people often do more damage than good.¹⁴ Thus, missionaries end up herding volunteers around, hoping that the damage will be minimal to the work. Meanwhile, the trained professionals are not doing the work for which they were equipped.

Scientific Study on the Long-Term Effect of Short-Term Mission (Minneapolis: STEMMinistries, 1999), 14 (table 6).

¹¹David Blackney, “Avoiding the Pitfalls of Short-Term Missions: Counting the Costs & Getting Short-Term Missions Right” (PowerPoint) available at <http://www.mastersmission.org/Avoiding%20the%20Pitfalls%20of%20Short%20term%20for%20e-ssentials.ppt>; accessed 27 December 2007.

¹²Quoted by Camp, “The Great Commission.”

¹³Bill Waldrop, “Trends Affecting Mobilization of the North American Church,” *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 11 (July-August 1994): 118.

¹⁴Greg H. Parsons, “Equipping At-Home Mobilizers,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 34 (July 1998): 285.

Volunteers create dependency.

Missionaries operate on the indigenous principle that precludes giving nationals money. Volunteers often operate out of guilt and the belief that all problems can be solved (or at least lubricated) by massive amounts of American dollars. They give money to nationals, creating resentment toward the career missionary, who has not been giving funds, and building dependency on the volunteer. This cavalier attitude toward giving destroys the national church's impetus to give, teaches nationals that Americans rather than God are their supply, and creates an unending cycle of dependency that cripples national work for decades.¹⁵

SOME SUGGESTIONS

Volunteerism seems to be a fad that will persist for some time. The International Mission Board and the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention must cooperate to ensure that maximum benefit comes both to the churches and to the Board. How can the Board and the churches work together to make volunteerism a complement to the core strategy of sending called, equipped, career missionaries to the ends of the earth?

Churches must take responsibility.

Churches that send mission teams out must accept the responsibility for their people. They need to insist that all volunteers be faithful, active members of the church; that they know the Bible and be people of prayer; that they witness regularly at home; and that they go through thorough preparation, including reading, training, and meeting together to form a cohesive team. Team members must be required to read books that teach missiological principles, and churches should work with the associations, state conventions, and seminaries to train volunteers in effective cross-cultural ministry.

Churches must work in partnership with missionaries on the ground, fit into their agenda, and insist that team members follow the rules or be sent home. They should apportion their financial resources to ensure that more monies go for career missions than for volunteer trips. They should also guard their resources to prevent people from taking annual trips at the expense of the church, the state convention, and the association simply because "they want to go." One way to accomplish this end would be to require those who go on successive trips to bear a greater portion of the cost each time, until they pay their entire way.

The International Mission Board should lead.

The IMB should lead in volunteer planning by providing appropriate trips to places where missionaries have effective strategies in place that can withstand the onslaught of volunteerism. They should partner with churches that work within IMB guidelines and

¹⁵Robert Reese, "Western Missions and Dependency," World Mission Associates, available at <http://www.wmausa.org/page.aspx?id=289947>; accessed 27 December 2007.

inform churches that show up unannounced that the missionary is not free to work with them. The Board should protect the missionary and the work, even if this could mean jeopardizing a relationship (but it couldn't be a strong relationship, or the team would have planned ahead).

Southern Baptists should develop a brief theology of missions that they can disseminate to churches and teams. This missiology should be clear, should define terms easily, and should be required reading before teams leave. A central tenet of IMB missiology—the priority of the career missionary—should be spelled out clearly so that volunteers understand the divide between those who travel overseas for a brief period and those who follow the call of God to live and work overseas.

The Board should provide a brief reading list for all volunteers, urge churches to plan ahead so that the team will have time to read, and reward churches that work within the structure. Further, the Board should ask churches for the names of all participants in volunteer trips and use these lists to develop appropriate ways to enlist career missionaries (such as hosting post-trip meetings, writing letters to challenge the participants, sending some type of e-zine that focuses on a “volunteer-to-career” push).

CONCLUSION

God's plan to disciple and perfect the nations is the local church. Incarnational missionaries lead nationals to Christ, start local churches, and train the leaders so are actively participating in His plan. Volunteers either fit into that plan and assist the work or come with their own agenda and hinder the work. When done well, volunteerism complements career missions by multiplying the efforts of the career missionary, providing critical skill sets for specific tasks, and bringing trained people alongside to further the work. When not done well, volunteerism hinders the work of missions in countless ways. Churches and mission agencies, and especially Southern Baptists, must work together to further the work of the kingdom and facilitate useful volunteerism that involves accountable stewardship of money, time, and talent.

TOWARDS BEST PRACTICE IN SHORT TERM MISSIONS

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INTRODUCTION

The topic of short term missions has become a very relevant one for many local churches, and for the church staff and lay leaders that are engaged in planning and executing these projects. Thousands of lay people and church workers travel across the globe constantly to share their faith through different inter-cultural encounters and service projects. The phenomenon is really quite recent from an historical perspective, since only a very few practicing Christians could have imagined going on a missions trip before 1970. Today, however, many churches are now designating a significant part of their missions budget to sending church members out on missions trips to all sorts of places around the world. Many church members have spent significant portions of their vacation time doing Christian service in some global venue, and most if not all church members have at one time or another given to help their friends or others to go and to work on their behalf. For a growing number of Christians travel with a kingdom purpose has become habit-forming, so that they expect to take an annual missions trip much like planning their personal vacation.

The phenomenon has grown quickly so that missiological literature has scarcely been able to attempt precise definitions. Moreau, Corwin and McGee describe short term missions thus: “This usually refers to trips with a mission focus that range from one week to one to two years. They may be organized by churches, agencies, or even individuals for a variety of reasons (English-language camps, church building projects, evangelistic campaigns).”¹

In the 1960s and into the 1970s most denominational mission boards and missionary sending agencies were still sending out exclusively career personnel. While missionaries did come home for various reasons before retirement, there was always a sense of loss—almost of failure—and often some stigma attached. Few could have seen that there would be such a huge upsurge of interest in short term missions projects. In fact, there was strong resistance from old-timers who considered that the career missionary was the backbone for missionary endeavors, and that this fad of “vacations for Jesus” would subside quickly. They could not have been more wrong. For example, when Southern Baptists were developing goals for the Bold Mission Thrust they initiated in 1979, the most “out there” challenge was that by the year 2000 there would be at least 10,000 volunteers doing an overseas project each year. However, this was the one goal that was more than achieved—so that by the year 2000 there were over 30,000 Baptists on mission in overseas projects that the mission board could count! Only God knows how many really went. According to *Christianity Today*, “In 1979 an estimated 22,000 lay people in the United States were involved in overseas or cross-

¹Scott Moreau, Gary Corwin and Gary McGee, *Introducing World Missions: A Biblical, Historical and Practical Survey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Books, 1993).

cultural ministries ranging from a few days to four years. A million now go forth annually, from 40,000 churches, agencies, and schools.”² Most recently, the tragic hurricanes along the Gulf Coast have highlighted the work of churches and Christian institutions in sending volunteer teams to help with various aspects of the reconstruction of the region. The cultural influence in recent times of short term missions trips can be seen in examples like the fact that after his missions trip to South Brazil well-known novelist John Grisham decided to pen a novel set in the region focusing on the work of missionaries there. The well-known book, *The Testament*, was the result.

In the last 25 years we have seen a sea change in attitudes in advancing short term missions. While the phrase “paradigm shift” has become overworked recently, lesser epithets would not capture the magnitude of the changes that have taken place. At one time most missions-minded churches would send a very few of their finest young men and women out as missionaries, pray for them while they were gone, and give to support their work. Now the church that does not sponsor some significant missions trips or hands-on experiences for its members is perceived as somehow behind the curve.

Denominational mission boards began to report as early as the 1980s that an increasing percentage of their missionary candidates received their call into missions while on a short term missionary experience. For this reason, the attitudes began to shift and missionaries began to pay close attention to short term missions experiences as recruiting tools for new missionaries. Now, missionary sending agencies like the IMB would note a significant shift in the composition of their missionaries on the field, since by the year 2000 the short-termers (staying for two to three years or less) had actually begun to outnumber the career personnel with longevity of service.

We have also seen the rise of countless new organizations whose mission is to help churches plan and execute good missions trips. Organizations like YWAM and Campus Crusade were among the early adopters of a strategy for short-term missions that utilized large numbers of energetic but largely inexperienced young people to pursue the global goals of their organizations. Frontier Missions is an organization with a fervent commitment to short term missions at the outset of its 25 year history. Its founder, Greg Livingstone, had enjoyed success in mobilizing the young generation to work sacrificially among North African Muslims: “Livingstone believed that young, teachable, relatively inexperienced believers could help launch fellowships of Muslim-born believers” Frontiers was started to give shape to that vision since the agency he worked for did not agree with that strategy.³

By any measure, the rapid growth of short term missions is one of the most defining trends of the last twenty-five years of missionary work. A recent article in USA Today highlights the extent to which US churches have embraced short term missions. It states: “Short-term mission trips (less than two weeks) are enjoying a wave of popularity with

²Ken Walker and Sarah Page, “Agencies Announce Short Term Missions Standards,” *Christianity Today*, 47.10 (Oct., 2003).

³“Celebrating 25 Years of Frontiers Ministry,” *Frontiers Frontlines* (Spring, 2007): 8.

Americans eager to put faith into action and make vacations meaningful. About 1.6 million Americans took such trips abroad last year, according to a survey by Robert Wuthnow, Princeton University sociologist of religion. Domestic trips, which peak in the summer, are even more popular.”⁴ The short term missions trip is now part of the cultural landscape of North American church life. Evidence of this is seen in the simple fact that a Google search on the phrase “short term missions trip” yields 1,070,000 hits!

Short term missions has come to designate in popular parlance two quite distinct, but related phenomena. One of them relates to the longevity of missionary service. Traditionally, missionaries were seen as taking up a lifetime calling. For most of the Modern Missionary Movement the idea of becoming a missionary was to mimic the experience of William Carey who left England for India to incarnate the gospel there. He never returned and his grave site is just outside Calcutta where he worked. The William Carey way of doing missions for all a lifetime has only recently given way to an army of energetic young Christians who will give two or three years of service overseas—usually immediately after completing college. Some of these will decide to return and develop a career of international ministry. Most of them will finish their term of service and integrate back into life in the USA, and carry the insights of their experience into the work they will do in their churches. However, a growing group of senior citizens have chosen to use the energies of their retirement years doing international work, and they have created another significant group of two to three year servants abroad.

The other phenomenon is that the “missions trip” has become a staple for church life in many, if not most US churches of any size. These trips can range in time commitment from a few days to a semester abroad in God’s service for students. An incredible number of people have chosen to dedicate their vacations to doing some kind of international service project, and others find ways to “get off work” to participate in such efforts by their churches.

One of the reasons to draw the distinction is that the two year commitment generally involves application to a missionary sending agency of some sort and/or raising monthly support. Those who go on a missions trip generally pay their own way or solicit one time contributions from friends and family to cover the costs of their efforts. Also, there is a fundamental difference in the way that one can engage another culture and come to understand how to work within it when there is a longer commitment than a few weeks.⁵

⁴*USA Today*, 19 June 2006. Section Life, 6D.

⁵To adapt to a culture in terms of learning to live and work effectively in it, is typically considered to be a process that requires about two years—though it is difficult to quantify this precisely or to determine at what specific point in the gradual process towards cultural integration a person actually becomes truly effective. See Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1985) 69-89. In this chapter on “Cultural Differences and the New Missionary” Hiebert traces the process of adaptation through culture shock. See also the more recent treatments by Brooks Peterson, *Cultural Intelligence: A Guide to Working with People From Other Cultures* (Boston, MA:

Somewhere in between these “categories” is the experience of college students who do a semester or summer abroad with a missionary purpose. This would suggest that there is more of a continuum on which we can describe differences in missionary experiences than any kind of rigid categorization. In fact, there is so much experimentation and innovation happening that it is still difficult to create any kind of iron clad categories in this sort of work.

A PERSONAL PILGRIMAGE

Short term missions has played a key role in my own experience. In fact, it was decisive as a motivator for getting me started in missions. My own life was redirected in a significant way when God took my wife and me to Romania and Yugoslavia in the summer of 1975. The region was still behind the Iron Curtain, ruled by Communist dictators. On that trip I spent three days in a small room with five young lay preachers who battled persecution in Romania bravely and whose curiosity about the Bible and Christian faith had no bounds. Their spiritual hunger convinced me that a growing church needed the steady guidance of healthy teaching or “sound doctrine” in order to sustain its growth. For me, the challenges of making disciples overseas in cross-cultural environments was infinitely more complex and stimulating than re--hashing theological arguments already rehearsed by many others in the USA. In short, God called me to be a missionary. This decision redirected my life. Rather than racing for the most prestigious pulpit I could find, I found myself studying for a doctorate in New Testament and Early Church in order to use these insights to prepare workers to lead the church in other parts of the world. My mission now was not so much “to preach the gospel” myself as it was to prepare and to coach those who would preach and lead the church. My life would be worthwhile if their efforts would bring many others to Christ. Therefore, let me cast my lot with those who believe strongly in the value of short term missions.

DIVERSITY OF METHODS—UNITY OF PURPOSE

The precise focus of missions trips runs across a wide spectrum of creative activities. Some focus on sports, on disaster relief, on cultural interchange, on AIDS prevention, on work with orphans, on agricultural assistance, on many forms of community development, on teaching courses to local Christians, on simple relationship building, on prayer-walking, on scripture distribution or on direct evangelism, or even on a building project. The list could go on and on. The only limit to the different kinds of trips with different kinds of purposes is the creativity of the planners in determining strategies to engage one aspect or another of the local society at the trip’s destination. One of my favorites was a team that went recently as solar oven engineers in Afghanistan—if for no other reason than it underscores that almost any activity imaginable could be potentially used in short term missions.

Realities on the ground should play a key role in determining the specific work of the trip. One would expect for there to be significant differences in what work might be done in

Intercultural Press, 2004) as well as David C. Thomas and Kerr Inkson, *Cultural Intelligence: People Skills for Global Business* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2003).

a major city, and out in the open countryside. Or, again that work in a hospitable environment politically such as a Canadian city would contrast sharply with what might be done in a restricted-access setting. The religion and culture of the people to whom the service of the group is directed will play a role. Especially in the Islamic world, group members will need to change their dress, their demeanor, and their methods.

All of these trips will appeal to those wanting to help local people experience one aspect or another of the way Christianity can impact their lives. However, strategies will change according to whether the project seeks to sow gospel seed, to harvest new believers, to develop new churches, to disciple new believers, or to develop and train leaders for the new churches. A good many projects will focus on the society at large and ask how to add value into the lives of people there. In many cases the missions project will actually focus on assisting across the many domains of society on improving quality of life in one dimension or another. This pre-evangelism can be a powerful tool for relationship building where gospel witness is given. So, these few examples should suffice to affirm that short term missions projects come in all shapes and sizes.

BASIC TIPS AND TRICKS FOR A GOOD MISSIONS TRIP

The literature that is referenced in the resource list attached contains a number of manuals that give specific guidance on the planning and execution of a missions trip. These include such valuable helps as timelines, coaching on fund raising for participants, suggested orientation programs, and even sample packing lists. Those works can be consulted by leaders of missions project teams. However, what follows is a list of essential general issues that must be managed well for a missions trip to achieve good results.

- Ask the local missionaries or a local church to help your group develop a project that will fit into an existing strategy of work, so that your efforts will not be a one-time shot. That way there will be people on the ground to follow up with what you achieve.
- Work with a trusted partner on site at your destination. The key to a successful trip is having locals who can guide you past cultural landmines and through to productive cultural engagement and service.
- Integrate prayer explicitly and consciously into every aspect of what you do. Ask God to guide you and to bless you and to use you as His instruments in the lives of those with whom you come into contact.
- Get the travel documentation right. Every participant must have a valid passport and the appropriate visas. All recommended immunizations must be done far in advance of the travel date. Flight arrangements, lodging, local transportation, and food are essential items that must be planned and budgeted for.
- Do careful orientation with your group. This allows you to do homework on the culture collectively in a shared way and team building that will prove useful while on the road.

- Help your participants to develop a group of prayer supporters, some of whom will also be financial contributors to help with the trip expenses. Getting a list of prayer partners, contacting potential donors, explaining what you hope to achieve and reporting what the trip accomplished is a large part of the experience.
- Coach your group on how to be culturally appropriate in sharing their faith in the local culture you will visit. It is always fitting to be a witness for Jesus—but there are ways and there are ways . . .
- Plan to be tourists while you are there. Do your work, use your service projects to make friends in the local culture, but since you are visiting a new place in the world for the first time, allow yourselves to be normal enough to enjoy some time learning about the place you are visiting. I like a half-day tour upon arrival and then to the work. Then, a couple of days for tourism and shopping at the end allows you to disengage from the ministry and do some important debriefing before you get on the plane.
- Plan your travel carefully. After all, this is a “trip!” A mistake on getting good flight reservations so that the group gets split apart in route, or a bad choice of hotel accommodations can make the entire trip difficult.
- Know the safety and health issues before you go. Learn what you need to be careful of. Getting robbed (or worse) will create a very negative experience. Eating at the wrong place and getting diarrhea will be memorable, but your group will not be effective.
- Plan on returning next year. Long term partnerships with repeated trips will yield far greater results in terms of ministry into the local culture, and open the possibility of developing deep relationships.

Certainly there are a great many other suggestions that could be passed along, but these are some key essentials to bear in mind.

SOME OBJECTIONS TO SHORT TERM MISSIONS

Popular as they are, critics say, short-term missions trips can be counterproductive -- or worse. Concerns surface especially with international trips. USA Today notes some of the nay-sayings:

Judd Birdsall, former managing editor of *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, a Christian journal, grew up in Japan in an evangelical missionary home. Too often these days, he says, untrained *short-term* missionaries -- or "vacationaries" -- offend indigenous populations and undermine hard-earned relationships cultivated by long-term missionaries over many years.

"At this point, it really is an out-of-control phenomenon," Birdsall says. "Americans come in with good intentions, but they couple zeal with ignorance, and that can be a deadly combination for the folks who are on the ground slogging it out year after year."

All too often, groups set off with scant foreign-language skills and minimal cross-cultural training, says David Livermore, author of *Serving with Eyes Wide Open*. Their construction projects sometimes take work away from locals or come at the expense of more pressing needs, Livermore says, but impoverished hosts dare not protest.

"Often there's too high a price for them to say no to this because often (hosting a group) is the means to getting the check that will help support them."

Volunteers also run the risk of duplicating efforts in today's decentralized *mission* environment, says Mark Oestreicher of Youth Specialties, an El Cajon, Calif.-based training firm for church youth leaders. One slum in Tijuana, Mexico, for example, now expects regular visits from *mission*-driven groups from Southern California.

"Each of these groups will come in, do a vacation Bible school and lead the same kids to Christ over and over again," Oestreicher says.

Others concede that the trips aren't perfect but say they do a lot of good. Dana Robert of the Center for Global Christianity and *Mission* at Boston University points to improved standards of living and broadened perspectives of those who travel, interact and serve.

"A lot of people come back from these trips humbled," Robert says. "I think, on balance, it's more worthwhile than not."⁶

Most missionaries have some horror stories to tell about culturally insensitive participants on missions trips who deeply offend local Christians and/or community members in ways that are really harmful. There would be value in adopting a missiological version of the Hippocratic Oath to "Do no harm." However, in practice this means a high commitment to understanding local, customs, practices, values and folkways. It requires a strong dose of humility, and eagerness to be a cultural learner and to avoid monocultural assumptions of the "Ugly American" syndrome. This unconscious cultural chauvinism and arrogance makes international relations difficult in many places around the world.

To be sure there are also horror stories about short term missionaries getting trapped unwittingly in cross-cultural misunderstandings, where unintentionally their words and actions raise expectations among local people that are contrary to what could have been intended. Most of these are quite inconvenient, but manageable.

⁶ *USA Today*, 19 June 2006. Section Life, 6D.

There are also many horror stories about well-intentioned benevolence being taken advantage of or having long-term debilitating consequences. One of the first articles of missiology that short term missionary participants must understand clearly are the practices required by Henry Venn's formula for an indigenous church. Anything that is done that does not make the church self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating will have negative, and sometimes disastrous consequences in the long run. This reality has led to some attempts to create "standards" for short-term missionaries. These doubtless serve a helpful function in preparing attitudes of missions trips participants. A good example of a statement of standards for short term missions is to be found attached in Appendix 1.

Finally, one must ask about the long term effects of repeated missions trips. These can be very good in some instances, such as in response to the devastation of Hurricane Mitch in Guatemala and Honduras a few years ago. Along the US Gulf Coast and in New Orleans, Texas Baptist Men and other disaster relief teams have been wonderful ambassadors for Southern Baptists as they have selflessly served the community in an hour of disaster and need.

Sometimes, the long term effects can actually backfire. For example, after 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall US Christians of all sizes and varieties rushed into the spiritual void behind the Iron Curtain. Romania, which in 1975 under severe Communist oppression had the highest level of church growth for Baptists in the world, found that freedom was far more difficult to deal with. After an initial surge, where in the early days churches were literally overrun by curious visitors, by the mid-1990s growth among Baptists there had stalled out into a flat line of stagnation. One of the major contributing factors was an obsession among local pastors there with finding potential donors among the many missions teams who visited them to finance the building of new church sanctuaries. You could argue that they took their eyes off the ball and ceased to focus first and foremost on the needs of the lost people around them. However, the blame should be mainly ascribed to well-intentioned but often thoughtless attempts by US Christians to "do something" to help out in ways that were not always missiologically smart.

Christians in much of the former Soviet Union were overwhelmed by a tidal wave of volunteers that was totally uncoordinated, but who often offered help that conflicted with other one another. In 1999 I attended the annual meeting of the Ukrainian Baptist Convention. There was a luncheon on the second day of all the groups who were sending volunteers to work in their churches. There were over 200 representatives of 112 different entities present.

A similar situation may soon exist in Cuba. There has been really phenomenal growth among evangelical churches there, in spite of many repressive measures by Castro's regime. Nevertheless, as freedom to travel becomes widespread, church leaders there predict that they will be overwhelmed by a tidal wave of well meaning US Christians, anxious to be a part of what God is doing there. They will bring all the techniques and mechanisms from our churches, that on the whole are not growing, and confidently recommend them to the polite and hospitable Cubans whose churches are doing quite well without them. God save them!

SOME POSITIVE BENEFITS OF SHORT TERM MISSIONS

The article on “Short Term Missions” in the *Evangelical Dictionary of World Mission* describes the benefits of short term missions in the following terms:

The short term missions movement has definitely been a key factor in the mobilization of world mission globally. The present generation of missionary candidates tends to make their decisions and commitments base on the knowledge gained through firsthand experience. As a result of short-term service a world vision can be developed that in turn affects the mobilization efforts of the church at large. In addition, many feel that short-term missions provides a valuable respite for career missionaries, brings fresh enthusiasm from the outside, and accomplished practical projects as well as significant ministry. Obviously, many who serve in short-term missions are likely candidates for long-term service, and in fact, a significant number of career missionaries today have had a short-term mission experience. Those who return without making a commitment to long-term service are able to impact the churches that they are a part of with a global awareness and an expanded vision of God’s work in the world.⁷

One of the best presented arguments for short term missions is found in a brief, 39 page, booklet by STM which provides documentation that participants in short term missions projects experience statistically significant changes in prayer, giving and commitment to missions.⁸ More such research is needed to demonstrate that missions trips do produce a significant shift in missionary mindset and commitment levels.

In an article entitled, “Getting Past My Selfishness” we hear this testimony of the positive effect of a missions trip by a participant:

I have sort of a love-hate relationship with *missions trips*. I’ve been on several—to Estonia and the Dominican Republic, not to mention homeless shelters and rehab centers here in the States—and I always go through the same cycle of thinking.

I start out with something like a sense of dread, because these things are physically and emotionally demanding. *Missions trips* are a pretty selfless thing, and I’m a very selfish person.

But I do them anyway, because I feel like God calls me to. And every time I do, I’ve been blessed. As much as I might gripe beforehand, when it’s all over, I have no

⁷Dennis Massaro, “Short Term Missions,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Mission* ed. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Books, 2000), 874.

⁸*Is Short Term Missions Really Worth the Time and Money? Advancing God’s Kingdom Through Short Term Missions* (Monrovia, CA: MARC Publishing, 1994); available from www.worldvisionresources.com.

regrets. Why? Because I've seen God's hand time and again, all around the world—even through my own selfishness.

Like that time in Estonia. We'd just arrived after 20 hours of travel, and the airline had lost our luggage. I was hot, sweaty, stinky—and ticked. But they'd scheduled a little concert that night in the town square.

So I go out there, still angry, and I start singing. A woman approaches me. She's dirty and smelly, and her breath reeks of alcohol. I'm totally repulsed by her, but she puts her hands on my face, kisses my cheek and says something in Russian. I just wanted her to go away.

Somebody later translated the woman's words for me: "My daughter," she was saying. "You look like my daughter. You have the face of an angel. I love you, I love you."

And then the words of Jesus hit me right between the eyes: "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40). I hadn't thought of that Scripture in ages. But there it was, staring me in the face—touching me, kissing me, speaking to me in a language I couldn't understand.

It was as if I had been touched on the face by God. It was like he was saying, "I'm just as much a part of this woman as I'm a part of you." I'll never forget it.⁹

Sue Lennarson calls her experiences on missions trips "a powerful education" and ends her testimonies with the exhortation: "I encourage congregational leaders to look at offering opportunities for serving that take people around the world. Step into a different culture, language, and way of life. Listen to all that God has to teach through God's people in these places."¹⁰

Not all of the take home value of short term missions trips is necessarily positive. Some students who go on trips experience an exhilarating sense of God's presence, and are astonished by the faithfulness of local Christians they meet and find their own lives challenged to embrace similar commitments. As healthy as this is, it can spawn a sense of disillusionment, even anger towards the church back home. Perhaps there is nothing at all wrong with learning by contact with Christians from other parts of the world that there are areas in which our own beliefs and practices may be substandard. However, it will be important to learn how to direct these negative feelings in a positive way.¹¹

⁹Jennifer Knapp, "Getting Past My Selfishness," *Campus Life*, 60.6 (Jan., 2002).

¹⁰Sue Lennarson, "To All Nations: Continuing Education on the Move." *The Clergy Journal*, (Oct., 2004): 19-20.

¹¹Sherry M. Malling, Cynthia B. Eriksson, Katherine J. Meese, Antonia Civica and Deborah Gorton with David W. Foy, "Cultural Identity and Re-entry in Short-Term Student

Descriptions of a new camaraderie with those on the trip, and an intense appreciation for life abound on missions trips. Take for example the poetic sense of immediacy in this description of a missions trip to Brazil in *Christianity Today*:

A BLOOD-RED MOON rises slowly into the black sky above the Amazon jungle. The low rumble of a riverboat's engine and the clatter of birds in the distant trees break the silence.

The Southern Cross hangs above us as we make our way up the Rio Negro, the largest tributary of the Amazon, the world's largest river system. This water highway provides a *missions* team of 25 American and Brazilian Christians an avenue to reach the small communities clustered along the shore. I am here to witness and record the journey.

About half of those aboard are medical professionals and boat crew. Among the others are a youth leader, the president of an airline company, and a contractor with his son. Some have been on this river before. Most have not. They are getting to know each other for the first time. But just 24 hours into the *trip*, there is a warmth and camaraderie despite the tight quarters. Their goal is to bring villagers a message of God's hope, along with urgent medical care. As they cruise through wide, dark waters and the vast rain forest, their sense of purpose as a team grows stronger.

There are an estimated 33,000 villages in the Amazon basin. Shallow-draft riverboats provide one of the few ways to reach these villages, most of which have fewer than 100 people.¹²

It is to be hoped that the reader will notice that all of the eulogizing about the value of missions trips in reality speaks to the way that the lives of those going on the trips are blessed and enriched. However, our motives for going at least begin with the presupposition that all the travel, fuss and bother are to help the people of the host culture that will receive the missions team.

One of the really important pieces of research that the present reality demands is a careful study that would survey those who are on the receiving end of our short term missionary endeavors to determine to what extent they share our enthusiasm for what we have done among them. One of the really beneficial aspects of short term missions is that it creates friendships across cultures and languages and geography and promotes mutual understanding. This factor should be measured, along with others dynamics that we need to

Missionaries," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 34.2 (2006): 153-164. This interesting study is one of the very few attempts to use any kind of quantitative analysis or scientific method in discerning the change in attitudes that going on a missions trip will cause. While all of their conclusions are not convincing, their method points the way to an area of research that begs to be explored by missiology.

¹²Gary Gnidovic, "River Deep Mercy Wide." *Christianity Today*, 48.2 (Feb., 2004).

have measured, such as whether the local churches prosper when the team leaves, or whether the people in the area are more receptive to the gospel as a result of their visit.

IS SHORT TERM MISSIONS US BASED?

Without any doubt there are cultural factors in the US which are contributors to the recent and exponential growth of short term missions. Some of the factors are:

- Global travel has become more affordable. Only a generation ago it was common to speak of the “jet-setters” who represented the richest of the rich. Now travel to global destinations is affordable to the middle class, and they are traveling! At present 10% of the Gross Domestic Product in the USA is dedicated to the Transportation industry—Americans spend more on personal travel than we do on food!
- Attitudes toward world travel have shifted significantly. When the baby boomers were in school they still considered it somewhat exotic to need a passport. However, 40% of Gen Xers stated in a 1999 survey that they expected to live and work outside the USA for 3 to 5 years of their lives. University curriculum has shifted accordingly, so that it is now a commonplace for most students to arrive on campus as freshmen expecting to spend a semester abroad. For those students who have a high level of Christian commitment there will be a desire to integrate their Christian faith into this global experience.
- Globalization is a primary and driving factor in the new world order. The internet and electronic communications have opened communications possibilities between people of different cultures in ways that reach far beyond even the global diffusion of the mass media that characterized the last generation. Now, as Thomas Friedman has aptly noted, *The World Is Flat*, so that it is possible to interact, to conduct business, and to exert influence from anywhere to everywhere. Proof of this is found in that when the Hong Kong Stock Exchange sneezes, Wall Street catches a cold. Likewise, the USA finds itself fighting a war 10 time zones away in order to keep terrorists from attacking us at home. Quite often one receives email replies from across the globe more quickly than one can confirm with a colleague across the hall whether to go get coffee together.
- The success of Mormon missionary efforts? While it is painful to bring up for most evangelicals, who still consider Mormon beliefs to represent a dangerous and sectarian form of Christian heresy, imitation is the most sincere form of flattery. Could it be that here is a group who does all the right things for all the wrong reasons? There has been a remarkable expansion of Mormonism, due to the activity of energetic young men who wear white shirts, ties, and name tags with the preposterous designation “elder.” The inter-cultural exposure of these young people has had an unintentional enriching effect in the Mormon community. Certainly in the Salt Lake Olympics it was obvious that there were translators available for almost every language of the world from among local Mormons.

- Volunteerism is on the rise in US society. It has become a social value for people to serve their community in tangible ways. Schools are promoting service projects, and even developing courses on “service learning.” The Peace Corp has enjoyed popularity for this reason. Habitat for Humanity and World Vision have mobilized large numbers of people to help on projects that are concrete and focused and that do some good thing for other people in a tangible way. This new “hands on” approach and mindset towards charity also influences the work of missions in churches.

Most of the treatment here makes the tacit assumption that the short term missionaries go out from the USA as the sending nation to other nations. That would be true for US churches, but increasingly there we must recognize that missions is not driven by people from one nation, or region of the world.

Many US Christians are surprised to learn that Korea is now the leading sender of missionaries around the world.¹³ In the same way it may be that China will be the chief provider of missionaries in the 21st century.¹⁴ Clearly the center of gravity of Christianity has shifted to the south and to the east, so that nations that were previously seen as missions fields are now serving as missions bases.¹⁵ Some of the most promising developments are to learn how short term missions has been adopted by Christians of other lands who are pursuing a careful missionary strategy as they travel and work around the world. There are even US based groups, like International Commission, whose focus is beginning to shift from promoting US short term missions abroad to including a strategy of promoting church to church partnerships in evangelistic activities among Latin Americans and other non-USA groups. In fact, one of the most promising strategies for missions in the 21st century will focus on the potential role of internationals, immigrants and ex-patriot new believers and churches who can return to the unreached people groups who share their ethnic origins.

American Christians who do short term missions will need to drop their “attitude” as they work around the world. It should be a part of project orientation to challenge American Christians to jettison their own cultural chauvinism and unconscious air of assumed superiority. If short term missions is to reap positive benefits, those who go must be conscious that their purpose is to promote the kingdom of God and the reign of Christ in the hearts of all people rather than the “American Way.” While they cannot nor should they try to repress their cultural identity as Americans, they can have sufficient humility to learn

¹³Rob Moll, “Missions incredible: South Korea sends more missionaries than any country but the U.S. And it won't be long before it's number one.” *Christianity Today*, 50.3 (March 2006): 28-34.

¹⁴Justin Long, “Why the Chinese church could be the greatest sending force of the 21st century,” Reality Check Email, July 21, 2004; cf. <http://www.strategicnetwork.org>.

¹⁵Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). cf. Timothy Yates, ed., *Mission and the Next Christendom*. (Sheffield, UK: Cliff College Publishing, 2005).

from others and seek to find how God is at work in new environments. The ultimate goal of all short term missions should be to make new friendships, in which we can share incarnationally how knowing Christ can enrich our lives in the present and determine our eternal destiny.

One good way to avoid this flawed sense of “one-way” missions on short term projects is to establish “partnerships” with mutual give and take with churches in a specific location, or among a certain people group or population segment. Partnerships embrace cooperation and provide ample opportunities for both traveling and receiving visitors.¹⁶ This allows churches and Christian institutions to develop overseas partners with kindred spirits to work together on areas of mutual interest. Also, a growing edge of missions that has yet to be really explored is the role that immigrant groups who are exposed to the gospel in a new environment, such as living as internationals in the USA, can play in taking their new appreciation of the gospel back to their kinsmen in their own homeland.¹⁷

Finally, another area for partnerships is the conscious formation of multi-cultural teams. Dallas Baptist University participated in a missions project to promote AIDS prevention among high school students in Swaziland in the summer of 2004. Teams of 10-12 students were formed to go to each high school that were an equal mix of DBU students from the USA, students on their missions year from the Scripture Union organization founded by Andrew Murray in South Africa, and Swazi students who were leaders in their own local churches. It made a very vivid impact upon Swazi high school students to observe the multicultural nature of the teams and their unity in professing that the only really effective means of stopping the AIDS epidemic was for God to help students practice sexual abstinence until marriage and strict faithfulness to their marriage partners.

NEW CHALLENGE: MISSIOLOGY FOR THE MASSES

When people do missions, then the people must learn missiology. Having the rank and file of church members engaging directly in hand-on encounters with ministry all around the globe simply challenges missiologists and theological educators to assist them in getting the tools necessary for their work. The Argentine President, Domingo F. Sarmiento, who is credited with founding public education in that nation is often quoted as saying: “If the people is sovereign, you must educate the sovereign.” By that he meant that a democratization of the education that was formerly reserved for princes was necessary, and that the common man who casts his ballot would necessarily need to understand the various domains of society and affairs of state. In the same way, one might apply this same dynamic to short term missions. In an earlier time, where it could be complained that missions was the “fad of the few” it made sense to give specific instruction on cross-cultural dynamics only to those who were heading overseas for service. However, with churches mobilizing all

¹⁶cf. Phill Butler, *Well Connected: How to Release Power and Restore Hope Through Kingdom Partnerships* (Monrovia, CA: MARC Publications of World Vision, 2006).

¹⁷In 2004 the annual meeting of the American Society of Missiology considered global migration patterns and looked at the theme: “Collaboration: The Missing Link in the World Christian Mission.”

of their members to do missions projects the “need to know” has expanded exponentially. This presents an important new challenge to missiologists. I would adapt the old statement of Sarmiento to short term missions by saying: “If the whole church will be on mission with God, then the whole church must study missiology.” Fortunately, orientation and debriefing for trips and the vivid experience out on the field provide wonderful teachable moments where Christians will be struggling with how best to contextualize their words, actions and attitudes in seeking to reach people of other cultures. Missiologists must now step up to the plate and be ready to teach their discipline to a rapidly expanding audience.

The issue of learning on missions trips how the gospel interfaces with different cultural realities is posed by Paul Jeffrey, A United Methodist Missionary living in Honduras:

As part of their experience, volunteers must wrestle with the questions of today's poor. One of the major tasks facing the U.S. church today is giving folks the tools with which to process and interpret their firsthand encounters with economic and racial disparities that characterize our hemisphere. We need curriculum that will prepare work teams for their trip theologically and culturally, and guide them through a process of discerning changes in their lives after they return.¹⁸

Likewise, Dennis Massaro calls for careful preparation of mission trip participants, and help debriefing them before they return home:

Clear communication channels should be established with churches, nationals and missionaries on the field in order to clarify expectations. Thorough preparation for those on the field, as well as the short-term workers, is essential. A clear understanding developed through training in the areas of spiritual formation, cultural issues, and interpersonal dynamics is necessary. Short term workers should also understand the biblical basis of their service. Realistic expectations for the short-term worker must be explored. Those expectations should assume a posture of learning and a desire to serve with the national leaders and career missionaries in a supportive partnership. One of the most important dimensions of any short-term mission is careful reflection at the end of the experience. Short-term workers must debrief and process their experience so that they can be responsible with what they have been allowed to experience. This will not only enable short-term workers to understand their mission experience better, but it will allow them to communicate their vision to others.¹⁹

The work of the IMB in recent years to develop training institutes for volunteer team leaders is an excellent model of the kind of work that needs to be done in a concentrated way in our churches and among Christian institutions in the near future. This is a fertile field for budding missiologists to ply their wares.

¹⁸*Christian Century*, December 12, 2001, 118.34.

¹⁹Dennis Massaro, “Short Term Missions,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Mission*, ed. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic Books, 2000), 874.

TAKING IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Short term missions is a significant present reality and that it is here to stay. However, there is so much innovation and experimentation that it may be that churches have yet to really discover how to get the best strategic results out of sending their members to the ends of the earth.

One could hope that US Christians will soon tire of simply doing “globe-trotting for Jesus” and serving as “vacationaries” by simply working to stick pins in maps on church bulletin boards of how many areas they have visited, however briefly. There are groups that are seeking to use volunteers as the integral, or perhaps organizing part, of a coordinated strategy among a specific people group or population segment. This is a growing edge where we can think carefully about how to maximize the kingdom benefits of the enthusiastic and altruistic work of a great many Christians.

One of my favorite new approaches is an astonishing new effort to engaging medium-sized unreached people groups by having small groups that are part of the Saddleback Community Church in California, pastored by Rick Warren. Curtis Sergeant, who served in Asia and helped to develop the Strategy Coordinator Training used by the IMB as a part of his DMin Project under my supervision here at Southwestern, is leading this effort. He felt so strongly about the new strategic possibilities of challenging and mobilizing small groups to adopt and to engage a people that he left a position with the IMB as a vice president. This is a program that is breaking ground in a whole new area. While by prior agreement, the efforts of Rick Warren and his wife to combat AIDS in Africa will have a great deal more press coverage, it may well be that the UPG work will have more consequence in terms of the global expansion of Christianity in our generation.

Another new approach is being developed here in the DFW metroplex by pastor Bob Roberts and the Northwood Church in Keller. This church was planted just over 20 years ago and has planted 85 other churches to date. A group of 15 church planting interns is working at the church for a year of training this year and will soon leave to launch their new church starts. A web-based network of church planters with a global vision unites on the Glocal Net sponsored by the church. Twelve years ago Bob Roberts visited Hanoi, Vietnam and has led his church to adopt that city and country in a partnership. Over 100 church members visit Vietnam annually in 4 or 5 different trips—each with its own project assignment. The church also helps with projects in Puebla, Mexico and Belize. What is interesting is that under Bob Roberts’ leadership the church has adopted a different view of what it means to be a church member—it is expected of members that they will find a way to be actively engaged at the global level, as well as the local level. Roberts’ view is that churches, at least, need to be open and honest about their identity even in resistant areas, and that if they engage the whole culture across all of the domains of society and find ways to add value to the lives of the people there that one can trust that these actions will open the door for direct personal witness and recommend the gospel to the people of that area. Bob Roberts has a contract with Zondervan to publish four new books that lay out his philosophy, the first two are now in print and the third is ready to send to the publisher. I highly recommend reading *Transformation: How Glocal Churches Transform Lives and Change the*

*World*²⁰ and *Glocalization: How Followers of Jesus Serve a Flat World*.²¹ These and other encouraging new initiatives point to the possibility of using short term missions volunteers in new and more vitally productive ways in the future.

CONCLUSION

One thing at least is certain. We live in days when God's kingdom is coming and his will is being done on earth in surprising new ways that only heaven could inspire. There are new winds of the Spirit blowing across the globe, and one can anticipate that what we are describing here as new will very soon seem old and antiquated in understanding. We are living in a time of upheaval and rapid change, so that very soon we may see that short term missions has carried us much closer to the unimagined realizations of the dream contained in the watchword of the old 1910 Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, Scotland—"Whole Gospel, Whole Church, Whole World."

APPENDIX 1

STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE IN SHORT TERM MISSION

THE NATIONALLY-DERIVED STANDARDS

1. **God-Centeredness**

An excellent short-term mission seeks first God's glory and his kingdom, and is expressed through our:

- 1.1 **Purpose** — Centering on God's glory and his ends throughout our entire STM process
- 1.2 **Lives** — Sound biblical doctrine, persistent prayer, and godliness in all our thoughts, words, and deeds
- 1.3 **Methods** — Wise, biblical, and culturally-appropriate methods which bear spiritual fruit

2. **Empowering Partnerships**

An excellent short-term mission establishes healthy, interdependent, on-going relationships between sending and receiving partners, and is expressed by:

- 2.1 Primary focus on intended receptors
- 2.2 Plans which benefit all participants
- 2.3 Mutual trust and accountability

3. **Mutual Design**

An excellent short-term mission collaboratively plans each specific outreach

²⁰ Bob Roberts, *Transformation: How Global Churches Transform Lives and Change the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006).

²¹ Bob Roberts, *Glocalization: How Followers of Jesus Serve in a Flat World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006).

for the benefit of all participants, and is expressed by:

- 3.1 On-field methods and activities aligned to long-term strategies of the partnership
- 3.2 Goer-guests' ability to implement their part of the plan
- 3.3 Host receivers' ability to implement their part of the plan

4. **Comprehensive Administration**

An excellent short-term mission exhibits integrity through reliable set-up and thorough administration for all participants, and is expressed by:

- 4.1 Truthfulness in promotion, finances, and reporting results
- 4.2 Appropriate risk management
- 4.3 Quality program delivery and support logistics

5. **Qualified Leadership**

An excellent short-term mission screens, trains, and develops capable leadership for all participants, and is expressed by:

- 5.1 **Character** — Spiritually mature servant leadership
- 5.2 **Skills** — Prepared, competent, organized and accountable leadership
- 5.3 **Values** — Empowering and equipping leadership

6. **Appropriate Training**

An excellent short-term mission prepares and equips all participants for the mutually designed outreach, and is expressed by:

- 6.1 Biblical, appropriate, and timely training
- 6.2 On-going training and equipping (pre-field, on-field, post-field)
- 6.3 Qualified trainers

7. **Thorough Follow-Up**

An excellent short-term mission assures debriefing and appropriate follow-up for all participants, and is expressed by:

- 7.1 Comprehensive debriefing (pre-field, on-field, post-field)
- 7.2 On-field re-entry preparation
- 7.3 Post-field follow-up and evaluation

From <http://www.stmstandards.org/standards-overview.php>

THE EXTENT OF ORALITY¹

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INTRODUCTION

The oral cultures of the world pose a particular challenge for conventional Christian ministry. Oral cultures are not print-oriented and do not respond well to forms of witnessing, discipling, teaching, and preaching that are based on print. So tracts, Bible distribution, fill-in-the-blanks workbooks, and bookstores are largely unappealing and ineffective within oral cultures. Even spoken communication can be so print-influenced that it has limited impact in oral cultures. Sermons built around outlines and lists of principles communicate poorly with people whose life is lived in oral cultures. Putting those same print-influenced sermons on audio cassettes does make them audible, which is a step in the right direction, but their print-based way of organizing thought is still an obstacle in communication.

Christian churches, mission organizations, and ministries have increasingly had to face the ways of communicating, relating, and thinking that characterize oral cultures. In the effort to take the gospel to all peoples, Christian workers have realized that they need to understand orality and to get a better grasp of just how extensive it is and how to respond to it. This article addresses the extent of orality; others will address how to respond to orality.

It is not a simple matter to determine the extent of orality worldwide. Anyone attempting to do it faces challenges. Chief among them is defining what orality is and determining how to measure it accurately. This article is an effort to address both matters in an introductory way, particularly with the needs of Christian ministers and missionaries in mind. Though there are multiple ways to try to estimate the extent of orality, this article addresses one of the most frequently-used and frequently-misunderstood measures, namely official literacy data. Before addressing the literacy data, however, it is first necessary to discuss what is orality.

DEFINITION

Dictionaries define orality rather simply as "a reliance on spoken, rather than written, language for communication." Notice the phrase "reliance on." It is significant. After all,

¹This article was originally published in *Dharma Deepika*, a journal on theology and missions in India, and we express our appreciation to the journal for allowing us to share this article with an American audience.

the vast majority of people *use* spoken language extensively. But what sets orality apart is *reliance on* spoken language. To the extent that people rely on spoken communication instead of written communication, they are characterized by “orality.” There are degrees of orality, depending on whether someone relies on spoken language totally or less than totally.

Note also that the definition is a positive statement. Historically those who have written about orality have typically approached it as the absence of literacy. Approaching orality as the absence of literacy focuses on what people cannot do rather than focusing on what they do. That approach takes literacy as the norm, resulting in a predictable, negative evaluation of orality.² Reducing the phenomenon of orality simply to “illiteracy” has often led people to conclude that orality is something to be minimized by literacy campaigns. Though literacy certainly has great value and should be encouraged, it is a mistake to take a one-dimensional and negative perspective on orality by simply equating it with illiteracy.³

Focusing on orality rather than illiteracy highlights the fact that people who live by orality are capable of using beautiful, sophisticated, and moving speech. They are responsible for some of the world’s great verbal artistry, expressed in songs, stories, poetry, and proverbs. Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, widely recognized as the greatest examples of epic poetry in western civilization, are oral compositions. Parts of the Bible were also composed orally before being written. So, orality should never be equated with backwardness, ignorance, or lack of intelligence.

When large numbers of people live by orality in community with one another over extended periods of time, it affects their whole culture. So a fuller description of orality takes into consideration the collection of characteristics (cognitive, communicational, and relational) that are typical of cultures that function orally. Walter Ong’s *Orality and Literacy* is a classic work that describes orality in considerable scholarly detail.⁴ Ong distinguishes *primary orality* from *secondary orality*. Primary orality exists in communities that have no written language and little or no acquaintance with reading and writing. Primary orality is increasingly rare. *Secondary orality* depends on electronic media and the literate people who

²The English language lacks a familiar positive term for reliance on spoken communication. This shows how dominant the preference for literacy is within the English-speaking world. European friends tell me that other major languages of Europe have a similar gap.

³Entire mission strategies have been built on this perspective. These have had some laudable outcomes, to be sure. But they have fallen short in some obvious ways as well. The chief failing has been in making literacy a *de facto* prerequisite for full participation in the Christian faith. This happened despite the fact that the early church grew up, in fact thrived, in an environment dominated by orality. In the book of Acts the church used oral communication as its primary means of evangelism and discipleship. The possibility of returning to that vibrant, rapidly-spreading, faith-filled apostolic Christianity is a major incentive for taking orality seriously in contemporary mission strategies.

⁴Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1982).

operate it. Secondary orality uses television, radio, film, and the like to communicate the staples of oral communication: story, song, poetry, proverb, drama, and discussion.

Sociologist Tex Sample has added a third category of orality: *traditional orality*. He uses the term to refer to situations in which people are familiar with reading and writing and may themselves have learned to read and write in school, but they use oral communication for most of their daily living. Their reading and writing is largely confined to school, work, and official documents. Even in those cases they choose oral communication over print if they have the option. For example, they ask a friend or coworker to show them how to do a task instead of reading an instructional manual. They ask a supervisee to summarize a report to them orally so that they do not have to read it themselves. They see the movie instead of reading the book. They watch television news rather than reading a newspaper. Their identity, beliefs, values, and behaviors come via oral traditions learned from their family, friends, and community, not from their reading.⁵

To summarize, individuals and communities around the world rely on spoken, rather than written, communication in varying degrees. Primary oral communicators, who cannot read and write and have not been exposed to print, are oral by default. Print makes no impact on their lives. In addition, traditional oral communicators have been exposed to literacy and may be able to read and write, but they still live by orality. Their orality is often a matter of *preference* rather than absolute necessity. Finally, secondary oral communicators are the people who, regardless of educational attainment, are deeply influenced by electronically delivered forms of oral communication such as songs, stories, drama, and the like. They have a surprising amount in common with primary and traditional oral communicators. They can legitimately be considered when estimating the extent of orality in the world. Admittedly, these three categories overlap, so it is impossible to count precisely how many people are in each category. This description does, however, have the advantage of reflecting how people actually live. It serves as a reminder that any estimate of the extent of orality must take account of the varying degrees to which people are oral.

LITERACY SKILLS AND ORALITY

In principle researchers should be able to develop survey instruments to assess the degree to which individuals and cultures live by orality. But this kind of research has not been done on any widespread basis. Governments do not gather data on orality; they gather data on education and literacy. As a result, the most common way of estimating the extent of orality is to use literacy data. Where literacy rates are low, it can be inferred that orality is high by necessity. This approach has both promise and peril, as recent publications have shown.

To mark the International Literacy Day in the fall of 2003, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) put out a news release stating

⁵See chapter 1 of Tex Sample, *Ministry in an Oral Culture* (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1994).

that almost 80% of adults worldwide are literate.⁶ If the reality were as rosy as that, it would be a cause for rejoicing. But the UNESCO news release relies on easily misunderstood statistics reported by U. N. member countries. The little-known truth is that many governments use quite generous definitions of literacy, so the statistics make the situation sound much better than it really is. It is time more Christian leaders understood the actual situation, because people's level of *functional* literacy (as opposed to published data) determines how people learn, develop their values and beliefs, and pass along their culture. If, like Jesus, we plan on "speaking the word to them *as they [are] able to hear it*" (Mk. 4:33, emphasis added), we must know how people are best able to hear our message. When they are able to receive the message through a variety of means, we should seek to determine which is their *preferred* means. The stakes are too high for us to misunderstand our audience's capacities and preferences with respect to orality and literacy.

DEFINING LITERACY

Literacy experts raise three fundamental, interrelated concerns about the published figures on worldwide literacy. They question how nations define literacy, how they gather the literacy data, and how the nations and others report it. First of all, they say that categorizing people as being either "literate" or "illiterate" is simplistic and misleading. As the UNESCO Institute for Statistics puts it, "Measuring literacy is not just a matter of saying who can read and who cannot. Literacy skills are needed at many different levels, from writing one's name on a form, to understanding instructions on a medicine bottle, to the ability to learn from reading books."⁷ If we regard people as being either literate or illiterate—no other options allowed—then we tend to count people as literate if they can merely sign their name or read a simple sentence about familiar things. After all, we reason, they *can* read, at least simple materials. (This is a bare-minimum definition of "read," by the way, which is itself part of the confusion.) If we call such people illiterate, they are likely to protest and attempt to prove that they can indeed "read," however haltingly. But signing their name or reading a poster is a far cry from reading a government document or the Bible *with understanding*. Just being able to sound out the words does not indicate that people can learn new concepts through reading. British educators Donna Thomson and Ruth Nixey discovered that many of their students tested well as readers on certain standardized tests, but in fact comprehended very little of what they read. Careful additional testing revealed "an extraordinary discrepancy between the children's ability to read and their overall comprehension. The evidence showed that many had very impressive decoding skills but alarmingly poor understanding of the text in comparison."⁸ The ability to vocalize text also

⁶"Statistics Show Slow Progress toward Universal Literacy,"
http://www.uis.unesco.org/ev.php?ID=5063_201&ID2=DO_TOPIC.

⁷Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (LAMP). See
<http://www.uis.unesco.org/TEMPLATE/pdf/LAMP/LAMPLetEng.pdf>.

⁸See Donna Thomson and Ruth Nixey, "Thinking to Read, Reading to Think: Bringing Meaning, Reasoning and Enjoyment to Reading," *Literacy Today* (September 2005). An edited version of their article is available at

does not prove that the readers will embrace new values through reading. Simplistic either/or distinctions about literacy continue to obscure this reality.

To correct this misunderstanding, leading literacy researchers have ceased referring to people as either “literate” or “illiterate” as though a person is simply one or the other. Instead, researchers distinguish four or five levels of skill with literacy.⁹ Despite researchers’ pleas, most countries still group people into just the two categories. For the reasons mentioned above, this makes it difficult to get accurate descriptions of the state of literacy (and thus the extent of orality). But what makes matters even worse for international statisticians is that each country is free to define “literate” for its own purposes. As a result, governments use widely different definitions of literacy. These definitions are crucial because they determine how many people will be counted as literate when the data-gathering takes place—often as part of a national census.

In March 2004 the UNESCO Institute for Statistics released a document telling how various nations define “literate.” Note the wide range of definitions and how generous some of them are:

- Malaysia says anyone aged 10 years and over who has *ever* been to school is counted as literate.
- Burkina Faso says anyone who declares that he or she can read and write in either one national language or one foreign language is counted literate.
- In Ecuador and Bolivia census takers count people as illiterate if the people state that they cannot read or write.
- Belize considers persons who are 14+ years old and who have 7 or 8 years at primary level or from secondary level up to be literate.

<http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/database/primary/thomsonnixon.html> and is the source for this quotation. It was accessed Oct. 28, 2005.

⁹In the early 1980s UNESCO recommended its member bodies use four terms: illiterate, literate, functionally illiterate, and functionally literate. See *UNESCO’s Standard-Setting Instruments*. Incorporating Supplement 1 (Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1981-2), 4, quoted in Ursula Giere, *Functional Illiteracy in Industrialized Countries: An Analytical Bibliography*. UIE Studies on Post-Literacy and Continuing Education: Functional Illiteracy in Industrialized Countries, no. 3. (Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Education, 1987), 28. Major studies conducted in the 1990s identified five levels of skill, calling them simply Level 1, Level 2, etc. See Irwin S. Kirsch, Ann Jungeblut, Lynn Jenkins, and Andrew Kolstad, *Adult Literacy in America: A First Look at the Results of the National Adult Literacy Survey* (Washington, D. C.: National Center for Education Statistics, 1993) for descriptions of the NALS categories. The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) used the same categories and terminology. The most recent major U. S. study, one comparable to the NALS, used the terms “below basic,” “basic,” “intermediate,” and “proficient” to characterize four ranges of literacy skill. See *National Assessment of Adult Literacy: A First Look at the Literacy of America’s Adults in the 21st Century* (Washington, D. C.: National Center for Education Statistics, 2005), 3.

- Pakistan says a person who can read a newspaper and write a simple letter in any language is treated as literate.¹⁰

By comparison, *UNESCO's Standard-Setting Instruments* describes as literate any person "who can with understanding both read and write a short simple statement on his everyday life."¹¹ With such varied definitions or measurements of literacy, it is unwise to compare the reported literacy rates in one country with reported literacy rates from another.¹² It is also unwise to lump this disparate group of measurements into a single worldwide literacy statistic.

GATHERING LITERACY DATA

These different approaches to estimating literacy reflect budget realities and other factors in developing countries.¹³ Most developing countries lack the funds and expertise to test literacy skills directly. Instead, they try to estimate literacy levels through less demanding methods, such as simply asking people whether they are literate or illiterate, as is done in

¹⁰http://www.uis.unesco.org/TEMPLATE/html/Exceltables/education/View_Table_Literacy_04March04.xls.

¹¹*UNESCO's Standard-Setting Instruments*, 4, cited in Giere, 28.

¹²There is a tendency to assume that someone counted "literate" in one country has the same skills that literates in other countries do. But this is not true, in part because the countries are not using the same definition of literacy. Nor is it safe to assume that ten years of schooling—even within a single country--produces an equivalent outcome at every school. Equal amounts of school attendance do not produce equal outcomes. Some students graduate from secondary school ready for elite universities; others, sad to say, graduate from secondary school barely able to read their diplomas. All are secondary school graduates, but their literacy skills differ dramatically.

¹³Economic and political factors may also influence definitions of literacy. When major international lenders such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank include literacy rates in their lending criteria, governments have an incentive to define "literate" in generous terms so that they can report higher rates of literacy. Additionally, government officials like to report improving literacy levels. India's human development resources minister, Murli Manohar Joshi, for example, was quick to protest in 2005 when UNESCO used 1991 data instead of figures from India's 2001 census. UNESCO projected a 57.2% literacy rate based on the 1991 data; Joshi said India's literacy rate was 65%. UNESCO officials explained that India had submitted their most recent data too late to be included in the report, but Joshi was insistent that UNESCO give India credit for its progress in literacy. Whether Joshi or UNESCO is right is not the issue. The point is that government officials are sensitive to public perceptions. It should come as no surprise that they gather and report literacy data in a way that puts them, their party, and their country in the best possible light. (See "Joshi Locks Literacy Horns with UNESCO," *The Telegraph*, Nov. 7, 2005; www.telegraphindia.com/1031108/asp/others/print.html, accessed March 21, 2006.)

Burkina Faso, Ecuador, and Bolivia. Other countries, such as Malaysia and Belize, estimate literacy based on school enrollment or the number of years of education. These methods of gathering literacy data inflate literacy statistics. They do not account for the poor quality of some schools, learning disabilities, spotty attendance, and social promotions. The *World Development Report 2004* included these sobering findings.

While most teachers try conscientiously to do their jobs, one recent survey found a third of all teachers in Uttar Pradesh, India, absent. Cases of malfeasance by teachers are distressingly present in many settings: teachers show up drunk, are physically abusive, or simply do nothing. This is not “low-quality” teaching—this is not teaching at all.

The 1994 Tanzania Primary School Leavers Examination suggested that the vast majority of students had learned almost *nothing* that was tested in their seven years of schooling—more than four-fifths scored less than 13 percent correct in language or mathematics.¹⁴

Simply attending a certain number of years of school does not guarantee that students have learned what they were expected to learn.

The above methods of estimating literacy also do not account for the likelihood of reversion. Students dropping out before completing eight years of good-quality education may revert to *functional illiteracy* if they do not keep reading regularly. “A person is *functionally illiterate* who cannot engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his own and the community’s development.” Likewise, a person is “functionally literate” who can do all those activities.¹⁵

The phenomenon of reverting to functional illiteracy is well known among literacy workers. When India’s Human Resources Development Ministry released its 2003-2004 report, it celebrated a 13.17% increase in literacy from 1991-2001, calling it the highest increase in any decade. Over 108 million people had acquired literacy, an extraordinary achievement. But a news article about the report said, “The report acknowledges that the basic literacy skills acquired by millions of neo-literates are at best fragile with a greater possibility of them regressing into partial or total illiteracy unless special efforts are continued to consolidate, sustain, and possibly enhance their literacy levels.”¹⁶ This phenomenon is not limited to India. Reversion occurs in many places.

Students may have been reading at their grade level when they left school, but if they do not keep reading regularly, their reading skills atrophy. They are not absolutely illiterate,

¹⁴*World Development Report 2004*, 112.

¹⁵UNESCO’s *Standard-Setting Instruments*, 4, cited in Giere, 28.

¹⁶“India’s Literacy Rate Is Now 65 Percent,” *Indo-Asian News Service*, Sept. 4, 2004; online article at <http://in.news.yahoo.com/040904/43/2fvlo.html>, accessed March 21, 2006.

but they have lost the literacy skills to function as a literate in society. They learn via what they see, experience, and hear rather than what they read. Speech, not print, is their primary form of communication.

People who have attended school but have “below basic” skills may not be able to do literate tasks like completing a job application, reading the instructions on a medicine bottle, or learning a new task from an instruction manual or book. Despite this, their government almost certainly will count them as literates. This is the primary factor that makes the 80% adult literacy figure so misleading. Judging from the results of direct testing of literacy skills in many countries, a large percentage of those counted as literate in UNESCO statistics seem to be functionally illiterate by the UNESCO-recommended definition.

As previously noted, international literacy experts know these realities. UNESCO literacy experts themselves confess the inadequacy of the data with which they work:

Existing measures of literacy are inadequate. Most data on adult literacy are not sufficiently reliable to serve the needs of national and international users. Generally, they rely either on individuals’ self-declaration of their own literacy or on “proxy” indicators such as their educational levels. These are indirect measures, which have been shown not to reflect reality very accurately. Moreover, they are not always collected on a consistent basis, so can be difficult to compare, and there are many data gaps. More reliable measures require people’s literacy ability to be assessed *directly*, in surveys that test their skills.”¹⁷

Literacy scholars advocate direct testing of literacy skills because it is a much more accurate—although politically uncomfortable—measure of literacy.

Direct testing of literacy skills in the western industrialized countries has proven this point with embarrassing consistency. The National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) administered by the U. S. Department of Education in the early 1990s found that 48-51% of adults in the U. S. scored at the two lowest literacy levels (out of five levels).¹⁸ When the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) tested adults in a 22-country project from 1994-98, similar results emerged in Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Portugal, Poland, New Zealand, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere.¹⁹ Political

¹⁷Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (LAMP). See <http://www.uis.unesco.org/TEMPLATE/pdf/LAMP/LAMPLefletEng.pdf>. Their emphasis.

¹⁸Irwin S. Kirsch, Ann Jungeblut, Lynn Jenkins, and Andrew Kolstad, *A First Look at the Findings of the National Adult Literacy Survey*, 3d ed. (Washington: U. S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 2002).

¹⁹See <http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/facts/IALS.html>. See also Albert Tuijnman, *Benchmarking Adult Literacy in America: An International Comparative Study* (Washington, DC: U.

and educational leaders discovered that 45-55% of their adult population actually had low levels of prose, document, and numerical literacy. These participants lacked the skills for handling complex reading material and lengthy documents, though few people were absolutely illiterate. Most of them could read to some degree, but not enough to do the full range of tasks it takes to function as a literate person in those societies. Approximately half of the adult populations in these countries proved to have inadequate literacy skills, yet many of these countries had been reporting literacy rates of 95% or more. Denmark, which claimed a literacy rate of 100%, recently discovered that “every second person has a problem with reading” and “every third person does not read anything significantly.”²⁰ Governments often count people as “literate” because they complete a certain number of years of school. But actual testing of their literacy abilities reveals that many have inadequate literacy skills.

If this is true in affluent developed countries after generations of compulsory education, then it raises serious questions about literacy data from developing nations where the schools get meager funding and literacy is a relatively recent phenomenon. In light of the NALS, IALS, and NAAL results, one could reasonably project that at minimum half of the world’s adults should be considered to have low literacy skills. Some who have studied the matter closely contend that approximately two-thirds of the adult population of the world is illiterate or functionally illiterate.²¹ (More about this will be said below.) It is no wonder that scholars who have studied the issues conclude that the method of gathering national literacy data is woefully inadequate in many countries of the world.

REPORTING LITERACY STATISTICS

Researchers’ third concern relates to the improper use of this flawed literacy data. Researcher David Archer of Actionaid UK points out that even when people know the limitations of literacy statistics, they still use them improperly:

One of the biggest obstacles to change in literacy programmes is the way in which literacy statistics are used at an international level. Most international reports on literacy now start with a cautionary word about the accuracy of the figures used. The draft of the 2002 *Education for All Monitoring Report* is no exception in this, recognizing clearly that the present international data on literacy is unreliable. However, this report follows the pattern of many before it. *After a brief acknowledgement of the*

S. Department of Education, 2000); also available at <http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/Benchmrk/2.htm>.

²⁰Viggo Sogaard, *Evangelizing Our World: Insights from Global Inquiry* (Pattaya, Thailand: 2004 Forum for World Evangelization, 2004), 11. Furthermore, in late 2005 the U. S. released findings from its *National Assessment of Adult Literacy*, conducted in 2003. NAAL discovered that in direct testing of literacy skills, approximately 43% of adults in the U. S. had “below basic” or “basic” skills in prose literacy. These figures are virtually unchanged from the 1992 NALS survey. In 2003, 44% scored at the “intermediate” level, and only 13% scored “proficient” in prose literacy, which involves reading and understanding text consisting of paragraphs, like newspaper articles and books.

²¹James B. Slack, J. O. Terry, et al., *Chronological Bible Storying* (forthcoming).

*flimsiness of the statistics, any doubts are rapidly forgotten and precise figures routinely quoted—such that we forget their inaccuracy and create the illusion that we do know or understand the situation—when this is far from the truth.*²²

Agencies like UNESCO report questionable statistics because that often is the best information that they have, even if it is far from accurate. *Their literacy experts know full-well the limitations of the data and write disclaimers about its limitations, but many people, especially non-specialists, ignore or soon forget the warnings.* Even today well-meaning Christian leaders are making strategic decisions based on statements like the one in the UNESCO news release about how almost 80% of adults worldwide are literate. The full story, which actually shows how misleading the 80% figure is, often lies buried in footnotes and appendices or is published in obscure documents read mainly by specialists.

ESTIMATING THE EXTENT OF ORALITY

By carefully studying the footnotes and specialist reports, by making some educated guesses and projections, it is possible to reach a very rough estimate of how many people in the world live by orality either by necessity or by preference. This procedure cannot produce anything approaching a precise number. The argument to this point has stressed the difficulties with the literacy data. But churches, Christian ministries, and mission organizations need at least some idea of the relative extent of orality. They are making strategic decisions every year and cannot wait until governments around the world provide scrupulously accurate data about literacy in their countries. Ministries need to know whether the UNESCO report claiming nearly 80% of adults worldwide as literate is true.

We begin our estimating with the direct testing of literacy skills done over the last fifteen years in twenty-two countries, most of them in Western Europe and North America. The NALS, IALS, and NAAL studies found that almost 50% of adults in the participating countries of Western Europe and North America have limited literacy skills. To use NAAL terminology, they function at the level of “below basic” or “basic” literacy.²³ It seems very likely that other regions of the world would do no better.²⁴ Many regions of the world

²²David Archer, “Literacy as Freedom: Challenging Assumptions and Changing Practice,” in *Literacy as Freedom: A UNESCO Round-table* (Paris: UNESCO, 2003), 42. Emphasis added.

²³“‘Below basic’ indicates no more than the most simple and concrete literacy skills.” People at this level can sign a form or search a short simple text to determine what a patient can drink before a test. “‘Basic’ indicates skills necessary to perform simple and everyday literacy activities” such using a television guide to determine what programs are on at a particular time. See *National Assessment of Adult Literacy*, 3.

²⁴Some individual countries, such as Japan, might do better than the averages in Western Europe and North America, of course. The point here has to do with the larger picture, the extent of orality in whole regions or continents.

would score worse, given their less-developed educational systems and weaker traditions of literacy. Because the affluent countries of Western Europe and North America account for about a sixth of the world's population and less developed ones account for most of the remainder, it seems reasonable to suggest that considerably more than half, perhaps 65-70% of the world's adults have "below basic" or "basic" literacy skills. Because adults make up about 70% of the world population, we can estimate that approximately 3 billion adults live largely by orality by virtue of having no literacy or limited literacy skills.

To those 3 billion we must add the children under the age of fifteen who have no literacy or limited literacy skills.²⁵ According to 2002 figures, 29% of the world population was under age fifteen and comprised a higher percentage of the population in the developing countries of the world (32%) and the least developed countries of the world (43%).²⁶ For the purposes of our rough estimating, about half of the children are so young, ages birth to seven years, that they must be counted as oral. So we can add them to our total, about 900 million of them. As for those ages, eight to fifteen, the situation varies from country to country. Some may read better than the average adult in their country because their school experience is fresh and the adults had little education or have regressed in their literacy. Other children, suffering from the educational limitations in their community or simply because adults in their country have many years of education, may be less adept as readers than the adults in their society. Again, just for the sake of simplicity, suppose that approximately half of the children ages eight to fifteen have below basic or basic literacy. Assume that they do neither better nor worse than adults in Western Europe and North America. This approximation adds another 450 million or so to the total.

So if there are 3 billion adults, 900 million very young children, and 450 million children between the ages of eight and fifteen with basic or below basic literacy, then 4.35 billion people in the world are oral by virtue of their limited literacy. That is approximately 70% of the world's population. Even a rough estimate like this one, which makes no claim of precision, reveals how misleading the UNESCO report is. Even if the estimate being offered here is off by a billion people, it still serves notice that literacy skills are far more limited than one might conclude from reading headlines celebrating nearly 80% literacy among adults worldwide.

²⁵Literacy data is frequently reported on ages 15-65 or 16-65, but as noted above, some countries include children as young as age ten when they count who is literate. The estimates being offered here do not allow for such discrepancies. Coming to precise worldwide figures is impossible, for reasons noted above. To reiterate, this is simply a rough estimate to get some idea of the magnitude of orality.

²⁶*Human Development Report 2004* (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2004), 155.

The estimating task, however, is not complete. The 4.35 billion estimate does not include people who have good literacy skills but who nonetheless live by secondary orality as a matter of preference. In the United States and Europe, recent studies have documented that people are doing less pleasure reading or leisure reading. Dana Gioia, chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, which sponsored the U. S. study of literary reading, summarized the findings:

This comprehensive survey of American literary reading presents a detailed, but bleak assessment of the decline of reading's role in the nation's culture. For the first time in modern history, less than half of the adult population now reads literature, and these trends reflect a larger decline in other sorts of reading.²⁷

This decline is most notable among younger Americans. "Literary reading in America is not only declining rapidly among all groups, but the rate of decline has accelerated, especially among the young."²⁸ The NAAL study found that in 1992, 40% of college graduates had "proficient" prose literacy skills; in 2003, only 31% of college graduates were at that level.²⁹ Similar trends have been emerging in Western Europe. British teenagers' pleasure reading, for instance, declined by about a third from 1991-1998.³⁰ It is difficult to quantify how these decreases in literacy skill affect orality, but neither should they be ignored. They hint at a growing secondary orality, even among the college educated. So the true extent of orality—primary, traditional, and secondary—includes people whose orality is not by necessity, but by preference. Identifying them is difficult, so estimating their numbers is difficult. But the fact that they are hard to count does not mean they can be ignored.

Christian groups who unwittingly accept governments' literacy statistics at face value are likely to perpetuate a tragic mistake. They will believe that the people to whom they minister are more literate than they actually are. They will continue to train their workers to use literate teaching and preaching approaches. Oral people will not grasp the literate teaching, but they will be reluctant to admit that there is a problem or tell what the problem is. Ministry leaders may conclude that people are spiritually unresponsive when the real culprit is the literate form of teaching that the teachers are using.

²⁷*Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America*, research division report no. 46 (Washington, D. C.: National Endowment for the Humanities, 2004), vii.

²⁸*Ibid.* In the NEA research, "literary reading" includes reading materials such as romance novels. "Literary reading" was not limited to "literary classics" or "high culture" literature.

²⁹*National Assessment of Adult Literacy*, 15.

³⁰*Young People in 1998*, a report compiled from surveys of 18,221 pupils by the Schools Health Education Unit based at Exeter University. Available at <http://www.sheu.org.uk/pubs/yp98.htm>.

On the other hand, ministries who adjust their approach to the literacy level of their group, whatever that level may be, can expect improved communication, more learning, and more life-change among the hearers. Oral communicators find it easier to pass along their faith, too, if they have heard it in a way that fits their normal style of communication. That has already been the experience of a number of international ministries who have, as a result, come together to form the International Orality Network. The group exists to share insights and network with others committed to taking the message of the Bible to those who learn best orally. Such people are more likely to be transformed when the message of the Bible comes through their traditional communication forms such as stories, proverbs, songs, chants, ceremonies and rituals, dance, and the like.³¹ Major missionary organizations and ministries such as Campus Crusade for Christ, the International Mission Board (SBC), TWR, Wycliffe Bible Translators, and Youth with a Mission (YWAM) have recently launched a significant initiative, the OneStory partnership, to reach out to the oral communicators of the world. They are using Chronological Bible Storying, one of several communications strategies developed with this need in mind.³² ‘Scriptures In Use’ trains grass roots church planters to use oral methods in their work. Many other organizations have incorporated orality-friendly approaches into their work. They have collaborated in publishing *Making Disciples of Oral Learners*,³³ which includes many suggestions about improving effectiveness in working with people who live by orality.

We can do effective ministry with people whose preferred way of learning is oral rather than written. Jesus turned the world upside down with disciples who were derisively called “uneducated and untrained men” (Acts 4:13). But first we have to understand them and how they can best learn. To do that, we will need to get beneath the surface of the literacy statistics.

³¹See www.oralBible.com.

³² See www.chronologicalbiblestorying.com.

³³ *Making Disciples of Oral Learners*, Lausanne Occasional Paper, no. 54 (Bangalore: Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization and International Orality Network, 2005).

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THE TRUTH IS CONTEXTUALIZATION CAN LEAD TO SYNCRETISM: APPLYING MUSLIM BACKGROUND BELIEVERS CONTEXTUALIZATION CONCERNS TO ANCESTOR WORSHIP AND BUDDHIST BACKGROUND BELIEVERS IN A CHINESE CULTURE

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INTRODUCTION

Contextualization issues have received much attention in recent years related to evangelical mission work. Phil Parshall who has written extensively on seeking to reach Muslims with the gospel has expressed some concerns in his book *Muslim Evangelism: Contemporary Approaches to Contextualization* related to contextualization among Muslim background believers. These concerns specifically address particular practices such as the encouragement to remain permanently in the mosque.

This article uses Parshall's concerns about Muslim background believers as a starting point to assess how the practice of ancestor worship and the worship of Buddha in a Chinese culture by Christians can be evaluated. The hypothesis is that the continued participation of Christians in these religious practices in a Chinese culture would be viewed as syncretism. Another concern relates to changing references to Jesus in Scripture as the Son of Man in a translation. The practice of using biblical passages to justify a strategy of remaining in a religious group outside of the Christian community will be discussed.

An analysis will be given of how contextualization can lead to syncretism. The dangers would apply to Chinese believers who come out of a background of ancestor worship or Buddhist worship, as well as to those who are Muslim background believers.

WORSHIP OF ANCESTORS AND BUDDHA

The author was privileged to live in a region of East Asia where those who became Christians often came from a background of worshipping ancestors and Buddha. The blending of these two distinct religious systems is an example of syncretism of religious systems resulting from an apparent adaptation by those spreading Buddhist beliefs^{2,3}. A large

¹Before joining the faculty at NOBTS, Dr. Pinckard served the International Mission Board for a number of years in China.

²Terry Muck observes that "Buddha's teachings proved adaptable to local cultures without losing their essential features." An example cited is Chinese Mahayana Buddhism. Terry Muck, "Buddhist, Buddhism" in A. Scott Moreau, et al., eds. *Evangelical Dictionary of World Religions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 149.

temple across the street from where the writer lived for several years was dedicated to Kannon, the bodhisattva called the “goddess of mercy” and who could be portrayed with multiple arms “to symbolize her countless acts of mercy in answer to the prayers of this world.”⁴ When one enters the temple grounds one can view how religious beliefs have been combined. There are rooms in the temple dedicated to Kannon and others devoted to Buddha. Furthermore, the same temple also contains rooms with tablets bearing ancestral tablets, records, pictures, and places for worship of the ancestors.

The same individuals who might go to the temple to worship Kannon, Buddha, and their ancestors usually perform acts of worship in their homes. Often an apartment has a small altar by the door which is dedicated to the door god. One enters to find a special table called in the local language ‘the god table’, which normally contains burning incense in a bowl of sand; fruit, which is attractively arranged—often oranges; and pictures of deceased relatives—especially parents. The home altar may also contain two or three ceramic figurines, such as a small replica of Buddha, and one or two images of traditional gods from the people group.

Persons in this particular culture would not think it unusual to offer worship to the door god, their ancestors, Buddha, and one or two traditional gods such as the kitchen god. Many side streets also contain altars where residents can offer incense. Certain trees may have incense sticks placed among the roots. In addition to the worship of all the above, a local resident may go to temples dedicated to other gods on their special festival days in order to seek special blessings such as for their business to prosper.

This multi-religious setting provides a rich context in which to examine the potential for syncretism. Scott Moreau observes that syncretism refers to a “blending of one idea, practice, or attitude with another. Traditionally among Christians it has been used of the replacement or dilution of the essential truths of the gospel through the incorporation of non-Christian elements.”³ Syncretism may easily occur in a culture with the blending of various religious beliefs. What happens when someone becomes a follower of Christ in such a culture? Does the possibility of syncretism exist in a culture for a Chinese coming from a background of ancestor worship and Buddhism? Although other religious traditions such as the worship of local gods can be found in such a culture, this paper focuses on believers who come from the ancestor worship and Buddhism background. Although the Muslim religion would be called monotheistic in contrast to ancestor worship and Buddhism, the concerns for potential syncretism apply to a variety of religious traditions including ancestor worship and Buddhism.

⁴Robert S. Ellwood, Jr. *Many Peoples, Many Faiths: An Introduction to the Religious Life of Mankind* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1976), 128.

³A. Scott Moreau, “Syncretism,” in A. Scott Moreau, et al., eds. *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, 924.

THE C1 TO C6 SPECTRUM AND CONCERNS

The author, Phil Parshall, has raised awareness of the need to reach Muslims with the gospel for over two decades, beginning with his book *New Paths in Muslim Evangelism* published in 1981.⁴ The second edition of the book was published in 2003 with the title *Muslim Evangelism: Contemporary Approaches to Contextualization*.⁵ Parshall uses the church planting spectrum of C1 to C6 developed by John Travis with C1 being a traditional church which uses language unfamiliar to the local Muslim community. The C6 identification refers to small Christ-centered communities of secret and underground believers. Parshall notes that since 1975 he had been an advocate of C4 which are “contextualized Christ-centered communities using insider language and biblically permissible cultural and Islamic forms.”⁶

Concerns are raised by Phil Parshall about the C5 category, which is described by John Travis as “Christ-centered Communities of ‘Messianic Muslims’ who have accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior. C5 believers remain legally and socially within the community of Islam. . . . Participation in corporate Islamic worship varies from person to person and group to group. . . . C5 believers are viewed as Muslims by the Muslim community and refer to themselves as Muslims who follow Isa the Messiah.”⁷ He raises concerns about the varying interpretations of C5 such as Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) being called “Muslims” with no reference to Isa or Messiah or their continuing to perform *salat* (Muslim prayers) in the mosque.⁸ Parshall does affirm the aim of C5 advocates: “C5 advocates have worthy goals. Their great desire is to produce a community of MBBs who remain in their own society as productive, respected citizens.”⁹ He expresses concerns about several C5 practices which include:

⁴Phil Parshall, *New Paths in Muslim Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981).

⁵Phil Parshall, *Muslim Evangelism: Contemporary Approaches to Contextualization*, rev. ed. (Waynesboro, GA: Gabriel Publishing, 2003).

⁶John Travis in Parshall, *Muslim Evangelism*, 62.

⁷John Travis, “The C1 to C6 Spectrum” in Ralph Winters and Steven Hawthorne, eds. *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, A Reader, Third Edition* (Pasadena:

William Carey Library, (1999), 659.

⁸Parshall, *Muslim Evangelism*, 68.

⁹*Ibid.*, 70.

1. Encouragement for MBBs to remain in the mosque permanently.
2. Affirmation of the Shahada, either implicitly or explicitly.
3. Use of the term Muslim without a qualifier.
4. Biblical passages used to authenticate C5.
5. “Son of God” becomes “Isa-Al-Maish.”¹⁰

APPLYING C5 CONCERNS TO ANCESTOR AND BUDDHIST WORSHIP

How would the concerns that Parshall raises fit a culture where believers have a background in ancestor and Buddhist worship? The first issue, remaining in the mosque permanently, relates to continuing religious practices done before one becomes a follower of Christ. Applying that suggestion means ancestor worshipers would continue to participate in religious activities related to ancestor worship. This would immediately create problems for the individual believer and the Christian community of which a believer belongs. One of the key ways of showing allegiance to Christ in a culture where ancestor worship is practiced would be to stop participating in the rituals associated with it in both public and private ways. Members of a local church may be invited to join new believers in a family for a ceremony in which they remove from their home the god table where they had burned incense and offered fruit to their ancestors. The public ceremonies related to ancestor worship might include a Christian going with other family members to the location of tablets with records of ancestors; however, they would not bow, burn incense, nor offer food offerings to ancestors.¹¹

A Christian who insisted on continuing private and public expression of ancestor worship would not be considered a genuine believer by others in the Christian community. Phil Parshall warns that Muslim background believers who continue to worship in the mosque are viewed as Muslims. “MBBs who continue to worship with Muslims are vulnerable to Islamic theology. . . . Everyone in the prayer line is regarded as a true believer in every aspect of Islam.”¹² Parshall in an earlier writing warns that identification with Islam results in syncretism. Using a chart, he shows what he calls “the great divide” that demonstrates contextualization can have a low risk of syncretism. However, once a certain point is passed, the danger of syncretism goes from low to high. He observes: “C5 can be placed anywhere along the syncretism spectrum, depending on how each issue is presented and understood by the Muslim community. Personally, I can only put conversion (or

¹⁰Ibid., 73.

¹¹One missionary shared about Christian friends in Hong Kong who said that they would bow, but verbally say while bowing that they did not believe in doing this. The author realizes that some interpret the bowing as showing respect instead of worship. Nevertheless, bowing in this context would be viewed as an act of worship.

¹²Parshall, *Muslim Evangelism*, 71.

reconversion) to official Islam as high syncretism, regardless of motivation.”¹³ In the same way, a person who claims to be a follower of Christ and yet continues to practice private and public worship of ancestors would be viewed as one who practices high syncretism.

Parshall does suggest that a new convert from a Muslim background have a transitional time in his adopted faith where he slowly pulls back from mosque attendance. However, he does note that a convert should disassociate from the mosque.¹⁴ Those who become Christians from the background of worshipping Buddha would need to disassociate from continued participation in public or private worship of Buddha. Otherwise, they would be viewed as syncretists.

The second concern of Parshall related to the affirmation of the Shahada, either implicitly or explicitly by believers with a Muslim background. The Shahada means “witness or confession; the first required pillar of Islam; there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of God.”¹⁵ Parshall raises concerns about calling Muhammad a prophet of God: “If one decides to elevate Muhammad to prophethood, then it is only logical to give allegiance to his greatest prophetic production, i.e., the Quran. Once one crosses that line, he or she becomes a Muslim in totality. At least that is the understanding of the on-looking Islamic community.”¹⁶

The rituals used in ancestor worship would not always have a standardized statement such the Shahada. There would be a ritual saying used by those who practice what is called “Pure Land Buddhism” who chant “Hail, Amitabha Buddha.”¹⁷ It seems logical that those who worship Buddha would interpret a person chanting to Buddha as a person who also worships and gives allegiance to Buddha.

The third concern raised by Parshall is using the term Muslim without a qualifier. The term Muslim may be defined as “one who believes in, belongs to, and performs Islam: ‘one who submits.’”¹⁸ Parshall warns, “No matter how much one does linguistic interpretation with the word *Muslim* the bottom line is what the receptor community is receiving. In this case, the average Muslim’s understanding is that the communicator is

¹³Phil Parshall, “Going Too Far?” in Ralph Winters and Stephen Hawthorne, eds. *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1999), 656.

¹⁴Ibid., 655.

¹⁵George W. Braswell, Jr. *What You Need to Know About Islam and Muslims* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2000), 28.

¹⁶Parshall, *Muslim Evangelism*, 71.

¹⁷Ellwood, 127.

¹⁸Braswell, 28.

saying he or she is totally within the Islamic *ummah*.”¹⁹ The Chinese dialect of Cantonese has distinct words for ancestor worship, Buddhists, and Christians. Those who declare that they worship ancestors or Buddha without qualification would not be associated with Christianity. Those who said that they are Christians but still practice ancestor worship or worship of Buddha would be considered practicing syncretism in a bold manner.

The fourth concern of Parshall would be using biblical passages to authenticate C5 practices. An example would be 1 Corinthians 7:20: “Each man must remain in the condition in which he was called.”²⁰ Parshall notes the words of a person who ministers to Muslims: “The context in 1 Corinthians 7 is addressing the issues of marriage and singleness; believers married to unbelievers; nothing to do with dictating that people from a false religion should remain in the false religion so as not to upset the apple cart. C5 proponents could be accused of isogesis here.”²¹

How would these issues relate to a believer with a background in ancestor worship? Scott Moreau notes that giving honor to ancestors, which could be seen as “ancestral veneration, may not be the same as giving homage to a deity.” He also notes, however, the problem in the Christian community is whether or not honoring one’s mother and father in a particular cultural context can be done without violating the biblical warnings about contact with the dead.²² One example would be a Buddhist funeral which the writer observed. A Christian went forward with his family to the picture of his deceased mother. While the other family members bowed before the picture, he stood there respectfully but did not participate in the bowing ceremony. He showed respect without publicly being viewed as giving worship to a dead relative. However, the Christian community in that local context would have viewed bowing to a picture of a relative as a form of worship, equivalent to burning incense to them. Even the argument that bowing to a dead relative simply represents respect would not pass the test of 1 Corinthians 10. The same passage notes that believers should not give offense to others outside or inside the church: “Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved.”²⁴

The final issue which Parshall raises about Muslim background believers is the practice of changing “Son of God” in the Bible to become “Isa-Al-Masih” or Jesus as

¹⁹Parshall, *Muslim Evangelism*, 72. Braswell defines *ummah* as “the community of Islam; the solidarity of faith and prayer; the political incorporation of the Islamic religion.” Braswell, 29.

²⁰Updated New American Standard Bible.

²¹Parshall, *Muslim Evangelism*, 73.

²²A. Scott Moreau, “Ancestral Beliefs and Practices,” in Moreau, *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, 59.

²⁴1 Corinthians 10:32-33. Updated New American Standard Bible.

Messiah.²⁵ Parshall observes that the replacement of Son of God as Jesus the Messiah is actually being encouraged. “This new translation is being promoted in a number of languages throughout the Islamic world.”²⁶ The writer questions how a translation can use words which would evoke a totally different meaning from the original text. It is acknowledged that the name, God, as used in the Bible could also refer to a god in the local language where the writer worked among ancestor worshipers and Buddhists. However, references to Jesus as the Son of God were not changed in translation for concern of being offensive. There is a warning in the Bible regarding the preaching of the cross as seeming foolish to unbelievers: “For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”²⁷ The apostle Paul does not indicate that believers should stop preaching the cross because those not believing think it foolish. He further adds, “For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and Gentiles, foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”²⁸ The apostle Paul acknowledges that certain cultures will find certain elements of the Christian message offensive. One cannot change the gospel simply to accommodate a particular audience. In this case one would be in danger of waving the banner of contextualization to justify what becomes a distorted gospel involving syncretism.

CONCLUSION

There certainly exists a place for properly applied contextualization in sharing the message of Christ cross-culturally. However, David Hesselgrave warns about accepting a new faith without discarding the old religion, which results in syncretism.²⁹ The participation by a Muslim background believer in the mosque or an Chinese believer in ancestor worship both represent contextualization that becomes high syncretism. There is no discarding of the old religion if one continues to worship as a Muslim at the mosque, as an ancestor worshiper or Buddhist while claiming to be a follower of Jesus. The continuing use of the Shahada by MBBs or chanting to Buddha by a believer is syncretism. Likewise, someone who claims to be a Christian but calls himself a Muslim, ancestor worshiper, or Buddhist without qualification has crossed the line from contextualization to syncretism. Scripture is misused when passages dealing with singleness and marriage are used to justify C5 strategy or someone as a believer acting like an ancestor worshiper or Buddhist. Changing the actual translation of “Son of God” to another term represents syncretism.

²⁵Parshall, *Muslim Evangelism*, 73.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷1 Corinthians 1:18. Updated New American Standard Bible.

²⁸1 Corinthians 1: 23-25. Updated New American Standard Bible.

²⁹David J. Hesselgrave, *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally: A Guide for Home and Foreign Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 248.

The attempts by those ministering to Muslims trying to reach them in culturally sensitive ways on the surface can be commended. However, the line seems clearly to be crossed between contextualization and syncretism in the practices described in this paper. The author realizes that believers from a Muslim background face dangerous opposition as believers. A communication received by the writer conveys the story of a believer beaten by a family member opposing their faith to the point of the believer fleeing for protection and needing hospitalization. Likewise, believers from ancestor worship or Buddhist backgrounds may also become persecuted as a result of their allegiance to Christ. Perhaps some feel that they are helping believers in dangerous cultural circumstances avoid persecution by clinging to aspects of their old religion while embracing Christianity. However, David Hesselgrave warns about the appeal of syncretism and that missionaries should “communicate patiently but clearly the uniqueness of Christ and Christian revelation. After all, some of the most exclusivistic claims of all religious literature are to be found in the Old and New Testaments. Ultimately, syncretism is but another form of Christ-rejection.”³⁰

Proper contextualization can help present the claims of Christ in a culturally understandable way. However, there is a danger when contextualization is misapplied. The trustees of the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention recently adopted a document on “Principles of Contextualization” which places limits at the C-4 level or simply expressed “C-4 and no more” in the work of their personnel. The article notes that “We advocate the learning and appropriate utilization of language and culture. Constant vigilance is required lest contextualization degenerate into syncreticism.”³¹ The truth is contextualization can lead to syncretism.

³⁰David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally. Second Edition. An Introduction to Missionary Communication* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 185-186.

³¹Don Graham, IMB Trustees Adopt Guidelines for Gospel Contextualization. Baptist Press, 11/15/2005. <http://www.imb.org/main/news/details.asp?StoryID=6197&LanguageID=1709>. (accessed November 16, 2007)

ADDRESSING ISLAMIC TEACHINGS ABOUT CHRISTIANITY

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INTRODUCTION

In September 2006, Pope Benedict XVI, in a scholarly address, quoted the fourteenth century Byzantine Christian Emperor Manuel Paleologos II, “Show me just what Muhammad brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached.”¹ Benedict did not explicitly agree with the statement nor repudiate it.¹ However in multiple Islamic locations violence against Christians and Christian institutions followed.

Beginning shortly after the pope's address, Jordanian Muslim scholars instituted two pleas for dialog. The second of these, proposing a reasoned dialog between Muslim and Christian communities,² engendered a response from Christian scholars.³

Recently, the trustees of the International Mission Board (SBC, USA) provided guidelines for cross-cultural evangelism especially among Muslim peoples.⁴ Although helpful, both of these discussions expose a reluctance to address core Islamic teachings concerning Christianity so as to enable coherent Christian conversations with Islam and Muslims. While the author applauds quests for common ground and clear communication by Muslims and Christians, it is imperative that Islamic teachings concerning core Christian beliefs be addressed for meaningful conversation to begin.

ISLAMIC TEACHINGS OBSERVED

For serious followers of Christ meaningful discussions with Muslims should begin with Muslim understandings of divine revelation, the Bible, the nature of God, the person of Christ, and the purpose and work of Christ. This paper explores the Qur’anic and Islamic

¹In addition to his work in counter-Islamic Christian apologetics, Dr. Edens has over twenty-five years of missionary experience in Islamic countries.

¹<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/09/15/ap/world/printableD8K5CCBG0.shtml>.

²<http://www.acommonword.com/>.

³<http://www.yale.edu/faith/about-commonword.htm>.

⁴See text elsewhere in this issue or Appendix.

view of divine revelation, the Bible and the nature of God. The purpose of observing these Islamic teachings is to open discussions with Muslims in these and other areas of concern.

ISLAMIC UNDERSTANDINGS OF BIBLICAL TEXTS

The Qur'an repeatedly cites the Christians and Jews as people of the Book and identifies the *Torah* of Moses, *Injil* of Jesus and *Zabour* of David. Both biblical testaments are said to predict the prophet of Islam and the Qur'an. The entire host of biblical prophets are claimed as Muslims and precursors of the community Muhammad was establishing. Yet, Muslims do not accept the current Bible as authoritative. Islam, in the Qur'an, claims to possess the correction and seal of the totality of divine revelation. The complex relationship of Islam with the books which preceded the Qur'an is reflected in these statements. Muslim teachings about the Bible as the Word of God to Christians are immensely important to Christians seeking to understand and be understood.

The Qur'an states its continuity with the Bible.⁵ God's mission for the Qur'an is to confirm and guard the earlier books.⁶ The task of the Qur'an, translated "guard" or "supervise" in Surah 5: 48 is an Arabic word which is built on the word "Amen". The Qur'an is to affirm the truthfulness of the previous Scriptures. The Qur'an is to confirm and say "yes!" to the Books which came before. In Islam the affirmation of Scriptures is understood to be bi-directional. Muhammad and the Qur'an are understood to be prophesied in the earlier Books. In Surah 3, the early Christians answer Jesus with a claim that they are Muslims and followers of The Messenger or The Apostle which is understood to be Muhammad.⁷ Several other important facts about the Qur'anic view of the Bible can be drawn. However, since the Qur'an clearly teaches that God delivered to Christians and Jews His Books, the issue is how can Islam teach that the present Bible has lost its divine authority?

Four Muslim views of the state of the previous Scriptures during the epoch of the Qur'an's revelation are found.⁸

⁵Surah 5: 44-48.

⁶Surah 5: 48a "To thee We sent the Scripture in truth, confirming the scripture that came before it, and guarding it in safety;" *The Holy Qur'an* translated by Abdullah Yusef Ali (New Delhi: Islamic Book Service, 2001). Unless otherwise specified all Qur'anic citations and quotations in this paper refer to the English text of this Arabic/English Qur'an.

⁷Surah 3: 52-53.

⁸The confusion over this issue is borne out in the Qur'an. At times it seems that there can be no changes in God's word and decree. Surah 6: 34, 115; 10: 64; 18: 27. Yet Surah 16: 101 clearly shows God exchanging revelations, "When We substitute one revelation for another, —and God knows what he reveals (in stages)—they say, 'thou art but a forger': but most of them understand not." and Surah 87: 6-7 teaches that God may promote forgetfulness, "We shall make you recite our revelations, so that you shall forget

1. Some view these Books as superseded by the Qur'an. Their understanding is that God directed those previous Books to a specific people and for a set time. This is illustrated from a saying⁹ concerning Muhammad narrated by Jabir ibn Abdullah.

Umar ibn al-Khattab brought to Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) a copy of the Torah and said: Allah's Messenger, this is a copy of the Torah. He (Allah's Messenger) kept quiet and he (Umar) began to read it. The color of the face of Allah's Messenger (pbuh)¹⁰ underwent a change, whereupon Abu Bakr said: Would that your mother mourn you, don't you see the face of Allah's Messenger? Umar saw the face of Allah's Messenger (pbuh) and said: I seek refuge with Allah from the wrath of Allah and the wrath of His Messenger. We are well pleased with Allah as Lord, with Islam as religion, and with Muhammad as Prophet. Where upon Allah's Messenger (pbuh) said: By Him in Whose hand is the life of Muhammad, even if Moses were to appear before you and you were to follow him, leaving me aside, you would certainly stray into error; for if (Moses) were alive (now), and he found my prophetic ministry, he would have definitely followed me.¹¹

2. Other Muslims understand specific teachings of the earlier Books have been abrogated by Qur'anic content. This is based on the teaching of Surah 2: 106, "Any of our messages that we abrogate or consign to oblivion, We replace with a better or a similar one. Do you not know that God has the power to will anything?" The Arabic term translated abrogate, *nasekh*, means to delete, abrogate, replace, substitute or copy. Qur'anic scholar's classify five modes of *nasekh*:

1. Qur'anic abrogation of the divine scripture which preceded it; 2. Abrogation of some Qur'anic texts which are said to have been blotted out of existence; 3. Abrogation of some earlier commandments of the Qur'an by the later revelations, while the text containing those commandments remained embodied in the Qur'an; 4. Abrogation of a *sunnah* (prophetic practice) by a Qur'anic injunction; 5. Abrogation of a Qur'anic injunction by *sunnah*.¹²

none of them except as God pleases. He has knowledge of all that is manifest and all that is hidden."

⁹These individual sayings and their several varied collections are called *Hadith*.

¹⁰In Islamic speech and writing when a prophet's name is mentioned a brief prayer is attached. *pbuh* stands for "Peace be upon him." This is a personal blessing and call for God's blessing on the prophet.

¹¹Sunan Ad-Darimi Vol. 1 Hadith 435.

¹²Farid Esack, *The Qur'an a User Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2005), 126.

The Qur'an presents Jesus as practicing this doctrine concerning the teachings of the Torah, "(I have come to you), to attest the Law which was before me. And to make lawful to you part of what was (before) forbidden to you."¹³

3. Many Muslims believe the Qur'an teaches that these Books have been corrupted by the peoples of the Book. Muhammad 'Ata ur-Rahim states this view.

Certainly, the picture many people have been given of Jesus—of who he was, and what he did—is a distorted one. Although there is some truth in them, it has been established that the four accepted Gospels have not only been altered and censored through the ages, but also are not eyewitness accounts.¹⁴

Islamic scholars cite non-canonical sources as the lost but true witnesses to the historical Jesus and his gospel. The most popular of these sources for Muslims today was not cited by any Islamic writer before the fifteenth century. An Italian manuscript of the *Gospel of Barnabas* began to circulate during the fifteenth century.¹⁵

4. Another view is that the Books have not been abrogated or superseded but Christian and Jewish teachers were corrupt.¹⁶ In the words of the Qur'an:

And There are some among them (people of the Book) who twist their tongues when quoting the Scriptures, so that you may think that what they say is from the Scriptures, whereas it is not. They say: 'this is from God,' whereas it is not. Thus they knowingly ascribe a falsehood to God.¹⁷

An example of the corrupt practice of the people of the Book is found in Bakhari's Hadith.

A jew and a jewess were brought to Allah's Messenger (pbuh) on a charge of committing an illegal sexual intercourse. The Prophet (pbuh) asked them. 'What is the legal punishment (for this sin) in your book (torah)?' they replied, 'Our priests have innovated the punishment of blackening the faces with charcoal and Tajbiya.' Abdullah bin Salam said, 'O Allah's Messenger, tell them to bring the Torah.' The torah was brought, and then one of the jews put his hand over the Divine verse of the rajam (stoning to death) and started reading what preceded and what followed it.¹⁸

¹³Surah 3: 50a.

¹⁴Muhammad 'Ata ur-Rahim, *Jesus Prophet of Islam* (Elmhurst: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 1991), 17.

¹⁵Unknown, *The Gospel of Barnabas* (Brooklyn: A & B Publishers Group, n.d.), xvi.

¹⁶Surah 5:46-50; 9:31-35.

¹⁷Surah 3: 78.

¹⁸Sahil Bakhari, vol. 8 Hadith 6819.

Clearly the corruption was not in the text but in the teachings and practices of the previous peoples of the Book.

Thus, the current Islamic practice of presupposing that the Qur'an alone of the Heavenly books has been preserved by God stands on a questionable Qur'anic basis. If a Muslim is confused about this or other matters, the Qur'an offers a solution. "If you doubt what We have revealed to you, ask those who have read the Scriptures before you."¹⁹ Beyond this confusing Islamic view of the biblical texts is the Qur'anic doctrine of divine revelation or the Word of God.

THE QUR'AN AND THE WORD OF GOD

The Qur'an and the Bible each presents itself as WORD OF GOD. However the normative Islamic view of Word of God is dramatically different from most Christian understandings of "Word of God" used in reference to a text. For Muslims the Qur'an is Word of God because the Arabic book is an exact copy of the eternal book with God. For them the Qur'an which descended to Muhammad in a period of human history is precisely the same as the heavenly book which is an uncreated and eternal attribute of God.²⁰ Muslims are taught that their Arabic Qur'an has no human content, earthly precursors, or influences. The Qur'an implies that the *Torah*, *Zabour*, and *Injil* were each sent down from heaven as intact books²¹ to the respective earthly messenger. These books are like the Qur'an God's speech. The closest Christian counterpoint to this concept is the *Logos*, the second person of the Godhead who is incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ. The Islamic concept of Books descending from God mediated by angels proceeds from and is controlled by the Islamic view of God.

ISLAM AND ALLAH AS GOD

Two major themes about God are found in the Qur'an. God, who stood behind the Qur'an, is singular, unique, and creator of all else. The Qur'an also presents him as the God who spoke through all the biblical prophets. However, the nature of Allah exposed in the Qur'an adds to and deletes understandings drawn from the biblical revelation.

¹⁹Surah 10: 94a.

²⁰Surah 43: 2-4.

²¹Surah 3: 3 "The book of truth descends to you confirming the *torah* and the *injil* which are with God and He sent down." (Author's translation).

ALLAH'S NATURE IN THE QUR'AN

The Qur'an agrees with Jewish and Christian Scriptures that God is the eternal all-powerful, all-knowing creator of all. He is unique and holy, different from all of creation. He is sufficient in Himself. He is one and there is no other eternal reality or being beside Him.²² The Islamic term for God's oneness is *tawheed*. The theological concept is based on the definite article and the number one (*alwaaheed*),²³ and describes Islam's central understanding of God—His singular identity. However, the Qur'anic concept of oneness goes beyond the concept of biblical unity and uniqueness of God. One expression of unique nature of the oneness of God in Islam is the Muslim reluctance to use foreign words meaning "God" in target languages; instead, Muslims transliterate "*Allah*", the Qur'anic word for God, into the target language.

ALLAH AND *TAWHEED*

The Qur'an presents God as absolute will. Geisler and Saleeb note,

God is absolute Will, and absolute Will must be absolutely one. . . . And Muslims believe God is absolutely One (both from revelation and by reason) Reason informed Muhammad that unity is prior to plurality. . . . Thus, unity is the most ultimate of all.²⁴

Allah as absolute is beyond and behind all creation. The Qur'anic god transcends all and has no direct access to his creation despite his absolute sovereignty. Yet he is merciful towards his creatures.²⁵ He is not directly involved in creation, once it is created, but he expresses a nearness to humanity.

It was We Who created man, and We know what dark suggestions his soul makes to him for We are nearer to him than (his) jugular vein. Behold, two (guardian angels) appointed to learn (his doings) learn (and noted them), one sitting on the right and one on the left. Not a word does he utter but there is a sentinel by him, ready (to note it).²⁶

²²Surah 6: 19.

²³Surah 2: 163; 6: 19; 37: 1-7; 38: 65-68; 112: 1.

²⁴Norman L. Geisler & Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam: The Crescent in Light of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 135.

²⁵Surah 6: 12; 7: 156.

²⁶Surah 50 : 16-18.

Thus, the transcendent God in Islam employs angelic beings²⁷ to observe humanity. The second way in which Allah shows mercy by angelic mediation is through guidance. This guidance takes the form of the office of prophet and provision through angels of their messages and books.

The God of the Bible, while incomparable, transcendent, and beyond human discovery in similar ways to the Qur'anic description, condescends to reveal Himself and relate to humanity, ultimately in the Incarnation.

Allah and 98 additional Qur'anic names²⁸ are descriptive of divine attributes.²⁹ However, none of these names even gives a shadow of the meaning of the Greek word, *agape*—love as found in 1 Jn 4: 16, “And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is Love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.”

Relationship is not a characteristic of Allah. *Shirk* is the Islamic concept of blasphemy which is defined as ascribing a relationship with Allah to anything. The Qur'an accuses some of tritheism³⁰ in worshipping three gods: God, Mary, and Jesus.³¹ There is no Qur'anic mention of a complex unity of God, nor God as one being expressed in three persons. The Christian concept of Trinity or Triune God is unknown in the Arabic Qur'an. What the Qur'an condemns is worshipping *thaletha*,³² three (gods). Others are condemned for teaching that God was physically and sexually involved with Mary which resulted in the birth of Jesus.³³ None of this is to deny Islamic opposition to the biblical revelation of the nature of God, but simply to point out that most of the Qur'anic objection is against non-biblical concepts. Many Muslims debate the meaning of terms such as “the face of Allah” and “the hand of Allah”, reluctant to go beyond the Qur'anic statements themselves. Yet, the same Muslims writers extend Qur'anic statements to Christian doctrines not specifically addressed in the Qur'an. Others use terms for the Arabic Qur'an's identity with God which add a complexity beyond the simple unity of the Islamic creed.³⁴

²⁷Angels and *jinn* (from which the English word genie is derived).

²⁸Ibid: 21-26.

²⁹Esack, 148-150.

³⁰Surah 4: 171; 5: 72-73.

³¹Surah 5: 116: “And behold! God will say: ‘O Jesus the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of God?’”

³²Surah 4: 171; 5: 73.

³³Surah 3: 64; 9:30; 112: 3.

³⁴Sachito Murata & William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House: 1994), 52, 174 and 179.

ADDRESSING QUR'ANIC TEACHINGS WITH MUSLIMS

After observing the teachings about these key doctrines of Christianity, some tentative conclusions appear.

1. The Qur'anic basis for the common Muslim teaching of corruption of the biblical text is questionable.

a. Assumptions of corruption in the texts of the Bible conflict with *hadith* which bear witness to Muhammad using the Bible to mete out judgment.

b. Assertions of the Bible being totally superseded by the Qur'an are not supported by the Qur'anic use of the Bible to verify itself and the prophetic ministry of Muhammad.

2. Muslims are encouraged to seek out Christians and Jews who received heavenly Books before them when beset by doubts or confusion. Although this Qur'anic injunction contradicts the common advice of contemporary Muslim teachers.

3. Teachings usually understood to condemn biblical faith in the Trinity are seen, on closer examination, to critique a non-biblical worship of tri-theism.

CONCLUSION

Amidst the calls for Christian-Muslim conversations the fact remains that the Muslims draw teachings from the Qur'an which oppose Christian positions on the nature of God, divine revelation, and the Bible. It is incumbent on Christians to address Islamic teachings about Christianity. Desired and necessary discussions between the two communities must be informed by the Qur'an's assessment of the Bible and understanding of the Christian faith.

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Mission of Today's Church: Baptist Leaders Look at Modern Faith Issues. Edited by R. Stanton Norman. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007. 210 pages. Softcover, \$16.99.

This collection of twelve essays originated with a conference entitled “The Mission of Today’s Church,” held at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in February 2005 under the auspices of The Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry. The Center for Baptist Theology and Ministry at New Orleans was directed by the editor, R. Stanton Norman, at the time of the conference. Since then, Dr. Norman has taken an administrative position at Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Missouri. Steve Lemke, the provost at New Orleans Seminary, has since been tasked with directing the work of this important locus of Baptist thought and practice. The purpose of the book is to explore what “Baptists believe about the nature and mission of the church and how that mission is contextualized in our contemporary world” (ix). The book meets its goal, but raises unintended questions about divergent views of the nature of the church and its mission.

On the one hand, the commonalities manifested by Baptists within the book should be stressed. On the other hand, the divergences expressed within the book should be noted, too. Below, we consider the book from the perspective of both unity and diversity with regard to Southern Baptist understandings of the Great Commission, the nature of the church, and the denomination’s direction. (Kenneth D. Keathley’s excellent essay on divine sovereignty and human salvation draws upon the Great Commission, but it is a heavier theological piece that is not easily classified within this book.)

First, it should be noted that the authors of the book are all Southern Baptists and are dedicated to Great Commission ministry within that denominational context. Beside Norman, the lineup includes one pastor, one state convention executive, three school presidents, three theology professors, and three other denominational servants. The preponderance of educators and denominational servants should not be seen as negative, however, for the writers collectively have many generations of pastoral experience between them. Moreover, the lives and words of each writer indicate that they are committed to serving the churches through their various roles.

Second, the editor comments that the authors are each passionately committed to fulfilling the Great Commission within the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention. There is little doubt in this regard, but the essays stress the mission of the church to varying degrees. The essays primarily devoted to consideration of the Great Commission as a practice include those by James Jenkins (“Three View of the Church’s Mission in the Black Community”), Charles L. Quarles (“Explaining the Gospel to Kids”), Ed Stetzer, (“The Missional Nature of the Church and the Future of Southern Baptist Convention Churches”), and Barrett Duke, (“Being Salt and Light in a Post-Christian Culture”). The essays by Jenkins

and Quarles are perhaps the most practical, even as their practicality necessarily entails a restriction of their subject matter to the black community and to children, respectively. Unfortunately, none of the writers were tasked with actually defining theologically and missiological what the Great Commission is and means.

The essays by Stetzer and Duke are more theoretical, even as they address the mission of the church in the world today. Both men address the problem of the relationship between culture and church. Duke carefully threads his way between the opposing reactions of engagement and retreat as the churches are confronted by an increasingly post-Christian, post-modern culture. Duke laments the loss of belief in a universal moral truth that accompanies post-modernism, even as he brings Scripture to bear in order to define and propose a relevant Christian worldview. Stetzer's essay is much less careful, for even as he notes the shift to a post-modern paradigm, he is loath to offer any criticism of it. Rather, Stetzer argues for contextualization or cultural relevancy, placing himself squarely against the dominant Southern Baptist tendency to regard the culture as a scandal. (Stetzer also argues for an expanded role for younger leaders.) The increasingly stark differences between the views of theologians like Stetzer, who want to downplay cultural problems in the name of evangelistic effectiveness, and the views of theologians like Duke, who want to maintain biblical truth in an increasingly anti-Christian environment, requires further thought by Southern Baptist intellectuals.

Third, there are a number of essays that consider the local churches, including offerings by David S. Dockery ("The Church, Worship, and the Lord's Supper"), R. Stanton Norman ("Together We Grow: Congregational Polity as a Means of Corporate Sanctification"), and Jerry Sutton ("Congregational Polity and Its Strategic Limitations"). Dockery intends to recover a Reformation doctrine of the Lord's Supper, including the spiritual presence of Christ within the worshipping congregation and the imagery of the supper as the visible Word. Dockery correctly argues that the supper should be "more than a mere appendage to the preaching service" (49). However, the place of the Lord's Supper as the expression of church communion and, therefore, of church discipline (i.e. excommunication) is remarkably absent. Norman draws upon many years of advocating biblical ecclesiology by defending congregational polity as a means of holiness. Sutton, on the other hand, argues against congregational polity as strategically limited, even as he denies that there is a discoverable "biblical model" for the church (citing Millard Erickson; 113). As with the divergence between Stetzer and Duke, so the divergence between Sutton and Norman is noticeable, if not intentional.

Finally, there are four essays that consider the progress of Southern Baptists. Two of the four essays are concerned with the cooperative nature of the Southern Baptist Convention. Jim Richards ("Cooperation among Southern Baptist Churches as Set Forth in Article 14 of the Baptist Faith and Message") discovers four areas of cooperation within the common confession of Southern Baptists. Those concerned about the decline of Baptist identity and the rise of evangelical ecumenism should consider Richards' very helpful paradigm. Providing yet another contrast to Sutton, Chad Owen Brand ("Toward a Theology of Cooperation") argues from the hermeneutic of the regulative church principle that Scripture, including the descriptive passages in the book of Acts, certainly does provide a model for the church and for cooperation between churches.

The remaining two essays, actually printed first, consider the progress of Southern Baptists as a whole. Daniel L. Akin (“Ten Mandates for Southern Baptists”) provides a balanced and comprehensive vision for the future of the Southern Baptist Convention, with regard to a recovery of biblical ecclesiology within the churches, with regard to the Great Commission focus of the denomination, and with regard to the function of its missionary and educational agencies. Finally, Charles S. Kelley (“Between Scylla and Charybdis: Reflections on the Baptist Way”) writes that Southern Baptists have always been a people of controversy and rehearses conflicts over Sunday School, evangelism, sin, and theology. He thus demonstrates that Baptist theology and polity have helped the Southern Baptist Convention to become a responsive and responsible organization that “emerging leaders” should enthusiastically embrace. “Feeling tensions is not a sign of death. It is a sign of life” (35).

Reflecting upon the current Southern Baptist tensions on unintentional display in this book itself, Kelley’s words strike this middle-aged reviewer as concurrently biblical and relevant. Perhaps the older generation has some wisdom to relay to the middle and younger generations after all. New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary is rendering Southern Baptists a great service through the continuing work of The Center for Baptist Theology and Ministry. And B&H Academic, a division of LifeWay Resources, has rendered Southern Baptists a great service by publishing this fine collection.

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Who Rules the Church? Examining Congregational Leadership and Church Government. By Gerald P. Cowen, with foreword by Jerry Vines and appendices by Emir E. Caner and Stephen Prescott. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003. 152 pp., \$19.99 paper.

The question of who rules the church is a crucial issue that has brought disagreement and painful rupture in a number of Baptist churches in recent years. Gerald Cowen, Senior Professor of New Testament and Greek at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, brings a wealth of biblical expertise and pastoral wisdom to answering this question. In short, Cowen articulates a convincing defense of the traditional Baptist interpretation that the New Testament authorizes two ministerial offices (pastor/elder, and deacon) under the framework of congregational polity.

Various chapters in the book address the key issues relating to the pastor-elder role: defining the pastor-elder, the call of the pastor-elder, the role of the pastor-elder, the qualifications for the pastor-elders, the authority of the pastor elder, and the pastor-elder and the deacon. After a helpful survey of all the relevant New Testament passages, Cowen concludes that the terms “pastor,” “elder,” and “bishop” all refer to the same office (most commonly called “pastor” in Southern Baptist churches).

The chapter on the call to service would be especially helpful to someone struggling to discern God’s will concerning a call to Christian ministry. Cowen gives specific guidance

about how to discern the inward call experienced by a person feeling led to serve as a minister and how to evaluate the outward call by which this inward call is confirmed and verified by other believers.

Carefully tracing the duties of the pastor-elder outlined in Scripture, Cowen categorizes these responsibilities according to instructional, pastoral, and administrative duties. He also describes the spiritual gifts that should be evidenced in a pastor's life. Cowen emphasizes that teaching is the primary responsibility of the pastoral office, so much so that Paul literally named this office "pastor-teacher" (Eph. 4:2). The role of deacon/servers was established by the church specifically for the purpose of allowing the apostles to focus on the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:2), with being "apt to teach" (1 Tim. 3:2, Tit. 1:9) as one of the distinguishing characteristics of a pastor-elder. Cowen thus denies the division of pastor-elders into "teaching elders" and "ruling elders," since teaching is the primary responsibility of all elders. Even 1 Tim. 5:17, the primary text used to justify ruling elders (because it mentions "elders who rule well") emphasizes that these elders are "those who labor in word and doctrine." Being effective teachers is one aspect of a pastor-teacher-elder "ruling" (or leading) the congregation well.

Cowen's survey of the New Testament qualifications for pastor-elder would be extremely helpful to any pastor search committee. He groups the qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 under the categories of general qualifications, moral qualifications, mental qualifications, personal qualifications, domestic qualifications, Christian experience, and reputation. In discussing the moral qualifications, Cowen offers a concise overview of the six main interpretations that have been offered regarding the meaning of "husband of one wife." Cowen favors the interpretation that a divorced man would be disqualified from the pastoral role.

The chapter on "The Authority of the Pastor-Elder" deserves to be read by every church in our day. Cowen surveys the three main approaches to church governance – bishop rule, elder rule, and congregational rule. Carefully examining the pattern of the New Testament church, the author offers a strong biblical defense of why Baptists and many other evangelical Christians believe in congregational church polity. Cowen cites six biblical reasons which suggest that congregational rule is the New Testament pattern, including the fact that the church is the final court of appeal in matters of church discipline (Matt. 18:15-17), the church officers are elected by all church members (Acts 1:15-26), the church approves representatives and missionaries sent out by the church (Acts 13:1-3, 14:27, 18:22-23, 1 Cor. 16:4), the fact of spiritual gifts within the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12), the settlement of disputes by the church (1 Cor. 6:2-4), and the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet. 2:5).

Cowen grounds his discussion of pastoral authority in congregational polity, offering a balanced approach that empowers divinely appointed leaders to lead, but accords the final authority for decisions with the congregation as a whole. In a helpful complementary chapter on the relation of the pastor to deacons, he outlines the scriptural qualifications and roles of deacons, and outlines a pattern for pastors and deacons to work together constructively to accomplish the work of the church.

Throughout his discussion, Cowen grounds his description of congregational leadership in the New Testament. He never resorts to following Baptist tradition simply because we have always done it that way. We have that tradition because that is what we understand a New Testament church to be. However, in two very informative and interesting appendices, Emir Caner and Stephen Prescott establish the fact that congregational rule as led by two scriptural offices of pastor and deacon is indeed a longstanding Baptist tradition. In “Ecclesiology in the Free Churches of the Reformation (1525-1608),” Emir Caner recounts how early Anabaptists such as Conrad Grebel, Balthasar Hubmaier, Michael Sattler, and Menno Simons sought to restore the pattern of New Testament church governance in contradistinction to the Roman Catholic and Magisterial Reformation models. In fact, Caner argues, the reason that the magisterial reformers martyred the early Anabaptists was precisely because of the reformers’ rejection of the Anabaptists’ different ecclesiology.

Stephen Prescott extends this argument in “Ecclesiology among Baptists in Great Britain and America (1609-Present).” Surveying all the major Baptist confessions, Prescott argues that Baptists historically have not differed significantly from other evangelicals on key doctrinal affirmations such as the sufficiency of Scripture, salvation by grace through faith, Christ as the only way of salvation, etc. Baptist ecclesiology has been our most distinctive doctrine. However, Prescott expresses the concern that this Baptist doctrine is endangered in our day. Addressing what he calls our “current ecclesiological confusion,” Prescott bemoans the fact that some churches with the name “Baptist” now refuse to require believer’s baptism as a basis of church membership, while some other churches have “adopted Presbyterian polity” (143) by adding ruling elders to the two New Testament offices and giving authority to lead the church to these ruling elders. According to Prescott, holding ecclesiological views so divergent from Baptist beliefs does not make one a heterodox or carnal Christian, but it does “make one not a Baptist” (144).

Who Rules the Church? is an important work that should be read by every Baptist, but it should be required reading for church leaders, deacons, search committees, and ministers. It is refreshing to read such a clearly articulated biblical explanation of what a New Testament church is and how it should be governed.

Dr. Steve Lemke
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

God and Time: Four Views. Edited by Gregory E. Ganssle. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001, 247 pp., \$19.99 paper.

Multiviews books have become immensely popular because they help us to attain a better understanding of how different perspectives address key issues. This book addresses a particularly difficult issue on which there is very little agreement among evangelicals – the relation of God and time. In this multiview format, each of the four contributors presents his own perspective, after which the other contributors respond with their criticisms of that perspective. The original proponent then has an opportunity to answer the criticisms.

Paul Helm of Regent College represents the traditional divine timeless eternity or *atemporalist* perspective. This view affirms the stasis, tenseless, or “B theory” of time, in which God experiences past, present, and future events all at once in an “eternal now.” Unfortunately, although Helm should have the advantage in that the position he represents has the most advocates in classical theism, he burdens the eternalist perspective with an overly rigid view of divine immutability and impassibility. Helm’s extreme views result in at least four unhappy logical consequences: (a) Helm is willing to give up a high view of divine omniscience because in his view God could not know indexical measures of time or distinguish what events are currently happening; (b) God does not actually relate to persons in time, but falsely represents Himself as doing so in ways that are not literally true; (c) Helm denies creation of the world and time *ex nihilo*, but proposes the possibility of the eternity of the universe; and (d) Helm asserts that “[T]here was no time when the eternal God was not Jesus of Nazareth” (54) and “[T]here is no time in which the Son of God exists in a preincarnate form” (55). These positions are not necessary to the atemporalist perspective, so Helm’s insistence on them makes this approach appear much less unappealing than it normally would. Nicholas Wolterstorff of Yale advocates unqualified divine *temporality*, corresponding to a tensed, dynamic, or “A theory” of time in which past, present, and future have ontological reality.

Two of the authors propose mediating positions between divine temporalism and atemporalism. Alan Padgett of Luther Seminary advocates the *relative timelessness* perspective in which God exists in a timeless eternity that flows from His being, which nonetheless allows Him to respond to the temporal world. God’s timelessness is relative to the measurable time of this space-time universe, but is temporal in relation to the metaphysical time that flows from His nature. William Lane Craig of Talbot School of Theology also proposes a novel mediating approach that he labels as *omnitemporality*. Craig agrees that God is best described as atemporal “before” or without creation but temporalist after creation with a dynamic perspective on time.

All four of the contributors cite biblical references consistent with their perspectives, but the biblical evidence alone is not so clear as to decide the issue decisively. All four contributors are analytic philosophers of some ilk, and they propose logical arguments in support of their positions. All the contributors share the presupposition that the answer to the relation of God and time is comprehensible by human logic. Perhaps the answer is a mystery bound up in the eternity of God that can only be affirmed by faith. None of the four positions represented in the book stands out as the clear winner. However, this book provides fodder for thoughtful reflection on this vital theological issue. This book requires a careful reading, but it is not so technical as to be beyond the nonspecialist reader. Highly recommended as a valuable survey to aid the reader in coming to one’s own position regarding the relation of God and time that is so crucial to constructing a sound systematic theology.

Dr. Steve W. Lemke
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

Gerald L. Stevens, *New Testament Greek Primer*, 2nd ed., (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2007). \$49.00.

The second edition of *New Testament Greek Primer* by Gerald L. Stevens is an introductory textbook for beginning Greek students. *New Testament Greek Primer* follows the deductive method of teaching Greek. Stevens contends that the time-honored, traditional approach to teaching Greek is more effective than some of the newer, “trendy,” pedagogical approaches (xvii). The author has developed a programmed approach to teaching and learning Greek honed from years of classroom application.

The content in the second edition is largely unchanged from that of the first edition, though there are a few minor revisions. These revisions fine-tune selected grammar discussions. Instructors familiar with Stevens’ first edition will notice that some of the homework exercises have been changed. Like the first edition, the exercise entries have been carefully chosen from the biblical text to give the student a “designed redundancy calculated for maximum, long-term benefit” (xvii). The exercise entries are contained in the textbook providing a cost saving for the student.

A great strength of both editions of *New Testament Greek Primer* is the English Appendix (445-512). Stevens states, “Yet, for myself, I am more convinced than ever that the problem with learning Greek is not Greek, but English!” (xviii). The English Appendix is a valuable aid for the student with a deficient grammar background. The English Appendix also contains copious examples of diagrammed Greek sentences to give the English student a better understanding of the Greek sentence structure.

Stevens introduces the student to the basic verbal and noun systems within the first four chapters. He builds on this foundation with successive chapters that gradually introduce the student to more complex tenses, verbal forms, and moods. Interspersed among these chapters are four Vocabulary Review Sessions and five Language Lessons. The Vocabulary Review Sessions guide the student to accomplish the fifty-word frequency proficiency level. The Language Lessons illumine difficult translation and language issues. Stevens also includes a partial answer key, a list of principle parts, summary paradigms, and subject index. In typical Louisiana style, the author provides the reader a healthy serving of *lagniappe* (bonus or extra). Interspersed throughout his text are his personal photographs of places, inscriptions, manuscripts, and artifacts from his extensive travel in the lands of the ancient biblical world.

For the instructor seeking a solid, introductory New Testament Greek textbook, *New Testament Greek Primer* offers the student a solid foundation to accomplish mastery of the introductory level of New Testament Greek. For the seasoned student of Greek looking to expand his library, *New Testament Greek Primer* promises to be a workhorse in your stable of New Testament Greek grammars.

Dr. Craig Price
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

Schippe, Cullen and Chuck Stetson, eds. *The Bible and Its Influence*. New York and Front Royal, Virginia: BLP Publishing, 2005. \$74.95

For decades the question of “can the Bible be taught in public schools” has received a great deal of attention. A few have taught it devotionally in spite of school district’s guidelines to the contrary. Others have thoughtfully attempted to introduce it as literature and have successfully taught its text. Unfortunately, most have consigned teaching of the Bible in public schools to the realm of the unthinkable and simply dismiss the possibility altogether. Cullen Schippe and Chuck Stetson, with their long list of contributors and consultants, have undertaken to present the biblical text in such a way that it meets the statutory requirements of state and federal law, while still presenting the material in a concise and comprehensive manner. On October 11, 2007, the Alabama State School Board designated *The Bible and Its Influence* as a comprehensive literature curriculum for the state. Alabama is the first state in the nation to approve a textbook for academic study of the Bible for statewide adoption.

There are a number of things to commend *The Bible and Its Influence*. The first, and foremost, is that the Bible is the beginning point of the study. Almost without exception, each section contains direct quotations of the appropriate chapter and verse of scripture for that discussion. In addition to the scripture quotation, there are other helps, such as the sections labeled “Biblical Information.” In these sections, information about the background of the book of the Bible, the position in the canon, contextual implications, and sometimes hermeneutical (the science of interpretation) insights are given to help the students with the proper perspective for the particular section being studied. Help is also provided in sections called “Vocabulary,” where difficult words or phrases are defined and explained. This improves the student’s understanding of sometimes difficult passages where often archaic terms are used in some of the English translations.

Another of the strengths of the presentation of the biblical material in *The Bible and Its Influence* is that the presentation is done in a more academic, even scholarly way. This helps to assure that personal biases and sectarian views are not interjected in the discussion and there is a fair presentation of the material. The text of the book incorporates the best of modern scholarship. Where the writers have translated the original languages (both Hebrew and Greek), they have done a good job of translation and interpretation. A student who completes this textbook will have an excellent introduction, and in many cases, a thoroughgoing presentation of the biblical text. The student’s understanding should be broadened due to the background, linguistic insight, and historical settings that the writers have incorporated to make the textbook more readable and comprehensive.

One of the more enjoyable parts of the textbook were the sections entitled “Unit Feature,” where historical events and people are presented to illustrate the truths being taught in the biblical text. Many of these sections show how that people throughout history have applied various biblical texts to circumstances that were impacting their lives.

It is immediately obvious that the writers also use art in many its forms to illustrate how the Bible has been used and interpreted throughout the ages. Some of the artwork is spectacular; all of it is amazing considering its vast origins. Most of the placement of the

artwork in proximity to the subject matter of the textbook is very appropriate for the applications. In fact, the whole premise of the textbook is that the Bible has been an “influence” on many, many, people, who in turn have had a great influence on our civilization.

Although my general opinion of *The Bible and Its Influence* is favorable, there are some specific areas that bear consideration. Because of the broad audience that this book will receive (Jewish and Christian especially), these items could be considered troublesome. These issues are not a comprehensive list, but represent examples of things that were observed. The first of these has to do directly with the art. It is incumbent on the writers of the textbook to make sure that the students who study this textbook will fully understand the interpretations that the various artists suggest in their work are not consistent with good biblical scholarship. In fact, in some cases, the artists were neither Jewish nor Christian and used their art to impugn the character of God. Although it is a given that this is a course to introduce the Bible to public school students and not a course in hermeneutics, it is also a given that in the absence of interpretive skills, the students will not understand that some of these interpretations are at the least aberrant and in some cases heretical. Although it is hoped that the teacher will assist in this matter, it is also a given that not all teachers (probably most) will not have the skills to make interpretive decisions. Based on the content of the textbook, it is evident that the writers are more than capable of discerning where these interpretive issues lie in their textbook and could easily point out to the students where these aberrant interpretations depart from mainline historic orthodoxy (for both Jews and Christians).

Another issue is the handling of the material about Isaiah on pages 113 and 116-117. On page 113, it says that Isaiah and Jeremiah both report that God called them before they were born. This certainly is true of Jeremiah, but most scholars understand that Isaiah is describing his calling in 6:1-8 as an adult. Further, on pages 116-117, the issue of the authorship of Isaiah is addressed. Although the view presented is indeed held by some scholars, to make a blanket statement that “liberal Jews, mainline Protestant Christians, and Roman Catholics (also called faith traditions on p. 117) see the book of Isaiah in three parts” is at the very least an exaggeration. There are many who do not believe this at all. This type of discussion would be anticipated in a college or seminary classroom, but debatable authorship issues are not necessary to present Isaiah to public school students. In fact, the space could have been used to further describe the biblical text or for more artwork.

There are a few editorial items. On page 238, under the heading “The Bible as Literature – Literary Features in the Gospel of Luke,” it says that Jesus’ birth was in Nazareth, instead of Bethlehem. On page 70, Miriam, Moses’ sister, is referred to as a prophet. This typically male usage describes other females in the textbook too. Although the duties, calling, etc. may be the same for both male and female, the Hebrew and Greek texts always add the feminine designations in the original texts so that we render it in English “Prophetess.” This suggestion has no gender roles in mind; it simply is consistent with the original text.

The review of *The Bible and Its Influence* has been done using the “Teacher’s Edition,” however, only the parts of the textbook that are related to the actual biblical text have been reviewed. Although some of the other “Teacher’s” notes were examined, no review of

pedagogical methods or techniques has been done. Even though there are many issues that hover in the background of a project such as this, only an examination of the consistency of the textbook with the content of Scripture has been undertaken.

As stated, there are many background issues. Perhaps the most troubling issue for those of the Judeo/Christian perspective is the opening of the proverbial “Pandora’s Box” regarding the introduction of “literature” from all sorts of religious groups including cults and even Satanism. The uneasiness that has been felt among most of those of the Judeo/Christian ethic and that has probably led to a reticence to adopt a particular “literature,” has been the fear that it will open the flood gates for all sorts of “religious literature” to be introduced and taught and that this will be court mandated under some sort of constitutional fairness doctrine. For those who see the writings of the Bible as sacred, to create the possibility that it could be, for instance, placed alongside Anton LaVey’s Satanic Bible and that it might appear to be equal in stature to that work is unthinkable.

Another major concern for people of faith has been the question of “who will teach the course and what will they teach?” The Bible Literacy Project, the publishers of *The Bible and Its Influence* provides university-based teacher training on how to teach the Bible in public schools. This is made available on-line for ease of access and gives credit to the teachers who complete the course. This is a commendable approach and can be of great help, but what are the safeguards that keep a teacher from presenting sectarian teachings?

There are other issues, but these two seem to best represent the attitude of apprehension about a project of this nature. Even with these apprehensions stated, hardly anyone denies that it is imperative that the Bible be reintroduced to our society and that its rich historical heritage and influence be shared. A great concern remains about how to present the Bible—something that is Holy Writ and sacred for so many—in such a way that its sacredness is preserved even when it is shared with those who do not hold that view.

Clearly, this project will be watched by many as it moves forward. What influence will *The Bible and Its Influence* have on our society? Only the Lord knows, and only time will tell.

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