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# THE JOURNAL

FOR BAPTIST THEOLOGY  
& MINISTRY

BAPTISTS  
IN DIALOGUE



A RESEARCH INSTITUTE OF NEW ORLEANS BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

# THE JOURNAL

## FOR BAPTIST THEOLOGY & MINISTRY

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# EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION: BAPTIST THEOLOGY & POLITY

DR. STEVE W. LEMKE

## AFFIRMING BAPTIST DISTINCTIVES

**H**ow important are the distinctive beliefs of Southern Baptists? At the Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry, we believe that standing strong on our core beliefs is crucial not only in maintaining our Baptist identity, but also in remaining faithful to the Scriptural teachings which are the source and authority for these distinctive doctrines.

In 1917, the founding faculty of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (then named Baptist Bible Institute) crafted a confessional statement known as *The Articles of Religious Belief*, since the school was founded before the first Baptist Faith and Message confessional statement was written in 1925. Every faculty member through the years at NOBTS has signed the same book affirming the confessional stance articulated in these documents. Article 10 of *The Articles of Religious Belief*, entitled “Baptist Loyalty to Distinctive Baptist Doctrines,” asserts the need for affirming Baptist beliefs.

We believe that Baptists stand for vital and distinctive truths, to many of which other denominations do not adhere, and that we cannot compromise these truths without disloyalty to the Scriptures and our Lord. We believe that we should co-operate with other denominations insofar as such co-operation does not affect these truths, but no union with them is possible, except on the basis of acceptance in full of the plain teachings of the Word of God.

*The Articles of Religious Belief* were written in an era which took Baptist distinctives very seriously, as was evidenced in the classic work edited by J. M. Frost and published in 1900, *Baptist Why and Why Not*. This “Baptist distinctives” literature, which was the focus of the dissertation research of Stan Norman, founder of the Baptist Center, sought to delineate the “lines of demarcation” between Baptists and other faith traditions. However, in our pluralistic age, strong ecumenical pressures are being brought to bear to minimize Baptist distinctives and to maximize our identity with other faith traditions. Much of the “name brand loyalty” that Baptists once accorded toward their denomination and its entities has evaporated. Events such as the “Together for the Gospel” conferences intentionally seek to join hands with believers across denominational lines, highlighting points of agreement and downplaying denominational distinctives.

What are the pressure points that could lead to compromising Baptist identity? Two of the key issues that have arisen recently which could possibly lead to a blurring of Baptist distinctives are the lean toward Reformed perspectives and the fascination with the Emerging/Emergent Church movement. Since these movements have been particularly attractive to many younger ministers. In the September 2006 issue of *Christianity Today*, the



cover page story by Collin Hansen was an article entitled “Young, Restless, Reformed,”<sup>1</sup> which dealt with two trends among younger evangelical ministers, including those within the Southern Baptist Convention. The primary focus of the issue was the Calvinistic turn of many young Baptist ministers toward Reformed traditions; a secondary focus was that many of these young Calvinists were also intrigued with the Emerging and Emergent Church.

These two topics – Calvinism and the Emerging/Emergent Church movement, were also the subject of our most recent Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry conferences on the campus of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Over the last few years, the Baptist Center has sponsored a conference in conjunction with the Greer-Heard Point-Counterpoint Forum, inviting Baptist college faculty and students to join NOBTS faculty and students to address key issues confronting Baptists. The conference has had a full house each year we have utilized this format.

#### SOUTHERN BAPTISTS AND CALVINISM

In February 2007, the theme of the conference was “Southern Baptists and Calvinism.” Given the well-documented turn by many young Baptist ministers toward the Reformed tradition, how far can one go toward the Reformed/Presbyterian tradition and still remain a Baptist? This is the subject that I as acting director of the Baptist Center attempted to answer in a paper entitled, “Baptists and Presbyterians: Nine Marks that Separate Baptists from Presbyterians.” In the paper, I provided three categories of comparison – beliefs that Baptists and Presbyterians share in common, beliefs that some Baptists share with Presbyterians, and beliefs that Baptists do not share with Presbyterians. Harkening back to the “Baptist distinctives” literature, the focus of the paper was to distinguish the areas of disagreement between Baptists and Presbyterians in order to delineate more clearly the “lines of demarcation” between these traditions.

The research for this paper utilized the Baptist distinctives identified in *Baptist Why and Why Not* (in which one chapter by T. S. Dunaway specifically addressed the distinction between Baptists and Presbyterians, and other several chapters contrasted Baptist doctrines from those in the Reformed tradition). The primary methodology of this study, however, was a careful comparison of the Second London Confession of 1689 and the virtually identical Philadelphia Confession of 1742 (both of which were authored by Calvinistic Particular Baptists) with the Westminster Confession of 1646, the doctrinal confession

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<sup>1</sup> Collin Hansen, “Young, Restless, Reformed,” *Christianity Today*, vol. 50, no. 9 (September 2006), available online at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/september/42.32.html> (posted 9/22/06). Hansen later published an expanded version of this article in *Young, Restless, Reformed: A Journalist's Journey with the New Calvinists* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008).

adopted by most American Presbyterians.<sup>2</sup> Since the Second London and Philadelphia confessions virtually quote the Westminster Confession word for word at many points, it is all the more remarkable when the Calvinistic Baptists diverged from the Reformed document. These divergences from the Westminster Confession (even by Calvinistic-leaning Particular Baptists) are the clearest mark of doctrines which divide Baptists from Presbyterians.

After my paper presentation, three theologians from Baptist college faculties participated in a roundtable panel discussion to provide responses to the ideas presented in my paper. The three panel participants were Dr. Mark Rathel, Associate Professor of Theology at the Baptist College of Florida (whom I had earlier incorrectly described as the "designated Calvinist" on our panel, but he has since corrected my impression, affirming that his position would be more accurately characterized as having learned from both the Calvinist and Arminian perspectives -- which from my perspective makes him a good Baptist!); Dr. Randy Hatchett, Professor and Chair of the Department of Christianity and Philosophy at Houston Baptist University; and Dr. Ken Gore, Associate Professor and Chair of the Division of Christian Ministries at Williams Baptist College. Each of the participants provided valuable insights, and we are grateful that they have provided their edited remarks for this issue of the *Journal*.

By the way, as a reminder, the Baptist Center is also 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. In addition to hearing from host Pastor and SBC President Johnny Hunt, the conference will feature legendary Southern Baptists preachers and former SBC Presidents Jerry Vines and Charles Stanley preaching sermons on the John 3:16 text. Southern Baptist scholars will then 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. The Baptist Center invites all interested Baptists to participate in this important conference.

THE EMERGING CHURCH, THE EMERGENT CHURCH,  
AND THE FAITH ONCE DELIVERED TO THE SAINTS

"The Emerging Church, the Emergent Church, and the Faith Once Delivered to the Saints," was the topic of the April 2008 Baptist Center conference, featuring a paper by Dr. Ed Stetzer, director of Lifeway Research. A prolific author and commentator on the Emerging and Emergent Church,<sup>3</sup> Stetzer provides a thoughtful and thorough analysis and

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<sup>2</sup> The Westminster Confession was created by the Westminster Assembly in 1664 in the midst of the English Civil War in an attempt to turn from the Episcopalianism of the Church of England to the Calvinism of both the Church of Scotland and Cromwell's Puritans. The Westminster Confession has been adopted (with minor revisions) by most American Presbyterian groups, including the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), and the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA).

commentary on the Emerging/Emergent Church movement in this paper. The audience at the Leavell Center was overflowing with students and faculty to hear Stetzer's presentation. There was also a roundtable discussion panel to interact with Stetzer's paper, consisting of Dr. Matt Pinson, President and Professor of Biblical and Ministry Studies at Free Will Baptist Bible College; Dr. Jack Allen, Assistant Professor of Church Planting and Director of the Cecil B. Day Center for Church Planting at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary; and Dr. Page Brooks, Assistant Professor of Theology and Islamic Studies at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Stetzer in this paper offers a thoughtful analysis and biblically faithful evaluation of the Emerging and Emergent Church movements that conservative evangelicals will find helpful in considering the appropriate response to the Emerging/Emergent Church movements.

#### FORMATIONAL DOCTRINAL ISSUES FOR BAPTISTS

The Fall 2008 issue of the *Journal* will focus on "Foundational Doctrinal Issues for Baptists." Contributors are welcome to submit articles or book reviews for this issue. Book reviews may be submitted to our book review editors: Dr. Dennis Phelps in ministry studies, Dr. Archie England in biblical studies, and Dr. Page Brooks in theological and historical studies. We are particularly honored to have a book review in this issue by Dr. James Leo Garrett, the legendary Baptist theologian from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Himself the author of a major two-volume work on Baptist theology entitled *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical* (which every Baptist should read), Dr. Garrett provides a thoughtful evaluation on one of the most significant new Baptist theology books in recent years, *A Theology of the Church*. Edited by Dr. Danny Akin, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, each chapter in *A Theology of the Church* is written by a faculty member at an SBC seminary or college, including chapters by Baptist Center founder Dr. Stan Norman ("Human Sinfulness") and former NOBTS faculty member Dr. Ken Keathley ("The Work of God: Salvation"). Many Baptist institutions will be utilizing

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<sup>3</sup> Ed Stezer, *Planting Missional Churches* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003); *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003); *Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches that Reach Them* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2009); "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); "Calvinism, Evangelism, and SBC Leadership," in *Calvinism: A Southern Baptist Dialogue*, ed. Brad Waggoner and E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2008); "Understanding the Emerging Church," *Baptist Press* (January 6, 2006); "Multicultural Teams in Church Planting," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, vol. 39, no.4 (October 2003):498-505; Ed Stetzer and David Putman, *Breaking the Missional Code: Your Church Can Become a Missionary in Your Community* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006); Ed Stetzer and Elmer Towns, *Perimeters of Light: Biblical Boundaries for the Emerging Church* (Chicago: Moody, 2004); Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2007); Ed Stetzer, Elmer Towns, and Warren Bird, *11 Innovations in the Local Church: How Today's Leaders Can Learn, Discern, and Move Toward the Future* (Ventura: Gospel Light, 2007); and Ed Stetzer and Philip Nation, *Compelled by Love: The Most Excellent Way to Missional Living* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2008).

this text over the next few years, thus making Dr. Garrett's insightful review all the more valuable.

We hope that this issue of the *Journal* gives greater clarity, definition, and strength to the distinctive beliefs for which Baptists have literally laid down their lives through the years. Baptists believe these doctrines for one very important reason – we believe that the Bible teaches them! Thank you for giving it your careful consideration.

In Christ,

Steve W. Lemke

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



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SECTION 1

SOUTHERN BAPTISTS  
& CALVINISM

“FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE  
GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, SO THAT  
WHOEVER WOULD BELIEVE IN HIM WOULD  
NOT PERISH BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE.”

JOHN 3:16

# WHAT IS A BAPTIST?

## NINE MARKS THAT SEPARATE BAPTISTS FROM PRESBYTERIANS

DR. STEVE W. LEMKE

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NEW ORLEANS BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

### INTRODUCTION

Baptists and Presbyterians are both products of the Protestant Reformation. They do not share precisely the same heritage, however, since Presbyterians arose from the Magisterial Reformation and Baptists arose from the Radical Reformation. Baptists arose in a separatist tradition, and suffered horrible persecution at the hands of Calvinist authorities. The primary reason that Baptists migrated to America, and that Roger Williams migrated from the Massachusetts Bay Colony to Rhode Island, was to avoid persecution (primarily from the hands of Calvinist authorities). Baptists who suffered bitter persecution and even laid down their lives at the hands of Presbyterians would be stunned that anyone could even ask the question of whether there is any significant difference between Baptists and Presbyterians.

At the same time, most early Baptists did affirm some key Calvinistic beliefs, particularly in the area of soteriology. Not all Baptists affirmed these beliefs (especially General Baptists and Free Will Baptists), but Particular Baptists and Hard Shell Baptists did affirm many points of a Calvinistic soteriology. So although the Baptist and Presbyterian traditions arose out from separate and independent roots, they became intertwined to some degree through the years. Baptists reflect a diversity of positions with regard to Calvinism.

Throughout its history, the Southern Baptist Convention has swung periodically toward and away from Calvinism. There has been a resurgence of Calvinism among Southern Baptists in the past few decades.<sup>1</sup> A “Together for the Gospel” conference highlighting Calvinist Baptist and Presbyterian speakers was held on the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary campus in April 2006, attracting over 3,000 attendees, and producing a

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<sup>1</sup>Keith Hinson, “Southern Baptists: Calvinism Resurging among SBC’s Elites,” *Christianity Today* (October 6, 1997); and Collin Hansen, “Young, Restless, and Reformed: Calvinism Is Making a Comeback – and Shaking Up the Church,” *Christianity Today* (September 22, 2006). The latter article, with a cover page picture of a person wearing a t-shirt with the words, “Jonathan Edwards Is My Homeboy,” has been widely circulated. For what it’s worth, Hansen described me as having “the most provocative comments in the SBC” regarding concerns about Calvinism. Clearly, many have said and are saying far harsher things than would I. In the phone interview, Hansen repeatedly tried to lead me to say negative things about Calvinism in general and a sister SBC seminary in particular, which I refused to do. However, his article portrays me as a naysayer to Calvinism, which does not reflect my position accurately.

“Together for the Gospel” document emphasizing shared beliefs of Baptists and Presbyterians.<sup>2</sup>

There are at least four streams of Calvinism in contemporary SBC life (which, like all such architectonics, are broadly descriptive but imprecise and somewhat overlapping) – Founder’s Movement Calvinists, Together for the Gospel Calvinists, Reformed Relevants, and Irenic Calvinists. *Founder’s Movement Calvinists* tend to look backward nostalgically to Calvinists of prior generations, to make their Calvinism the focal point of their ministries, to be rather assertive and defensive about their Calvinism, and to be less evangelistic than the average Southern Baptist church.<sup>3</sup> They primarily interact with and attend conferences with other Calvinists. *Together for the Gospel Calvinists* tend to be well-trained theologically, and they give careful attention to Calvinism as a doctrinal system. This branch has a number of persons in key positions of convention leadership, especially at the seminaries. *Reformed Relevants*<sup>4</sup> are less doctrinaire than Founder’s Movement Calvinists or Together for the

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<sup>2</sup>The Hansen article references this conference. For more information, see the Together for the Gospel web site at [www.t4g.org](http://www.t4g.org).

<sup>3</sup>In a study comparing the baptisms, worship attendance, and membership patterns of 233 Southern Baptist churches self-identified as Founder’s Fellowship-friendly churches (as listed on the Founder’s Fellowship website), the Founder’s Fellowship churches had considerably fewer baptisms, smaller congregations, and more declining membership than the average Southern Baptist Church. In 2004, not a single one of the 233 self-identified Founder’s Fellowship Southern Baptist Churches had 40 or more baptisms. Their baptism to member ratio was 1:62; it was 1:42 in the rest of the Southern Baptist Convention (the worst baptism ration in SBC history). Nearly a fourth of the Founder’s Fellowship churches had no baptisms at all in 2004, just over 60 percent had fewer than five baptisms, and over 80 percent of the Founder’s Fellowship churches had fewer than 10 baptisms in 2004. The Founder’s Fellowship churches also tended to be smaller than the average Southern Baptist church. Only eleven of the 233 churches had more than 1,000 members in 2004, and only one had regular worship attendance of 1,000 or more. Over 42 percent of the Founder’s Fellowship churches had 100 or fewer members, and over 60 percent had 200 or fewer members; in both categories the Founder’s Fellowship churches were dramatically smaller (by double digit percentages) than the typical Southern Baptist church. The Founder’s Fellowship churches were not only smaller, but also had 10 percent more plateaued or declining churches than the SBC as a whole. For more details, see Steve Lemke, “The Future of the Southern Baptist Convention as Evangelicals,” a paper presented at the Maintaining Baptist Distinctives Conference at Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary in April 2005, available online at <http://www.nobts.edu/Faculty/ItoR/LemkeSW/Personal/SBCfuture.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup>This nomenclature was suggested by Emergent Church leader Mark Driscoll, pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle, in “A Pastoral Perspective on the Emergent Church,” *Criswell Theological Review*, n. s., 3, no. 2 (Spring 2006):89-90. Driscoll is following Ed Stetzer’s threefold division of the Emergent Church movement into Relevants, Reconstructionists, and Revisionists. According to Driscoll, Relevants are “theologically conservative evangelicals who are not as interested in reshaping theology as much as updating such things



Gospel Calvinists. They tend to be less loyal to the SBC as a denomination, and tend to accommodate some Presbyterian practices such as openly drinking alcoholic beverages. *Irenic Calvinists* are Calvinistic in their doctrine, especially regarding some aspects of Calvinistic soteriology, but they do not share a Calvinistic missiology. They do not make their Calvinism a major issue in their ministries, and they give conscious attention to the effectiveness of means in missions and evangelism.

The resurgence of Calvinism has not been received positively by many within the SBC. Some seasoned and respected SBC leaders such as Adrian Rogers, Danny Akin, Paige Patterson, Bobby Welch, Nelson Price, and Frank Page have voiced concerns about where the current trajectory of Calvinism in the SBC will lead us.<sup>5</sup> John Connell of Georgia presented a motion at the 2006 SBC convention in Greensboro “that the Executive Committee be directed to establish a committee to study the present impact of Calvinism on Southern Baptist life; to assess what the future ramifications are likely to be; and to recommend any necessary course or courses of action.”<sup>6</sup>

Southern Baptists will be deciding in the next couple of decades what we are going to do with the resurgence of Calvinism in the Southern Baptist Convention. Pendulum swings are very common in human history, and there is always the danger of pendulums swinging too far in the opposite direction. Some questions we have to address are: “How far is the resurgence of Calvinism going to go in the SBC?” “What boundaries should alert us that the pendulum has swung too far in the opposite direction toward a stronger version of Calvinism?” “Will Baptist Calvinists distinguish themselves clearly and definitively from

as worship styles, preaching styles, and church leadership structures” (89). Their goal is to appeal to younger postmodern-minded persons. According to Driscoll, Reformed Relevants look to John Piper, Tim Keller, and D. A. Carson for theological direction.

<sup>5</sup>Adrian Rogers, “Predestined for Hell? Absolutely Not!” preached at Bellevue Baptist Church on August 23, 2003, available online from Love Worth Finding website at <http://resources.christianity.com/ministries/lwf/main/talkInfo.jhtml?id=16068>; Danny Akin, “The Danger of Loving a Theological System More Than a Savior,” chapel message delivered at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary on September 17, 2002, available online at <http://www.sebts.edu/president/resources/viewResource.cfm?ResourceID=63&CategoryID=114>; Paige Patterson, “Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God,” The Gurney Lectures on Evangelism at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, delivered March 2-4, 2004, available online at <http://www.nobts.edu/Chapel/Archives/Spring2004.html>, downloadable from the Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry at <http://baptistcenter.com/audiofiles.html>; Bobby Welch, “Calvinism and Christ’s Great Commission,” in the weekly newsletter of First Baptist Church in Daytona Beach, FL (July 10, 2005); Joni B. Hannigan, “Welch Reflects on Two Years of Leading Southern Baptists,” *Baptist Press*, June 6, 2006; Nelson Price, “Evangelical Calvinism Is an Oxymoron,” *The Christian Index* (November 23, 2006), with more on this subject at [www.nelsonprice.com](http://www.nelsonprice.com); and Frank Page, *Trouble with the Tulip: A Closer Examination of the Five Points of Calvinism* (Canton, GA: Riverstone Group Publishing, 2000).

<sup>6</sup>“Proceedings of the Southern Baptist Convention (June 13-14, 2006),” items 23 and 145, *2006 SBC Annual* (Nashville: Southern Baptist Convention, 2006), 59, 93.

Presbyterians?” “Will some varieties of Calvinism limit or hinder our evangelistic focus?” There would appear to be a strong possibility that the Southern Baptist Convention may become embroiled in what could be called the “battle of Geneva.” Calvinism could be the most explosive and divisive issue facing us in the near future. This issue has already split literally dozens of churches, and it holds the potential to split the entire Convention.

Now, knowing that this issue of Calvinism is a very “hot” and sensitive topic, before I proceed I want to make several things very clear. First of all, Calvinism is a valid expression of the Christian faith and of the Baptist tradition. Its popularity has risen and fallen through history, and today it is a minority view in the Southern Baptist Convention. But it is a valid and important perspective within the Baptist tradition. Second, let me again acknowledge, as I noted earlier, that there is not just one Calvinism, but many Calvinisms. Third, it is simply not the case that Calvinism does not have a long history in Southern Baptist life, as some have suggested.<sup>7</sup> Southern Baptist roots draw directly from the Particular Baptists and Regular Baptists, who were Calvinist in orientation. Fourth, although I’ve not been a cheerleader for the resurgence of Calvinism in the SBC, Calvinism has indeed made valuable contributions to Southern Baptist life. It has probably offered a healthy counterbalance and a useful corrective to the somewhat Arminian tendencies in the revivalism and the church growth movement within the SBC. In particular, it has rightly reminded us we must never fall into the heresy that our actions or methods accomplish salvation. Calvinism has also reminded us that evangelism is not accomplished as the result of a magic formula from some church growth guru. No revival takes place by human means alone; it is God that gives the increase (1 Cor. 3:6). So I want to be very clear that I am not challenging the validity of Calvinism within the Southern Baptist Convention.

The sections which follow detail some areas that Baptists and Presbyterians share in common, some areas that some Baptists share with Presbyterians, and some areas which Baptists are distinct and separate from Presbyterians.

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<sup>7</sup>Paul E. Robertson and Fisher Humphreys assert that “traditional Baptists are not Calvinists” and that “the first Baptists were not Calvinists.” See Paul E. Robertson and Fisher Humphreys, *God So Loved the World: Traditional Baptists and Calvinism* (New Orleans: Insight Press, 2000), 2. These claims seem difficult to justify in light of the significant influence that Calvinists have had on Baptists through the years.



BAPTISTS AND PRESBYTERIANS TOGETHER:  
NINE POINTS OF GENERAL AGREEMENT BETWEEN MOST BAPTISTS AND  
PRESBYTERIANS

Baptists, Presbyterians, and other conservative evangelicals<sup>8</sup> obviously share a significant group of core Christian beliefs (including the five “fundamentals” of biblical inerrancy, the deity and virgin birth of Christ, the bodily resurrection of Christ, and the return of Christ, as well as basic doctrinal affirmations on the nature of God, the Trinity, salvation through Christ alone, a complementarian view of the family, etc.). The list that follows will highlight nine key doctrinal issues which some have associated primarily with Presbyterian beliefs but in fact Baptists enthusiastically hold as well:

- *Sola Scriptura* – (BF&M, Article 1; *Westminster*, Article 1; *T4tG*, Articles 1-2)<sup>9</sup> – Scripture is the ultimate plumb line for all Christian truth claims. The *Baptist Faith and Message* affirms that the Bible is “the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried.”<sup>10</sup> The *Together for the Gospel* statement on Scripture correctly correlates the Baptist and Presbyterian affirmations of Scripture.<sup>11</sup> It is no accident that the *Baptist Faith and Message*, the *Westminster Confession*, and the *Together for the Gospel* statement all begin their doctrinal statements with the first article addressing the authority of Scripture as foundational for theology. Not only do conservative Baptists and Presbyterians affirm *Sola Scriptura*, but they also affirm the inerrancy, authority, and sufficiency of Scripture. The BF&M affirms that the Bible is “divinely inspired,” “a perfect treasure of divine instruction,” “totally true and trustworthy,” and the “supreme standard by which all human conduct,

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<sup>8</sup>“Baptists” in this paper is shorthand for the Baptist fellowship of which I am a part, the Southern Baptist Convention. It is not intended to be representative of other Baptist groups such as Free Will Baptists, American Baptists, or Baptist Missionary Association, although there are many points of commonality. “Presbyterians” in this paper is generic shorthand for conservative evangelical Presbyterians, such as PCA Presbyterians.

<sup>9</sup>The BF&M references refer to the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* unless otherwise noted. A helpful side-by-side comparison of the 1925, 1963, and 2000 *Baptist Faith and Message* statements is available at <http://www.sbc.net/bfm/bfmcomparison.asp>. *T4tG* is an abbreviation for the *Together for the Gospel* statement of “Affirmations and Denials,” which is available in English and German online at <http://www.t4g.org/T4TG-statement.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup>BF&M, Art. 1.

<sup>11</sup>Art. 1 of *T4tG* affirms “that the sole authority for the Church is the Bible, verbally inspired, inerrant, infallible, and totally sufficient and trustworthy. We deny that the Bible is a mere witness to the divine revelation, or that any portion of Scripture is marked by error or the effects of human sinfulness.”

creeds, and religious opinions be tried.” It has “truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter.”<sup>12</sup> The *Together for the Gospel* statement makes very similar affirmations.<sup>13</sup>

- *Soli Deo Gloria: The Primacy of the Glory of God* – (BF&M, Articles 2, 5, 13; *Westminster*, Article 2; *T4tG*, Articles 8, 18) -- The BF&M affirms that we owe God “the highest love, reverence, and obedience,”<sup>14</sup> and God’s electing grace is “the glorious display of God’s sovereign goodness.”<sup>15</sup> Christians are under obligation to be good stewards of their time, talents, and material possessions “for the glory of God.”<sup>16</sup> These statements are similar to those in the *Westminster Confession* and the *Together for the Gospel* statement.
- *Sola Gratia and Sola Fide (Salvation by Grace Alone)* -- (BF&M, Articles 3-5; *Westminster*, Articles 7, 10-12; *T4tG*, Articles 8, 12) – The BF&M affirms that election is “the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners.”<sup>17</sup> The *T4tG* statement likewise affirms God’s determination “to save his redeemed people by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to His glory alone.”<sup>18</sup> You don’t have to be a Presbyterian to believe in “the doctrines of grace” -- salvation by grace alone through faith alone (Eph. 2:8-10) is a foundational Baptist belief.
- *Solus Christus: Salvation through the Substitutionary Atonement of Christ Alone* -- (BF&M, Articles 2b, 4; *Westminster*, Article 8; *T4tG*, Articles 7, 10) – The BF&M affirms that Jesus provided for human redemption through His “substitutionary death on the cross”<sup>19</sup> and that “there is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.”<sup>20</sup> Likewise, the *Together for the Gospel* statement denies “that the substitutionary character of Christ’s atonement for sin can be compromised without serious injury to the Gospel or denied without repudiating the Gospel.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>BF&M, Art. 1.

<sup>13</sup>Art. 2 of the *Together for the Gospel* statement reads, “We affirm that the authority and sufficiency of Scripture extends to the entire Bible, and therefore that the Bible is our final authority for all doctrine and practice.”

<sup>14</sup>BF&M, Art. 2.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., Art. 5.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., Art. 13.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., Art. 5.

<sup>18</sup>*T4tG*, Art. 8.

<sup>19</sup>BF&M, Art. 2b.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., Art. 4.

<sup>21</sup>*T4tG*, Art. 7.

- *The Sovereignty of God over All His Creation* – (BF&M, Articles 2, 5, 9; *Westminster*, Articles 2-3, 11; *T4tG*, Articles 5, 8) -- The BF&M affirms that God is the “one and only one living and true God,” the “Creator, Redeemer, Preserver, and Ruler of the Universe” who is “infinite in holiness and all other perfections.”<sup>22</sup> God “reigns with providential care over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history.”<sup>23</sup> Salvation is “the glorious display of God’s sovereign goodness.”<sup>24</sup> The Kingdom of God includes God’s “general sovereignty over the universe and His particular kingship over men who willfully acknowledge Him as King.”<sup>25</sup> Presbyterians and five point Calvinists aren’t the only ones who believe in the sovereignty of God!<sup>26</sup>
- *The Divine Calling, Election, and Predestination of Believers to Salvation* (BF&M, Article 5; *Westminster*, Articles 3, 10; *T4tG*, Article 13) – The BF&M defines election as “the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners.”<sup>27</sup> While more explicit than the *T4tG* statement and less detailed than the *Westminster Confession* on election and predestination, the BF&M clearly affirms divine election and predestination of believers.
- *The Security of the Believer* -- (BF&M article 5; *Westminster* articles 17-18; not addressed specifically in *T4tG*) – The BF&M explicitly affirms the security of the believer: “All true believers persevere to the end. Those whom God has accepted in Christ . . . will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end.”<sup>28</sup> In language closely reminiscent of the *Westminster Confession*, the BF&M acknowledges that believers may

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<sup>22</sup>BF&M, Art. 2.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., Art. 2a.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., Art. 5.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., Art. 9.

<sup>26</sup>Some Calvinists, however, go to so such extremes in the name of exalting God’s sovereignty that they mistakenly and unbiblically accuse God of causing all things, including sin. R. C. Sproul Jr., for example, says, “Every Bible-believing Christian must conclude at least that God is some sense desired that man would fall into sin . . . . I am not accusing God of sinning; I am suggesting that he created sin.” R. C. Sproul Jr., *Almighty in Authority: Understanding the Sovereignty of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 53-54. Sproul Jr. describes God as “the Culprit” that caused Eve to sin in the garden (51). Sproul Jr.’s argument is that God changed Eve’s inclination to cause her to sin and thus created sin so that His mercy and wrath may be gloriously displayed. His views appear to be at variance with the *Westminster Confession*, which affirmed that God is not “the author of sin” (*Westminster Confession*, Art. 3, par. 1). See also Jas. 1:13-17.

<sup>27</sup>BF&M, Art. 5.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., Art. 5.

*“fall into sin through neglect or temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, and bring reproach on the cause of Christ and temporal judgments on themselves, yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.”*<sup>29</sup> Baptists and Presbyterians clearly are together on the security of the believer.

- *The Perfect Omniscience and Complete Foreknowledge of God* -- (BF&M, Article 2; Westminster, Article 2; T4tG, Article 5) – The BF&M affirms that God is “all knowing” and “His perfect knowledge extends to all things, past, present and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures.”<sup>30</sup> The BF&M 2000 presumably added some of this language in response to the recent ascent of freewill theism, which denies that God knows all future events. The T4tG statement likewise affirms that “God possesses perfect knowledge of all things, past, present, and future, including all human thoughts, acts, and decisions.”<sup>31</sup>
- *The Imperative of the Proclamation of the Gospel by the Church* -- (BF&M, Article 12; Westminster, Article 15; T4tG, Article 9) – The BF&M avers that it is “the duty and privilege of every follower of Christ and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to endeavor to make disciples of all nations.” Missionary efforts are a “spiritual necessity” that is “repeatedly commanded in the teachings of Christ,” especially “the preaching of the gospel to all nations.”<sup>32</sup> The T4tG statement also affirms that “the church is commissioned to preach and teach the Gospel to all nations,” but denies “that evangelism can be reduced to any program, technique, or marketing approach.”<sup>33</sup>

#### FLOWER POWER: POINTS OF AGREEMENT BETWEEN SOME BAPTISTS AND PRESBYTERIANS

In addition to these doctrines about which there is general agreement, there are some Calvinistic doctrines primarily related to soteriology which a minority of Baptists believes in common with most Presbyterians. Although these beliefs may be topics of intense discussion and debate among Baptists, these beliefs have a long history within the Baptist tradition and at some times and places have been the majoritarian perspective within Baptist life. Although Baptists are currently witnessing a resurgence of Calvinism to some degree, recent research suggests that only about 10 percent of full-time Southern Baptist pastors are

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid. Words in italics are identical to those in the *Westminster Confession*, Art. 17.

<sup>30</sup>BF&M, Art. 2.

<sup>31</sup>T4tG, Art. 5.

<sup>32</sup>BF&M, Art. 12.

<sup>33</sup>T4tG, Art. 9.

“five point Calvinists.”<sup>34</sup> While these Calvinistic beliefs are not currently the majority perspective among Southern Baptists, they are clearly within the broad spectrum of Baptist theology. Some hold to some of these doctrines but not others, and some Baptists hold to all these beliefs. These Calvinistic beliefs include the following.

- Total Depravity – Understood in the fully Calvinist sense, “total depravity” means that infants are born with original sin, and are thus “dead” spiritually (Eph. 2:1-3), and utterly incapable of responding to God without God’s election.
- Unconditional Election – Many Calvinists understand “unconditional election” to mean that salvation is provided by God without any involvement or free choice on the part of the sinner, counting any human response (even assent) as a work.
- Limited Atonement – Double predestination requires that God foreordains some to heaven and some to hell. So when Jesus died on the cross, He died only for the elect, not for all the sins of the world.
- Irresistible Grace – Because all of salvation is from God, the Calvinist system requires irresistible grace -- that God would even violate human freewill by forcing persons to believe in Him against their sinful wills, for these human wills are incapable of responding to God affirmatively apart from His enabling grace.
- Perseverance of the Saints – All Southern Baptist confessions affirm the security of the believer -- once someone is genuinely saved by God, they are saved for all eternity. Some Augustinians and Calvinists do seem to open the door for perseverance to be by works after justification has come by grace through faith.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>The study of 413 SBC pastors is documented in Libby Lovelace, “10 Percent of SBC Pastors Call Themselves 5-Point Calvinists,” *Baptist Press* (September 18, 2006), available online at <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?ID=23993>. In conversation with the researchers, they mentioned that the study addressed only full-time pastors. On further reflection, they thought that few of the large number of bivocational pastors in the SBC were five point Calvinists, and therefore they estimated the overall percentage of strongly Calvinistic pastors to be closer to 8 percent.

<sup>35</sup>Ken Keathley has raised concerns about the interpretation of the warning passages in Hebrews made by Thomas Schreiner and Ardel Caneday in *The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001) in a paper presented at the 2000 Southwest regional Evangelical Theological Society meeting at Criswell College. Schreiner and Caneday propose a “means-of-salvation” view of assurance in which one is saved *by* perseverance. See Ken Keathley, “Does Anyone Really Know If They Are Saved? A Survey of the Current Views on Assurance with a Modest Proposal,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 15, no. 28 (Spring 2002): 37-59; available online at <http://www.faithalone.org/journal/index.html#AUTUMN%202002>. Some Augustinians, Pelagians, and Semi-Pelagians separated election to salvation from election to perseverance. One could be elected to salvation without human agency (since it was provided gratuitously by God), but

It should be noted that Calvinistic Baptists who affirm the five points of the TULIP *still* do not completely affirm a thoroughgoing Calvinist soteriology. To be fully Calvinist or Presbyterian requires belief in a covenantal salvation whereby “not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one or both believing parents are to be baptized”<sup>36</sup> to remove original sin. I know of no Baptists who believe this; so even though it is the doctrine of salvation that Calvinistic Baptists find most attractive about Calvinism, they do not fully affirm Calvinist soteriology.

Most Baptists seem to be about two and a half point Calvinists (as am I);<sup>37</sup> although some Calvinists might dispute the way we count the points. We usually affirm *total depravity*, although often not in the same sense as Dortian Calvinism. Virtually all Baptists would affirm universal human sinfulness (apart from Christ) and the moral and spiritual depravity of all persons over the age of accountability. But while affirming the sinfulness of all mankind, most Baptists usually see some role for human response or “point of addressability,” as suggested in Romans 1 and 2. One can raise two questions about the Calvinist interpretation of Eph. 2:1-3. First, if one takes being “dead in trespasses and sins” literally, i.e., if “dead means dead,” then one can neither accept or reject Christ. Dead people cannot accept, but on the other hand, neither can they reject, either! Second, the language of spiritual deadness is not the only description of lostness used in Ephesians 2. This description should be balanced by the “aliens and strangers” metaphor (Eph. 2:11-22). Aliens are alive; they simply do not have the proper relationship as citizens in the Kingdom. *Unconditional election* is largely affirmed by Baptists, in the sense that all Baptists agree that salvation is by grace through faith, not by works. But while Baptists believe that salvation is wholly from God, they also believe that in the economy of God’s salvation He has chosen for human response to be prerequisite to actualizing salvation. Most Baptists view *limited atonement* as the least scriptural of the five affirmations (John 3:16-18, 1 Tim. 2:4-6; 4:10; 1 John 2:2), and this doctrine is rejected by most Baptists, except in a merely functional sense that Christ’s atonement is sufficient for all, but actualized only by the elect. *Irresistible grace* or effectual calling is also flatly denied by most Baptists, except for the affirmation that salvation is through grace alone. All Southern Baptists, however, affirm *perseverance of the saints*.

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once one became a Christian one regained full moral agency. Therefore, without election to perseverance one could still lose one’s salvation. See Rebecca Harden Weaver, *Divine Grace and Human Agency: A Study of the Semi-Pelagian Controversy*, Patristic Monograph Series (Atlanta: Mercer University Press, 1996).

<sup>36</sup>Westminster Confession, Art. 28, par. 4.

<sup>37</sup>For an excellent succinct evaluation of the five points of the “TULIP” from a perspective of Scripture and the Baptist Faith and Message 2000, see Malcolm B. Yarnell III, “The TULIP of Calvinism in Light of History and the Baptist Faith and Message,” *SBC Life* (April 2006), 9-10, available online at <http://www.sbclife.org/articles/2006/04/sla8.asp>. For an evaluation somewhat more sympathetic to Calvinism, see Daniel Akin, “Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: How Should Southern Baptists Respond to the Issue of Calvinism?” *SBC Life* (April 2006), 8, available online at <http://www.sbclife.org/articles/2006/04/sla8.asp>.



There are a variety of softer forms of Calvinism. Jacob Arminius, whose views are often set in apposition to those of John Calvin, was himself a devout Calvinist.<sup>38</sup> Many Calvinistic Baptists are attracted to the thought of Moise Amyraut (1596-1664 A.D.), a Calvinist who agreed with the Synod of Dort's declarations but sought to soften them by proposing what has come to be known as "hypothetical (or conditional) universalism." In Amyraldian Calvinism, God's desire is the salvation of all persons, and Jesus' atonement is at least hypothetically universally sufficient for the salvation of all persons, but is effectual just for the elect. So Christ's atonement was universal in its extent and intention, but particular in terms of its effect.<sup>39</sup>

Timothy George, himself a Calvinist, has provided a helpful alternative to the "TULIP" acronym of Synod of Dort Calvinism with a "ROSES" acronym of a softer version of Calvinism that is closer to what most Baptists believe.<sup>40</sup> "ROSES" stands for radical depravity, overcoming grace, sovereign election, eternal life, and singular redemption. Each of these phrases moves away from the harder Calvinism represented in the TULIP.

- *Radical Depravity* -- Compared with total depravity, *radical depravity* agrees that every aspect of our being was damaged through the Fall and we can do nothing to save ourselves, but affirms that humans are not totally evil because we retain the image of God despite our fallenness.
- *Overcoming Grace* – Compared with irresistible grace, *overcoming grace* (or effectual calling) affirms that God accomplishes salvation, but differs in that rather than salvation being a

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<sup>38</sup>For a helpful account of Arminius that deserves more attention, see Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan/Francis & Taylor, 1985). See also Mark A. Ellis, trans. and ed., *The Arminian Confession of 1621*, in the Princeton Theological Monograph Series (Eugene: Pickwick, 2005).

<sup>39</sup>See Andrew T. B. McGowan, "Amyraldianism," in *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*, ed. Trevor A. Hart (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 12-13. Some versions of Amyraldianism describe themselves as four point Calvinists or Christmas Calvinists (because there is no "eL"). A similar but different proposal is in Terrance L. Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved? Reassessing Salvation in Christ and World Religions* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004). Tiessen, himself a Calvinist, concedes to some "difficulties in Calvinism" regarding election, and proposes an alternative view of God's "universal sufficient enabling grace" (241-242), modifying the hypothetical universalism of Amyraut. In Tiessen's neo-Amyraldian "universal sufficient enabling grace," God provides everyone with a universal at-death revelatory experience with a final opportunity to confess Christ (239-258, 487-497). Since in Tiessen's proposal God's enabling grace is not efficacious and therefore not sufficient for salvation, it does not resolve the criticism voiced by Pascal that the problem with the (Jesuit) concept of "*sufficient grace*" was that it was *not sufficient* for salvation.

<sup>40</sup>Timothy George, *Amazing Grace: God's Initiative – Our Response* (Nashville: LifeWay, 2000), 71-83.

mechanical and deterministic process, it allows for even sinful, obstinate humans to respond to God's persistent wooing.

- *Sovereign Election* -- In contrast to the double predestinarianism of unconditional election, God sovereignly elects those whom He foreknows will respond to Him.
- *Eternal Life* -- The phrase "perseverance of the saints" might suggest that although we are saved by grace, we are kept by our good works. The phrase "Once saved, always saved" could suggest that we could claim Christ as Savior without making Him Lord of our lives. George prefers *eternal life* or eternal security to convey the scriptural truth of the assurance of the believer
- *Singular Redemption* -- Finally, unlike limited atonement, *singular redemption* communicates that Jesus' death was sufficient to save everyone but is efficient only for those who repent and believe.

While Calvinistic perspectives have a long history in Baptist life and Southern Baptists have always tolerated five-point Calvinism as a legitimate position within Baptist life, I do not believe that the majority of the Southern Baptist Convention will ever embrace or require five point Calvinism. If most Baptists really are between two and three point Calvinists, there are countervailing forces in the SBC which constitute a limit factor on Calvinism in the convention.

#### BAPTISTS AND PRESBYTERIANS NOT TOGETHER: NINE MARKS WHICH SEPARATE BAPTISTS FROM PRESBYTERIANS

Despite these many shared beliefs, there are some beliefs which one cannot abandon and still be called Baptist in any meaningful sense. Some current Baptists appear to enjoy fellowship with PCA Presbyterians more than with their fellow Southern Baptists, and even recommend that others join certain Presbyterian churches rather than Baptist churches in that area.<sup>41</sup> At some point, one crosses a Rubicon whereby one's beliefs simply align more closely with a Presbyterian confession than within a Baptist confession.

Actually, it is imprecise to say that virtually *any* Baptist is a Calvinist. A distinction can be drawn between a *Calvinist* (that is, someone who embraces all or most of the doctrines of Calvinism) and *Calvinistic* (that is, someone who embraces some doctrines of Calvinism), some Baptists might count as Calvinistic, but not Calvinist. Richard A. Muller, whose Calvinist credentials are indisputable (a *Calvinist* who was a member of the *Calvin*

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<sup>41</sup>Mark Dever created a "9 Marks" organization, so named for the nine marks that he considers most important in a church. His web site <http://churchsearch2.9marks.org/> recommends churches that meet these standards in each state, in many cities recommending non-SBC churches (often Presbyterian churches) over SBC churches in the same city. Dever was nominated but not elected as First Vice President of the Southern Baptist Convention at the 2006 SBC convention in Greensboro.

College faculty writing an article for the *Calvin Theological Journal*), makes fun of evangelicals such as Baptists who think of themselves as Calvinists simply because they believe in the five points of Calvinist soteriology:

I once met a minister who introduced himself to me as a “five-point Calvinist.” I later learned that, in addition to being a self-confessed five-point Calvinist, he was also an anti-paedobaptist who assumed that the church was a voluntary association of adult believers, that the sacraments were not means of grace but were merely “ordinances” of the church, that there was more than one covenant offering salvation in the time between the Fall and the *eschaton*, and that the church could expect a thousand-year reign on earth after Christ’s Second Coming but before the end of the world. He recognized no creeds or confessions of the church as binding in any way. I also found out that he regularly preached on the “five points” in such a way as to indicate the difficulty in finding assurance of salvation: He often taught his congregation that they had to examine their repentance continually in order to determine whether they had exerted themselves enough in renouncing the world and in “accepting” Christ. This view of Christian life was totally in accord with his conception of the church as a visible, voluntary association of “born again” adults who had “a personal relationship with Jesus.”

In retrospect, I recognize that I should not have been terribly surprised at the doctrinal context or at the practical application of the famous five points by this minister – although at the time I was astonished. After all, here was a person, proud to be a five-point Calvinist, whose doctrines would have been repudiated by Calvin. In fact, his doctrines would have gotten him tossed out of Geneva had he arrived there with his brand of “Calvinism” at any time during the late sixteenth or the seventeenth century. Perhaps, more to the point, his beliefs stood outside of the theological limits presented by the great confessions of the Reformed churches – whether the Second Helvetic Confession of the Swiss Reformed church or the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism of the Dutch Reformed churches or the Westminster standards of the Presbyterian churches. He was, in short, an American evangelical.<sup>42</sup>

Muller disdained Particular Baptists such as John Gill (called “hyper-Calvinist” by some for his rather extreme views) because he did not embrace the rest of the Calvinist doctrines.<sup>43</sup> To be a Calvinist requires much more than the five points often associated with the Synod of Dort. For Muller, to be truly a Calvinist requires the affirmation of other beliefs such as the baptism of infants, the identification of sacraments as means of grace, and an amillennial eschatology. When these additional Calvinist doctrines “are stripped away or forgotten,” Muller laments, “the remaining famous five make very little sense.”<sup>44</sup> I must

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<sup>42</sup>Richard A. Muller, “How Many Points?” *Calvin Theological Journal* 28, no. 2 (November 1993):425-426.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 428.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

confess that at times I might have to suppress a sense of *shadenfreude*<sup>45</sup> to see some purportedly Calvinistic Baptists persecuted or cast out of Geneva for their heretical non-Calvinist beliefs!

What does it mean to be distinctively Baptist? In Article 10, entitled “Baptist Loyalty to Distinctive Baptist Doctrines,” of *The Articles of Religious Belief*, a doctrinal confession written and signed by the founding faculty of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (then named Baptist Bible Institute) in 1917 before the first *Baptist Faith and Message* was written in 1925, asserts the need for affirming Baptist beliefs.

We believe that Baptists stand for vital and distinctive truths, to many of which other denominations do not adhere, and that we cannot compromise these truths without disloyalty to the Scriptures and our Lord. We believe that we should co-operate with other denominations insofar as such co-operation does not affect these truths, but no union with them is possible, except on the basis of acceptance in full of the plain teachings of the Word of God.<sup>46</sup>

Baptists have stood strongly for these distinctive Baptist beliefs, from *Baptist Why and Why Not*<sup>47</sup> at the beginning of the twentieth century to Stan Norman’s *More Than Just a Name: Preserving Our Baptist Identity*<sup>48</sup> at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Two major historical sources provide us with the starting point for understanding the distinction between Baptists and Presbyterians. First, the *Second London Confession* and the *Philadelphia Confession* were produced by the Particular Baptists, the more Calvinistic strain of Baptist heritage. In these confessions, they followed the language of the Presbyterian *Westminster Confession* rather closely, often following it section by section exactly word for word. Therefore, when the *Second London Confession* and the *Philadelphia Confession* change the language of the *Westminster Confession*, it is all the more remarkable. Each of these changes marks a significant departure by even the Calvinistically-oriented Particular Baptists from Calvinist Presbyterian doctrine. These departures from the *Westminster Confession* mark the irreducible minimum differences between Baptists and Presbyterians. The second major

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<sup>45</sup>For my non-Germanic readers, *shadenfreude* is taking a perverse delight in the discomfort of others.

<sup>46</sup>*The Articles of Religious Belief* is available through a Seminary catalog or an online version of the NOBTS catalog at [www.nobts.edu](http://www.nobts.edu).

<sup>47</sup>J. M. Frost, ed., *Baptist Why and Why Not* (Nashville: Sunday School Board, 1900).

<sup>48</sup>R. Stanton Norman, *More Than Just a Name: Preserving Our Baptist Identity* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2001). Norman identifies six overarching Baptist distinctives: authority, church, ordinance, polity, competency, and freedom. See also R. Stanton Norman, *The Baptist Way: Distinctives of a Baptist Church* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2005); and John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005).

source is in the classic Baptist text *Baptist Why and Why Not*, edited by J. M. Frost,<sup>49</sup> which includes a chapter authored by T. S. Dunaway devoted to the topic, “Why Baptist and Not Presbyterian,” and other articles on distinctive Baptist doctrines. The beliefs which move outside the Baptist confession and align more closely with a Presbyterian tradition include the following:

- *Mark 1: Soul Competency/Priesthood of All Believers/Religious Liberty* (not Established Church, Christian Reconstructionism, Theocratic Dominionism, or Theonomy)

Calvin’s original model for Presbyterianism in Geneva was as an established state religion, a theocracy. When Presbyterians and their Congregationalist successors arrived in New England, they imposed the strictest limitations on religious liberty in the New World. After fighting a long rear guard action against religious liberty, the New England states were the last to relinquish Congregationalism as the established church. Even in the last fifty years, conservative Presbyterians such as R. J. Rushdoony have headed a movement known variously as Christian Reconstructionism, Theocratic Dominionism, or Theonomy, which would put the church in charge of civil government.<sup>50</sup> So Presbyterians have not been at the forefront of the fight for religious liberty.

It is an established fact of history that religious liberty is a doctrine most associated with Baptists. From our inception, Baptists have been separatists rather than establishmentarians; advocating religious liberty rather than the establishment of a state church. Many Baptists came to America seeking to avoid the religious persecution they had experienced in Europe, only to find it transported to America as well. Roger Williams, pastor of the first Baptist church in America, was exiled to Rhode Island from the Massachusetts Bay Colony because of his religious convictions. He wrote *The Bloody Tenet of Persecution* (1644) and *The Bloody Tenet of Persecution, Made Yet More Bloody* (1652) to protest the religious persecution in Massachusetts, driven by the established Congregationalist church of which Jonathan Edwards was a key leader. Imprisonment, taxation, whipping, and seizure of property were commonplace vehicles of persecution. John Clarke, who detailed persecution by Calvinist authorities in *Ill News from New England*, was imprisoned with

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<sup>49</sup>T. S. Dunaway, “Why Baptist and Not Presbyterian,” in *Baptist Why and Why Not*, 127-136. Other articles in this volume relevant to the issues at hand are “Why Baptism of Believers and Not Infants,” by R. P. Johnston, 151-162; “Why Immersion and Not Sprinkling or pouring,” by C. A. Stakely, 163-180; “Why Baptism as Symbol and Not a Saving Ordinance,” by J. B. Moody, 181-192; “Why a Converted Church Membership,” by J. O. Rust, 205-224; “Why Local Churches and Not State Church,” by G. B. Eager, 267-278; “Why the Baptist Doctrine,” by F. H. Kerfoot, 351-360; “Why Loyalty to Baptist Doctrine,” by H. F. Sproles, 361-378; “Why the Baptist Sentiment,” by W. E. Hatcher, 379-390; and “Why Become a Baptist,” by David M. Ramsey, 391-408. The volume also includes a popular Baptist doctrinal declaration of faith statement crafted by J. Newton Brown, 409-430; and the well-known “Church Covenant” that was printed and posted in many Baptist churches, 431-432.

<sup>50</sup>The classic presentation of this position is in R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, 3 vols. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1973).

Obadiah Holmes for the “sin” of ministering in Massachusetts. Holmes was also brutally whipped thirty times with a three-pronged whip. Governor Endicott explained that these Baptist ministers were being imprisoned because they “denied infant baptism” and that they “deserved death.”<sup>51</sup> Isaac Backus, originally a Congregationalist deeply influenced by Jonathan Edwards’ theology, helped restore Calvinistic theology to the Separate Baptists. But he was tireless in writing tracts and petitions for religious liberty in Connecticut. His mother, like many Baptists, was imprisoned for thirteen weeks for refusing to pay the tax for the established Congregationalist church.<sup>52</sup>

The Baptist leader John Leland, after playing a key role in winning religious freedom in Virginia and helping obtain the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, moved back to Massachusetts and experienced even more persecution. He wrote tracts such as *The Rights of Conscience Inalienable; and therefore Religious Opinions not Cognizable by Law: Or, The High-flying Churchman, Stript of His Legal Robe, Appears a Yahoo* (1791), in which he called for religious liberty in Connecticut for not only Baptists but for “Jews, Turks, heathen, papists, or deists.”<sup>53</sup> He even brought a 1,200 pound block of cheese to the White House on January 1, 1802, to lobby President Jefferson for religious liberty.<sup>54</sup> The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment of the Constitution became law in 1791, but the Presbyterian/Congregationalist established churches in the New England states doggedly fought against disestablishment, and Massachusetts did not disestablish the Congregationalist state church until 1833.<sup>55</sup> So while Baptists were at the forefront of the fight for religious liberty, Presbyterian/Congregationalists fought it in a delaying action for four decades after the First Amendment granted freedom of religion.

Baptists saw the need for religious freedom not just from their own experiences, but from their convictions about soul competency (individual responsibility and accountability

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<sup>51</sup>William R. Estep, *Revolution within the Revolution: The First Amendment in Historical Context, 1612-1789* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 86-92.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 97-119.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 157-170. John Leland, *The Rights of Conscience Inalienable; and therefore Religious Opinions not Cognizable by Law: Or, The High-Flying Churchman, Stript of His Legal Robe, Appears a Yahoo*, is available online at <http://classicliberal.tripod.com/misc/conscience.html>.

<sup>54</sup>Stephen Waldman, “The Framers and the Faithful: How Modern Evangelicals Are Ignoring Their Own History,” *Washington Monthly* (April 2006), available online at <http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2006/0604.waldman.html>.

<sup>55</sup>An excellent survey of disestablishment of state churches is provided by Carl Esbeck, “Dissent and Disestablishment: The Church-State Settlement in the Early American Republic,” *Brigham Young University Law Review* (February 6, 2004), 1-69; available online at [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa3736/is\\_200402/ai\\_n9474018/pg\\_1](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3736/is_200402/ai_n9474018/pg_1). Esbeck notes that for John Adams in 1775, disestablishing the state church was about as likely as dislodging the planets from their orbits in the solar system (p. 44).



before God), the priesthood of all believers, believer's baptism, and a gathered church.<sup>56</sup> Only in a setting of religious freedom could individuals be free to actualize these foundational Baptist beliefs.

- *Mark 2: Age of Accountability (not Original Sin as Inherited Guilt)*

The Presbyterian perspective on personal accountability flows from its conviction about original sin. According to the *Westminster Confession*, from the sin of Adam and Eve “the guilt of the sin was imputed, and corrupted nature conveyed, to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation,”<sup>57</sup> and “[e]very sin, both original and actual, being a transgression of the righteous law of God, and contrary thereunto, does in its own nature, bring guilt upon the sinner, whereby he is bound over to the wrath of God, and curse of the law, and so made subject to death, with all miseries spiritual, temporal, and eternal.”<sup>58</sup> Infant baptism is a logical corollary of the belief that children are guilty of sin since birth: “Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one or both believing parents are to be baptized.”<sup>59</sup>

Baptists have not typically understood the impact of Adam and Eve's sin in the Presbyterian way. While the Calvinistic *Second London* and *Philadelphia* confessions repeat much of the *Westminster Confession* language as an attestation to the profound impact of the Fall, the focus appears to be placed on actual sins rather than inherited guilt: through the “original corruption” of Adam we are “inclined to all evil,” and from this proclivity we commit “actual transgressions.”<sup>60</sup> More noticeably, both these Calvinistic Baptist confessions delete the affirmation of the *Westminster Confession* that “Every sin, both original and actual . . . [brings] “guilt upon the sinner.”<sup>61</sup> All standard Baptist confessions of faith point to fallen human nature having a strong disposition or proclivity toward sin. For example, the *BF&M* affirms that Adam's posterity “inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin.”<sup>62</sup> However, Baptist confessions tend not to use the term “original sin” by name, and two Baptist confessions explicitly deny it. John Smyth in his *Short Confession* of 1609 affirmed, “That there is no original sin (lit., no sin of origin or descent), but all sin is actual and voluntary, viz., a word, a deed, or a design against the law of God; and therefore,

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<sup>56</sup>*BF&M*, Art. 17. For more, see G. B. Eager, “Why Local Churches and Not State Church,” in *Baptist Why and Why Not*, 267-278.

<sup>57</sup>*Westminster Confession*, Art. 6, par. 3.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, Art. 6, par. 6.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, Art. 28, par. 4.

<sup>60</sup>*Westminster Confession*, *Second London Confession*, and *Philadelphia Confession*, Art. 6, par. 4 in each confession.

<sup>61</sup>*Westminster Confession*, Art. 6, par. 6.

<sup>62</sup>*BF&M*, Art. 3.

infants are without sin.”<sup>63</sup> Likewise, the *Short Confession of Faith* of 1610 affirmed that *none* of Adam’s posterity “are guilty, sinful, or born in original sin.”<sup>64</sup> The focus is on guilt from actual chosen sin, not inherited guilt.

The *Westminster*, *Second London*, and *Philadelphia* confessions all allow for the divine election of “infants dying in infancy” and persons “who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word.”<sup>65</sup> The *Second London* and *Philadelphia* confessions, however, delete the *Westminster Confession*’s allowance for infants to be baptized, asserting instead that only “those who do actually profess repentance towards God, faith in, and obedience to, our Lord Jesus Christ, are the *only* proper subjects of this ordinance.”<sup>66</sup>

The age of accountability is a key but often overlooked Baptist doctrine. It is presupposed by the concept of soul competency, and is propaedeutic to other Baptist beliefs such as believer’s baptism and the gathered church. All three *BF&M* statements assert that “as soon as they are capable of moral action” they become “transgressors” and are under condemnation.<sup>67</sup> While it may be more of a “state” of being accountable rather than an “age” of accountability, apart from mentally challenged individuals this state of accountability is normally associated with a “coming of age.” No specific age is given; it is assumed that individual children mature at different paces from each other. By affirming the age of accountability, Baptists deny that children are guilty upon birth, and so deny infant baptism. Only those who are of age for moral accountability are capable of recognizing their own sinfulness, the first step toward salvation in Christ. One cannot be born into the church by physical birth, although a Christian upbringing clearly affords wonderful opportunities for young people to grow up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. However, children are not saved by their parents’ confession. Each person must make his or her own profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; children are not included in some broader involuntary covenant.

Popular contemporary Presbyterians such as R. C. Sproul reject the notion that children below the age of accountability who die go to heaven. Sproul chided Billy Graham for comforting the victims of the Oklahoma City bombing (which included many victims from a children’s day care center) with these words: “Someday there will be a glorious reunion with those who have died and gone to heaven before us, and that includes all those innocent children that are lost. They’re not lost from God because any child that young is automatically in heaven and in God’s arms.” Sproul insisted that since we are born guilty of original sin, and infants have no opportunity for justification by faith, they have no real hope

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<sup>63</sup>John Smyth, *Short Confession of Faith in 20 Articles*, Art. 5.

<sup>64</sup>*A Short Confession of Faith* (1610), Art. 4.

<sup>65</sup>Art. 10, par. 3 in the *Westminster Confession*, *Second London Confession*, and *Philadelphia Confession*.

<sup>66</sup>*Second London Confession*, Art. 29, par. 2; *Philadelphia Confession*, Art. 30, par. 2.

<sup>67</sup>*BF&M* 1925, 1963, and 2000, Art. 3.

of salvation. He accused Graham of advocating “a new gospel – justification by youth alone.”<sup>68</sup> Sproul's article was infamous in that not only did this article result in quickly setting the record for letters to the editor, but in setting this record not a single one of these letters affirmed Sproul's position. Baptists have always believed that since infants are not yet capable of actual sin, they go to heaven.<sup>69</sup>

- *Mark 3: Believer's Baptism/the Gathered Church (not Infant Baptism)*

One of the most obvious changes in the *Second London* and *Philadelphia* confessions from the *Westminster Confession* regards believer's baptism. According to the *Westminster Confession*, “Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one or both believing parents are to be baptized.”<sup>70</sup> In clear contradistinction from this statement, the *Second London* and *Philadelphia* confessions affirm, “Those who do actually profess repentance towards God, faith in, and obedience to, our Lord Jesus Christ, are the *only* proper subjects of this ordinance (Mark 16:16; Acts 8:36, 37, 2:41, 8:12, 18:8).<sup>71</sup> The affirmation of believer's baptism is in all major Baptist confessions, including all three *Baptist Faith and Message statements*.<sup>72</sup> Likewise, the *Westminster Confession* defined the visible church as consisting “of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion,” together with “*their children*.”<sup>73</sup> The *Second London* and *Philadelphia* confessions defined the church as consisting of “[A]ll persons throughout the world, professing the faith of the gospel, and obedience unto God by Christ according unto it . . . and of such ought all particular congregations to be constituted (Rom. 1:7; Eph. 1:20-22).”<sup>74</sup> Obviously, the

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<sup>68</sup>R. C. Sproul, “Comfort Ye My People—Justification by Youth Alone: When Does Comfort Become Confusion?” *World* (May 6, 1995).

<sup>69</sup>See Daniel L. Akin and R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “Why We Believe that Infants Who Die Go to Heaven,” available online at Dr. Akin's website at <http://www.sebts.edu/president/resources/viewFile.cfm?DocumentID=422>.

<sup>70</sup>Believer's baptism was the first distinction between Baptists and Presbyterians that T. S. Dunaway addressed in “Why Baptist and Not Presbyterian,” in *Baptist Why and Why Not*, 127-136. Dunaway cited Presbyterian theologian Charles Hodge that “children of one or both believing parents” are proper candidates for baptism (131-132), and the *Book of Church Order* adopted by the Presbyterian General Assembly of 1879 that “the infant seed of believers are through the covenant and by right of birth members of the church” and thus “entitled to baptism” (132). See also R. P. Johnston, “Why Baptism of Believers and Not Infants,” 151-162; and J. O. Rust, “Why a Converted Church Membership,” 205-224, in *Baptist Why and Why Not*.

<sup>71</sup>*Second London Confession*, Art. 29, par. 2; *Philadelphia Confession*, Art. 30, par. 2.

<sup>72</sup>BF&M, Art. 7.

<sup>73</sup>*Westminster Confession*, Art. 25, par. 2.

<sup>74</sup>*Second London Confession*, Art. 26, par. 2; *Philadelphia Confession*, Art. 27, par. 2.

Baptist confessions omitted the children of church members from membership until they had made their own profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord. The Baptist confessions speak of a “gathered” church. The three editions of the Baptist Faith and Message follow the New Hampshire Confession in describing the church as consisting of “baptized believers.”<sup>75</sup>

It is, after all, because of Baptists’ distinctive practice of baptizing new believers (rather than sprinkling infants) that separated us from other Reformation denominations. And it was this practice that gave us the name “Anabaptists” (baptize again) or, more simply, Baptists. Believer’s baptism is central to our identity as Baptists. The notion of sprinkling of infants to wash away their original sin is repugnant to Baptists throughout our history. This is not a peripheral issue for Baptists. Baptists have literally given their lives for this belief at the hands of Calvinist authorities. The New Testament is utterly bereft of any reference to infant baptism, and thus it is one of the most unbiblical Presbyterian doctrines.

However, some modern-day Baptists understand believer’s baptism to be a secondary or peripheral issue or deny it altogether. Just how important is this issue? Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr. has provided a helpful rubric for considering this issue. In “A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity,”<sup>76</sup> Mohler calls for a more careful delineation of first-order, second-order, and third-order theological issues, urging Christians to be more unified around the first-order beliefs. His distinction between first-order doctrines and second-order doctrines is that “believing Christians may disagree on the second-order issues.” Mohler clearly appears to be applying the old medieval dictum: “In the essentials, unity; in the non-essentials, diversity; in all things, charity.” Of course, all Christians should affirm oneness in Christ, as Jesus called us to practice (John 17:20-23).

The key issue is, however, which doctrines are essential and which doctrines are non-essential? The first-order beliefs listed by Mohler include such “essential” and “crucial” doctrines as the Trinity, the full humanity and deity of Christ, justification by faith, and the authority of Scripture. Among the issues Mohler lists as secondary is “the meaning and mode of baptism.” While noting that Baptists and Presbyterians “fervently disagree over the most basic understanding of Christian baptism,” Mohler asserts that “Baptists and Presbyterians eagerly recognize each other as believing Christians.”

The doctrine of salvation must obviously be listed among the “essential” beliefs. However, might not Mohler’s proposal be enhanced by adding believer’s baptism (or the age of accountability) as a first order belief, since it is so closely tied to a Baptist understanding of salvation? Clearly, Baptists deny belief in baptismal regeneration – that baptism is required for salvation. Baptism is a symbol of a salvific event that has already taken place. Nonetheless, the point is that for Baptists, persons are not viewed as saved (and thus

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<sup>75</sup>*BF&M*, Art. 6.

<sup>76</sup>Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity,” in *Baptist Press* (August 23, 2006), available online at <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?ID=23842>; and at Dr. Mohler’s web site at [http://www.albertmohler.com/commentary\\_print.php?cdate=2005-07-12](http://www.albertmohler.com/commentary_print.php?cdate=2005-07-12)).

candidates for baptism) until they have repented of their sins and placed their faith personally and consciously in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. This is impossible for infants. The question at stake is whether Baptists would recognize Presbyterian infants as saved Christians on the basis of their infant baptism. So while the mode of baptism is indeed an important but secondary issue, do any of Mohler's "essentials" rule out declaring that a Presbyterian infant who has been sprinkled is *saved* (or, for that matter, that the infant was *lost* before the age of accountability)?<sup>77</sup> If Mohler's "essentials" were applied literally, could not these guidelines imply that we should not recognize as a Christian a fervent, mature Pentecostal Christian who affirms Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord but has a defective view of the Trinity, while we would "eagerly recognize" a sprinkled Presbyterian infant as a Christian? Most Baptists would not recognize the salvation of those sprinkled as infants, and would be very reluctant to relegate the meaning of baptism as only for *believers* to be merely a secondary issue, because what is at stake is the doctrine of salvation. Modern day Baptists should not compromise this soteriological issue and count it as merely a peripheral issue. Baptists in prior generations suffered persecution and even martyrdom from Calvinist and Catholic authorities in defense of their beliefs. Clearly, their convictions were that believer's baptism was an essential rather than secondary issue.

What about those who would deny believer's baptism altogether? Suppose that a very bright and popular faculty member employed at an SBC seminary resigned his position in large measure because he came to have Presbyterian convictions and baptized his infant children as a matter of conviction. However, what if in conversation with other faculty members he came to understand that his views were at variance with Baptist beliefs, and he later joined the faculty of a Presbyterian seminary. Would this be a significant issue for someone teaching or pastoring in Southern Baptist life? I believe that is a significant issue. Baptizing those who are not yet the age of accountability and have not affirmed Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is a crucial soteriological issue, not merely a secondary ecclesiological one.

- Mark 4: Baptism by the Mode of Immersion (not Sprinkling or Pouring)

The *Second London* and *Philadelphia* confessions differ strikingly from the *Westminster Confession* regarding the mode of baptism. According to the *Westminster Confession*, "Dipping

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<sup>77</sup>One might suggest that "justification by faith" would be sufficient to deny infant baptism. However, without desiring to be uncharitable to Dr. Mohler, he is a key signatory along with many Presbyterians of the *Together for the Gospel* document, in which Article XII affirms, "We affirm that sinners are justified only through faith in Christ, and that justification by faith alone is both essential and central to the Gospel," and denies "that any teaching that minimizes, denies, or confuses justification by faith alone can be considered true to the Gospel." Since many Presbyterians (who affirm infant baptism because of their covenant theology) also signed this document, justification by faith is apparently not a clear enough standard to rule out infant baptism. *Clearly, Dr. Mohler is not an advocate of infant baptism.* As he affirms, Baptists and Presbyterians "fervently disagree over the most basic understanding of Christian baptism." Therefore, it would enhance his proposal to add believer's baptism (or the age of accountability) to his list of first-order doctrinal essentials.

of the person into the water is not necessary; but baptism is rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling water upon the person.”<sup>78</sup> In stark contrast to this Presbyterian mode of baptism, the *Second London* and *Philadelphia* confessions affirm that “immersion, or dipping of the person in water, is necessary to the due administration of this ordinance (Matt. 3:16; John 3:23).”<sup>79</sup> Baptism by immersion is again affirmed in Article 7 of the *BFC&M*.

Like all distinctive Baptist beliefs, believer’s baptism is not merely a tradition, but arises out of a careful reading of God’s Word. The Greek word *baptizo* literally means to immerse in water. Since many early translations of the Bible into English were done by persons from denominations which practice sprinkling, rather than translate the word *baptizo* as “immerse,” they transliterated it into a new anglicized version of the word, “baptize.” However, the main scriptural reason for affirming that baptism should be by immersion is what baptism signifies. According to Rom. 6:1-11, the proper symbol of baptism is not washing away sin, but of death, burial, and resurrection. Baptism looks back to the past as a memorial and reminder of Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection. As Paul affirms, “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death” (Rom. 6:3-4). Regarding the present, baptism symbolizes the death to the old self and the resurrection to the new life in Christ. Paul refers several times to this symbol of our old sinful nature being “crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Rom 6:6), but “should walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). We should therefore reckon ourselves, Paul says, “to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:11). Baptism also looks forward to the resurrection at the end of time, for “if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection” (Rom. 6:5).

There are some Baptists today, however, who are willing to compromise this distinctive Baptist belief that even the Calvinistic Particular Baptists required. For example, John Piper, Pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, (a Baptist General Conference church rather than an SBC church, but Piper is popular among many younger Southern Baptist pastors) presented a paper to the church’s elders in January 2002 called, “Twelve Theses on Baptism and Its Relationship to Church Membership, Church Leadership, and Wider Affiliations and Partnerships of Bethlehem Baptist Church.” In this paper, Piper proposed the following amendment concerning the requirement for baptism for membership in the church:

Therefore, where the belief in the Biblical validity of infant baptism does not involve baptismal regeneration or the guarantee of saving grace, this belief is not viewed by the elders of Bethlehem Baptist Church as a weighty or central enough departure

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<sup>78</sup>*Westminster Confession*, Art. 28, par. 3.

<sup>79</sup>*Second London Confession*, Art. 29, par. 4; *Philadelphia Confession*, Art. 30, par. 4. Dunaway cites the findings of the 1894 Presbyterian General Assembly that “Baptism by immersion is not Scriptural as to its mode,” in Dunaway, “Why Baptist and Not Presbyterian,” in *Baptist Why and Why Not*, 131. See also C. A. Stakely, “Why Immersion and Not Sprinkling or Pouring,” in *Baptist Why and Why Not*, 163-180.



from Biblical teaching to exclude a person from membership, if he meets all other relevant qualifications and is persuaded from Bible study and a clear conscience that his baptism is valid. In such a case we would not require baptism by immersion as a believer for membership but would teach and pray toward a change of mind that would lead such members eventually to such a baptism.<sup>80</sup>

The doctrinal confession of the Baptist General Conference of which Bethlehem Baptist Church is a part, by the way, affirms: “We believe that Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water into the name of the triune God.”<sup>81</sup> Piper’s proposed statement did not find initial agreement among the church’s elders, but Piper continued pushing the issue with the elders in multiple meetings over several years. Piper finally persuaded the elders to approve an amended policy in August 2005. Although expressing preference for baptism by immersion, the amended membership statement (somewhat echoing Mohler’s proposed theological triage) expressed the desire “not to elevate beliefs and practices that are nonessential to the level of prerequisites for church membership.” Thus, according to the proposed amended policy, “Christians who have not been baptized by immersion as believers, but, as they believe, by some other method or before they believed, may under some circumstances be members of this church.”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>John Piper, “Twelve Theses on Baptism and Its Relationship to Church Membership, Church Leadership, and Wider Affiliations and Partnerships of Bethlehem Baptist Church,” p. 14 in “Baptism and Church Membership at Bethlehem Baptist Church: Eight Recommendations for Constitutional Revision,” by John Piper, Alex Chediak, and Tom Steller, available online at [http://desiringgod.org/media/pdf/baptism\\_and\\_membership.pdf](http://desiringgod.org/media/pdf/baptism_and_membership.pdf).

<sup>81</sup>“The Ordinances,” Art. 9 of *An Affirmation of Our Faith*, available at the Baptist General Conference web site at <http://www.bgcworld.org/intro/affirm.htm>.

<sup>82</sup>“Eight Recommendations Approved by the Council of Elders, August 2005,” p. 11 in “Baptism and Church Membership at Bethlehem Baptist Church: Eight Recommendations for Constitutional Revision,” by John Piper, Alex Chediak, and Tom Steller, available online at [http://desiringgod.org/media/pdf/baptism\\_and\\_membership.pdf](http://desiringgod.org/media/pdf/baptism_and_membership.pdf). Although not noted anywhere in that document, Piper and the elders later withdrew the proposal in December 2005 when some elders again doubted the wisdom of moving forward in response to a public outcry against the proposal (thanks to Timmy Brister for pointing out this later development). On a different web site, the Bethlehem Baptist Church web site, an undated statement is posted under the heading, “Present Status of the Baptism & Membership Issue.” This statement describes the timing and reasons for withdrawing the proposed amendment, and adds the following statement about future plans for dealing with this issue: “The elders realize that the issue cannot be dropped because the majority of the elders still favor the motion, including almost all the pastoral staff, and because that conviction puts most of the elders and staff in conflict with at least one literal reading of the [Bethlehem Affirmation of Faith](#). Our Affirmation of Faith defines the local church as follows: “We believe in the local church, consisting of a company of believers in Jesus Christ, baptized on a credible profession of faith, and associated for worship, work, and fellowship. . . .” Noting that their current

The danger of compromising doctrinal convictions in order to be tolerant or in the interest of ecumenical unity is that the call for one compromise after another never ends. Once one starts down the path of compromising one's own biblical convictions, it is difficult to hold any doctrine uncompromisingly. Should one ever compromise what one believes to be not merely a private opinion, but a scriptural teaching?

- *Mark 5: Baptism and Lord's Supper as Symbolic Ordinances (not as Sacraments)*

While the *Second London* and *Philadelphia* confessions copy word for word much of the *Westminster Confession* regarding baptism and the Lord's Supper, there is one very obvious change in wording: the Presbyterian confession consistently refers to baptism and the Lord's Supper as "sacraments," while the Baptist confessions describe them as "ordinances" appointed by Christ. Sacraments are, according to the *Westminster Confession*, "holy seals and signs of the covenant of grace," and "in every sacrament there is a spiritual relation, or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified; whence it comes to pass that the effects of the one are attributed to the other."<sup>83</sup> The Baptist confessions omit this sacramental language altogether, substituting statements that these ordinances were "appointed," "ordained," or "instituted" by Jesus Christ.<sup>84</sup> The ordinances are seen as symbolic rather than sacramental in character.<sup>85</sup>

- *Mark 6: Congregational Church Polity (not Presbyterian Church Polity)*

affirmation of faith differs from Presbyterian doctrine on this point, the elders state, "In view of these things, we will be praying and thinking and discussing various ways to move forward together as a church." (See "Present Status of the Baptism and Membership Issue," accessible online at <http://www.hopeingod.org/CurrentTopicsBaptismMembership.aspx>, last accessed 10/28/08).

In an interview done a year later and posted on the Desiring God web site, Piper repeats this information but states, "I still think it was a mistake" to withdraw the amendment, and "I would love to see this go forward someday if we could get more of our people on board." (See "Can You Update Us on the Baptism and Church Membership Issue from 2005?" by John Piper. © Desiring God. Website: [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org)). So despite temporarily withdrawing the amendment for pragmatic reasons in the face of a negative public response, Piper and the majority of the elders at Bethlehem Baptist Church remain adamant that the church should not require believer's baptism by immersion for church membership, and express the desire to change the existing policy when opposition subsides. Again, this is a doctrinal compromise that our Particular Baptist forbears were not willing to make.

<sup>83</sup>The comparison is between the *Westminster Confession*, Art. 27; with *Second London Confession*, Art. 28, par. 1; and *Philadelphia Confession*, Art. 29, par. 1.

<sup>84</sup>*BF&M*, Art. 7.

<sup>85</sup>For more discussion of this issue, see J. B. Moody, "Why Baptism as Symbol and not a Saving Ordinance," in *Baptist Why and Why Not*, 181-192.

The early Baptist confessions consistently describe church governance as congregational. It is to local churches that Jesus has given “all that power and authority, which is in any way needful for their carrying on that order in worship and discipline.”<sup>86</sup> Bishops/elders should be chosen by “the church itself.”<sup>87</sup> All church members are subject to “the censures and government” of the church “according to the rule of Christ.”<sup>88</sup> Church members taking offense at the actions of other members should not act on their own, but should “wait upon Christ, in the further proceeding of the church.”<sup>89</sup> At every point of authority, then, whether in choosing congregational leaders, practicing church discipline, or resolving problems, it was the church as a whole (not some smaller appointed group) which was authorized to decide the issue according to the mind of Christ. Likewise, the 1963 and 2000 *Baptist Faith and Message* statements refer to the local church as “autonomous” but operating “under the Lordship of Jesus Christ” through “democratic processes.”<sup>90</sup>

- *Mark 7: Local Church Autonomy (not a Hierarchical Denomination)*

The *BF&M* describes the church as “an *autonomous* local congregation of baptized believers.”<sup>91</sup> Each Southern Baptist church is independent and autonomous. Local churches voluntarily cooperate with Baptist associations, state conventions, the national SBC, and other entities, but in terms of authority the organizational flowchart of the SBC is a pyramid. All the authority and freedom reside in the autonomous local church. No denominational official, whether associational, state, or national, can impose anything on an autonomous Southern Baptist church, even when that church is practicing things that are outside of the *BF&M*. The associations and conventions may refuse to seat messengers from these churches at annual meetings, or even withdraw fellowship from them, but no Baptist entity can force a local church to change any policy. The associations and conventions draw all of their guidance from messengers appointed by local Baptist churches. But the associations and conventions cannot in turn impose regulations on the local churches. In contrast,

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<sup>86</sup>*Second London Confession*, Art. 26, par. 7; *Philadelphia Confession*, Art. 27, par. 7.

<sup>87</sup>*Second London Confession*, Art. 26, par. 9; *Philadelphia Confession*, Art. 27, par. 9.

<sup>88</sup>*Second London Confession*, Art. 26, par. 12; *Philadelphia Confession*, Art. 27, par. 12.

<sup>89</sup>*Second London Confession*, Art. 26, par. 13; *Philadelphia Confession*, Art. 27, par. 13.

<sup>90</sup>*BF&M*, Art. 6. For a biblical defense of congregational church governance, see the perspective of James Leo Garrett in *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity*, with Daniel Akin, James Leo Garrett, Jr., Robert Reymond, James R. White, and Paul F. M. Zaul, ed. by Chad Brand and Stan Norman (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2004); James Leo Garrett, Jr., “An Affirmation of Congregational Polity,” *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2005):38-55; and Paige Patterson’s perspective in *Who Runs the Church? Four Views of Church Government*, with Peter Toon, L. Roy Taylor, Paige Patterson, and Samuel L. Waldron, ed. by Steven Cowan (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004).

<sup>91</sup>*BF&M*, Art. 6.

Presbyterian churches are guided by presbyteries, synods, and councils<sup>92</sup>. Although these meetings have representatives from local churches, the broader entities can impose rules and regulations on the local churches. That could never happen in Baptist life.

One expression of local church autonomy is its ability under God's leadership to choose its own leadership. Dunaway noted the distinctive that Baptists do not have a requirement for a seminary-educated ministry.<sup>93</sup> This requirement could only be imposed by a "top-down" denominational structure, not "bottom-up" structure like that of Baptists. Local church autonomy is a keynote of Southern Baptist life.

- Mark 8: Two Scriptural Officers -- (Pastor/Bishop/Elder and Deacon (not Three Officers – Pastor/Bishop, Elder, and Deacon)

Given our current debates over the role of elders in Baptist life, it is striking to see that the Particular Baptist confessions did not share this confusion. Both the *Second London Confession* and the *Philadelphia Confession* identify two offices in a New Testament church. The first office is known variously as pastor, bishop, or elder, and the second office is of deacon. Clearly, pastors, bishops, and elders are seen as the same office in these Calvinistic Baptist confessions. In one of the rare places that the 1925 *Baptist Faith and Message* appears to reflect the language of the *Philadelphia Confession*, it identifies the two scriptural offices as "bishops, or elders, and deacons." The subsequent 1963 and 2000 *Baptist Faith and Message* statements omit reference to elders altogether, referring to just two scriptural offices, "pastors and deacons."<sup>94</sup> While many churches utilize multiple persons in pastoral staff roles or a plurality of elders, churches that have a third office apart from pastors and deacons have departed from Baptist ecclesiology.

- Mark 9: Decisional Conversion/Gospel Invitations (not Confirmation)

One basic fault line between most Baptists and Presbyterians regards the ability of sinful humans to respond to God. The *BF&M* repeatedly affirms human freedom to respond and to make decisions. The "future decisions of His free creatures" are foreknown

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<sup>92</sup>The role of synods and councils in Presbyterian life is delineated in the *Westminster Confession*, Art. 31, "Of Synods and Councils." This article was deleted in the *Second London* and *Philadelphia* confessions.

<sup>93</sup>Dunaway, "Why Baptist and Not Presbyterian," in *Baptist Why and Why Not*, 135-136.

<sup>94</sup>*BF&M* Art. 6. For a scriptural defense of pastor-teachers, elders, and pastors being the same office, see Steve Lemke, "The Elder in the Early Church," *Biblical Illustrator* 19 (Fall 1992): 59-62; Gerald Cowen, *Who Rules the Church? Examining Congregational Leadership and Church Government*, with foreword by Jerry Vines and appendices by Emir E. Caner and Stephen Prescott (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003); and Gerald Cowan, "An Elder and His Ministry: From a Baptist Perspective," *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2005):56-73.

by God;<sup>95</sup> and God's election to salvation "is consistent with the free agency of man."<sup>96</sup> Persons are created by God "in His own image," originally "innocent of sin" and endowed by God with "freedom of choice." Even after the Fall, "every person of every race possesses full dignity."<sup>97</sup> Salvation "is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior." (This free offer of salvation would seem to fly in the face of a limited atonement.) In regeneration the sinner responds in repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus," and repentance "is a genuine turning from sin toward God" and faith is "acceptance of Jesus Christ and commitment of the entire personality to Him as Lord and Savior."<sup>98</sup> The picture that emerges from the *BF&M* is that while sinful humans certainly cannot save themselves by any good work, God requires persons to utilize the freedom of choice He created within them to respond to His gracious offer of salvation by grace through faith in Christ.<sup>99</sup> Central to this Baptist perspective is that salvation fundamentally involves a *response* or choice on the part of the convert. Note the role for human response in the words of W. T. Conner, longtime theology professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, in expressing the balance between God's sovereign grace and human agency:

Jesus regarded men as sinful--all men--but He did not believe that men were fixed in their sinful state. He knew the love of God toward men, and He believed in the possibility of winning men to a favorable response to God's grace. . . . Jesus did not believe, then, that man could lift himself out of his sinful state in his own strength, but He did believe that men could respond to God's grace and let God lift them out of their sins. It is true that this response was one that was won from the man by the grace of God offering to save man. Yet it was man's response. And Jesus counted on such a response on the part of sinful men. . . . He welcomed such a response. He

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<sup>95</sup>*BF&M*, Art. 2.

<sup>96</sup>*Ibid.*, Art. 5.

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.*, Art. 3.

<sup>98</sup>*Ibid.*, Art. 4.

<sup>99</sup>These issues of interpretation about the human and divine role in salvation did not arise originally with Calvin and Arminius, of course, but from Augustine and his successors in conversation with Pelagius and the semi-Pelagians. As Rebecca Harden Weaver ably details in *Divine Grace and Human Agency: A Study of the Semi-Pelagian Controversy*, Augustine had argued that salvation comes totally and gratuitously from God, because fallen humans are incapable of responding positively to God in any way. Pelagius and the Semi-Pelagians affirmed that salvation is by grace, but Pelagius (to a greater degree) and the Semi-Pelagians (to a lesser degree) affirmed some role for human agency in salvation. In an excellent survey of the controversy, Rebecca Harden Weaver points to the role that the culture of good works in the monastic system played in discussion. Personally, I found the Augustinians to understate the role of human response in salvation and the Pelagians and Semi-Pelagians to understate the role of divine grace in salvation. I suppose you could call me a semi-Augustinian semi-Pelagian, or, as we are better known, a Baptist.

eagerly watched for it. He said there was rejoicing over it in the presence of the angels in heaven.<sup>100</sup>

The Second Great Awakening engendered the explosion of Baptists in North America, and although models for offering public invitations go all the way back to Pentecost, the use of the public invitation or altar call became a fixture in Baptist worship services after the Great Awakening. There are scriptural reasons for offering such a public invitation (see discussion below), but doctrinally a decisional public invitation is logically entailed in other Baptist beliefs such as soul competency, believer's baptism, and the gathered church. In particular, it presupposes what might be called a "decisional" or "crisis" view of salvation, as opposed to a more gradual or developmental view of salvation. In "decisional" view of salvation, a sinner presented with the gospel can respond to God's calling in a decisional moment through repentance and faith.

Presbyterians, on the other hand, tend to downplay public invitations and decisional presentations of the gospel. After infants are sprinkled, they later undergo catechetical training and are confirmed. The catechetical training is more cognitive than volitional, and confirmation is more age-driven and developmental than decision-driven.

Some strongly Calvinistic Baptists have become enchanted with the Presbyterian model and would like to inject it into Southern Baptist life. In a discussion that would be astonishing to most Southern Baptists in the pew, a Southern Baptist seminary publication printed a debate between three of its faculty members about whether or not it is unbiblical for churches to have an invitation for the lost to be saved at the end of the worship service.<sup>101</sup> Jim Elliff argued that "it is my contention that our use of the altar call and the accouterment of a 'sinner's prayer' is a sign of our lack of trust in God."<sup>102</sup> Elliff claimed

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<sup>100</sup>W. T. Conner, "Jesus, The Friend of Sinners," in *The Christ We Need* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1938), 45. Mark Coppenger in his article in *The Founder's Journal* on "The Ascent of Lost Man in Southern Baptist Preaching" cited this quotation as a mistaken view of human depravity. I believe that most Southern Baptists would resonate with the balance between divine sovereignty and human response in Conner's perspective. But in the Calvinistic understanding of total depravity, humans are incapable of such a response to God's gracious offer of salvation. Although many Southern Baptists say they believe in the "T" of the TULIP (total depravity), in fact their view is closer to the *radical depravity* described by Timothy George. While all Baptists believe that all persons of age are sinners, and that they cannot be saved without the grace of God and the conviction of the Holy Spirit, most Baptists still believe in a role for human choice or response to the gracious offer of God.

<sup>101</sup>The three articles were printed under the heading of "Walking the Aisle," in *Heartland* (Summer 1999):1, 4-9, a publication of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. The three articles were "Closing with Christ," by Jim Elliff, which argued that altar calls were unbiblical; "Rescuing the Perishing," by Ken Keathley, which argued that invitations were biblical and appropriate, and "Kairos and the 'Altar Call,'" by Mark Coppenger, which allowed for some limited use of altar calls.

<sup>102</sup>Elliff, "Closing with Christ," 6.

that “there is no biblical precedent or command regarding a public altar call,” but it was an invention of Charles Finney, and that “the sad truth is that it [the sinner’s prayer] is not found anywhere but in the back of evangelistic booklets.”<sup>103</sup> Elliff further questions the practice of pastors who would share Scripture verses about assurance of salvation with new believers, or to present them to the church publicly for baptism, because Elliff believes that the majority of these would-be converts are probably not genuinely saved.<sup>104</sup>

As Ken Keathley has demonstrated,<sup>105</sup> Elliff’s suggestions do not stand up to the tests of Scripture and logic. While we should always guard against excesses of revivalism or emotional manipulation which might lead to a mere emotional response that lacks any real commitment, we should be eager to accept even a thief on a cross into the Kingdom. Even C. H. Spurgeon complained that some of his fellow Calvinists seemed “half afraid that perhaps some may overstep the bounds of election and get saved who should not be,” and claimed that “there will be more in heaven than we expect to see there by a long way.”<sup>106</sup>

#### A CALL FOR DOCTRINAL INTEGRITY AND DIVERSITY WITHIN CHRISTIAN UNITY

In the previously mentioned hypothetical case study of a SBC faculty member who resigned his position and subsequently joined the faculty of a Presbyterian seminary after he came to have Presbyterian beliefs and baptized his infant children out of his convictions about original sin, it is notable that he did so in recognition of the fact that his beliefs were fundamentally at variance with historic Baptist beliefs. Is it possible that there are other conservative evangelicals who currently attend Baptist churches or serve in Baptist institutions who actually belong more comfortably within a Presbyterian fellowship? If so, they need to follow the example of the gentleman suggested in this case, who had the integrity and courage of convictions to align himself with a denomination whose confession he could affirm wholeheartedly. He recognized that it would reflect a fundamental lack of integrity to be paid by Baptists to proselytize their young Baptist ministers into Presbyterians. And, as many have said, every pastoral candidate who intends to lead a church to change fundamental Baptist polity or doctrine should have the integrity to tell the church his intentions before coming to the church. Let Baptists be Baptists by conviction, and let Presbyterians be Presbyterians by conviction. May we be unified as witnesses to

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<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid.

<sup>105</sup>Keathley more than adequately refutes these claims with biblical evidence in “Rescuing the Perishing,” 4-5. See Ken Keathley, “Rescue the Perishing: A Defense of Giving Invitations,” *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2003):4-16, available online from the Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary at <http://baptistcenter.com/Journal%20Articles/Spr%202003/02%20Rescuing%20the%20Perishing%20-%20Spr%202003.pdf>.

<sup>106</sup>C. H. Spurgeon, *Tabernacle Pulpit*, 17:449, and 12:477, cited in George, *Amazing Grace*, 77.

Christ for the glory of God, and one in the Spirit in our affirmation of Jesus as Lord, but also people of integrity who do not compromise our doctrinal convictions.



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*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  
Doctor of Philosophy, Oxford University (England)



## **David L. Allen**

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Bachelor of Arts, Criswell College, Dallas, TX  
Master's of Divinity, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary  
Doctor of Philosophy in Humanities, University of Texas at Arlington



## **Steve Lemke**

*Provost, Professor of Philosophy and Ethics,  
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary*  
Master of Divinity, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary  
Master of Arts in Philosophy, Texas A&M University  
Doctor of Philosophy, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary



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# SHALL (CAN) WE GATHER AT THE RIVER?: A RESPONSE TO LEMKE'S NINE MARKS OF BAPTIST IDENTITY

DR. MARK RATHEL  
BAPTIST COLLEGE OF FLORIDA

## PERSONAL POINTS OF APPRECIATION

First, I appreciate Dr. Lemke's concern for Baptist identity. Legendary Yale church historian Kenneth Scott Latourette claimed: "I am a Baptist by heritage, by inertia, and by conviction."<sup>1</sup> I am a Baptist by heritage only in the sense that a young Christian Baptist lady, now my wife of nearly thirty years explained the gospel to me. I remain a Baptist partially by inertia. I received three educational degrees from Baptist schools; the majority of my close friends are Baptists; and even though I try to be a catalyst for change, I live my life in a Baptist comfort zone. Yet, I remain a Baptist because of personal conviction. I see a close correlation between the New Testament and Baptist teachings. Being a Christian entails convictions and a commitment to distinctive Christian principles. Likewise, being a Christian Baptist ought to involve convictions and a commitment to distinctive Christian Baptist principles. In the midst of our Baptist self-identity crisis, I hope we can rediscover the joy of being Christian Baptists by conviction.

Second, I appreciate Dr. Lemke's emphasis upon the importance of baptism.<sup>2</sup> Like Dr. Lemke, I affirm that New Testament baptism entails the right subject (believer), right mode (immersion) and right meaning (union with Christ through immersion as a symbol of death and resurrection). Further, I concur with Dr. Lemke that some Baptists disregard or ignore the distinctive of believer's baptism. Unlike Dr. Lemke, I do not understand Calvinistic Baptists within the Southern Baptist Convention as the source of this threat to baptistic theology and practice of the ordinance. Rather, I perceive churches in which biblical authority is an issue as threatening this distinctive. A generation of leaders within the Southern Baptist Convention lack knowledge of the concept of "alien immersion." Yet, in Baptist history, Baptist associations disfellowshipped churches that recognized "alien baptism." Perhaps the Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry could undertake a research project related to the practice of "alien immersion."

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<sup>1</sup>William Powell Tuck, *Our Baptist Tradition* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 1993), 2.

<sup>2</sup>Unfortunately, a press release New Orleans Baptist Seminary sent to the editor of the *Florida Baptist Witness* seemed to suggest I supported Lemke's call to elevate baptism to a first-level theological concern. I will express my misgivings related to Lemke's theological triage later in my response.

Third, I appreciate Dr. Lemke's recognition of Calvinist Baptists as a "valid expression of the Christian faith." Caustic, emotional, vitriolic language, from both sides, has accompanied the resurgence of Calvinism with the Southern Baptist Convention. In his sesquicentennial history, Jesse Fletcher commented that the theological issue of God's sovereignty and human free will comprises the oldest fault line in Baptist life.<sup>3</sup> A unique heritage shaped Baptists. Baptists possess a theological heritage in both Arminianism (General Baptists) and Calvinism (Particular Baptists). The fault line will continue to exist after the present generation passes from the scene. Both sides scurrilously label those with whom they differ as heretics, an attitude that neither honors Christ nor builds up the kingdom.

Fourth, I appreciate Dr. Lemke's recognition of the importance of Calvinistic theology in Baptist heritage. Twenty-six years ago, Dr. Walter Shurden's seminal essay delineated the Baptist traditions comprising the Southern Baptist synthesis: Charleston, Sandy Creek, Georgia, and Tennessee.<sup>4</sup> Yet, Dr. Shurden failed to highlight the theological tradition common to all four traditions. A form of Calvinistic theology provided the theological underpinning of all four of these traditions. Richard Furman modeled evangelistic Calvinism in Charleston. The Sandy Creek Association, representative of a larger Separate Baptist theology, affirmed the imputation of Adam's sin, effectual calling, and unconditional election.<sup>5</sup> Evangelical Calvinist Jesse Mercer and Calvinist apologist P. H. Mell exercised dominant influence in Georgia.<sup>6</sup> R. B. C. Howell, James M. Pendleton and J.

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<sup>3</sup>Jesse C. Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention: A Sesquicentennial History* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1994), 372.

<sup>4</sup>Walter B. Shurden, "The Southern Baptist Synthesis: Is It Cracking?" *Baptist History and Heritage* 16 (April 1981): 2-11.

<sup>5</sup>Principles of Faith of the Sandy Creek Association, Articles II and III. The confession is found in William Lumpkin, ed., *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, Revised Edition. (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1969), 358. The church covenants of Grassy Creek Baptist Church (1757) and Kiokee Baptist Church (1771) affirm Calvinistic soteriology. Shubal Stearnes brother-in-law Daniel Marshall served as pastor of both churches. Both covenants are included in John A. Broadus, *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms*, edited by Timothy and Denise George, in *Library of Baptist Classics* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1996), 201-07.

<sup>6</sup>For Mercer's theology see Anthony L. Chute, *A Piety above the Common Standard: Jesse Mercer and Evangelistic Calvinism* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2004). P. H. Mell served as moderator or clerk of the local association thirty-six times and as moderator or president of the Georgia Baptist convention thirty-two times. In addition, he served as president of the Southern Baptist Convention seventeen years, more than any other individual did. For a brief biographical sketch of P. H. Mell see Emir and Ergun Caner, *The Sacred Trust: Sketches of the Southern Baptist Convention Presidents* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2003): 13-17. Individuals associated with the Founder's Movement have republished his apologetic for predestination. Patrick Hues Mell, *A Southern Baptist Looks at Predestination*, eds Robert Paul Martin and C. Ben Mitchell (no publication data).

R. Graves espoused a softer Amyraldian Calvinism in the Tennessee tradition.<sup>7</sup> Although the heritage of Southern Baptists is Calvinistic theology, the Bible alone functions as our authority. We listen wisely to our heritage, but our heritage does not function as authoritative.

Fifth, I appreciate Dr. Lemke's attempt at architectonics of Baptist Calvinists. Many Calvinisms exists in the Southern Baptist Convention and any attempt to differentiate and classify will not be satisfying to the Calvinists themselves. Fluidity hinders rigid typology. Later, I will express concerns about the typology of Together for the Gospel Calvinists. Northern evangelical Calvinists comprise one small group within the SBC Calvinist family not delineated by Dr. Lemke. Several faculty members at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, including Bruce Ware, Thomas Schrenier, Greg Allison, and Steve Wellum, came to their positions of service from northern evangelical Calvinism rather than from within the Southern Baptist Convention.

#### AREAS OF FURTHER DISCUSSION

First, the broader and antecedently prior question "What explains the loss of Baptist identity?" needs further discussion. Neither a single answer nor simplistic answers provide a proper response to this important question. The causal factors of the loss of Baptist identity are multiplex including cultural factors, generational factors, neglect of doctrinal teaching, and influences from other denominations. I personally believe that experience-driven charismatic influences outweigh Presbyterian influences as a factor in the loss of Baptist identity. One must evaluate Dr. Lemke's focused answer in the light of this broader question. In one sense, he argues that some form or forms of Baptist Calvinism accounts for the Baptist identity crisis. On the other hand, he explicitly claims that Calvinism in the SBC is a *tertium quid*—neither properly Calvinists nor truly Baptist since some varieties of Calvinism modifies Baptist identity at numerous points.

Second, I hope Dr. Lemke explains the meaning of this statement, "Irenic Calvinists are Calvinistic in their doctrine, especially regarding some aspects of Calvinistic soteriology, but they do not share a Calvinistic missiology." What is a Calvinistic missiology? With whom do Irenic Calvinists not share this Calvinist missiology? Is it appropriate to unite Calvinistic theology and Calvinistic missiology? What is the wedge that divides Calvinistic theology and Calvinistic missiology? Historically, Particular Baptists, such as William Carey, Adoniram Judson, and Luther Rice, birthed the modern missions movement. Is the phrase

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<sup>7</sup>R. B. C. Howell, James Pendleton, and J. R. Graves denied the doctrine of active reprobation, defined election in a manner consistent with human responsibility, and affirmed an Amyraldian type understanding of the atonement. See C. Michael Wren, Jr., "R. B. C. Howell and the Philadelphia Confession: A Modification of Early Baptist Calvinism," a paper presented at the Southeastern Regional Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in March 2007 at the Baptist College of Florida.; James M. Pendleton, *Christian Doctrines: A Compendium of Theology*. (Valley Forge.: Judson Press, 1878), 103, 105, 107, 242; J. R. Graves, *The Work of Christ in the Covenant of Redemption: Developed in Seven Dispensations* (Memphis: Baptist Book House, 1883): 95-108.

“Calvinistic missiology” a descriptive label based on the statistical data regarding baptisms, worship attendance, and membership patterns New Orleans Baptist Seminary compiled regarding Founder’s Movement Calvinists? If I am correct, perhaps the phrase “Founder’s Movement missiology” functions as a more appropriate term without impugning the missiological theology and practice of Calvinist Baptists in general.

Third, I hope Dr. Lemke explains his methodology of comparing and contrasting The Baptist Faith and Message, Westminster Confession, and the Together for the Gospel Statement. First, the Baptist Faith and Message and Westminster Confession are comprehensive confessional statements formally adopted by denominational groups; in this case the SBC and the PCA. The Together for the Gospel Statement is neither comprehensive nor denominational. Second, only four individuals signed the Together for the Gospel Statement: Ligon Duncan, C. J. Mahaney, Mark Dever, and Al Mohler. (All four men serve on the Board of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals and are involved in the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood.) Would Dr. Lemke’s improve his theological comparison if he included the doctrinal statement of Mars Hill Community Church? Why does he not identify someone in the Irenic Calvinist category and use a representative doctrinal statement for purposes of his comparison?

Fourth, I hope Dr. Lemke’s equating of Baptists as semi-Augustinian semi-Pelagian engenders deeper conversation. Justo González denies the usefulness of the term semi-Pelagian: “Indeed, the so-called semi-Pelagians were in truth ‘semi-Augustinians’”<sup>8</sup> In his recent book on *Arminian Theology*, Roger Olson, professor of theology at George Truett Theological Seminary, recognized the validity of the term and he labeled semi-Pelagianism a heresy. Olson defines semi-Pelagianism as a teaching that “embraces a modified version of original sin but believes that humans have the ability, even in their natural or fallen state, to initiate salvation by exercising a good will toward God.”<sup>9</sup> Olson decries the term semi-Pelagianism that Lemke advocates. I fear that true semi-Pelagianism shapes the practical

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<sup>8</sup>Justo González, *A History of Christian Thought: From Augustine to the Eve of the Reformation*, Vol. 2, revised edition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), 57. Gerald Bonner concurs: “Although commonly called semi-Pelagians [they] would be better termed semi-Augustinians.” Gerald Bonner, “Pelagianism,” in *Dictionary of Historical Theology*, ed Trevor A. Hart (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 424. Dropping “semi-Pelagian” from the Baptist equation serves a practical purpose. New Orleans Semi-Augustinian Theological Seminary is a shorter name than New Orleans Semi Augustinian Semi Pelagian Theological Seminary! Further, *Mere Semi-Augustinian* serves as a better title for Dr. Lemke’s next book.

<sup>9</sup>Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 17-18. Olson regards semi-Pelagianism as humanistic synergism. In distinction, he calls Arminianism evangelical synergism. Olson concurs with Rebecca Weaver’s analysis of Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism. Yet, based on Weaver’s book, Dr. Lemke embraces the term semi-Pelagianism. In contrast, based on the same analysis, Olson labels semi-Pelagianism heretical. Further, Olson attempts his own architectonics of Arminianism: “Arminianism of the heart” and “Arminianism of the head.” “Arminianism of the heart” is the theological heir of Jacob Arminius, while “Arminianism of the head” is the theological heir of semi-Pelagianism and the Enlightenment.

theology of many contemporary Baptists who assume they make a decision towards God without the prior activity of God's grace in their lives, whether one understands God's grace in an Arminian or Calvinistic sense.

The Reformation divide between the Remonstrances and Dortians was not between Augustinianism and Pelagianism. As Timothy George correctly noted this debate was an "intra-Reformed" debate.<sup>10</sup> The Remonstrant-Dortian battle was between Augustinians and semi-Augustinians. Evangelical Arminianism exemplifies semi-Augustinianism! Non-Calvinist Baptists, therefore, can stop short of an affirmation of semi-Pelagianism in their rejection of Calvinistic theology.

#### PERSONAL POINTS OF DISAGREEMENT

First, I disagree with Dr. Lemke's understanding of Dr. Timothy George's ROSES acronym. In his exposition of Radical Depravity, Dr. Lemke wrote, "Compared with total depravity, *radical depravity* agrees that every aspect of our being was damaged through the Fall and we can do nothing to save ourselves, but affirms that humans are not totally evil because we retain the image of God despite our fallenness" (p. 9). This statement implies that total depravity necessitates the loss of the image of God. Calvinist theologians affirming total depravity also affirm the retention of the image of God after the fall, albeit the image marred by the fall but renewed in Christ.

Further, Dr. Lemke misstates Dr. George's view on election. Lemke wrote, "In contrast to the double predestination of unconditional election, God sovereignly elects those whom He foreknows will respond to Him." According to several Calvinist theologians, unconditional election does not entail the acceptance of double predestination. Actually, Dr. George affirms unconditional election but he denies double predestination. In his discussion of double predestination, Dr. George asked, "Does God elect some for salvation and others for damnation *in the same way*?"<sup>11</sup> Dr. George understands election to salvation as God's active choice, but he qualifies reprobation as passive or God "passing them by." Therefore, election to salvation and reprobation are not "in the same way."

Moreover, Dr. George affirms election in terms of God's foreknowledge of the fall of man. In contrast, the Dutch Remonstrants affirmed election based on simple foreknowledge of human response: "That God determined, by an eternal and unchangeable purpose in Jesus Christ his Son, before the foundations of the world were laid, determined to save, out of the human race which had fallen into sin, in Christ, for Christ's sake, and

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<sup>10</sup>Timothy George, *Amazing Grace: God's Initiative – Our Response* (Nashville: Lifeway, 2000), 60.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 76. Italics mine.



through Christ, those who through the grace of the Holy Spirit shall believe”<sup>12</sup> The Remonstrants affirmed that faith functioned as the pre-condition of election. Dr. George denies that election rules out a genuine human response, but I do not believe that Dr. George defines election as based on simple foreknowledge of human response as did the Remonstrants: “Election is unconditional in the sense that it is not based upon our decision for God, but rather God’s decision for us.”<sup>13</sup>

Second, in my opinion Dr. Lemke misunderstands and even misrepresents the theological triage of Dr. Albert Mohler. Using the analogy of a medical triage, Dr. Mohler identified three orders of theological priorities. First-order theological issues are the theologically urgent central doctrines. First-order theological issues include “the Trinity, the full deity and humanity of Jesus Christ, justification by faith, and the authority of Scripture.” Mohler identifies the meaning and mode of baptism as a second-order theological issue. Second-order theological issues create boundaries between denominations. Thus, believer’s baptism by immersion functions as a denominational boundary or a Baptist distinctive. Dr. Mohler wrote, “Standing together on the first-order doctrines, Baptists and Presbyterians eagerly recognize each other as believing Christians, but recognize that disagreement on issues of this importance will prevent fellowship within the same congregation or denomination.” For Dr. Mohler, eschatology is an example of a third-order theological issue in which members of the same local congregation (or theological institution within the same denomination) may disagree.<sup>14</sup>

Dr. Lemke chastises Dr. Mohler for locating baptism as a second-order theological issue. For Dr. Lemke the doctrine of salvation is an essential belief that Baptists should place among the first-order issues. He claimed that the issue regarding the meaning and mode of believer’s baptism is the doctrine of salvation. For Dr. Lemke classifying baptism as a second-order theological issue compromises the soteriological issue. In biblical teaching, baptism is not salvific; rather baptism is a dramatic portrayal of the Gospel of salvation. I fail to see how placing baptism among the second-order theological doctrines compromises soteriology. Dr. Lemke’s theology of baptism does not differ from Dr. Mohler’s theology of baptism; therefore, where is the soteriological compromise?

Dr. Lemke asked two questions of Dr. Mohler regarding Presbyterian infant baptism. Dr. Lemke prefaced his questions with the following comment. “The issue at stake is whether Baptists would recognize Presbyterians infants as saved *on the basis* of their infant baptism” (*italics mine*). No Southern Baptist would recognize a person as saved *on the basis* of baptism, either infant baptism or believer’s baptism. The Westminster Confession does

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<sup>12</sup>“The Remonstrance, or The Arminian Articles, 1610,” in *Creeds & Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, vol. 2, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 549.

<sup>13</sup>George, 75.

<sup>14</sup>Albert Mohler, “A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Ministry,” *Commentary* (20 May 2004); available online at [http://www.albertmohler/commentary\\_pring.php?cdate=2004-4-20](http://www.albertmohler/commentary_pring.php?cdate=2004-4-20).

not necessarily regard baptized infants as regenerate: “Grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it [baptism] as that no person can be regenerated or saved without it, or that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated.”<sup>15</sup>

Dr. Lemke frames his first question as follows: “Do any of Mohler’s ‘essentials’ rule out declaring that a Presbyterian infant who has been sprinkled is *saved* (or, for that matter, that the infant was *lost* before the age of accountability)?” Dr. Lemke attempts to impale Dr. Mohler on the horns of a false dilemma. No doubt, Dr. Mohler affirms the infant child of a Presbyterian family that dies in infancy as saved. The basis of the infant’s salvation, however, is neither infant baptism nor Presbyterian heritage. “When it comes to those incapable of volitional, willful acts of sin, we can rest assured God will, indeed, do right. Precious little ones are the objects of His saving mercy and grace.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, Dr. Lemke fails to impale Dr. Mohler on this false dilemma.

Dr. Mohler affirms the doctrine of the age of accountability as strongly as Dr. Lemke. Dr. Mohler’s understanding of the doctrine of the age of accountability provides the answer for Dr. Lemke’s question in the case of an infant who has not died. In his exposition of the *Abstract of Principles*, Dr. Mohler affirmed the relation between transgression and moral accountability: “Born under the curse of their primal parents, all human beings commit actual transgressions—truly all have sinned—as soon as they are capable of moral action.”<sup>17</sup> Because infants are incapable of moral action, Dr. Mohler would not condemn an infant child of a Presbyterian, a Baptist, a Muslim, or a secularist to a position of separation from God until they reach the stage of moral accountability. Dr. Mohler affirms the Baptist Faith and Message. An individual is not under condemnation from God until they are capable of moral action and transgress God’s law.<sup>18</sup>

Second, given Mohler’s theological triage, Dr. Lemke asked, “If Mohler’s ‘essentials’ were applied literally, could not these guidelines imply that we should not recognize as a Christian a fervent, mature Pentecostal Christian who affirms Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord but has a defective view of the Trinity, while we would ‘eagerly recognize’ a sprinkled Presbyterian infant as a Christian?” I will split my response to this two-part question. Since Dr. Lemke addresses his question to Dr. Mohler, my response is an attempt to state the issues, as I believe Dr. Mohler would. Please understand that I do not know Dr. Mohler; therefore, my response, at best, is based on my understanding of the coherence of his theology. I am the responsible part for any misrepresentation of Dr. Mohler’s theology.

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<sup>15</sup>Westminster Confession, Article 28.5.

<sup>16</sup>R. Albert Mohler, Jr. and Daniel L. Akin, “Why We Believe Children Who Die Go to Heaven,” available online at <http://www.sebts.edu/president/resources/viewFile.cfm?DocumentID=422>.

<sup>17</sup>R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “A Brief Affirmation and Interpretation of the Abstract of Principles of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary,” (February 1993), 12.

<sup>18</sup>Baptist Faith and Message, Article III.



In my opinion, Dr. Mohler would not recognize an Oneness-Pentecostal as a Christian brother. He wrote in his commentary on theological triage, “These first-order doctrines represent the most fundamental truths of the Christian faith, and a denial of these doctrines [as the Oneness rejection of the Trinity] represents nothing less than an eventual denial of Christianity itself.” I conclude, therefore, that Dr. Mohler would not recognize an Oneness Pentecostal as a brother because a denial of the Trinity is a denial of Christianity. Further, I believe that Dr. Mohler would apply Leibniz’s “Law of the Indiscernability of Identicals” to this issue. For example, Dr. Lemke and the provost of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary are identical, if and only if, they share the same properties and nature. If a proposition accurately expresses a truth regarding the provost of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and the proposition is not true of Dr. Lemke, then Dr. Lemke is not the provost of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Since Baptists affirm the Trinitarian nature of God and Oneness Pentecostals deny the Trinitarian nature, I believe that Dr. Mohler would deny that Baptists and Oneness Pentecostals worship the same God.

Dr. Lemke, how would you answer your own question, “Would you recognize as a Christian a fervent, mature Pentecostal Christian who affirms Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord but has a defective view of the Trinity?” I ask this honest question because I do not know how you would answer.

The language of “eagerly recognize” in the second part of the question mimics Dr. Mohler’s language. “Standing together on the first-order doctrines, Baptists and Presbyterians eagerly recognize each other as *believing* Christians.” Dr. Lemke transforms Dr. Mohler’s language. He borrows the phrase “eagerly recognize” but deletes the essential adjective “believing.” (So much for essentials!) The context of Dr. Mohler’s language provides the proper form of the question, “would we ‘eagerly recognize’ a sprinkled Presbyterian infant as a *believing* Christian?” No, Baptists would not recognize the infant as a believing Christian, but neither would Presbyterians. Charles Hodge wrote of infant baptism, “The difficulty of this subject is that baptism from its very nature involves a profession of faith; it is the way in which by the ordinance of Christ, He is to be confessed before men; but infants are incapable of making such confession; therefore, they are not the proper subjects of baptism.”<sup>19</sup> Presbyterian theologians, as exemplified by Hodge and Berkhof, do not recognize, let alone “eagerly recognize”, a sprinkled Presbyterian infant as a

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<sup>19</sup>Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (New York: Charles Scribner and Co., 1871), 546. Dr. Hodge defends infant baptism on the grounds of the nature of the church, not on basis of the faith of the infant. Likewise, Louis Berkhof denies that infants possess active faith; hence, one may not ascribe the term “believing Christians” to infants. Dr. Berkhof wrote, “Now it is perfectly true that the Bible points to faith as a prerequisite for baptism, Mark 16:16; Acts 10:44-48; 16: 14, 15, 31, 34. If this means that the recipient of baptism must *in all cases* give manifestations of an active faith before baptism, then children are naturally excluded. But though the Bible clearly indicates that only those adults who believed were baptized, it nowhere lays down the rule that an active faith is absolutely essential for the reception of baptism.” Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1949), 637. Dr. Berkhof argues that the absence of evidence is evidence. He does not argue that infants possess faith.

*believing* Christian. Why, then, ask a Baptist theologian if he would recognize a sprinkled Presbyterian infant as a believer?<sup>20</sup>

Dr. Lemke refers to my public response during the panel discussion after his oral presentation of the paper in footnote 78. I remain convinced that “justification by faith” is sufficient *for Baptists* to deal with the type of questions Dr. Lemke raised about infant baptism. A Presbyterian from another generation, Louis Berkhof commented on the connection between justification and faith, “The preposition *dia* [*dia pisteos* in Rom. 3:25; Gal. 2:16] stresses the fact that faith is the instrument by which we appropriate Christ and His righteousness. The preposition *ek* [Rom. 3:30; 5:1] indicates that faith logically precedes our personal justification, so that this, as it were originates in faith.”<sup>21</sup> Presbyterians affirm that faith precedes justification, deny that a sprinkled infants possess faith, yet “We affirm justification by faith alone is both essential and central to the Gospel. We deny that any teaching that minimizes, denies, or confuses justification by faith alone can be considered true to the Gospel”<sup>22</sup> Baptists are not responsible for the dilemma Presbyterians encounter. Do I think that they minimize justification by faith in terms of infant baptism that ingrafts the infant into Christ? Yes. This dilemma should function as a further source for Dr. Lemke’s *shadenfreude*.

Moreover, the International Mission Board operates on the theological triage model for global partnerships. The International Mission Board recognizes that the world evangelization task is larger than Southern Baptists, or even Baptists. The IMB developed a new paradigm in light of spiritual needs and our inadequacy. “Out of a new question [what is it going to take?], missionaries have come to see their need for a broader community of evangelical colleagues.”<sup>23</sup> The International Mission Board has established five levels of relationships with non-IMB entities, a partnering triage, to continue Dr. Mohler’s analogy. Level One allows partnerships to serve the purpose of gaining access to a people group. Level Two partners include prayer ministry, partnerships with Catholics and even secular

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<sup>20</sup>Some older Calvinistic theologians, both Presbyterians and Baptists, affirmed an interval of time between regeneration and conversion. Berkhof wrote, “In the case of those regenerated in infancy, there is necessarily a temporal separation of the two [regeneration and conversion], but in the case of those who are regenerated after they have come to years of discretion, the two generally coincide.” Berkhof, 491. James Boyce also affirmed an “appreciable interval” between regeneration and conversion. James P. Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, reprint edition (Handord, CA: den Dulk Christian Foundation, n. d.), 381. In Berkhof’s and Boyce’s theology, then, an infant, or adult, may be regenerated but not converted. In the article on justification by faith, *The Together for the Gospel* statement denies a separation between regeneration and conversion. “We further deny that any teaching that separates regeneration and faith is a true rendering of the Gospel.” Article XII.

<sup>21</sup>Berkhof, 520.

<sup>22</sup>*Together for the Gospel*, Article XII.

<sup>23</sup>*Something New Under the Sun: Strategic Directions at the International Mission Board* (Richmond: Office of Overseas Operations, 1999), 27.

agencies, such as the International Red Cross and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, for meeting human needs. Level Three permits partnerships with Great Commission Christians to present the gospel. Level Three partnership groups include local non-Baptist churches, TransWorld Radio, or Campus Crusade for Christ. Level Three partners ascribe to Mohler's first-order theological doctrines: Trinity, full deity and humanity of Jesus Christ, justification by faith, and authority of Scripture. At Level Four (church planting) and Level Five (theological education and mission-sending structures), IMB personnel collaborate only with baptistic churches (level 4) or Baptist churches (level 5). In Levels Four and Five, then partners affirm both first-level and second-levels of the theological triage. Level Four, then, rules out involvement with groups, like Presbyterians, that do not advocate believer's baptism. The elevation of baptism to a first-order doctrine logically entails the abandonment of Level Three partnerships with para-church groups and non-immersion evangelicals to present the Gospel.

If Baptists place baptism among the first-order theological issues, with whom can we do the work of evangelism except a fellow Baptist? We certainly would not share evangelism partnerships with anti-Trinitarians or groups that deny the deity or humanity of Jesus. If baptism is elevated to a first-order theological issue, then the practical consequences limit evangelism partnerships to fellow Baptists. On what basis could one allow an exception for evangelism partnerships with paedobaptists but not with anti-Trinitarians?

Frankly, Dr. Lemke's unfair assessment of Dr. Mohler's theological triage perplexes me. I can only reach one conclusion. Dr. Lemke commits the informal fallacy of guilt by association. The Jewish leaders who opposed Jesus committed this fallacy: "He eats with sinners; therefore, he must be a sinner." Dr. Al Mohler fellowships with Presbyterians, therefore, he must be compromising Baptist distinctives.<sup>24</sup>

#### SHALL (CAN) WE GATHER AT THE RIVER?

I agree with Dr. Lemke that Baptists suffer from an identity crisis. This malaise originates in Baptist pulpits, and perhaps, reaches the status of a pandemic infecting large numbers of Southern Baptists. Moreover, I heartily concur with Dr. Lemke's conclusion. "Let Baptists be Baptists by conviction, and let Presbyterians be Presbyterians by conviction. May we be unified as witnesses to Christ for the glory of God, and one in the Spirit in our affirmation of Jesus as Lord, but also people of integrity who do not compromise our doctrinal convictions." In contrast to Dr. Lemke, I respectfully disagree that locating baptism as a second-order issue in a theological triage compromises Baptist doctrinal convictions.

My areas of disagreement with Dr. Lemke focused on his discussions related to the positions of Dr. Timothy George and Dr. Al Mohler. I hope I have faithfully represented

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<sup>24</sup>Based on the use of this fallacy, I can call and raise the ante. Richard Neuhaus and Peter Kreeft spoke in chapel during the same week at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Dr. Akin hangs with Catholics, therefore, Dr. Akin must be a Catholic. This is not a criticism of Daniel Akin; it is a further illustration of this fallacy. I confess that I enjoyed listening to the podcast of Peter Kreeft's address, "Will There Be Sex in Heaven?"

the positions of these two Baptist leaders. As well, I hope I understand Dr. Lemke's viewpoints accurately and fairly represented his position. Misrepresentation of the positions of our fellow Baptists will not solve our Baptist identity crisis. The issues Dr. Lemke raised concerning the viewpoints of Dr. George and Dr. Mohler have nothing to do with whether one is a Calvinistic Baptist or a non-Calvinistic Baptist. The issue is, "Did Dr. Lemke correctly and fairly represent the views of Dr. George and Dr. Mohler?" In my opinion, he failed to engage accurately their positions.

Baptists and Presbyterians can collaborate to communicate the Good News. Baptists and Presbyterians cannot gather at the river of baptism; after all, Presbyterians do not need a river. A more important question is, "Can Baptists gather at the river?" Specifically, can Calvinist Baptists and non-Calvinist Baptists gather at the river? At times, I am pessimistic about the possibility. If we cannot unite on the issue of baptism, what hope exists for Southern Baptists? In my opinion, the proliferation of Baptist identify conferences provides some measure of hope, although they do bring to light numerous tensions within Southern Baptist life.

In light of Dr. Lemke's paper, I do have a proposal for unity within the Baptist family. The Ohio River flows into the Mississippi. Yes, Louisville influences New Orleans. *Can* we gather at the river? *Shall* we as Baptists gather at the river in New Orleans?

I propose that we do evangelism together and conclude our campaign with a baptismal celebration in the Mississippi River conducted under the authority of local churches. Dr. Mohler could travel downstream. Dr. George may need to portage a short distance to the Tombigbee River, but eventually, even he could arrive in New Orleans. Dr. Mohler, Dr. George, and Dr. Lemke could unite in a baptism service in the Mississippi River. I believe that Dr. George would gladly baptize individuals God elected unconditionally yet who genuinely responded to the gospel. What a day that would be! I believe that Dr. Mohler would gladly immerse new believers as well as Presbyterians converting to the Baptist denomination. What a day that would be! I believe that Dr. Lemke would experience *shadenfreude* as he immerses repentant semi-Pelagians who formerly thought they made a decision for Christ unaided by God's prior gracious activity in their life. (Yes, non-Calvinistic Baptists solidly affirm the prior necessity of God's grace to enable a person to make a personal decision for Christ.) What a day that would be!

I am a theological nobody from the theological backwaters of the Southern Baptist Convention. I humbly, therefore, beseech my brothers. Let us gather at the river of baptism!

# A RESPONSE TO STEVE W. LEMKE'S "WHAT IS A BAPTIST?: NINE MARKS THAT SEPARATE BAPTISTS FROM PRESBYTERIANS"

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I am grateful to Dr Lemke, panel members, and students for the good-spirited and useful exchange concerning Baptist identity. Special thanks go to my friend, Dr. Lemke, for the invitation to present my response. The following comments constitute the basic direction of my response at the conference with only one additional reflection upon a later exchange.

I am in substantial agreement with the concerns expressed by Dr. Lemke, who is concerned that some of our Calvinistic Baptist brothers and sisters may ignore or alter convictions so near to the heart of Baptist identity that they may cease to be Baptist or redefine Baptist. He articulates Baptist traits in an effort to mark Baptist boundaries and thus Baptist identity. He is concerned that today's Calvinistic Baptists surrender or diminish crucial Baptist ideas, clustered around believer's baptism and believer's church, which early Calvinistic Baptists held with strong and costly conviction.

Numerous disclaimers are needed. 1) There are other threats to Baptist identity beyond Calvinistic Baptists who may surrender Baptist essentials. 2) Efforts to contrast Baptist ideas with Calvinistic ideas are inherently difficult given a shared and intertwined history.<sup>1</sup> 3) My own personal indebtedness to and appreciation for the reformed tradition is significant; my response does not address Calvinism in general. 4) And finally, there are minor concerns about the paper. My friend is less than careful with several expressions that needlessly distract from the core of his concerns. For example, the language of "original sin" seems to have considerable nuance and usage beyond strict Reformed theology; it need not be rejected. The language of "semipelagian" is unguarded and inconsistent with my understanding of Lemke's theology at large. My endeavor, however, will focus on several more global responses.

## GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Two related observations will provide some hermeneutical or historical frame of reference. The first concerns the impoverishment and eclipse of theology in our denomination. And a second is about the difficulty in grasping the enduring identity of a movement, tradition, or denomination.

First, we begin with an illustration. A young person attends a Passion worship assembly and is challenged to link her worship with a fervent discipleship of the mind; upon

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<sup>1</sup>This peril is witnessed in Paul Robertson and Fisher Humphries, *God So Loved the World: Traditional Baptists and Calvinism* (Insight Press, 2000).

returning home she reads her first serious theological book by John Piper; she wonders why her church has been holding out on her; she adopts the critique offered at the conference—her church’s worship, thinking, and discipleship is poor and weak because their understanding of God is poor and weak.<sup>2</sup> There needs to be little wonder as to why young Baptists are attracted to Calvinism. Our churches too often are gnostic; our teaching and preaching consists of therapy, self-fulfillment and personal affirmation that seems curiously secular; our study material is unchallenging with little serious engagement of the text or theology; but Calvinism is theology—that is, refreshingly, about God.

Her parents fare little better visiting an all too typical Baptist church. Her dad, perhaps a salesman or public relations worker, senses immediately what is true about the church meeting that members may not see—every thing is designed for him. Ironically the church folk declare, “it is a God thing” and “it is all about You [God/Jesus]” when her father knows that it is all about him as a representative of the target group. The message is loud and clear; the sermon is self-help; the architecture and décor are for his comfort; the platform performers are salespersons and customer assistants; he is familiar with programs designed to satisfy targeted customers as a part of his every day routine in the workplace. The dad visited the church with some instinctive hunch that he may encounter something bigger than and beyond himself (bigger than even the program and institution of the local church) only to be disillusioned. He reads J. I. Packer and feels intuitively what his daughter feels: they slightly resent the company store that they imagine has conspired to keep serious matters from their attention. Numerous SBC practices contribute to this eclipse of theology; I have complained only about church growth/market strategy and the resulting theology-deprived condition. God bless the Calvinist, they speak about God, and even dare to draw conclusions about God that are not always immediately understood as user-friendly. The SBC needs to recover its/a theological voice<sup>3</sup>.

A second observation notes that traditions experience change. And that change looks like a betrayal to some and a restoration to others. Traditions evolve and transform. They change, leaving behind convictions that some think essential and taking up new goals and methods. Sometimes they adopt completely different rhetoric, and on other occasions, they keep the same wording albeit with different meaning and rationale.<sup>4</sup> So also Calvinism has changed. Today, various surviving traditions within Calvinism now lay claim to being Calvin’s most genuine inheritor. Long ago, Luther and Calvin would have viewed strangely much of the work of Quenstedt and Wollebius who sat in their respective chairs of theology

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<sup>2</sup>Here I agree with the diagnosis but only partially with the proposed remedy; we must return to theology.

<sup>3</sup>Reading “its” calls for a fidelity to historic Baptist theology; reading “a” might call for displacing the historic Baptist views with another orientation (Lemke’s concern).

<sup>4</sup>Edward Norman provides a good example. The church is so overcome by the secular mindset that it often unknowingly defends its tradition by secular strategy and argument. See his *Secularisation*, Continuum, 2002.

less than 100 years later<sup>5</sup>. Even the synod of Dort makes affirmations that seem unlikely for Calvin himself (limited atonement).<sup>6</sup> In short things change.

Baptists have been changing through the years; in the Baptist wars of recent decades, old school moderates thought they lost their identity in the conservative resurgence; today, traditional revivalist Baptists fear they are losing “it” to Calvinists who seem to be growing in influence. History reminds us that it was Calvinistic Baptist folk who saw God stir awakenings and missions only to see gifts inherited by others of a less Calvinistic bent; ironically, students today are surprised to learn that Calvinistic Baptist folk were the driving force (humanly speaking) behind these phenomenal works of God.<sup>7</sup>

When change occurs, beliefs are the first casualties, while practices rooted in those beliefs often linger on. One such a lingering practice provides concrete illustration for these conceptual matters and a window into the past. This illuminating, lingering practice is the act of voting to receive prospective members—still done in some Baptist churches. Members may vote without knowing where the practice comes from or the old convictions in which it was grounded. In some churches the old practice barely survives, having now morphed into a round of applause to affirm the newcomer. I am old enough to have served old Baptists who believed they should cast votes to discern whether the prospective candidate should be admitted into the church. Membership meant something more to them; it was more like getting married than merely granting admittance to a social organization. In their thinking, members were bound by covenant to each other. The newcomer would be your priest and you were to be a priest to him or her. If you were obliged to follow after Jesus while yoked together as one, the prospective member may change your life if admitted into the fellowship. They wanted to know about the person’s conversion and convictions before entering into such a weighty covenant relationship.

The illustration addresses the transition in tradition but also illuminates a historically important trait for Baptists that is now fading; I regret its decline and long for the “good old days,” or at least the goodness and character of these old cherished friends.

#### BAPTIST TRAITS

Dr. Lemke is to be commended for his listing of Baptist traits. I will supplement and only slightly supplant his listing and explore how these traits may provide resource for supporting his concern. Baptists are people shaped by a *covenantal and communal vision of the church* (cf. items 3, 6, and 7 on Lemke’s list and the preceding illustration). This is an older

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<sup>5</sup>Bromiley, *Historical Theology* (Eerdmans, 1978); see his note and qualifications, 327.

<sup>6</sup>R. T. Kendall’s, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford, 1981), still stands in my judgment despite critique.

<sup>7</sup>Recent history at Southern seminary is presented as a restoration of lost Calvinist identity. Again some things are recovered while other things, such as eschatology and ecclesiology, are overturned.

notion that is almost vanished; one sighting in recent years is found in Henry Blackaby's series, *Experiencing God*. Therein Blackaby recounted how his small flock would at times postpone plans and ministries until they arrived at a unanimous sense of leadership. Baptists did not invent the idea that learning to follow Christ involves pilgrimage with other believers; but the notion of a church of professing believers who enter the church upon the pledge and witness of baptism is rare enough in the Christian tradition; it is persistent in the Baptist way.

This Baptist sense of a covenantal community provides a neglected lens through which to view numerous events. While the SBC controversy is often recounted as the triumph of Bible believers over more liberal folk, I believe this rendering is thin; the matter may also be seen through ecclesiastical eyes to include a failure of covenant and the corollary idea of congregational discernment and care.<sup>8</sup> A covenant-minded commentary could be voiced thusly: Moderate folk (think late 60s and early 70s) were so sure of their calling to take Baptists into the new century, so sure of the more secular agenda and apologetic, so sure that the unsophisticated brethren in the hinterland were obscurantists that would never wise up, that they forged ahead knowing that they would lose many conservative brothers and sisters in the journey. Old moderates not only lost the convention, they had lost previously a sense of covenant fellowship. The winning conservative parties often failed as well. Many were relieved when moderates left the convention; the notion of patient witness and ongoing engagement with a wayward brother seemed dangerous and complicated when compared to the cleaner, efficient political solution. Among the losers were the Baptist ideas of covenant community and brotherhood.

Similarly today, a Baptist theologian viewing circumstances through the covenant lens may ask why some (especially newly recruited) Calvinistic voices give so little affection, connection, and covenant to the people in the pew and their practices. Baptists of a by-gone era would serve with a loyal sense that these people were his people. The idea of recruiting faculty to an "evangelical" or "Calvinist" (read denominationally generic) seminary that happens to be supported by a Baptist denomination is a failure of theology and practice<sup>9</sup>; loyalty to covenant members is missing or perhaps loyalties to another community or constituency are taking priority.

Failures of covenant may reflect that current day Baptists have been conformed to the modern mindset (think 1600-mid 1900) of this world. Modern thinking rejected the contributions and restraints of tradition and community for the autonomous reasoning of a free and independent thinker. Among the many implications of the modern era was a new

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<sup>8</sup>I concede that as a Baptist these ideas apply only by extension to the convention as a whole; the buck does [not] stop at the local church.

<sup>9</sup>Building a seminary with intentional denominational diversity among its faculty is a praiseworthy goal, but is beyond the explicit goals of SBC seminaries. Even such ventures usually have a theological identity that serves as an anchor or center. For example, one may build a seminary around distinctively Baptist beliefs where faculty differs upon the issues of Calvinism or a Calvinistic seminary where faculty differs on the issues distinctive to Baptist theology (Lemke's worry).



way of thinking of one's group. An older view, which recognized our indebtedness and "rootedness" in a concrete organic body, gave way. Instead individuals began to see their relationships as elective; even the groups to which we belong we now see as composed of replaceable parts<sup>10</sup>. Characteristically modern leaders who ponder change simply calculate the numbers (people) lost and gained. The record sadly shows that Baptists, like other children of modernity, treat almost every covenant with the same dismissive attitude; in membership or marriage we behave like everyone else.

Also Baptists have been *conversionist* (cf. items 3,4, and 9 from Lemke's list). I concede most Baptists today understand conversion too narrowly in terms of revivalism. Not every Baptist conversion may look alike, but almost every Baptist believes each person must have a moment or season of turning and rebirth. The implications of conversion are numerous. Baptist conversion weighs against infant baptism. Also Baptists' persistent announcement of the Gospel in missions and evangelism, while beginning among Particular Baptists, was maintained by less Calvinistic folk in more recent experience in America. The question of the compatibility of evangelism and Calvinism cannot be answered in theory only, but also in practice.<sup>11</sup> A conversionist theology may even lead Baptists to read the Bible differently—a communal reading that typically promotes a hermeneutic of immediacy; simply put, Baptists read the Bible as a body of followers seeking to render simple and sudden obedience. Baptists' hermeneutics are less sophisticated in one sense; they read texts in a more straightforward manner and have been suspicious of interpretations that seem to reverse the face value of the text. For example, Calvin reads Jesus' prohibition of oath-taking in light of larger contextual and canonical considerations; Calvin concludes that believers can take oaths under certain circumstances. By comparison Baptists have seemed like simple Biblicists; but they are not necessarily simplistic. While Calvin's argument seems right to most Baptists today, earlier folk thought it curious that after enough interpretation was done obedience no longer seemed necessary.<sup>12</sup>

Thirdly, Baptists have emphasized the necessity of *honestly acting upon convictions* (this replaces Lemke's first trait)<sup>13</sup>; a believer's convictions matter and call for a concrete communal expression. While we did not invent integrity, our history is full of persons coming to conviction and acting upon it in costly and courageous ways. We remember that Reformed folk persecuted Baptist folk precisely over convictions about conversion and community. Baptist pioneers may have been too quick to act upon convictions. We

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<sup>10</sup>Both ancient Gnostics and contemporary children of Modernity seek liberty from community; Modernity's discontent is profoundly pictured by the late A. J. Conyers, *The Listening Heart: Vocation and the Crisis of Modern Culture* (Spence, 2006).

<sup>11</sup>I concede that Fuller and others make theoretical sense; I also acknowledge that the denomination's current disarray with program-driven and production-minded thinking makes genuine, spiritual, discernment (for example, of evangelism) very difficult.

<sup>12</sup>Supplementation is supplanting as they say today. cf. my "The Hermeneutics of Conversion" in *Ties That Bind*, ed. by Freeman and Furr, Symth and Helwys, 1994.

<sup>13</sup>I struggle with and cautiously appropriate soul competency.

frequently teach students about John Smyth in England and Holland and Roger Williams in England and America by recalling their many denominational and convictional phases. Both of them went through numerous phases before landing upon a phase, at least for a time, which we call Baptist. The Baptist traits of community and personal conviction hold in a necessary and unavoidable tension.

These are sad days for a people descended from Smyth or Williams who taught convictions were important enough to suffer for and who advocated religious liberty on the premise that convictions should not be coerced. Reports that missionaries are coerced to retroactively comply to new policy are disappointing; the report of a missionary who indicates his compliance against his conviction is also disappointing; the report of a missionary whose work is exemplary and Baptist by every other measure but who comes home because he prays in tongues is also disappointing.

Servants to the denomination face simple tests: do we show committed love to teach and serve this people (covenant community)? Do we affirm and teach the theological orientation of this people (conversion et al)? Do we serve with integrity and teach with sincerity of purpose (true to conviction)?

Additionally, I will address one subject of exchange between Drs. Lemke and Rathel. They reflect upon a proposal for “theological triage” which ranks Trinity, Christology, justification of faith, and the authority of Scripture among first order doctrines (Christian essentials), and baptism in a second category. In a commonsensical fashion, we must explore the purpose and utility of a model. If we propose a “triage” as a working guide for our interaction with other Christian traditions then it seems less threatening; if the triage, once put in place, is a guide to or justification for reshaping the denomination (such as hiring new faculty members or admission to cooperative ventures), then its advocates face questions concerning character and conviction.

While calling for theological fidelity to a Baptist vision, we must also offer a constructive voice in dialogue with the larger church. My own personal convictions are voiced not only in my local church but also within the context a Baptist family that extends through history and across the world; similarly, I find my place in a larger Christian family; the language of “baptist” and “catholic” (lower case) make more sense than ever. Despite my longing to know and love the larger church wherever I find it, eventually, I must express my faith in a concrete fashion through the practices of a community. The question of Baptism is, in this sense, essential and not secondary; sooner or later one should join or start a church. Furthermore, the theological ideas identified as essential or first tier are subject to a wide variety of interpretation; we share them with other Christians not only because they are central, but because in an effort to find common ground we state them in a more general fashion. For example, readers may be surprised to know that some Catholic believers would affirm these four first tier doctrines when stated so summarily. In the concrete and practical matters of appropriating and responding to the gift of justification we would differ. Also, we would differ on the understanding of the Trinity and how we should respond to God’s

character in the arenas of ethics and worship.<sup>14</sup> Again, the task of validating these doctrines in our concrete and congregational practices reveals who we are in the bigger and richer church and kingdom. More than ever, I belong to great catholic and baptist families; but for now I belong to a people who follow peculiar practices; in a humble way, this people gives witness to the larger church by their faithful baptismal practice; community, conversion, and conviction stand together.

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<sup>14</sup>The centrality of the doctrine of the Trinity emerges in the conversation of Lemke and Rathel as well as recent SBC headlines. We observe that both doctrines and practices must be discerned with care; we must teach that both the person and the work of the Holy Spirit are to be honored. More charitable readings of Pentecostal teachings are suggested in Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Baker, 2005).

# A RESPONSE TO STEVE W. LEMKE'S "WHAT IS A BAPTIST?: NINE MARKS THAT SEPARATE BAPTISTS FROM PRESBYTERIANS"

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Before I get into my response, let me tell you about my personal pilgrimage with Calvinism. I first encountered it 25 years ago when I was a sophomore in College. One of my friends believed in Calvinism, and he did well in formulating his view. While articulate, he was not able to persuade. He, however, remained a good friend.

Although I lived in Scotland for two years (near John Knox's home), I did not again encounter Calvinism until I was in seminary. One friend spoke to me about the "Doctrines of Grace," and he asked me what I thought of them. I said, "I'm somewhere between a 2- and 3-point Calvinist: the 'T,' the 'P,' and perhaps the 'L.'" Immediately he fired back, "No! You can't be 2- or 3-point; it's all or nothing!" Without hesitation, I simply told him, "Well, that's where I am; call it what you want." Basically, I've not changed my position. I hold the same basic understanding that Dr. Lemke has noted in his paper, and I believe most Southern Baptists hold the same view.

You may wonder what, if anything, I can offer to this discussion. After all, I'm a professor of Old Testament at a small Baptist school in Northeast Arkansas, one of the last bastions of Landmarkism within Southern Baptist life. We're still tackling issues of "closed communion" and "alien immersion" in our churches, so how does Calvinism affect us at Williams?

For the most part, Calvinism affects our students with mild interest, since most of them have never encountered it before they arrived to campus. Some of our students will go to "Passion" during Christmas break (and hear John Piper speak), while others at times attend the Reformed Baptist church in our area. In my years at Williams, I have seen the discussion rise and fall: for a while it will be popular, then it will subside. While presently most of the Calvinism discussion on campus has subsided, I'm sure it will appear again. New followers simply appreciate its concise formulaic answers, and many like its structured view of theology. Opponents of Calvinism, however, have two basic concerns to the system: the origin of sin, and the all-encompassing nature of God's love.

First, if one takes Calvinism to its full conclusion, the question has to be raised: how did sin begin in the world? If Adam and Eve were sinless and had no sinful nature, what made them sin? Though not all believe this, many Calvinists feel that God made them sin. Personally, I find such a view repulsive and heretical. Not only does it create more answers than it solves, the Bible states that God does not cause people to sin (cf. James 1:13).

Second, the Bible speaks of God's all-encompassing love for everyone. One of my most vocal Reformed students would discuss with me of his view of limited atonement, and he'd quote to me Romans 9-11 and Ephesians 2 (two citations that Calvinists often quote).

I, in turn, would defend my view of God's love, quoting 1 John, 1 Timothy 2, and John 3:16.<sup>1</sup>

One day this same student met my mother, who visited us for a few days. He learned that my mom was raised Presbyterian; and this fascinated him. He asked her, "I'm surprised that you grew up Presbyterian, but you're now a Baptist. Why did you change?" Without hesitation, she replied, "In the Baptist church I encountered something I never did in the Presbyterian church: I learned that God loved me." She had heard many sermons on social reform and neo-orthodoxy, but she had never heard one about God's love. When she learned of God's love, she accepted Christ. My mom may not have attended seminary or college, but she understands salvation! Her testimony changed my student, and he has since toned down some of his Calvinistic beliefs.

Although the above two concerns are the most noted, there are a few more I wish to mention. First, Calvinism is a system of belief, one of many systematic theologies. It does not answer every theological question, nor can it. It is a good, rational way of understanding theology, but it is not divine. There are other possibilities.

Second, the Reform movement is more than just theology. The idea of reforming our country is at the center of Calvinism. While there is some good in this, may I remind you that, if you want to see the Reform movement in action, look at Switzerland. It is one of the most efficient, precise, and wealthy nations on earth—and one of the most post-Christian.

Third, I think Baptists—even those who are "5-point"—prefer the "cafeteria" plan of Calvinism. Some Reform pastors want elders, but not synods! Without the proper checks and balances, an elder system creates an autonomous pastor. Several have merged what they like about the Reform movement with Baptist church polity.

Fourth, while I follow the basic idea of the "age of accountability," it is very difficult to find suitable biblical citations regarding this tenet. Even Baptist theologians like W. T. Conner could not use the Bible to prove his case; he simply could not conceive of a God who would send a child (or "child-like" person) to hell. While Baptists cannot find scriptural support for pedobaptism, the same could be said of the "age of accountability."

When I talk about Calvinism in class, I do not take sides, much to my students' dismay. When we talk about God's plan, I talk more about the philosophical beliefs of determinism, libertarianism, and compatibilism, then I "theologize" them. I'm sure my systematic friends would cringe! Though I rarely say it in class, most of my students learn that I am a centrist in the Calvin-Arminian debate, and that I'm more of a "biblical" theologian than a "systematic" theologian. I honestly don't mind the tension. Maybe none of us should.

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<sup>1</sup>One of my colleagues was once asked, "what does 'the world' mean in John 3:16? He replied, "Um, I think it means, "*the world!*"

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## SECTION 2

# THE EMERGING CHURCH, THE EMERGENT CHURCH, & THE FAITH ONCE DELIVERED TO THE SAINTS

“BELOVED, WHILE I WAS VERY DILIGENT TO  
WRITE TO YOU CONCERNING OUR COMMON  
SALVATION, I FOUND IT NECESSARY TO WRITE  
TO YOU EXHORTING YOU TO CONTEND  
EARNESTLY FOR THE FAITH WHICH WAS ONCE  
FOR ALL DELIVERED TO THE SAINTS.”

JUDE 3



# THE EMERGENT/EMERGING CHURCH: A MISSIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE<sup>1</sup>

DR. ED STETZER  
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While recounting his return to the West after serving as a missionary in India for decades, the late Lesslie Newbigin was unsettled by the accommodation of the Gospel to “existing plausibility structures.” Therefore, he set out to “rescue” the Gospel from perpetual inefficacy as defenders of the faith continued to give ground in debate.<sup>2</sup> Newbigin called on defenders of the “message” to resist domestication of the Gospel:

It is plain that we do not defend the Christian message by domesticating it within the reigning plausibility structure.<sup>3</sup>

Newbigin borrowed from Peter Berger in order to explain “plausibility structures” as “patterns of belief and practices accepted within a given society, which determine which beliefs are plausible to its members and which are not.”<sup>4</sup>

The Emergent/Emerging Church (E/EC)<sup>5</sup> often stands as something of a collective voice intent on calling attention to the ways in which contemporary expressions of Christianity have been domesticated. In doing so, it often provides a helpful critique. At the same time, like all movements before, it runs the risk of itself domesticating the Gospel to “emerging plausibility structures”—repeating the same error but in a new expression. This paper will explore its history and pertinent nuances stemming from the development of Emergent Village as one expression of the Emergent/Emerging Church. I will provide some observations as to its current state, particularly in relation to how the gospel engages culture. These interactions will lay the groundwork for offering a way to engage the positive

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<sup>1</sup>This paper was originally presented at the Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry conference entitled “The Emerging Church, the Emergent Church, and the Faith Once Delivered to the Saints” held on April 4, 2008.

<sup>2</sup>Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 3.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>5</sup>I am using “Emergent/Emerging” as this was the title of the conference where I presented this paper. Increasingly, some are making a distinction between the two. Some evangelicals are indicating that they are comfortable with Emerging, but uncomfortable with Emergent.



contributions of the Emergent/Emerging Church movement as well as avoid what I believe to be overly contextualized features of some within the movement.

Therefore, the perspective of this paper will be chiefly based on the work of a missiologist. Thus, the history, the values, and the practice of contextualization by those in the Emergent/Emerging Church movement will provide a framework to suggest bridges and boundaries for an evangelical engagement with the Emergent/Emerging Church movement.

#### LEAVING THE OLD COUNTRY<sup>6</sup>

While speaking at Westminster Seminary, Scot McKnight, of North Park College, offered an evaluation of the Emergent/Emerging Church (ECM) movement.<sup>7</sup> In his introduction he noted,

To define a movement, we must let the movement have the first word. We might, in the end, reconceptualize it – which postmodernists say is inevitable – but we should at least have the courtesy to let a movement say what it is.<sup>8</sup>

McKnight challenged critics to let those in the movement speak for themselves or at least engage in conversation until those being criticized would be able to say, “You’ve got it.”

Tony Jones, National Coordinator for Emergent Village, gives what many see as the best inside look at the ECM. In fact, Scot McKnight asserts all conversations about Emergent Village must now go through Tony Jones’ book,

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<sup>6</sup>Tony Jones, *The New Christians* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008). The subheading here is taken from Jones’ own telling of the E/EC story.

<sup>7</sup>Scot McKnight may well be considered one of the theologians of the Emergent Church. At the very least, Scot carries on a good many conversations with the more prominent members of Emergent Village discussing theology and praxis in relationship to the re-visioning of theology often present among “Emergents.” The following biographic information comes from his blog, [www.jesuscreed.org](http://www.jesuscreed.org). “Scot McKnight is a widely-recognized authority on the New Testament, early Christianity, and the historical Jesus. He is the Karl A. Olsson Professor in Religious Studies at North Park University (Chicago, Illinois). A popular and witty speaker, Dr. McKnight has given interviews on radios across the nation, has appeared on television, and is regularly asked to speak in local churches and educational events. Dr. McKnight obtained his Ph.D. at the University of Nottingham (1986).”

<sup>8</sup>Scot McKnight, “What is the Emerging Church?” Westminster Seminary Audio presentation ([http://www.wtsbooks.com/product-exec/product\\_id/4959/nm/What\\_Is\\_the\\_Emerging\\_Church\\_and\\_Misnomers\\_Surrounding\\_the\\_Emerging\\_Church](http://www.wtsbooks.com/product-exec/product_id/4959/nm/What_Is_the_Emerging_Church_and_Misnomers_Surrounding_the_Emerging_Church)), 2006. The transcript of the audio may be found with the referred quote found on p.2 at <http://www.foolishsage.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/McKnight%20-%20What%20is%20the%20Emerging%20Church.pdf>.

I admit to some weariness with folks mischaracterizing emergent and emerging when we have had so many good studies mapping the whole thing. Well, now, the major debate is over. If you want to know what “emergent” (as in Emergent Village) is all about, here’s the only and best firsthand account: Tony Jones, *The New Christians*.<sup>9</sup>

McKnight’s characterization of Tony Jones’ work as definitive is not without detractors within the E/EC. As I have researched and written this paper, I have found that some differ (often strongly) with some of Tony Jones’ conclusions. Also, others have written (and are writing) other histories.<sup>10</sup> And not all see *The New Christians* as the definitive history. For example, well known E/EC leader Andrew Jones does not list *The New Christians* among his top five E/EC books.<sup>11</sup>

However, due to the limited length of this paper, my analysis will be truncated and will rely on Tony Jones’ work, with some modification. A broader treatment of the ECM would have to draw from sources outside of the United States, which I have not done to limit the scope of the paper. Furthermore, it would look back further than I have done. For example, Andrew Jones contends the beginnings of the ECM in Europe pre-date the same movement in the United States<sup>12</sup> and he also interprets counter-cultural church movements beginning in the 1960s to be precursors to the E/EC rather than the organizations and movements that become Emergent Village.<sup>13</sup>

That being said, we have used Tony Jones’ history for several reasons. First, Tony Jones admits his telling of the story is indeed just one story and that it is part memoir, part explication of the ECM as he has experienced. Second, D. A. Carson raised the level of focus on the EMC in his book, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*. Carson critiqued Brian McLaren and Tony Jones, among others, and their identification with Emergent Village alerted many evangelicals to the ECM. Thus, for many, the ECM has been identified with Emergent Village.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Scot McKnight, <http://www.jesuscreed.org/index.php?s=conspirators>.

<sup>10</sup>See for example, Becky Garrison, *Rising from the Ashes: Rethinking Church* (New York: Seabury Books, 2007) and Phyllis Tickle’s forthcoming, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008).

<sup>11</sup>Andrew Jones, <http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/2008/06/emerging-chur-1.html#more>

<sup>12</sup>Andrew Jones, [http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/2006/10/my\\_history\\_of\\_t.html](http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/2006/10/my_history_of_t.html). Jones writes, “I didn’t realize at the time that in the UK there were new models of church far more advanced than ours. But more about that another time.”

<sup>13</sup>Andrew Jones, [http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/2005/03/emergant2\\_count.html](http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/2005/03/emergant2_count.html).

<sup>14</sup>This conclusion will be dated as Dan Kimball, Scot McKnight, and several others are discussion additional collaborations even as this paper is published.

Finally, Brian McLaren represents one of the most public figures in the ECM. Brian's association with Emergent Village raised its visibility as a key voice (particularly in the United States) for the ECM. Thus, for the focus and intent of this paper I have chosen to follow the story of the ECM as Jones tells it (with some revisions as detailed below).

Thus, *The New Christians: Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier* bears the weight of its endorsers as "the" definitive "explication and explanation" of emergent.<sup>15</sup> In the first section entitled, "Leaving the Old Country," Jones offers his perspective on the history of the ECM. Tony helps the reader think through the reigning plausibility structures questioned by the group which eventually became Emergent Village and which also shaped the ECM.<sup>16</sup> The ECM reaches around the world, having a significant presence in the UK, Europe, Australia and around the world years before what we witness in the United States. However, again, I will focus on the expression of the Emergent/Emerging Church Movement in the United States.

A brief lexicon may help the reader. This material is taken from Jones' work:

**Emergent Christianity:** the new forms of Christian faith arising from the old; the Christianity believed and practiced by the emergents.

**The Emergent Church:** the specifically new forms of church life rising from the modern, American church of the twentieth century.

**The Emergents:** the adherents of emergent Christianity.

**Emergent:** specifically referring to the relational network which formed first in 1997; also known as Emergent Village.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Tony Jones, *The New Christians* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008). The quotation is attributed to Phyllis Tickle on the dust cover.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 1-22.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., xix-xx. Following McKnight's conviction that to understand a movement is to let it speak until those who engage it hear, "You've got it," I will use the lexicon found in Jones' book. With that in mind, it is important to note the use of "The Emergent Church" may be a bit confusing to the readers, as old patterns would consider such a description to include something of a denominational structure. In this sense, there is no "Emergent Church." Instead, there are those in existing denominational structures who practice Emergent Christianity. Their network is a loose connection of people who share what will be referred to as an "ethos." Scot McKnight is helpful at this point when he notes, "*There is no such thing as the emerging "church." It is a movement or a conversation – which is Brian McLaren's and Tony Jones' favored term, and they after all are the leaders. To call it a "church" on the title of his [D.A. Carson] book is to pretend that it is something like a denomination, which it isn't. The leaders are determined, right now, to prevent it becoming anything more than a loose association of those who want to explore conversation about the Christian faith and the Christian mission and the Christian praxis in this world of ours, and they want to explore that conversation with freedom and impunity when it comes to*

Prior to the release of Jones' book, others had offered lexicographic help for understanding terms used by those considered "in" the Emergent/Emerging Church. For example, Darrin Patrick of Journey Church in St. Louis gave a presentation at Covenant Seminary in which one session was dedicated to a lexicon for conversations about emergent.<sup>18</sup> There is more than one good option for the vocabulary. However, this paper will follow Jones' terminology when the context relates to Emergent.

I will use the term "emerging" to describe the wider movement. One key difference rests with organizational expressions of the ECM, where Emergent Village (EV) would represent a more formal expression with events, local cohorts and publishing agreements. On many occasions, I will use the combination "Emergent/Emerging Church" (E/EC) when the distinction between Emergent and Emerging is less helpful and the context is the wider movement that takes in Emergent and Emergent Village in particular.

#### GENERATIONAL THEORY AND A NEW CHRISTIAN MARKET

The nexus for the story of the (E/EC) may be tied to generational theory and the market approach to church growth/planting, at least in its expression in the United States.<sup>19</sup> In 1986 Dieter Zander planted New Song in California as one of the first Gen X churches in the United States.<sup>20</sup> It would be another ten years before talk of Gen X churches gained traction. At the time, "targeting" for church planting referenced "Busters" or in Zander's terminology, "The People in Between." Ten years after the start of New Song, Zander wrote one of the first books on Gen X ministry, *Inside the Soul of a New Generation: Insights and Strategies for Reaching Busters*.<sup>21</sup>

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*doctrine.*" (McKnight, "What Is the Emerging Church?" delivered at Westminster Seminary, October 2006.).

<sup>18</sup>Darrin Patrick, "Popular Terms of the Emerging Church," Covenant Seminary, October 22, 2007. The audio file may be found at <http://www.journeyon.net/sermon/session-two-popular-terms-of-the-emerging-church/>.

<sup>19</sup>Andrew Jones included Zander and generational ministry in his telling of the history, but also adds that there were other early expressions of the ECM present in the 1980s that were not widely reported. Jones wrote me, "My first emerging church effort was a coffee shop environment in 88-89 at an Evangelical Free Church in Portland... there were others in the 1980s but these people did not have book deals... so the history is skewed and inaccurate."

<sup>20</sup>Keith Matthews, Conference call recording with Dieter Zander obtained from ETREK Collaborative Learning Journeys, 2007. Information about Dieter Zander and New Song may be found at <http://www.newsongsd.org/253217.ihtml>.

<sup>21</sup>Tim Celek, Dieter Zander and Patrick Kampert, *Inside the Soul of a New Generation: Insights and Strategies for Reaching Busters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

Dieter Zander attended the first Gen X forum at Colorado Springs in 1996 sponsored by Leadership Network.<sup>22</sup> Those in attendance at the Gen X forum discussed a number of issues. The following year, 1997, Doug Pagitt interviewed with Leadership Network to become the Young Leader coordinator. In addition, a group of about 500 met at Mount Hermon Conference Center in California as one of the key early meetings.

The third conference in this series took place at Glorieta, New Mexico, and was dubbed the Re-evaluation Forum. Pagitt planned this event which offered a variety of tracks and speakers. However, Travis contends (and Andrew Jones confirmed) that “the Group of 20” that became the seedbed of “Emergent” was actually post-Glorieta.

During and between these larger meetings, it appears from Jones that smaller informal meetings or networking sessions took place. From these developing friendships “emerged” what Travis calls “the Group of 20.” Jones’ telling of the story places the development of this group prior to Glorieta. Our research team confirmed the planning of the first “Gathering” at Glorieta by this small group was announced via a flier at the very first Emergent Convention in San Diego. Further, a reference to a “Group of 20” is applied by those outside that network.

The small group bore more resemblance to a G8 type group representing various smaller networks sharing “Emergent” sensibilities. Leadership Network concerned itself with facilitating a variety of “affinity” groups into networks. One of those networks included young leaders with an “Emergent” ethos. Though their perceptions in timing differ as to the emergence of a small “leadership” group, Travis’s and Jones’ accounts illustrate that the roots of what would become the (E/EC) developed through Leadership Network gatherings and the organizations goal of facilitating various networks for ministry.

Emergent Village represents the most organized iteration of a movement that initially sought to raise up the next Bill Hybles or Rick Warren. Tony Jones offers brief details of a meeting at Glen Eyrie Mansion just outside of Colorado Springs, CO.<sup>23</sup> The name chosen for the gathering of about a dozen young leaders, orchestrated by Doug Pagitt representing Leadership Network, was “Gen X 1.0.”

Several years would pass before the term “Emergent” would signal a significant move on the contemporary Christian landscape. The meeting in Glen Eyrie would eventually comprise a project referred to as “The Young Leader Network” and later “The Terra Nova Project.” Conversations occurred to purposefully identify ways to connect with the Gen X generation. From these discussions, considerations regarding cultural shifts developed which created new challenges and opportunities for the church.

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<sup>22</sup>Dave Travis (of Leadership Network) sent me an e-mail noting the timeline for the general meetings sponsored by Leadership Network, clarifying some perceived inaccuracies.

<sup>23</sup>Jones, *The New Christians*, 42-43. Tony acknowledges others would tell the story differently and notes he was not present at any of the early meetings. The timeline is really only relevant as it pinpoints certain participants” at a given meeting. A number of streams, threads, or influences contributed to “Emergent Village” and that is chiefly Jones’ point.

Moreover, these conversations led the group to conclude that Evangelical Theology was in need of “re-visioning.” Questions arose as to the success of the “Evangelical” project.<sup>24</sup> However, when Emergent Christianity sets its critical gaze toward the state of the Church, it often finds left and right categories polarizing, whereas at times I find these categories clarifying.

This desire to critique modern expressions of Christianity was often directed at Evangelicals. However, some in the emerging church are even-handed in their critique of the church. Not only do those in the Evangelical tradition face scrutiny, mainline churches do not get a free pass. As recently as last fall at the American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature (AAR/SBL) meeting in San Diego, Tony Jones sparred with Diana Butler-Bass over his frequent assertion that the “Mainline Church” is “dead.”<sup>25</sup> This has led to some controversy within the emerging expressions of some mainline denominations as many E/EC movements are a part of those structures.

Some characterize the prophetic call of Emergent Christianity to be nothing but angry rhetoric. I believe that a closer look at the unarguable decline of Christianity in the United States gives cause for us to reconsider the Emerging Church’s call rather than dismiss it out of hand because we do not like the tone. The loss of Christian influence in American culture must be born by all expressions of the Faith, particularly denominations who fail to take into account the changing cultural milieu while dreaming of a bygone day. As I have said of our own denomination, should the 1950s return we will be ready. Can it really be argued the issue is simply a matter of ecclesial structures? The (E/EC) suggests otherwise, and I believe that here they are at least partly right.

#### BEYOND CONSUMER CULTURE AND THE “HERMENEUTIC OF DECONSTRUCTION”

The framework for evaluating current practices and theology, by what would become the Emergent/Emerging Church, came during that Glen Eyrie meeting. After some discussion focused on marketing to Gen X, the meeting shifted. As Brad Cecil listened, he found the conversation lacking.<sup>26</sup> At a point where his body language indicated that he had not embraced the tone and direction of the conversation, he was asked for his input. Brad suggested that the issues were deeper than looking for style points with Gen X. Deep

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<sup>24</sup>I would agree with the need to evaluate the Evangelical movement and to conclude that it falls short of its promise, hence my affirmation of efforts such as “The Gospel Coalition.”

<sup>25</sup>Scot McKnight, Tony Jones and Diana Butler-Bass, “AAR Panel,” Podcast, 2007, <http://www.emergentvillage.com/podcast/aar-panel-part-1> and <http://www.emergentvillage.com/podcast/aar-panel-part-2>.

<sup>26</sup>Brad Cecil, “Axxess”, web page background of ministry led, at times, by Brad Cecil, [http://www.axxess.org/?page\\_id=2](http://www.axxess.org/?page_id=2). Also view the powerpoint Cecil put together on the subject, <http://www.slideshare.net/knightopia/ministry-in-the-emerging-postmodern-world>.

cultural shifts indicated a need to look beyond matters of marketing to a new iteration of Christian consumer culture.<sup>27</sup>

Cultural analysis combined with ecclesiological, missiological, and theological responses led Cecil to refer to his reading and interaction with John (Jack) D. Caputo.<sup>28</sup> For Cecil, the way forward would be led by Caputo's "hermeneutic of deconstruction."<sup>29</sup> Caputo sought to put forth a way to retain orthodoxy while at the same time exposing the attachments and accommodations that existing forms of Christianity make to conform to the reigning plausibility structures. At a pivotal break in the meeting, a few soon-to-be prominent figures would look around the room and wonder just "who got it."

The turn this new group would make led to the early label, "angry young white children of Evangelicalism." Many who found the "hermeneutic of deconstruction" helpful for recovering the Gospel from the clutches of a consumer culture had not yet learned to temper their "discontent with grace." Many popular message boards contained scathing words directed at what was and is referred to as the "Institutional Church."<sup>30</sup>

One of the early places for those working through the critique of the Church was TheOoze. Spencer Burke left Mariner's Church convinced that ecclesial structures needed to be evaluated. One key issue was the disproportionate financial commitment to the "Sunday" event creating more of a consumer construct than a place for spiritual transformation and building community. Again, the entrance into theological conversations proved to be ecclesiology.

"TheOoze" community grew and many of the interactions on the message boards in the early days demonstrated much of the angry evangelical rhetoric. However, it became a key gathering point and connection place for leaders in the emerging conversation. It would also be the place where I first researched the movement. In 2001, I conducted a survey on TheOoze which focused on churches reaching postmoderns. That research was published in my book, *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age* (2003).

Recently TheOoze celebrated its ten-year anniversary with the release of, *Out of the Ooze*. In the introduction founder Spencer Burke noted,

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<sup>27</sup>Jones, *The New Christians*, 42-43.

<sup>28</sup>John (Jack) D. Caputo retired from Villanova University and is now at Syracuse University, <http://religion.syr.edu/caputo.html>.

<sup>29</sup>John D. Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?: The Good News of Post-Modernism for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 19-34. Caputo considers healthy deconstruction to be a "hermeneutic of the Kingdom of God."

<sup>30</sup>For example, TheOoze message boards offered a place for the discontented to engage in conversation around themes questioning the future of the Church as institution, <http://www.theooze.com>.

In 1998, I decided to launch TheOoze.com as a place where people could come and share their questions, longings, and musings about the body of Christ. My desire was to create a place where honest and transparent dialogue about faith, culture, and ministry could happen.

Since that time, TheOoze.com has grown to over two hundred and fifty thousand visitors a month from more than one hundred countries around the world. Who are these people? They are people who love the church and desperately want to see her become the essential, life-giving-community that God designed her to be. They come from a wide variety of traditions, viewpoints, and cultures.<sup>31</sup>

Over time, the early phase of grumblings and complaints faded and the early conversations changed direction. Only offering critique would no longer be sufficient; it was now time to consider what contributions could be made to “see her [the Church] become the essential, life-giving-community that God designed her to be.”<sup>32</sup>

#### ORGANIZATIONAL TURNS

What would be the next steps? The organization of TheOoze illustrates a shift. Hierarchies are often anathema for those in emerging Christianity. The disdain is not against order as much as a conviction that responsibility be shared across a network. For example, TheOoze is maintained by a number of volunteers. Each area of content is managed in a way to include nearly anyone who would commit to participate.

Discontent with ecclesial structures represents a significant turn in the history of the Emergent/Emerging Church. From the collaborative structure of TheOoze to the loose network created by Doug Pagitt, the need to gather the growing group into more of a formal network began.

As noted, Leadership Network was the early sponsor of what would become the emerging Church. I recently spoke with Bob Buford about his “sponsorship,” and he was unhappy with what the movement had become. The gerund “emerging” showed up in one of the many taglines supplied on Leadership Network materials. In one iteration of the many taglines LN described itself as “advance scouts for the emerging church.” The reference to “emerging church” by LN is more coincidence than endorsement for any movement; more descriptive of Leadership Network’s development of “emerging networks” rather than “emerging church.” However, those who would eventually become leaders in the E/EC developed their network out of relationships forged via Leadership Network “networks.” That gerund (emerging) would eventually become a noun (emergent) and from relationships fostered by LN, a future movement would find its moniker.

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<sup>31</sup>Spencer Burke, *Out of the Ooze: Unlikely Love Letters from Beyond the Pew* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2007), 14.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 14.



Jones writes of the faltering relationship between the Young Leaders and Leadership Network. In a conference call, this fractured relationship was discussed and the group determined to create a more formal organization to promote constructive ways to “live the way of Jesus in a postmodern age.” The label “Emergent” rose to the fore as a metaphor for new growth on the forest floor “emerging” beneath the old growth.<sup>33</sup> The idea was to maintain the connection with Christian history and at the same time develop new forms to engage the postmodern shift in culture.

Leonard Sweet offered a similar conception with the “swing.”<sup>34</sup> In this image statement found on his website, Sweet borrowed from research which suggested that when a person “swings” he or she simultaneously leans back and presses forward. Application of this image called for a reaching back into Church history and a pressing forward into the future. The issue of contextualization would be an important component in analyzing this movement. Sweet became a popular Church Historian/Futurist in the early days of the Emergent/Emerging Church and, in many ways, encouraged the “Emergent Turn.”

Recently, it should be noted here that Sweet offered the criticism that the “turn” may have gone too far with Emergent. So far, he asserts—rather than reach back into 2000 years of Church history, Emergent stopped at the “liberal turn” wherein the Gospel became all social and no gospel. Sweet emailed me:

The emerging church has become another form of social gospel. And the problem with every social gospel is that it becomes all social and no gospel. All social justice and no social gospel. It is embarrassing that evangelicals have discovered and embraced liberation theology after it destroyed the main line, old line, side line, off line, flat line church.<sup>35</sup>

Interestingly, in response to similar concerns, Brian McLaren responds on Andrew Jones’ web log to the charges of embracing liberation theology and accompanying criticisms.<sup>36</sup>

Dan Kimball, one of the early members of the Emergent Village “coordinating council,” chronicled the use of the term “emerging” on his blog in April 2006. The irony

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<sup>33</sup>The metaphor of new growth emerging from the forest floor represents a common explanation of the attractiveness of “emerging” used in talks by many “leaders” in the E/EC.

<sup>34</sup>Leonard Sweet, “Image Statement”, <http://www.leonardsweet.com/imgstatement.asp>.

<sup>35</sup>Personal email from Len Sweet.

<sup>36</sup>Andrew Jones, “Brian McLaren Responds to *Everything Must Change* Concerns”, March 25, 2008, <http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/2008/03/brian-mclaren-r.html>.

lies in the title of Kimball's book, *The Emerging Church*.<sup>37</sup> Kimball notes he first heard the reference to "emerging" from Leadership Network which inspired him to use the term in the title of his book, published in 2003. Kimball notes that the domain names *emergingchurch.com*, *emergingchurch.net*, *emergingchurch.org* were all purchased between 2000 and 2001. (I registered *postmodernism.net* in April 2000 to be used as a resource for those seeking to reach this emerging culture. But, unlike Dan Kimball, I never used the domain.)

The Young Leaders Theology Group that became Emergent Village purchased *emergentvillage.com* and *emergentvillage.org* in June of 2001. These moves indicate an interest to "ramp up" public interest and the networking of and for those self-identifying with the "emergent/emerging conversation."

These networks coalesced into the formation of Emergent Village. Early on Emergent Village functioned as a loose network under the leadership of a "Coordinating Council." Those who participated did so voluntarily and without remuneration. The first "event" for this group took place at Glorieta Conference Center in New Mexico and was dubbed "The Emergent Gathering." Those who gathered for this event paid a small registration fee. Once again, the collaborative nature of the event found expression in the "breakout" sessions. Anyone who traveled to Glorieta could offer to host a session around the topic of their choice. The feel of the gathering was more fellowship than conference.

"The Gathering" was a small event but spurred a desire for larger conferences and more focused events. The need for partnerships to facilitate conferences and book publishing became apparent, and the first partner to step forward was Youth Specialties. Not only would YS offer a proven event planning team, but they also presented a viable publishing partner. YS and its founder Mike Yaconelli co-sponsored the first National Pastor's Convention in San Diego. Soon a parallel convention, referred to as "The Emergent Convention," provided an alternate "track" for National Pastors Convention attendees. The partnership was short lived as YS re-focused their energies on their core ministry to youth workers. The separation was amicable. For example, Mark Ostreicher often writes of his continued friendship with Doug Pagitt, as well as Tony Jones and others he met during the YS-Emergent partnership. As evidenced by the most recent event in February 2008, many connected with Emergent still make presentations at the National Pastor's Convention.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Dan Kimball, "Origin of the terms "Emerging" and "Emergent Church – part 1, [http://www.dankimball.com/vintage\\_faith/2006/04/origin\\_of\\_the\\_t.html](http://www.dankimball.com/vintage_faith/2006/04/origin_of_the_t.html).

<sup>38</sup>Scot McKnight, Phyllis Tickle, and Tony Jones have all been associated with the Emergent Church on some level. Others at the conference could also be considered sympathetic. For example, Sarah Cunningham's book *Dear Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006) expresses the ethos of the Emergent Church. An argument could be made that Erwin McManus also has written in a vein familiar to the Emergent Church "mood."

## ORTHODOXY OVER ORTHOPRAXY?

For many in the Emergent/Emerging Church, calls to rethink historic bi-polarities figure prominently into conversations, whether in conference talks or books written. Without question one of the marks that frames the values of the Emergent/Emerging Church and, as already noted, provides the door to theological re-visioning is “ecclesial discontent.” The heart of this issue turns on the practice of faith in Jesus and its relationship to right belief. For many in the Emergent/Emerging Church, the question of orthodoxy or orthopraxy is a false dichotomy. At the same time, they would be quick to note their experiences have witnessed a disconnect between right belief (orthodoxy) and right practice (orthopraxy). They often come across sounding as though right practice trumps right belief. I would contend that this is in itself an unnecessary bi-polarity. Yet, for those in the Emergent Church, practice is often considered a first order spiritual matter while doctrine is second order.

Donald Miller may be a popular example of the emerging church’s desire to emphasize orthopraxy (right practice). In *Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality*, he tells the story of the “confessional.” In an attempt to connect with what was considered one of the most secular college campus populations in the United States at Reed College, Miller and others set up a confessional during a week of festivities around the campus referred to as Ren Fayre.

Dressed in monastic attire, they waited for students to approach the booth. Upon inquiry, students learned the group was not accepting confessions but making them. Miller and his band of confessors apologized to students for the bad practices they had endured at the hands of Christians. The group confessed by referencing events in Christian history that seemed to contradict the ethic of Jesus. While Miller and his group had not directly participated in the actions, they understood the perception created by these events which often left non-Christians questioning the veracity of a faith that forced, for example, conversions at the point of a sword.<sup>39</sup> They graphically demonstrated the difference between orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

Brian McLaren provides another example. He considers himself something of an anomaly when it comes to the ECM. Rather than an early participant as a “young leader,” Brian instead responded to the invitation to participate though a full ten years or more older than the group assembled by Pagitt. His book *A New Kind of Christian* struck an early chord. The experiment in “fiction/non-fiction” gave voice to many young people who found their experience of life and faith in Jesus formed in more conservative, even fundamentalist, church settings. If *A New Kind of Christian* became the entry point for many to consider what would be the Emergent/Emerging Church Movement, Jones’ *The New Christians* serves as a description of how the movement developed along those lines. In that sense, the connection between McLaren’s *A New Kind of Christian* and Tony Jones’ *The New Christians* is unmistakable.

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<sup>39</sup>Donald Miller, *Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 113-127.

In 2006, McLaren published *The Secret Message of Jesus*. In the first chapter titled, “Excavation,” Brian notes a deepening disconnect between what he learned as a young Christian, and also preached as a pastor, and his reading of the Scriptures. He explains,

For me, these aren’t theoretical questions. I grew up in the church and heard wonderful stories about Jesus that captured my imagination throughout my childhood. Then in my teenage years, after a brief but intense period of doubt, I became intrigued by Jesus in a more mature way, and I began wondering what it means to be an authentic follower of Jesus in my daily life. In college and graduate school, although I went through times of questioning, skepticism, and disillusionment, I retained confidence that Jesus himself was somehow right and real and from God—even if the religions bearing his name seemed to be a very mixed bag of adherents like me often set a disappointing example.<sup>40</sup>

Here, a prominent figure in the Emergent Church points up not simply the dissonance between orthodoxy and praxis as an observer but also as a participant in the life of the Church.

#### “-MERGENTS”: THE BREADTH OF THE MOVEMENT AND THE MISSIONAL INFLUENCE

The movement has clearly grown in influence. For some, they believe that influence will grow dramatically over the coming years. Phyllis Tickle, currently Contributing Editor in Religion and former Religion Editor for Publishers Weekly, offered some reflections on her forthcoming book, *The Great Emergence*, in an Emergent Village podcast.<sup>41</sup> During the conversation Tony Jones points up the interesting advocacy Tickle has demonstrated toward the E/EC. For two consecutive years, in 2004 and 2005, Tickle spoke to those who gathered at the Emergent Convention. A quote from her forthcoming book offers her rationale,

While no observer is willing to say emphatically just how many North American Christians are definitively emergent at this moment, it is not unreasonable to assume that by that by the time the Great Emergence has reach maturity, about 60 percent of practicing American Christians will be emergent or some clear variant thereof.<sup>42</sup>

Once the ECM gained national prominence as a movement or conversation, observers and critics have attempted to determine the “theology of the Emergent/Emerging Church.” There are certainly diverging opinions on the theology of the emerging church.

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<sup>40</sup>Brian McLaren, *The Secret Message of Jesus* (Nashville: W Publishing, 2006), 5.

<sup>41</sup>Emergent Village Podcast, 07/14/07, <http://www.emergentvillage.com/podcast/phyllis-tickle-interviewed-by-tony-jones>.

<sup>42</sup>Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 139.

Scot McKnight contends there is no theology of Emergent.<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, Don Carson considers Emergent to have left orthodoxy behind.

If Scot McKnight's admonition to let Emergent speak for itself is followed, then it may do well to consider the stated values of Emergent Village. The result would be the expression of an ethos assimilated into a variety of denominational, and so in many ways theological, constructs. The breadth of the Emergent Church ethos found in nearly every denominational setting makes it hard to consider the movement expressly theological. It may well lead to "re-visioning" theological formulations, but this appears to often be done so in the context of one's faith tradition. In a recent Emergent/C e-mail newsletter, National Coordinator Tony Jones and webmaster Steve Knight note,

We're not sure how it started to happen exactly, but people from many different streams of Christianity started finding some inspiration, hope, and community through Emergent Village—and then they started to find each other. Well, it's grown dramatically over the past couple years, thanks in large part to the Internet. We're thrilled about this, as people explore how the emergent experiment might take hold in the Petri dish of their own traditions/denominations.<sup>44</sup>

They go on to note "mergent" groups Lutheranmergent (Lutheran), Methodomergent (Methodist), Presbytermergent (Presbyterian), Reformmergent (Reformed), Submergent (Anabaptist), Anglimergent (Anglican/Episcopal), Convergent (Quaker), and AGmergent (Assemblies of God/Pentecostal).<sup>45</sup> The Emergent Village website describes itself as "a growing, generative friendship among missional Christians seeking to love our world in the Spirit of Jesus Christ."<sup>46</sup>

Applying adjectives to forms of Christianity may help understand nuances, but it often proves to limit the breadth of a movement. Embedded in the Emergent/Emerging Church ethos one will find a distinct missional thread. Some find confusion when examining current Christian moves. Is it "missional?" Is it "Emergent?" Is it "Missional Emergent?" Is it "Emergent Missional?" Or, "What does missional have to do with Emergent?"

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<sup>43</sup>Scot McKnight, "What is the Emerging Church?" Westminster Seminary Audio presentation ([http://www.wtsbooks.com/product-exec/product\\_id/4959/nm/What\\_Is\\_the\\_Emerging\\_Church\\_and\\_Misnomers\\_Surrounding\\_the\\_Emerging\\_Church](http://www.wtsbooks.com/product-exec/product_id/4959/nm/What_Is_the_Emerging_Church_and_Misnomers_Surrounding_the_Emerging_Church)), 2006. The transcript of the audio may be found at <http://www.foolishsage.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/McKnight%20-%20What%20is%20the%20Emerging%20Church.pdf>.

<sup>44</sup>Tony Jones and Steve Knight, "Emergent Hybrid Synergy: The Rise of the – Mergents", March 28, 2008, <http://www.emergentvillage.com/weblog/emergent-hybrid-synergy-the-rise-of-the-mergents>.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Emergent Village, "Home Page", [www.emergentvillage.com](http://www.emergentvillage.com).

The Emergent/Emerging Church cannot ignore the influence of the Gospel and Our Culture Network and its accompanying “missional conversations.” Alan Roxburgh has served as an interesting conversation partner for both the Emergent Church and the GOCN. He served as a contributor to *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* published in 1998. Roxburgh was also invited to some of the pre-Emergent Village conversations and to be a breakout session leader for at least one of the Emergent Conventions sponsored by Youth Specialties.

Biblical Seminary may provide a helpful example of how missional and emerging have blended. Alan Roxburgh served as consultant to Biblical Theological Seminary (BTS) as they were re-imagining their role as a place to offer theological education. His association with GOCN and the “missional conversation” bears a significant mark on the language and move BTS has taken. At the same time, John Franke represents one of the young theologians many in the Emergent/Emerging Church became familiar with at the release of *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* that he co-authored with the late Stanley Grenz. There is little doubt that Grenz’s conviction that Evangelical theology needed to be “re-visioned” has influenced those in the Emergent/Emerging Church.

Another figure offering input and consultation with BTS has been Tim Keel, pastor of Jacob’s Well in Kansas City, Missouri. Tim has served on the Coordinating Council of Emergent Village since the early days. His church has been considered by some to really capture the ethos of the Emergent Church and, at the same time, carry on the missional thread with great intention. Tim tells his story in his recent book, *Intuitive Leadership: Embracing a Paradigm of Narrative, Metaphor, and Chaos* published under the “emersion” imprint. Today, Tim serves as a Trustee of BTS.

#### WALKING THE TIGHTROPE: A CASE IN POINT

When the edges of the Emergent/Emerging Church garnered both attention and harsh critique, BTS made a conscious decision to maintain a place in the middle between the extremes of the Emergent Church and the Missional Conversation. Todd Mangum, Associate Professor of Theology and Dean of the Faculty, helped craft a statement expressing the place Biblical would stand. The statement reads in part,

“Emergent” is a loosely knit group of people in conversation about and trying experiments in how the people of God can forward the ministry of Jesus in new and different ways. From there, wide diversity abounds. “Emergents” seems to share one common trait: disillusionment with the organized, institutional church as it has existed through the 20th century (whether fundamentalist, liberal, megachurch, or tall-steeple liturgical) ... Biblical is seeking to come alongside the emergents as an evangelical friend that understands the disillusionment and wants to help. We’re trying to supply training that capitalizes on the strengths and helps emergents mature beyond the weaknesses. We’re unapologetically evangelical in our theology (not all emergents are), but because we’re generous and value the relationship (two virtues

that trump everything else typically for emergents), we can get along with emergents even with whom we disagree vigorously in theological conviction.<sup>47</sup>

While some view it as flirting with danger, BTS attempts what others consider the impossible. Their conviction rests with the need to explore the value of the “Missional Turn” in concert with those healthy prophetic voices in the Emergent Church for the good of the Church. In fact, Mangum presented a paper to the Theology and Culture Study Session of the Evangelical Theological Society in November of 2007 in San Diego titled, “Has Our Culture Changed So Much Really? (An Apologia for the ‘Missional Turn’)”. It is hard to escape the same sentiment expressed by Scot McKnight when he notes that Emergent Christians are seeking to live out the way of Jesus in a postmodern context—a clear missional concern..

The text of the BTS statement given by Todd Mangum does appear to distance the seminary in some sense from the Emergent Church. Other examples also illustrate the point. The Center for Emerging Church Leadership (CECL) has undergone a name change to, Catalyst for Missional Leadership (C4ML). My own role at BTS, leading their 2007 faculty retreat and serving as an adjunct faculty member, was expressed around their desire to be more “missional” and less “emerging.” Thus, some want to be missional but are cautious about being “emergent.”

The ethos of Emergent Village characterized by their identity statement cannot be viewed as anything other than an attempt to express the melding of “emerging” and “missional.” One could argue that “generative friendship” illustrates the move from hierarchical models of networking acutely important to the Emergent Church. And, “missional Christians” retains the understanding of the work of God in the world in existing cultural contexts. The impulse to contextualize the Gospel marks the Emergent Church as a “missiological turn” as much as it does a “theological turn.”

#### VALUES AND THE EMERGENT CHURCH

While the Emergent Church continues to speak for itself through those with platform and voice, it becomes increasingly important to see how its values reflect a framework for contextualization and creates an agreed upon “rule of life” out of which Emergents seek to live the way of Jesus. The values of the Emergent/Emerging Church illustrate a clear emphasis upon practice which they believe is missing in the more conservative forms of the Faith. For instance, Tony Jones identifies traits that he found as he visited a number of Emergent Churches across the United States. He begins laying these out by writing,

As a result of those category-defying characteristics, many emergents feel homeless in the modern American church. In 2006 I visited eight emergent congregations across the country. At each, I performed one-on-one interviews and facilitated focus

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<sup>47</sup>Todd Mangum, “Q & A with Todd Mangum”, October 6, 200, Catalyst for Missional Leadership at BTS’s website, <http://www.c4ml.com/wandering-off-course/10/>.

groups, listening for articulations of just what emergent Christianity offered these people.<sup>48</sup>

Three traits emerged during the interviews and conversations Jones conducted. First, a remarkable disappointment with modern American Christianity grounded in the polarizations experienced in the left-right divide. Second, these people evidenced a tortured desire for inclusion that transcended the warnings they would fall on the slippery slope into liberalism. Instead they gave themselves to the ideal considering the “other” as valuable human beings, even the enemy is in need of forgiveness. Third, despite the condition of the world, those with whom Tony talked shared a relentless hope-filled orientation. The Good News of Jesus is believed to be just that, Good News of hope that brings an end to war, poverty, and hunger. And, “emergents” believe that they should actively participate in sharing this hope for the good of the world.<sup>49</sup>

One may readily recognize the connection to the kinds of sentiment Jones discovered with the values given on the Emergent Village website. Each value is supported by both explanation and suggested practices which also call attention to the unnecessary disconnect between orthodoxy and orthopraxy. The values given on the Emergent Village website are a commitment to God in the Way of Jesus, a commitment to the Church in all its forms, a commitment to God’s World, and a commitment to one another. It would be a mistake to assume what these mean without reading the practices and actions supporting these commitments.

The illumination of these values takes many forms. For example, one may argue Scot McKnight’s recent book, *A Community Called Atonement*, serves both as polemic and apologetic for the conversations about the atonement among emerging Christians. In terms of apology, McKnight calls the reader to the various ways the atonement has been viewed in history and so emphasizes its breadth. As a polemic, McKnight reminds the reader of the necessity of the various perspectives on the atonement, lest in throwing out one view a person may develop as truncated a view of the atonement as they critique others of having.

One cannot deny the interplay between orthodoxy and praxis. Great risks are run when seeking one over the other. The Emergent Church considers it obvious that contending for doctrinal precision has not necessarily produced an embodied ethic—and I

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<sup>48</sup>Jones, *The New Christians*, 70. The “category-defying characteristics” is illustrated by an e-mail Tony received wherein a Christian manager at Starbucks responds in a conversation by saying, “You know what I hate about those emergent people? They love everyone.” This was in response to learning a group of Christians had befriended a lesbian barista in the store he managed, even offering a church to attend.

<sup>49</sup>Jones, *The New Christians*, 70-72. Jones concludes this brief section with a parenthetical caveat, “lists are dangerous, and emergents are rightly suspicious of them. These three characteristics of emergent Christians are not conclusive, nor are they necessarily provable – or disprovable. They are simply my intuitions based on scores of conversations with emergents, and I expect—and hope—that they will provoke much debate.”



believe few would disagree with them. They would assert that the critics dissect words quickly in an attempt to ensure “orthodoxy,” but that for them orthodoxy has not been compromised in favor of being relevant.<sup>50</sup> The curious, like the critics, look for marks by which to evaluate the Emergent Church.

PRACTICES, TAXONOMIES, STREAMS AND LAKE EMERGENT –  
UNDERSTANDING THE DIVERSITY OF EMERGENT CHRISTIANITY

Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger set out to identify the Emergent/Emerging Church in their book *Emerging Churches: Creating Community in Postmodern Cultures*. The title of the book points the reader to consider the Emergent/Emerging Church in terms of its practices. Gibbs and Bolger identified nine characteristic practices. They note,

Emerging churches are communities that practice the way of Jesus within postmodern cultures. This definition encompasses nine practices. Emerging churches (1) identify with the life of Jesus, (2) transform the secular realm, and (3) live highly communal lives. Because of these three activities, they (4) welcome the stranger, (5) serve with generosity, (6) participate as producers, (7) create as created beings, (8) lead as a body, and (9) take part in spiritual activities.<sup>51</sup>

Based on their research, Gibbs and Bolger appear to indicate the formation of an “Emerging Church” tends toward these practices rather than an exclusive theological framework.

Even with the identification of nine practices observed by Gibbs and Bolger, the diverse expressions among Emergent/Emerging Churches frustrates the curious and the critic alike. Engagement with one Emerging Church does not necessarily stand for the evaluation of another.

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<sup>50</sup>D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005). Carson chiefly interacts with his reading of Brian McLaren. He includes Steve Chalke in the conversation. Those familiar with Emergent-UK note Chalke is not considered part of the movement there. In his famous line, “Damn all false antitheses,” Carson asserts rather than deconstruct polarities offensive to the Gospel, McLaren creates false dichotomies that lead to a move away from, if not denying, the Gospel. Scot McKnight suggests Carson rightly contends “hard postmodernism” runs contrary to the Gospel (Westminster Seminary presentation noted earlier in this paper). But, McKnight goes on to illustrate there is no evidence Brian McLaren or others leading Emergent Village, for example, are indeed “hard postmodernists.” Rather, they are likely “soft postmodernists.” While the intent of this paper is not to debate the level to which some or all Emergents have embraced a philosophy of postmodernism, the contextual move will be important for understanding “taxonomies and streams” suggested by those hoping to engage Emergents and the Emergent Church.

<sup>51</sup>Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 44-45.

## MY TAXONOMY OF THE EMERGENT CHURCH

In January of 2006 I wrote, “Understanding the Emerging Church.”<sup>52</sup> I laid out a three-layered taxonomy originally written for my own denominational context. I hoped that it would help my co-denominationalists to understand the diversity in the Emergent/Emerging Church. Unashamedly, part of my objective was to create “space” for young pastors who considered themselves emerging but still held to the denomination’s theological statement.

My observation noted the diversity of this amorphous movement:

It’s been interesting to watch the emerging church conversation over the last few months. Important issues are being discussed. Unfortunately, like many conversations, good things are lumped together with bad and important conversations are lost in more heat than light.

My own observation as one who speaks at some events classified as “emerging” is that there are three broad categories of what is often called “the emerging church.” Oddly enough, I think I can fairly say that most in the emerging conversation would agree with my assessments about the “types” of emerging leaders and churches—and just differ with my conclusions.<sup>53</sup>

I dubbed the three groupings of the Emergent/Emerging Church as the Relevantists, Reconstructionists, and Revisionists. The article received surprising attention, not, I believe, because it was brilliantly written, but because it stated what others already saw—there was a wide diversity of what was called “emerging.” Andrew Jones, at the time the most prominent emerging church blogger, commented on the article saying, “Ed Stetzer gets it.”<sup>54</sup> I think it was simply a statement that there are levels “emerging” that need to be recognized.

To my knowledge, this was the first widely distributed analysis, however it was not the last. And, some were better than mine. Some borrowed and expanded on the article. Others created new approaches. But, new taxonomies emerged from Wes Daniels, Darrin Patrick, Mark Driscoll, Scot McKnight, and Andrew Jones<sup>55</sup> as noted on the website, “Who

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<sup>52</sup>“Understanding the Emerging Church”, Baptist Press article, January 6, 2006, <http://www.baptistpress.org/bpnews.asp?ID=22406>.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>[http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/2006/01/ed\\_stetzer\\_gets.html](http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/2006/01/ed_stetzer_gets.html)

<sup>55</sup>Andrew Jones, <http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/2008/01/models-of-emerg.html>. Jones recently reminded me that he had written an earlier analysis and notes on his blog, “No one has ever quoted mine because no one has ever read it, at least not in the last 8 years. It was never published online, only in a Leadership Network magazine called *Next Generation*.”

In the World Are We?”<sup>56</sup> C. Michael Patton offers one of the most recent taxonomies of the Emergent/Emerging Church.<sup>57</sup>

Two years later, I see a few different nuances and might add an additional sub-category, but I still believe these categories helped provide a much needed catalyst for those hoping to understand this movement or conversation and not be so quick to dismiss any positive contributions.<sup>58</sup> In a recent presentation to the Evangelical Free Church of America Mid-Winter, I remarked,

Ultimately there is such diversity in what is called the emerging church from inerrantists, complementarians, verse-by-verse preaching of evangelicals to basically post-evangelicals whose faith would be unrecognizable to those who would be firmly in the evangelical movement. And yet they would all consider themselves emerging. Now the challenge is how do you have a conversation without understanding from where people come?<sup>59</sup>

Though taxonomies are limited and limiting, I believe they provide helpful frameworks for participating in the kinds of conversations needed when engaging any reform movement.

#### RELEVANTS

The first category of people associated with the Emergent Church, “Relevants,” is an admitted neologism.<sup>60</sup> These people attempt to contextualize music, worship, and outreach much like the “contemporary church” movement of the 1980’s and 1990’s. Their methodology may be considered by critics to be progressive. However, their theology is

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<sup>56</sup>Laura, “Hunting for Taxonomies”, January 15, 2008, <http://whointheworldarewe.blogspot.com/2008/01/hunting-for-taxonomies.html>. Identified as a student at Talbot Seminary, Laura lists the noted taxonomies. Others have been offered and a Google search reveals many “posts” or “articles” on the subject. Also, McKnight’s contribution, to be used in this work, takes a different shape than, say, my taxonomy and so will be used to illustrate the “streams” contributing to “Emerging Lake.”

<sup>57</sup>C. Michael Patton, “Would the Real Emerger Please Stand Up?”, February 15, 2008, <http://www.reclaimingthemind.org/blog/2008/02/15/would-the-real-emerger-please-stand-up/>

<sup>58</sup>“Understanding the Emerging Church”, September 21, 2007, [http://blogs.lifeway.com/blog/edstetzer/2007/09/understanding\\_the\\_emerging\\_chu.html](http://blogs.lifeway.com/blog/edstetzer/2007/09/understanding_the_emerging_chu.html). In this blog post I admit, “I’d probably change a bit of it now. Yet, even though it was imperfect, I think it was helpful because it helped people to see that the Emerging Church has many “streams” to it.”

<sup>59</sup>Evangelical Free Church MidWinter Ministerial.

<sup>60</sup>“Understanding the Emerging Church”, Baptist Press article, January 2006.

often conservative and evangelical. Many are doctrinally sound, growing, and impacting lostness.

#### RECONSTRUCTIONISTS

“Reconstructionists” describe the second category. Largely concerned about existing church structures, these people emphasize an “incarnational” model and may find a home in the “house church” movement. My main concern with this group has been noted, “If reconstructionists simply rearrange dissatisfied Christians and do not impact lostness, it is hardly a better situation than the current one.”<sup>61</sup> The move appears to be one step beyond the Relevantists who maintain existing structures while innovating in worship and outreach.

#### REVISIONISTS

Those in the third category are the “Revisionists.” Most of the harsh critique is reserved for this group. I noted that some in this group have certainly abandoned evangelicalism. (And, I do not think that statement would be either “news” or “offensive” to those in this category.)

For this group, both methodology and theology may be re-visioned. My concerns include that some might dispense with the substitutionary atonement, the reality of hell, views of gender, and the very nature of the Gospel. It is at this point that many believe the move is similar to the mainline denominations years before, and I agree.

Writing in a limited word count Baptist Press article requires some simplification of the subject. The writing requirements do not allow for a research piece. However, in my presentation to the Evangelical Free Church of America MidWinter Ministerial event, I had occasion to illustrate these categories by suggesting where some people may be in the taxonomy. Mark Driscoll would fit in the Relevant category. Driscoll himself borrowed my taxonomy and added a category for those who are Reformed.<sup>62</sup> Darrin Patrick modified the categories to include a different sub-category into which he felt more comfortable. Patrick and Driscoll participate in the Acts 29 Network and believed a further bit of distinction necessary for those who express their emerging impulse from a Reformed theological framework.

I talked with Dan Kimball about this taxonomy and he agreed that he would fit the Relevant category. He quickly noted his understanding of the category was not merely an aesthetic issue—not about candles and coffee, a caricature largely pejorative and unhelpful.<sup>63</sup> Brian McLaren, Tony Jones, and Doug Pagitt would fall in the “Revisionists” category.

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Mark Driscoll, “A Pastoral Perspective on the Emerging Church”, *Criswell Theological Review*, 3(2) 2, 87-94.

<sup>63</sup>Evangelical Free Church of America MidWinter Ministerial, 2008.

Having talked to these men personally I do not think they would object to the idea they were “revisioning,” though all have indicated their disapproval of the article. It is my conclusions and evaluations that concerned them.

These extremes leave a large “middle” which once again points out the diversity among those generally classified as Emergents. When I first wrote this piece, Tony Jones objected to the categorization in the *Christianity Today* blog, Out of Ur.<sup>64</sup> However, I believe they help the rest of us gain some understanding of the diversity in the Emergent Church.

### STREAMS CREATING LAKE EMERGENT

In a 2007 article written for *Christianity Today*, Scot McKnight took a different approach describing the Emergent/Emerging Church. McKnight acknowledged he would himself fit in the broad movement. Rather than list a series of categories, McKnight wrote about “Five Streams of the Emerging Church.”<sup>65</sup> The metaphors of “streams” and “lake” may create more clarity regarding the difficult task of drawing out the features of the Emergent/Emerging Church, making it possible to understand the breadth of the movement by noting its themes.

According to McKnight, the five “streams” flowing into “lake” Emergent are: Prophetic (or at least provocative), Postmodern, Praxis-Oriented, Post-Evangelical, and Political. In his introduction, McKnight elaborates,

Along with unfair stereotypes of other traditions, such are the urban legends surrounding the emerging church—one of the most controversial and misunderstood movements today. As a theologian, I have studied the movement and interacted with its key leaders for years—even more, I happily consider myself part of this movement or “conversation.” As an evangelical, I’ve had my concerns, but overall I think what emerging Christians bring to the table is vital for the overall health of the church.

In this article, I want to undermine the urban legends and provide a more accurate description of the emerging movement. Though the movement has an international dimension, I will focus on the North American scene. . . . Following are five themes that characterize the emerging movement. I see them as streams flowing into the emerging lake. No one says the emerging movement is the only group of Christians doing these things, but together they crystallize into the emerging movement.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>[http://blog.christianitytoday.com/outofur/archives/2006/05/is\\_emergent\\_the.html](http://blog.christianitytoday.com/outofur/archives/2006/05/is_emergent_the.html)

<sup>65</sup>Scot McKnight, “Five Streams of the Emerging Church”, January 19, 2007, *Christianity Today*, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/february/11.35.html?start=2>.

<sup>66</sup>Scot McKnight, “Five Streams of the Emerging Church.”

The metaphor of streams and a lake help underscore the sensibilities informing and giving shape to the Emergent Church.

## THE PROPHETIC

The Prophetic, or provocative, draws parallels to the Old Testament prophetic voice according to McKnight. The intent is to trigger an understanding within the hearer that things need to change. In the case of the Emergent Church, it is the church that is in need of such change. McKnight acknowledges the rhetoric is exaggerated, including his own on occasion. But, the hope is that the particular use of language will make the point and not cause divisions.

One illustration of an “over the top” use of rhetoric came in the 2003 Emergent Convention in San Diego. In one main session, a series of presenters were featured that declared some familiar features within the church “dead.” The intent was to point out that the way of doing youth ministry, children’s ministry, and even preaching needed to undergo radical change in most churches.

Another example would be Doug Pagitt’s “Preaching Re-Imagined.” Pagitt contends that the day has come for old forms of preaching to radically change. No longer should we depend upon one person to formulate a message. The community of faith preaches the message. One person may lead this “preaching” time, but the message flows from the organic movement of the people of God living out the way of Jesus today. Solomon’s Porch, the church Doug planted in Minnesota, attempts to live out this “re-imagined” way of preaching.

## POSTMODERN

In a witty turn of phrase, McKnight describes the Postmodern stream,

Mark Twain said the mistake God made was in not forbidding Adam to eat the serpent. Had God forbidden the serpent, Adam would certainly have eaten him. When the evangelical world prohibited postmodernity, as if it were fruit from the forbidden tree, the postmodern “fallen” among us—like F. LeRon Shults, Jamie Smith, Kevin Vanhoozer, John Franke, and Peter Rollins—chose to eat it to see what it might taste like. We found that it tasted good, even if at times we found ourselves spitting out hard chunks of nonsense. A second stream of emerging water is postmodernism.

Postmodernity cannot be reduced to the denial of truth. Instead, it is the collapse of inherited metanarratives (overarching explanations of life) like those of science or Marxism. Why have they collapsed? Because of the impossibility of getting outside their assumptions.

While there are good as well as naughty consequences of opting for a postmodern stance (and not all in the emerging movement are as careful as they should be), evangelical Christians can rightfully embrace certain elements of postmodernity.

Jamie Smith, a professor at Calvin College, argues in *Who's Afraid of Postmodernity?* (Baker Academic, 2006) that such thinking is compatible, in some ways, with classical Augustinian epistemology. No one points the way forward in this regard more carefully than longtime missionary to India Lesslie Newbigin, especially in his book *Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt, and Certainty in Christian Discipleship* (Eerdmans, 1995). Emerging upholds faith seeking understanding, and trust preceding the apprehension or comprehension of gospel truths.<sup>67</sup>

McKnight values a description given by Doug Pagitt which describes three possibilities for those wishing to engage postmoderns.<sup>68</sup> Some minister to postmoderns, some minister with postmoderns, and others as postmoderns. The latter group tends to be the most heavily critiqued.

#### PRAXIS-ORIENTED

Another stream suggested by McKnight, Praxis-Oriented, illustrates the ecclesiological concern. Worship, orthopraxy, and missional comprise the three areas where McKnight suggests “Prax-Oriented” is on display.<sup>69</sup> From the call for sacred spaces, to a solid understanding of missional practice as a holistic redemptive move among Christians, the Emergent Church seeks to live out a consistently robust faith. Again, Solomon’s Porch provides an example. Rather than a pulpit with hard pews and everyone facing forward, those who gather for worship do so in the round—seated on couches and chairs scattered around the room.

For example, IKON, an emerging group from Ireland, provided a modern Tenebrae service at the Emergent Convention in Nashville.<sup>70</sup> Those who attended shared worship in a Presbyterian church. IKON created a sacred space for worship with candles, video, and original music. One may find a description of this service in Peter Rollins book, *How [Not] to Speak of God*.<sup>71</sup> The second part of Rollins’ book contains contemporary liturgies illustrating “Praxis-Oriented” worship.

#### POST-EVANGELICAL

McKnight describes Post-Evangelical as a move which dissents from current practices of evangelicalism in the same way that neo-evangelicalism was post-fundamentalist. However, as McKnight remarks, it is not a move away from theology—

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>[http://wiki.ikon.org.uk/wiki/index.php/Main\\_Page](http://wiki.ikon.org.uk/wiki/index.php/Main_Page)

<sup>71</sup>Peter Rollins, *How [Not] to Speak of God* (Brewster: Paraclete Press, 2006), 77-85.

Frankly, the emerging movement loves ideas and theology. It just doesn't have an airtight system or statement of faith. We believe the Great Tradition offers various ways for telling the truth about God's redemption in Christ, but we don't believe any one theology gets it absolutely right.<sup>72</sup>

Post-evangelical in this vein is “post-systematic theology.” McKnight also notes a concern for the “in versus out” exclusivity practices of evangelicals. On the one hand, the concern is related to no one single Christian theology getting everything right. On the other hand, McKnight warns against a move to globalize this sentiment applying it to theology itself. He warns,

This emerging ambivalence about who is in and who is out creates a serious problem for evangelism. The emerging movement is not known for it, but I wish it were. Unless you proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ, there is no good news at all—and if there is no Good News, then there is no Christianity, emerging or evangelical.

Personally, I'm an evangelist. Not so much the tract-toting, door-knocking kind, but the Jesus-talking and Jesus-teaching kind. I spend time praying in my office before class and pondering about how to teach in order to bring home the message of the gospel.

So I offer here a warning to the emerging movement: Any movement that is not evangelistic is failing the Lord. We may be humble about what we believe, and we may be careful to make the gospel and its commitments clear, but we must always keep the proper goal in mind: summoning everyone to follow Jesus Christ and to discover the redemptive work of God in Christ through the Spirit of God.<sup>73</sup>

Does this post-evangelical turn lead some further than others? Certainly. For example, Spencer Burke wrote *A Heretics Guide to Eternity* in which he asserts that all may be born “in” and some “opt out” in regards to their eternal destiny<sup>74</sup> In this case the “in versus out” noted by McKnight is applied to evangelism for Burke.

The beginning point for Burke is that human beings are born “into” the family of God by grace and “opt out” by walking away. He maintains a commitment to total depravity but believes grace is the gift of God to all people who cannot do anything to overcome their sinful condition. The decisional commitment is to embrace grace and be faithful to it or to walk away from grace and be condemned. Burke would indeed consider it a danger to ignore the call to follow Jesus. And, yet, he re-formulates the lines along which that call is made. Rather than call for a decision to follow Jesus from the position of being “out,” the call is to embrace grace as someone already in and part of the covenant community.

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<sup>72</sup>Scot McKnight, “Five Streams of the Emerging Church.”

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

<sup>74</sup>Spencer Burke, *A Heretics Guide to Eternity* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 61.



Burke is just one illustration some are willing to go further than others in making the post-evangelical turn. Burke's view is not the view of all Emergents. In fact, Burke hints, it may not be his view in the future. He often notes, "If I am not embarrassed about something I said I believed yesterday, then I have not learned anything today."<sup>75</sup> The oft-used retort indicates the intention to dialogue without coming to a particular conclusion and remaining open rather than closed to conversation a trait noted by McKnight. However, this tact can be challenging and troublesome, as McKnight rightly warns.

## POLITICS

Politics describes the last theme in McKnight's five streams. His autobiographical insertion in the piece is a helpful description,

I have publicly aligned myself with the emerging movement. What attracts me is its soft postmodernism (or critical realism) and its praxis/missional focus. I also lean left in politics. I tell my friends that I have voted Democrat for years for all the wrong reasons. I don't think the Democratic Party is worth a hoot, but its historic commitment to the poor and to centralizing government for social justice is what I think government should do. I don't support abortion—in fact, I think it is immoral. I believe in civil rights, but I don't believe homosexuality is God's design. And, like many in the emerging movement, I think the Religious Right doesn't see what it is doing. Books like Randy Balmer's *Thy Kingdom Come: How the Religious Right Distorts the Faith and Threatens America: An Evangelical's Lament* (Basic Books, 2006) and David Kuo's *Tempting Faith: An Inside Story of Political Seduction* (Free Press, 2006) make their rounds in emerging circles because they say things we think need to be said.<sup>76</sup>

His words do not come without warning. Just as Leonard Sweet comments about the Emerging Church making the same mistakes that leading mainline denominations have made in the past (which leads to a social gospel that is all social and no gospel), McKnight also sounds a word of caution.

Brian McLaren writes about, and in many ways represents, this stream in *Everything Must Change*.<sup>77</sup> His association with Jim Wallis and Sojourners regularly earns critique as trading the Gospel for politics. McLaren desperately wants Christians to consider the "big questions" people are asking today because he believes that the Gospel of Jesus Christ speaks to these issues. McLaren cajoles the religious right for forsaking these larger matters.

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<sup>75</sup>Spencer Burke, an oft-repeated mantra by Burke in keynote addresses, breakout sessions and radio interviews. Used in conversation for an ETREK Collaborative Learning Journeys Course at Biblical Seminary based on his book, *Making Sense of Church: Eavesdropping on Emerging Conversations About God, Community and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).

<sup>76</sup>Scot McKnight, "Five Streams of the Emerging Church."

<sup>77</sup>Brian McLaren, *Everything Must Change* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007).

(McKnight's warning about exaggerated rhetoric may apply here.) Speaking at the Emergent Convention in Nashville, McLaren comments that sometimes extreme moves in thinking and exaggerated rhetoric become useful means—something of a spiritual chemotherapy for the perceived cancer of modern accommodations to the Gospel.<sup>78</sup>

Categories and themes noted by observers and insiders help those hoping to engage the Emergent Church. One underlying issue gleaned from the variety of taxonomies, streams and critiques centers on the practice of contextualization by those in the Emergent Church. McKnight chose to describe this matter in terms of a prepositional relationship to a postmodern culture with to, as, and with. Another way exists to broaden this spectrum—a missiological contextualization framework.

#### FROM TOO LITTLE TO OVERDONE – A CONTEXTUALIZATION SCHEME

A key missiological question as it relates to the Emergent Church regards contextualization. I believe it is unfair to say that the emerging church jettisons theology. I have found emerging churches to be more theologically-shaped than traditional and contemporary churches that came before them. This is not to say that I agree with all the theology, but it is disingenuous not to acknowledge this as a theological movement. The missiological perspective offers a way of seeing any movement as it carries the Gospel to a given cultural context. The missiological question may well offer an evaluation of the Emergent Church from an angle creating better differentiation than taxonomies and streams.

#### C – WHAT?

Greg Allison presented a paper, titled “An Evaluation of Emerging Churches on the Basis of the Contextualization Spectrum (C1-C6),” to the Evangelical Theological Society on November 17, 2006.<sup>79</sup> Allison takes the categories I wrote of—Relevants, Reconstructionists, Revisionsists – and applies them to the spectrum of contextualization. The place of beginning for Allison was the contextualization spectrum posed by John Travis (a pseudonym) in 1998 published as, “The C1 Through C6 Spectrum: A Practical Tool for Defining Six Types of Christ-Centered Communities Found in Muslim Context.” He writes,

At the heart of my proposal is the conviction that the emerging church phenomenon is, in part, a contemporary attempt at contextualizing the gospel and the church of Jesus Christ in a changing (postmodern) world. If this is the case, then the emerging church phenomenon (1) bears some similarities with contextualization efforts carried

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<sup>78</sup>Brian McLaren in a breakout session at the Emergent Convention in Nashville, 2004.

<sup>79</sup>Gregg R. Allison, “An Evaluation of Emerging Churches on the Basis of the Contextualization Spectrum (C1-C6)”. November 17, 2006, Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Society, Washington, D.C..

out in the past, and (2) manifests a spectrum of embodiments that are contextualized from a lesser to a greater degree.<sup>80</sup>

Allison may well have captured the missiological interest in the Emergent Church.

The abbreviations of the C1-C6 were modified by Allison to reflect the application to the British and North American contexts.<sup>81</sup> The spectrum offered by Allison suggests the following distinctive characteristics, which may be applied to the Emergent Church. I will discuss Allison's modification represented by Cm1-Cm6 where "m" represents "modified."<sup>82</sup>

"Cm1" represents Christ-centered communities that would be described as traditional using outsider language. The use of the terms insider and outsider in this context relate to the peculiar culture surrounding a given Christ-centered community. Therefore, outsider language would be those talking about life and faith in "churchy" terms, the language of Zion. For example in Allison's matrix a Cm1 faith community would include churches where some people may be very entrenched in a postmodern worldview but use language outside that (postmodern) culture. Allison writes,

These churches are very traditional and reflect traditional Christian culture, liturgy, activities, etc. A huge cultural chasm, especially because of (but not confined to) linguistic distance, exists between these churches and the surrounding community.<sup>83</sup>

The Cm2 category describes a traditional church using insider language. This level of contextualization may pair with the Relevant category in my taxonomy and in the "to" spectrum for those wishing to engage postmoderns as noted by Doug Pagitt. These people use language from a postmodern worldview, but the religious vocabulary is still distinctively Christian.

Contextualization in Cm1 and Cm2 categories comprise predominantly traditional forms. A shift begins to occur at the Cm3 level. Those in the Cm3 category exhibit a Christ-centered community using insider language and religiously neutral insider cultural norms. Religiously neutral forms may include folk music, ethnic dress, artwork, etc. The aim is to reduce the foreignness of the gospel and the church by contextualizing to biblically permissible cultural forms.

If Cm1 and Cm2 reside in the Relevant category, then the Cm3 level most certainly describes this group. These people engage in postmodern culture—it is the water in which they swim. It is the lens through which they see the world. At the same time, they are only using certain permissible cultural forms. They are careful about issues where there might be

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 1.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid.

confusion. Allison places Mars Hill in Seattle, where Mark Driscoll is the pastor, and Apostles Church in New York City in the Cm3 category.

The next level, Cm4, moves further. These people form Christ-centered communities using insider language and biblically permissible cultural forms as well as postmodern forms. Each of the first three levels refers to believers as Christians. In this group, the common Emergent idiom “followers of Jesus” or “Christ followers” is prevalent. This level may parallel the Reconstructionist category which I created and the “with” focus noted by Pagitt. Those in this category are deconstructing and reconstructing in postmodern culture, being careful in most cases to use only biblically permissible forms. Many conservative evangelical mission agencies (including the International Mission Board<sup>84</sup>) view Cm4 as the limit of contextualization. Allison places Vintage Faith Church in Santa Cruz, where Dan Kimball is the pastor, in the Cm4 category.

For myself and many evangelicals, the next two levels cross the line into over-contextualization. The Cm5 level forms Christ-centered communities where participants see themselves more as postmoderns who are Christians rather than as Christians living in a postmodern milieu. Allison places ReImagine in San Francisco, led by Mark Scandrette, in the Cm5 category.

The high end of the spectrum, Cm6, encompasses small Christ-centered communities of secret underground believers. Allison notes Cm6 communities “eschew many/most of the activities, attitudes, traditions, even doctrines of the Cm1-Cm5 communities.”<sup>85</sup> Allison places Monkfish Abbey in Seattle and IKON in Ireland, mentioned earlier, in the Cm6 category.

The Emergent Church began with a cultural consideration, “How will we reach Gen X?” Existing forms would not be able to capture this generation, even if there were a “boomerang” experienced like the “Boomers” returning to church years earlier. The turn came about when Brad Cecil observed that the cultural shifts were too dramatic to simply adjust the aesthetics of worship styles and outreach methodologies. The ecclesiological question gave way to exploring the theological foundations for existing forms and structures. The Emergent Church set out to contextualize the Gospel by taking apart (deconstructing) and implementing new forms (reconstructing) to facilitate the advancement of the Gospel during a period of erratic, discontinuous change.<sup>86</sup> On occasion, these moves have left some in the Emergent Church perilously close to “abandoning the Gospel” as noted by D. A. Carson. I believe the move, in some cases, may be more a “neglect of the Gospel” than abandonment. It is often not a denial, but in my opinion, often a dangerous lack of emphasis.

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<sup>84</sup><http://imb.org/main/news/details.asp?StoryID=6197>.

<sup>85</sup>Allision, 6.

<sup>86</sup>The phrase “discontinuous change” is described by Alan Roxburgh in *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006).

## EVALUATION

Can anything good come from the Emerging/Emergent Church? What boundaries should be set when considering engagement with the Emerging/Emergent Church?

**BRIDGES, CONTRIBUTIONS, BOUNDARIES AND GUIDELINES**

Christians always engage new cultures—whether they cross an ocean in the case of foreign work, or the culture changes around them in the case of the postmodern shift. The Emergent/Emerging Church Movement may be more than, but it is not less than, a contextualization movement. Care must be taken when considering this movement from a missiological perspective—such engagement has some bridges and some boundaries.

**BRIDGES FACILITATING ENGAGEMENT**

Bridges that engage the Emergent/Emerging Church may be developed through a consideration of important lessons from early engagement with the movement. Evangelical leaders may wish to write off all things “emerging” and proclaim that Brian McLaren is wrong because he uses the title, “Everything Must Change” (a statement made by one well known apologeticist, demonstrating he had not read beyond the title). However, young evangelical pastors do not write off all things emerging. I have spoken to young leader gatherings in many denominations (Southern Baptist, Evangelical Free, Church of God, Wesleyan, Assemblies of God and others)—and they are talking about the Emerging Church. At the Evangelical Free Midwest Ministerial, a third of those attending indicated they use the term “emerging” to define themselves—and, yes, this is Don Carson’s denomination. Thus, some principles for responsible engagement should be considered.

First, the Emerging Church Movement cannot be ignored. As noted earlier, the E/EC finds expression within nearly every denomination in the United States. Some expressions may be more formal than others, but the movement has attracted attention widely.

Second, critics must be on guard against bearing false witness. When the contemporary church movement gained the same kind of traction across denominational boundaries, many critical words were spoken, many of them false. The E/EC has not been able to escape the same kind of criticism. In regards to the contemporary and the emerging church movements, it seems that many struggle with the ninth commandment in evangelicalism—a shame when we evangelicals hold to the inerrancy of Scriptures that list that very commandment. If you are going to speak out against a movement, learn about it. Then, you can speak with wisdom and clarity—for there is much that needs critique in the church, including the emerging church.

Third, many have embraced the E/EC movement uncritically. If evangelicals intend to remain evangelical and hold to biblical fidelity, no movement can afford to be embraced without careful evaluation. There is much to be concerned about in the E/EC movement. For example, I have little disagreement with Don Carson’s analysis of Brian McLaren. (One

of the reasons I recently joined the faculty at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School was because of my appreciation of Don.)

Fourth, reading one book or hearing one speaker considered to reside within the Emergent Church does not constitute interaction. Too many have undertaken partial engagement. While D. A. Carson rightly evaluated Brian McLaren in his book, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, many would be quick to point out that McLaren does not represent the diversity that is present in the Emergent Church. In other words, you cannot become conversant with the emerging church by reading only Brian McLaren (with a little Steve Chalke) particularly when you only read about them and you do not read them.

#### CONTRIBUTIONS

Scot McKnight considers one of the streams of the Emergent Church to be the “Prophetic.” Many believe that Evangelicalism has not delivered, and it would be difficult to argue against that point. The Prophetic aspect within the E/EC may provide needed correctives.

First, the emphasis upon authenticity cannot be overstated. Dishonesty about sin and our own failings leads most to believe all is well. Too often, the temptation is to clean up our history, heritage, and personal experiences. We find it difficult to abide the late Mike Yaconelli, who considered real spirituality to be messy.<sup>87</sup> Instead, we put on a façade to the world and to one another, hiding our own foibles and idiosyncrasies—our own sin.

Second, the E/EC emphasis on the Kingdom of God may mark the recovery of a lost treasure in Evangelicalism. The covenantal-dispensational rift relegated conversation of the Kingdom of God to the sideline. *Everything Must Change* by Brian McLaren offers a vision of the impact of the Kingdom of God, on what he sees as the key issues facing the world. While there may be disagreement on the extent of the Kingdom of God and how it is expressed, one cannot escape the call to consider Jesus’ obsession with the Kingdom of God.<sup>88</sup>

Third, the missional turn in the E/EC provokes a regular reference to the *Missio Dei*. The theological underpinning of the “God who sends” prompts those in the Emergent/Emerging Church to pursue contextualization; understanding the *Missio Dei* is larger than the missio ecclesia. This move does not exclude the Church but locates the missional turn in the very nature of God. Misused however, this contribution can also be weakness, as noted later.

Fourth, the E/EC rejects reductionism. Sometimes, emerging leaders have chosen interesting terminology to illustrate this contention. For example, the phrase “atonement only Gospel” is a euphemism that the work of the atonement is broader than ensuring a

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<sup>87</sup>Mike Yaconelli, *Messy Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

<sup>88</sup>Russell Moore’s *The Kingdom of Christ* is an excellent look at the Kingdom of God from a conservative evangelical perspective.

person misses Hell and gains Heaven. Scot McKnight uses the language of a “holistic” Gospel. That is, a call to see Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection as vital to our relationship with God, self, others, and the world.<sup>89</sup> Modern reductionism concerns only the personal relationship with God.

Fifth, similar to John Piper’s call in *Brothers We Are Not Professionals*, the Emergent/Emerging Church rejects pragmatism. The charge is often made that modern churches look more like businesses with CEO’s than bodies of Christ with God-called pastors. Managing the church becomes akin to marketing goods and services to a Christian subculture.

Sixth, the E/EC promotes holistic ministry. Jesus not only asserted that He came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10), but He also drew attention to a ministry of justice (Luke 4). Some consider that the road the Emergent/Emerging Church is taking to live out this second mandate may well become its undoing. Time will tell. However, Christians must find a way to join Jesus and His mission—to seek, to save, and to serve in such a way that also preserves theological integrity.

#### BOUNDARIES

Critical evaluation of any movement not only evaluates contributions, but it also requires the consideration of boundaries or areas of caution. The same is true for the E/EC. As an evangelical, there are some areas that concern me and I would suggest boundaries are needed.

First, one of the risks run by those in the Emergent/Emerging Church, who press very close to over-contextualization, appears to be an underdeveloped ecclesiology. Here, the concern relates to those who have an over-developed sense of the Kingdom of God, that in some writings all but eliminates the church. The Apostle Paul makes it clear that the wisdom of God will be made known through the church, not without it.

Second, over-contextualization skews the necessary boundaries and, more often than not, gives way to syncretism and a loss of the uniqueness of Jesus, the Christ. The answer does not lie in resisting contextualization. Rather, maintaining the Scriptures as the “norming norm” militates against going too far in our desire to bring the Gospel to bear on the various cultures in which people minister—postmodern or Muslim. The accompanying danger of over-contextualization means one makes sin acceptable and calls it an attempt to engage culture.

Third, some seem to have an apparent fear of penal substitutionary atonement, a fear of the cross as understood by evangelicals and other historic Christian traditions. Some in the E/EC point out that there are multiple theories of the atonement. However, it appears at times that this diminishes the import of substitutionary atonement. This criticism may not be universalized in the Emergent/Emerging Church, but it is present nonetheless. And, it has become an issue in broader evangelicalism, as some in the Emergent/Emerging Church

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<sup>89</sup>Scot McKnight. *A Community Called Atonement*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), 9.

have challenged existing views of the atonement. For example, in my interview with Brian McLaren, he indicated that he talks about the atonement as having many facets. Yet, when I pressed if the penal substitutionary atonement was one of the clubs<sup>90</sup> (views) in his bag (understanding of the atonement), he agreed. Yet, for most evangelicals, the penal substitutionary atonement is the view they would mention first.

Fourth, the Emergent/Emerging Church is not immune to promoting caricature. Those in the E/EC often resist caricatures assigned to them, but they seem willing to make exaggerations regarding those whom they critique. Wrestling with and through movements requires maintaining the integrity of the ninth commandment. Caricatures can be misrepresentations, and their use can border on lying.

#### CONVERSATION AND THEOLOGY

Acknowledging contributions and forming boundaries creates the need to establish “conversation” guidelines when engaging the Emergent Church or any reform movement. It is essential that we contend for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3). Yet, contending must be accompanied by contextualization, as Paul considers it important to become all things to all people so some might be saved (1 Corinthians 9:22-23). A biblically faithful church living in and contextualized to emerging culture will look different than a biblically faithful church that is living in and contextualized to modern culture. If those ministering in the world deny the reality of contextualization, the Gospel becomes more about the cultural norms used to transport the Gospel than the Gospel itself. In the end, we risk losing the Gospel.

When the Gospel becomes solely about the norms created around it, it leads to what missiologists call “nominalism.” Nominalism is almost always rejected in the next generation. The Gospel has to be re-born, become indigenous, into a new culture. The nature of the Gospel does not change. The language around the Gospel may change, but the Gospel does not change. Methodologies may change; our understanding of the Gospel may even deepen; but the Gospel does not change.

The Emergent/Emerging Church provokes different ministry paradigms in new contexts, as alertness to cultural changes necessitates building new bridges to the lost. Evaluating those matters about which contentions will arise involves the hard work of differentiating between preferential matters and non-negotiable issues. Too often, lines have been drawn along preferential patterns.

In a denominational context, the charge to contend also requires compassionate love intent on coming alongside those who may walk too close to the edge of orthodoxy. The missiological perspective gives aid to this process. Since many come close to the edge of orthodoxy via the route of contextualization, familiarity with the missiological perspective of any movement may create a humble orthodoxy or proper confidence. From this position, all

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<sup>90</sup>Here the reference to “clubs” is found in Scot McKnight’s analogy found in *A Community Called Atonement*.



can be strengthened to carry on the mission of God in the world, regardless of changing cultural milieus.

At the end of the day the incredible cultural shifts that exist require contextualizing the presentation of the Gospel and how we live it out in culture. The narrative of the early missionaries in Acts reveals a number of small stories that support the larger story of the Church's growth and the expansion of the realities of the Kingdom of God. Each of these stories illustrates an unchanging Gospel contextualized within a particular context, from Jews and God-fearers to polytheists and philosophers. In each case the Apostle Paul showed with great skill how the Gospel proves itself powerful across cultures. As the Spirit gave life via the contextualization of the Good News of Jesus, the Christ in diverse arenas, lives were transformed.

The Emergent/Emerging Church calls attention to the rapid cultural changes and the accompanying diversity that exists in our world and, without question, the United States. Yes, good has come out of the E/EC and its call to view the Church as something other than a purveyor of religious goods and services. The call to "be" the Church, to live an embodied ethic, and to engage the world by pointing to the King and the Kingdom is always needed in any age and any day—it is the *semper reformanda* call.

But, with any reform movement, history has demonstrated the perils of pressing too far. We cannot give up nor give away the Gospel under the rubric or rouse of contextualization. We must contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. We must stand for biblical truth; truth that can be known, known through language, and believed. We cannot afford to waffle on doctrine, and we cannot refrain from the call to holiness.

New creations live in redemptive, healing relationships with God, others and the world. The only way we may bring the reality of the King and the Kingdom to bear on the world is by standing for the truth of the King and living as his subjects—without reservation.

## CONCLUSION

To end where we began, Christianity always runs the risk of adopting the plausibility structures of the culture in which it is currently embedded. Contending for the faith and contextualizing the Good News means always considering countercultural moves. Rather than becoming like the earthly powers, we must be in position to speak to the powers, whether they are structures in our culture, in our churches, or in our denominations. Building countercultural communities of faith who stand for the truth and contextualize the Gospel would be the proper response to any reform movement in any age. May we follow the Spirit into the "emerging" day—where we who are new creations in Christ lovingly contend, faithfully contextualize, and authentically live as citizens of the Kingdom of God.

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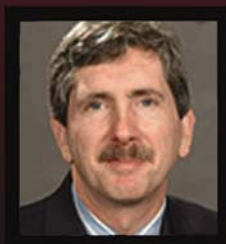


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# A RESPONSE TO ED STETZER'S "THE EMERGENT/EMERGING CHURCH: A MISSIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE"

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I want to thank Dr. Stetzer for a stimulating and enjoyable treatment of the emerging church. I agree by and large with most of what he said. My comments below will reflect my appreciation for his approach and engage him on some significant questions regarding the emerging church.

## LEARNING FROM THE EMERGING CHURCH

Dr. Stetzer and I would agree that the emerging church has a great deal to teach conservative evangelicals, but many of us just don't want to admit it.<sup>1</sup> For example, in being more of a postmodern, or at least antimodern, movement, the emerging church rejects seeing life as something akin to a scientific experiment or assembly line. It wants to see life as more organic; the best way to solve human problems is more organic. Thus, for example, the way one should engage in evangelism is not hitting someone with a five-step process or a four-page tract. Rather, one should engage in relational evangelism, seeking a more organic or natural approach. Similarly, for instance, the emerging church correctly—and biblically—sees the church as more of a living organism than a bureaucratic organization.

The emerging church also rightly wants to emphasize community over individualism. And I think the best parts of the emerging church want to emphasize authenticity. I fear we are seeing movement away from this. But there is still an emphasis on authenticity over against consumerism in some strains of the emerging church, from which we can learn. We can also applaud the emerging church's emphasis on justice and the alleviation of poverty, which dovetails with their stress on incarnationality. These are vitally important priorities for the church of Jesus Christ. The emerging church should be commended for their commitment to engaging the culture—not necessarily becoming just like the culture, but engaging it—particularly by engaging the arts, rather than by being anti-art and anti-culture and anti-intellectual.

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<sup>1</sup>I often distinguish between "emerging" church, which is broader and more concerned more with cultural relevance than postmodern theology, and "emergent" church, which I see as more tied to institutions such as Emergent Village. While the latter would center on leaders such as Brian McLaren, Tony Jones, and Doug Pagitt, the former would include people like Dan Kimball and even the doctrinally conservative Calvinist, Mark Driscoll. My goal in this response is to deal not so much with the theologically and politically progressive emergent stream but more with some ecclesiological concerns I have about the broader emerging movement.

Emerging church practitioners should also be commended for their openness to tradition. This is something we saw more of in the early days of the emerging movement but are starting to see less of now. I think this observation is shown in Dr. Stetzer's paper, particularly his citation of Leonard Sweet, who worries about the emerging church stopping at liberalism and not going back to all 2,000 years of Christian tradition. There seems to be increasing ambivalence in much of the emerging church about reaching back and recapturing the tradition of the church in terms of Robert Webber's ancient-future initiative.<sup>2</sup> Thus, we might wonder if the emerging church is almost in danger of being only about futurism and not about the "ancient" part.

I appreciated Dr. Stetzer's comment that the emerging church emphasis on the Kingdom of God may mark a recovery lost in evangelicalism. If there's anything we can learn from the emerging conversation, it would be the emphasis on the Kingdom. I was interested recently to read Scot McKnight's positive review of Russell Moore's book, *The Kingdom of Christ*.<sup>3</sup> I think there is a genuine opportunity for cross-pollination between people like McKnight and conservative evangelicals like Russell Moore, who are doing a lot of nuanced work on the Kingdom.

We should also be encouraged when we see the emerging church reject pragmatism (I hope it still does). That is one of the things that concerns me as the emerging church begins to become successful and certain strains of the emerging church begin to attract large numbers. I wonder if the emerging church will continue to be concerned about consumerism and pragmatism and the problems with the seeker-sensitive movement. We should also be thankful that leading voices in the emerging conversation wish to reject reductionism. This gets back to that modernistic, formulaic mentality—five steps to this, seven steps to a successful that, how to be a better you, and so on. It's important to note that the emerging church offers an antidote to this kind of simplistic, reductionistic thinking. Instead of reductionism, the emerging church wants to see things and do things holistically. Again, for example, they want to see evangelism in the context of relationality. This is important.

#### DOMESTICATING THE GOSPEL

Now I want to discuss some concerns I have about the emerging church (not necessarily things I disagreed with in Dr. Stetzer's paper). I agree with what Dr. Stetzer said about the movement running the risk of domesticating the gospel to emerging plausibility structures. This is important, because the genius of the emerging church at its beginnings was the fact that it was criticizing Bill Hybels and Rick Warren and the fundamentalists—and everybody—for domesticating the gospel to a modernist paradigm. It was either a modernist fundamentalist paradigm in the mid-twentieth century or a modernist evangelical

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<sup>2</sup>See Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1999).

<sup>3</sup>See <http://www.jesuscreed.org/?p=1106>. See also Russell D. Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004).

paradigm in the late twentieth century, with the consumer church mentality, marketing of the church, and so forth.

I want to ask my emerging friends to think really hard about this issue: Are you in danger of domesticating the gospel to emerging plausibility structures? This is my greatest concern about the movement and the whole issue regarding how to minister to postmodern and emerging generations. I do not want to say “postmodern” generations, because most people are not necessarily postmodern, whether they are the Asian university students in my city or the country boys from the rural areas or inner city African-Americans or the wealthy individuals from very educated Episcopalian backgrounds or Kurdish refugees. Most people are not in the narrow “postmodern” niche that many in the emerging church seem to be targeting. We need to be careful that we don’t just become marketers to another (newer, hipper?) niche market when we think about how to deal with upcoming generations.

#### OVER-CONTEXTUALIZATION

I agree with Dr. Stetzer that the emerging church is in danger of over-contextualizing. I do n’t think they’re in danger of it; I think that’s what they’re doing. And I also appreciate his concern about the gospel becoming more about the cultural norms used to transport the gospel than about the gospel itself. This cuts both ways. Conservatives and progressives both need to listen to Dr. Stetzer on this and be wary, lest we think the gospel can be effective only if it is wed to the culture we like. I’m not a Southern Baptist, but I listen in on your conversation. I recently heard one of your seminary professors, Mark Coppenger, say that if a study came out proving that the best way to get souls into heaven was to dress up in a white leisure suit, white patent-leather shoes, and a red bowtie and suspenders and play an accordion in a nursing home, emerging church people wouldn’t do that, because they would think it was cheesy—they wouldn’t like it. Sometimes I wonder if Coppenger’s statement might be true.

There’s a great new book challenging the emerging church entitled *Why We’re Not Emergent, By Two Guys Who Should Be*, by Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck.<sup>4</sup> DeYoung is a pastor in a university town in Michigan, and Kluck is an ESPN sports writer who is a member of Kluck’s church. Both men are in their late 20’s. People who are interested in the emerging church should read this book. They talk about how, so many times, the emerging church is simply about what people like. Church planters from small town, Southern backgrounds are often cautioned about not simply transplanting “Just a Little Talk with Jesus” churches in the inner city because they like it and have come to identify the Christian faith with that particular subcultural expression. But I think everyone should ask this question: Are we making the church merely something we like? Are we really pushing a type of ministry because it appeals to our cultural preferences at the moment? The trouble with that is, what happens when the cultural preference changes in three to five years? This is something that applies to progressive and conservative evangelicals alike.

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<sup>4</sup>Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We’re Not Emergent, By Two Guys Who Should Be* (Chicago: Moody, 2008).

## WEDDING FAITH TO CULTURE

We could learn from some of the critiques of evangelicalism outside conservative evangelical circles. I went to Yale Divinity School, which was anything but conservative evangelical. Rather, it was home to theologies as divergent as postliberalism, liberation theology, feminist/womanist theology, and so forth. The postliberal thinkers at Yale with whom I studied, like George Lindbeck, and some of their colleagues like Stanley Hauerwas, have a great deal to say to evangelicals from outside the movement. And we should listen. Some of these individuals agree with some of the theological points from the left wing of the emerging movement. But when it comes to ecclesiology and culture, what they are saying is that contemporary expressions of evangelicalism are mired in a tendency to marry the faith to the current culture—to the passing evil age—rather than tapping into the powers of the age to come, what Lindbeck would call interiorizing the Christian story.<sup>5</sup>

I think we have things to learn from some of these voices outside of evangelicalism—and some from outside conservative evangelicalism, like Marva Dawn and Jonathan R. Wilson. Again, some of these thinkers might tend to be more informed by some of the postmodern theory that undergirds emerging theology. But they are warning emerging evangelicals to be careful about the cultural and ecclesial issues at the heart of the movement. They sternly caution evangelicals about allowing consumerism, individualism, entertainment culture (whether highbrow, middlebrow, or lowbrow), and market considerations to shape church practice, to be the main thing we think will be effective in getting people to receive Christ. They say that the gospel is the power of God to salvation, not a particular style or affinity group consideration.

We should stop and think, for example, about Marva Dawn's statement that evangelicals have a tendency to reshape the church according to consumer tastes and entertainment culture. She says that this tendency "reinforces the idolatrous way of life that worship is intended to expose, disarm, and conquer."<sup>6</sup> This critique from many outside conservative evangelicalism urges evangelicals to take the emphasis off the gospel as commodity, where you just sell the gospel, you seal the deal, and there's no service after the sale. They want to put the emphasis on the fact that the gospel is a life-shaping practice, that the church is a community of God bringing people in through the structures God has given us in his New Covenant.

Allow me to give another, more lengthy, quotation from Jonathan R. Wilson's recent book, *Why Church Matters*. He offers some cautions to Brian McLaren and the emerging movement. In discussing McLaren's sharp criticisms of the seeker-sensitive, megachurch mentality, Wilson says the following:

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<sup>5</sup>cf., e.g., George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1984), 62.

<sup>6</sup>Marva J. Dawn, *A Royal "Waste" of Time: The Splendor of Worshiping God and Being Church for the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 98.

The critical edge he exhibits toward modernity dulls quite a bit as he turns his attention to the postmodern. His approach to postmodernity begins to resemble [Rick] Warren's approach to modernity. Just as modernity is unproblematic for Warren, postmodernity appears to be unproblematic for McLaren. . . . Similarly, the ecclesiology conveyed by [the] holiness [or set-apartness of the church] . . . is muted at best in McLaren's work. There is little to nothing about the church set apart or called out as a people by God. McLaren pursues a vigorous critique of the relationship between modernity and Christianity, but even here the problem with modernity seems to be less that modernity is an expression of "the world" and more that it is passé and thus any ministry that presumes the culture of modernity will be outdated. But even more significant than the absence of the "set-apartness" of the church is the absence of its set-apartness to God. In contrast to [Charles] Colson and [Ellen] Vaughn, who begin and end their ecclesiology with the fear of the Lord, McLaren's ecclesiology seems driven by the fear of irrelevance. Now, if the church has been called out to live for the sake of the world, then irrelevance is a form of unfaithfulness. But fear of irrelevance is not the foundation of ecclesiology, the fear of the Lord is.<sup>7</sup>

#### COUNTERCULTURAL COMMUNITIES OF FAITH

I don't have any easy answers when it comes to being the church in a changing culture. But I think we need to go back to Lesslie Newbigin's caution, and be careful not to let modern-day American plausibility structures—with their consumeristic, niche-marketing and individualistic sensibilities—to shape how we worship and serve the transcendent God. And that means the pop 1980s sensibilities of my generation, or the hip, edgy sensibilities of people who live in lofts in New York or Seattle. We also have to be attentive to the ways that these plausibility structures will erode the church's ability to sustain the faith over generations as it has for two millennia across cultures. We need to think about more than just closing the sale and getting people converted—conforming to the marketing notion of getting people to close, to sign on the dotted line, and make a commitment. We need to think about the eight-year-old and the eighty-year-old. We need to think about intergenerational covenant faithfulness that will stand the test of time.

Dr. Stetzer says that early Christianity "illustrates an unchanging Gospel contextualized to a particular context from Jews and God-fearers to polytheists and philosophers." I am sure he is right. However, I want to be careful not to over-interpret early Christian contextualization. I would be hard-pressed if I were a contemporary church growth consultant who travelled in a time machine back to the first centuries of the Christian church. Whether I was a seeker-sensitive or emerging-style consultant, either one, I would want to know immediately why the churches weren't using, in their worship, the music, drama, dance, and images of their very pagan, multi-cultural, and pluralistic Greco-Roman cities. I would want to know why they were so puritanical in their cultural conservatism when all about them were radical pagan cultural forms. In short, I would

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<sup>7</sup>Jonathan R. Wilson, *Why Church Matters: Worship, Ministry, and Mission in Practice* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006), 151-52.

wonder why people like Paul and Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria were spending so much time preaching long sermons and worrying about details of the Lord's Supper and writing long treatises about the dangers of pagan cultural practices. I would want to counsel the early churches to shed these backward practices and become more like the cultures around them to build a bridge for the gospel.

I liked what Dr. Stetzer said about the need for Christians to build truly countercultural communities of faith. We all need to heed this wise counsel. The key is to figure out how to be truly in the world, profoundly engaging the culture, while not being of the world—being truly countercultural to win the world. This is the challenge for the emerging church, and it is the challenge for us all.



# A RESPONSE TO ED STETZER'S "THE EMERGENT/EMERGING CHURCH: A MISSIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE"

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In Baptist life, the emergent/emerging church baby seems to be the result of an unplanned pregnancy. Things were ginning along nicely—or so it seemed—until these young people starting experimenting with forms, traditions, and texts long since abandoned. They traded confrontational evangelism for a soft-sided relational approach. They lit candles, they dimmed the lights, they draped the windows, they wore flannel shirts, jeans, and flip-flops in the pulpit, *and then they removed the pulpit!*<sup>1</sup>

They played guitars, which were tolerated, but then they unplugged their guitars and played—my soul, is that *beatnik* music? What are these kids up to? They read *liturgies*. They pray *written* prayers. They preach on political issues, and sometimes they do not preach at all. They rename our “Lord’s Supper” ordinance “Communion,” and center an entire worship service on it. Instead of passing the elements to the congregation, they make the congregation come up front *in front of everyone*. Then they renamed the Sunday worship service a worship “gathering” and started holding communion every week like those liberal Methodists (wait are the Methodists still considered Evangelical?). They sit in circles and think silence is a virtue, and dead air an invitation to the Spirit. To be honest, this all seems a bit *Catholic*.

They talk incessantly about community and use the word “like” often enough to make one think that all of life is analogous. They find tattoos acceptable—*on their women!* They tolerate alcohol as a beverage, divorce as a forgivable mistake, and they argue their opinions from an opposing view of biblical texts long since agreed upon by the majority. They tell us not to celebrate the conservative resurgence and demand that we embrace social justice issues like healthcare and environmental stewardship. Hmm, they’re starting to make a point, but my goodness, they seem angry.

Many of the emergent church’s advocates and practitioners express their anger toward the prevailing Evangelical culture. What? We bought them cars and gave them cable television? Ungrateful lot! That, or they are a gang of loose-knit prophets and we better listen.

On one hand, emergent anger is right to expose evangelical traditionalism that, by its gluttony on its own preferences, prevents the current generation from hearing the Gospel. On the other hand, emerging practices sometimes reflect a kind of theological adolescence and the typical petulance that spoiled adolescence brings. In the former case, emergent themes provide a welcome call to what Christ had in mind—holiness, good news, and

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<sup>1</sup>My tongue is in my cheek, here. You knew that, right?)

freedom from worldly pursuits. In the latter, the movement strays far from Christian dignity, and leads people *away* from Christ into a soup of syncretism.

Not all of what one might classify as Emergent is bad. Stetzer's three categories offer tremendous help in sifting the wheat from the chaff. His history of the Emergent movement, while a bit long, proves insightful and helpful in framing Emergent ideas. One rightly appreciates the calm tone of his paper. If anything, however, Ed's work may be too tame.<sup>2</sup>

This response refers to Ed's paper parenthetically, and hopes to add to the Emergent conversation. As a mild disclaimer, when I refer to Emergents in generalized terms indicating my agreement with their point, I am referring to the ones who hold to certain doctrinal orthodoxy. The sovereignty of God, the atoning death of Christ and his bodily resurrection, a high view of Scriptural inerrancy, and the necessity of a regenerate church seem to be good starting points.<sup>3</sup> In places where I disagree, I attempt to be clear and welcome criticism.

#### IS EMERGENT TRYING TO GET A MISSIONAL FOCUS?

For centuries, Baptists were the ones leading the charge against church practices that held the Gospel captive. Baptists were the prophetic voice railing in the wilderness against anything out of square with the Bible. Stetzer's voice—backed by impeccable research—usually offers us a way through our Baptist blind spots. His calling card has not been his niceness. We commend him for taking a tone that purposely does not label or offend our Emergent brothers and sisters.

The issue that the Emergent church seems to bang its young head against is the lack of missional focus in the Evangelical church of North America. By missional—an old word thankfully resurrected by Ed—one may conclude the issue emanates from the idea that effective, evangelistic disciple making is the mission Jesus intended for his church. I am not at all sure they have become missional, however, for I do not see them crossing many cultural barriers. The focus of the Emergent churches seems to be on creating Christian gatherings united by affinity. Is that not the same thing that they accuse the traditionalists of doing? I will add more on this idea of affinity later in the paper.

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<sup>2</sup> Ed Stetzer, "The Emergent/Emerging Church: A Missiological Perspective," (paper presented at the Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry Conference, New Orleans, LA, April 4, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> For some reason, regenerate membership and discipline of church members is controversial today. I found the following sources helpful: 2008 SBC Resolution 6, "On Regenerate Church Membership And Church Member Restoration," <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=1189>; R. Stanton Norman, *The Baptist Way: Distinctives of a Baptist Church* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 59-61; and William M. Pinson, Jr., "Baptists: Regenerate Church Membership in Peril?" <http://www.baptistdistinctives.org/textonly10.html>.

The indisputable reality for now is that Southern Baptists and, for that matter, all Evangelical churches are sliding toward evangelistic irrelevance and our speed is increasing. To be missional is to be evangelistically relevant; it is to be on the *mission* of our Lord; it is to *make disciples*. If anything, Southern Baptists might need to get a little *madder* than Emergents—the SBC needs to get mad enough to change its evangelistic apathy.

#### IS THIS ABOUT THE IRRELEVANCE OF THE PREVAILING CHRISTIAN SUB-CULTURE?

None of us is very good at following Jesus, who was always humble, loved everyone, told the truth, never shied away from criticizing arrogance (even when it wore religious robes), and he always tried to bring outsiders into the kingdom. All Christ's disciples, including Emergents, can use another tablespoon of humility, but we can also speak the truth about the official religion of our land: nominalism. Critical statements that Emergents make against stagnant ecclesiastical forms are on the mark, and any person who walks with the Lord sees the same problems.

Hooray for Tony Jones! The mainline church *is* dead (5). It is as dead as Paris Hilton's little dog in a Louisiana swamp (the thing may still be swimming, but the end is just a matter of time). Someone should stop calling them mainline, and turn that title on Southern Baptists—we're the new mainline with acres of church property periodically occupied by decreasing numbers of graying Christians doing not much other than arguing about whether or not we're declining.

Of course, we do not like the tone of Emergents (5). They offer correction where none was requested. Have they not read Dale Carnegie? Have they no Southern gentility, no manners, no courtesy? No, they do not because they are mad. Their anger stems from watching the church of their youth become less and less evangelistic. The American Evangelical church no longer wins souls at a rate consistent with people who claim to be in step with the Holy Spirit. They ought to be mad. *We ought to be mad!*

Research indicates that nine out of ten Evangelical churches are just as dead as the Mainliners are. Traditionalists criticize Emergents for supplanting biblical teachings with culturally attuned practices, but one wonders why Traditionalists fail to remove the log from their eyes. They eat at the other end of the same trough, the one labeled "Let's Do Church Like it's 1965."

Perhaps the better question concerns not Emergent churches overload on culture, but their record of accomplishment on making disciples. Do Emergents show a track record of people whose lives mirror Christ's more than they mirror the world? Do their churches actually create community, do they escort people from hell to heaven, are their environments healthier, are their prayers answered, their divorce rates low, or their children drug-free? Do they just talk a lot and argue about nonessential issues like most Evangelical churches?

None of us is very good at Scriptural living. We do not accurately reflect the cross event to our world. We do see a few rare individuals who live without much regard for themselves over others, and when we do, we can be sure that either the mainstream church or the prevailing culture will not accept them. One side will brand him a flaming liberal and

the other side will brand him a raving fundamentalist. One thing is sure, however, when Len Sweet calls your theology “liberal” you may need to scale it back a bit (8-9).

Stetzer observes that, “The nexus for the story of the Emergent/Emerging Church may be tied to generational theory and the market approach to church growth/planning,” (3), which was exactly the point I made in the public response at the Baptist Center. Emergent seems to advocate a church for likeminded folks; it is for those who celebrate cultural homogeneity if you please. On that note, one wonders: Is it marketing (“we go to the new, cool church up the street”) or is it language (“we belong there because we understand what the leader is saying”)? With the latter in mind, it is important to realize that Emergent seems to be something of a reformation movement (or several reformation movements) within the Evangelical church. Emergents still operate from within, evidenced by their choices of language, use of media, and even the places they hold meetings.

#### CAN WE FIND THEIR EVANGELICAL ROOTS?

How odd is it that the initial meetings took place in Colorado Springs and Glorieta (4)? This reformation started in two of the most traditional Evangelical environments on the planet. One might have thought they would have found a garage in Seattle or San Francisco, if not an independently owned coffee shop next to an organic food store in Vancouver (all of which sound more fun than Glen Eyrie to me).

Ed’s metaphor of new growth emerging from the forest floor beneath the old stalwarts works but needs development (8). In nature, the old, healthy growth protects the new, tender new growth. Moreover, the new growth is of the same DNA and will—if allowed to grow—look exactly like its parents.

In American Christianity, the new forms look radically different from the old and many times carry different DNA. What we see may be of a different strain than us, so we need to question and test it.

On the darker side—and this is a dark forest, is it not?—old growth can easily attract diseases and parasites. The old churches are dying. As though an old tree could snuff out a sapling, many older congregations seem to try to prevent new churches from springing up. We see such cannibalism even when the new church is born from the same roots as the old ones. The old tries to cut off resources to the new; using them instead to keep the older, similar-styled and in need of revitalization congregation going. The problem is that if one is really interested in expanding Christ’s kingdom, he finds little data to support revitalization over new growth.

That is not to say that traditional churches should spend their money on new churches haphazardly. Strategy is important, and orthodoxy is still more important. At the point of doctrinal fidelity, much of what is in the Emergent camp has disconnected from the Bible. As I mentioned earlier, when Len Sweet labels your theology as too liberal, you have a problem (9).

He (Sweet) is right in calling for a repeal of Emergent's social gospel tendencies. The Social[ist] Gospel of the early twentieth century (Rauschenbusch) was wholly inconsistent with the full message of Jesus, and it died. Liberation Theology (Gutierrez, Boff, Cone) came of age in the 1980s, and is similarly not the Gospel at all, but a revised socialist wolf dressed in churchy sheep's clothing. Both movements were reactions against the excessive lack of compassion displayed by the wealthy, aristocratic, controlling Christians of their day. While the foundation of the Social Gospel and Liberation Theology are biblical ("treat people justly"), their methodology and conclusions are not only wrong, but also dangerous ("steal from the rich and give to the poor").

In a sense, Emergents come across with the same left-leaning reaction against the wealth, privilege, and consumerist tendencies of American Evangelicals. They have a point. Much of what one observes in American Christendom is more American than Christian. When it is easier to raise money for a new recreation center at the Evangelical Church of Anytown than it is to house and feed AIDS orphans in Africa, one wonders about our priorities. For several years, I have noticed that Baptist churches repave their parking lots and Baptist agencies fund unreliable church revitalization schemes while bi-vocational Baptist church planters file for welfare. Many of the Emergent leaders have planted churches. Do you see the connection and root of their anger? On my latter point at least, may we please acknowledge the righteous foundation of Emergent *Evangelicalism*?

#### IS IT ABOUT FALSE POLARITY AND RIDICULOUS ASSUMPTIONS?

I appreciate Ed's observation of the false bi-polarity between orthodoxy and orthopraxy (10). The former should lead to the latter, but it does not always. Much of the Evangelical system (especially our leadership training institutions) assumes that if we get enough good information in the heads of young leaders they will make the right decisions. That is, of course, ridiculous. Some of the smartest people in the world do some of the dumbest things.

It may be that the Emergents have seen the reality of the modernist monastic system and found it wanting. They are the first generation to live under a media-charged postmodernist education and they like it. Perhaps they embrace the flip-flopped notion that one belongs before he or she believes, and, therefore, orthopraxy precedes orthodoxy. If so, then one must "join" his or her church before he becomes a regenerate member of it. Those of us schooled to make a cognitive and cathartic decision of agreement before we can unite with a group find this exactly backward thinking. We cannot make sense of it, and they—thinking as they do—cannot make sense of our perceived rigidity. They cannot imagine head or heart agreement with anything until they live inside it and know its presuppositions. Time will tell if the new system bears fruit.

Mangum makes a big point on the disillusionment of Emergents (quoted by Stetzer, 14), but who thinks this is news? Evangelical churches have a bold line of disillusioned prophets dating back before the modernist controversy. Notable names include Oswald Chambers, C. S. Lewis, A. W. Tozer, Carlyle Marney, and W. A. Criswell. All of them voiced loud disillusionments over the apathy and consumerism of the American church. A better

historian than me will likely think of two or three disillusioned Christian leaders that represent every generation since Timothy's.

Perhaps Ed will agree with me that Emergents (the ones friendly to the Bible anyway) are not really all that new or rebellious, but well within the boundaries of ancient Christian tradition. We who follow Christ need some brothers and sisters to courageously tell us when we stray from the path even if their thinking is new and different. Elders are not always right, and conservatives are not always right. A little humility before the texts of Scripture will go a long way in freeing the church from useless traditionalism, and welcoming new saints.

#### DO THEY SEEK AN ECCLESIOLOGICAL STRUCTURE?

At some point, one might identify the marks of the movement as a series of conversations about ecclesiastical structure and governance, ideas of mission and praxis, evangelistic conversion and regeneration, biblical authority and which texts to emphasize, and how (or if) one disciplines a body of believers. Excellent! These are the very categories over which the church has struggled for millennia, and will continue to struggle until Christ returns (which is likely another point over which Emergents will struggle!).

To contend with Emergents on a fair plane, it helps to know their idea of what the Gospel proposes. Jones says it is about, "Good News of hope that brings an end to war, poverty, [sic] hunger in which they should actively participate for the good of the world" (quoted by Stetzer, 16). Is that the Gospel? Really? I think it's a bit deeper than material comfort, don't you?

The Gospel is the good news that Jesus gives people power to cheat death. Humanity stands justly condemned to hell for our rebellion against God. God's Good News proclaims Jesus' death as payment for our debt, and all that he requires of us is that we stop fighting him (C. S. Lewis's metaphor for repentance).

What Jones proposes, if I understand him correctly, is a return to the failed social gospel of the early 1900s. Yes, I agree that the Gospel offers hope for an end to humanity's moral ills, but only *after* people walk with Christ can one have any hope in that hope. Sane people do not base their hopes on wishes, but on realities of the new creation and the renewed mind that one receives the Holy Spirit's filling presence. To hope in anything that does not depend on the manifestation of the Holy Spirit is smoke.

Ed's three-layered taxonomy is the gold nugget readers seek (18). Emergents will not like the categories (no one likes to be categorized by others), but they stand the tests of fitness and simplicity. I agree—as you may have guessed—that we have much to learn from the Relevantants and much from which to push back against the Revisionist[a]s (so-framed so by me because of their similarity to failing theologies of liberation).

Evangelicals should universally celebrate the Relevantants' embrace of mystery in worship gatherings. Do not all Christians long for God's unexpected actions? Do we really enjoy knowing on Saturday precisely what will happen in church on Sunday? Is God that

boring, or is it us who, being boring at heart, have *tamed* him, even killed him as Nietzsche warned? Of course we cannot tame or kill God, but the prophets tell us that when we try, he will leave us alone to our boring selves, let our crops fail, let our animals be stillborn, stunt our growth, (plateau our churches?). If Relevantists bring back mystery by using something as simple as candles, and throw in a heaping dose of hospitality with something as cheap as a cup of coffee, may their tribe increase.

#### IS McLAREN EVEN WORTH OUR TIME (OR THEIRS)?

Ed spends some ink on McLaren's knock of "the religious right for forsaking these larger matters," his code words for issues of social justice (25). Is McLaren even worth rebutting? Is he an historical as well as theological revisionist? Perhaps I have not read him well enough. Perhaps I misunderstand him, or perhaps his education did not include a study of conservative Christianity's stands against abortion (how could you miss it, Brian?), consumerism, absentee fathering, workplace slackness, substance abuse, redefining gender and marriage, social engineering, worthless educational systems, violence, and the media driven cult that celebrates all things crass and base. I read enough of McLaren to know he is not my enemy and that he hopes to solve virtually the same list of social problems as me. His big sounding rhetoric seems akin to Hauerwas's—grabbing attention with a punch then spending forty pages to tell me that the obvious meanings of his words are not the meanings he intended. Please. I have better things to do than decipher code.

For the same reason, Ed thankfully corrects Carson's accusation that Emergents forsake the Gospel (28). We are better off to say that *some* members of the Emergent camp abandon the Gospel, and we can add that some members of the conservative Evangelical camp seem to abandon it right along with them (how many so-called conservative churches go a year or more without a single conversion?). It is one thing to critique a theological stream such as conservatism, liberalism, or something in between, and quite another to slander it. Please, let us not slander one another (29).

#### AT THE END OF THE DAY, ISN'T THIS JUST A CHRISTIAN AFFINITY GROUP?

A thought that continues to roll around in my mind is that Emergents just started a bunch of new churches for people like themselves. People who attend Emergent churches are either in rebellion to orthodox Christianity (nothing new there), or they are trying to practice Christianity in a way that makes sense to people of like sensibilities (nothing new there either). Emergent churches are simply revisiting the trends previously established by liberal, conservative, moderate, Bible-teaching, snake handling, seeker-sensitive, purpose driven, house network, cowboy, and any of the other of the thousands of contemporary church expressions of the past several generations. In that sense, Emergent ecclesiology is *church for people like themselves*. It is an affinity group not much different from the churches that went before it.

Like all the ones who went before them, unless Emergents focus on the Gospel of Jesus *above all else*, their churches will die off. Some future generation will decide that they want newer churches for people like themselves. Perhaps, that is exactly what Jesus

intended. It may just be that he wants his churches unified on doctrinal essentials, but diverse on their cultural expressions of how that doctrine plays out in styles of worship and social emphases.

Dr. Stetzer deserves our appreciation for a good paper on a movement that bears scrutiny. Moreover, Emergents deserve our love and help as they try to take the Gospel to their generation. Who knows, we might answer each other's questions.



# A RESPONSE TO ED STETZER'S "THE EMERGENT/EMERGING CHURCH: A MISSIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE"

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Dr. Ed Stetzer has impacted a generation of church planters in North America and around the world. I am glad to be one of those church planters. Having taken several church planting classes while going through seminary, I devoured his church planting books. Now as a professor, I am privileged to offer this response to Stetzer's presentation. In this response I really do not have much to argue against him. Rather, I would like to reiterate some ideas he has already highlighted but paying special attention to the theological and philosophical challenges of the Emergent Church. Following this, I will offer a simple model by which church planters and pastors may build on the past while continuing to evangelistically engage the culture in the future.

I believe it is important to note two aspects of the Emergent Church.<sup>1</sup> First, I consider the Emergent Church to be, at its foundation, a reaction to the modernistic tendencies of the contemporary church. Modernism and postmodernism are primarily western intellectual movements. Other parts of the world where the church is growing exponentially, in China and Africa for example, have historically seen little effects of modernism and postmodernism because they have not been through those movements. Today, however, the effects of postmodernism are slowly saturating all cultures to one extent or another because of better communication technology.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>I use the terms *emerging* and *emergent* synonymously, as does Stetzer, unless a distinction is made. D.A. Carson, in his book *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, apparently prefers to use the term *emerging* to describe both emerging and emergent groups. Carson is correct in stating that those who still held to orthodoxy but wanted to be missional tried to use the term *emerging* to note their affinity with the emergent church. Already, however, the term *emerging* is waning because the emerging church has already emerged. See D.A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 13-14.

<sup>2</sup>For some reading coming from differing perspectives on this general topic, see Ien Ang, *Living Room Wars: Rethinking Media Audiences for a Postmodern World* (London: Routledge, 1996); Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986); Alister McGrath, *The Future of Christianity*. Blackwell, 2002 (London: Routledge, 2001); and Angela McRobbie, *Postmodernism and Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

What would be considered the so-called “modernistic” tendencies of the contemporary church that are identified by those in the Emergent Church?<sup>3</sup> These tendencies would include dogmatic interpretations of Scripture, hierarchical organization, and inflexible doctrine. But the complaints of the Emergent Church concerning the contemporary church go beyond theology and into methodology. At this point, one must make a distinction between the Emergent Church and those who merely wish to be more missional in methodology. Stetzer has correctly pointed out the differences between the two. The point I wish to emphasize is that Emergents critique both the theology and methodology of the contemporary church.

An example in evangelism will help clarify my point. Emergents critique the evangelism methods of the contemporary church by saying that one cannot necessarily do “evangelism” because evangelistic presentations, by nature, state that one party is wrong (the non-believer who is going to hell) and one party is right (the believer who is going to heaven). Emergents say that such presentations are based upon dogmatic interpretations of Scripture and cannot stand. On the other hand, those who are orthodox in theology but missional in methodology state that while such dogmatic interpretations of Scripture are correct (leading to the belief in the exclusivity of Christ for salvation), the *method* by which the evangelistic presentation is made is too modernistic for a postmodern generation. Instead of handing a person an evangelism tract, going through a series of questions, and then saying a prayer to receive salvation, one must listen to the *story* of postmoderns and develop a relationship with them before necessarily “presenting the gospel.”<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, I believe the Emergent Church is secondarily a reaction to the perceived non-engagement of the culture by the contemporary church. The modernistic tendencies of the contemporary church have become too outdated for the postmodern generation. A reformulation must happen to re-engage the culture. As Stetzer noted, they say we must jettison both theology and methodology to reach the culture.<sup>5</sup> I will address this particular concern in the last part of my response.

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<sup>3</sup>cf. chapters 4 and 5 of Carson’s *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*.

<sup>4</sup>For a critique of contemporary church evangelism from an emergent perspective, see Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost, *The Shaping of Things to Come* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003). In this work, Hirsch and Frost emphasize the postmodern characteristic of community and its influence on evangelism. In other words, the church is a community inviting others to come join that community. The difference becomes *how* Emergents prefer to invite people in to the community. In the congregational tradition, a person professes faith and then becomes a member of the community. Hirsch and Frost propose that a person needs to become a member of the community in the beginning to explore Christianity and the story of Christ. Then, they *may* profess faith, but at least in the beginning people are given the opportunity to experience the community of believers.

<sup>5</sup>Brian McLaren wittily argues for a change of both theology and methodology in his books. cf. *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001) and *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006).

So, what can we learn from the Emergent Church? First, I believe we must hear them in their cry to engage culture and to have a missiological focus within the church. I believe Emergents are correct that the culture has changed too fast for the contemporary church to keep up with it. We must evaluate our methodology to better engage the culture with the gospel of Christ. However, I believe this is the only thing we can learn from them because Emergents go too far in sacrificing orthodox beliefs. We cannot give up the doctrinal traditions and confessions we have held to in the past. Mark Driscoll, who once was part of the Emergent group but has since parted ways with it, says we must engage culture with one hand open and the other closed. The closed hand holds to the orthodox teachings of the faith while the open hand engages with the culture and contextualizes the never changing gospel with an always changing culture.<sup>6</sup>

I believe Driscoll's illustration is very accurate. We are always in a process of contextualizing the gospel. The church through the centuries has done contextualization. Every time the gospel is taken to a new people group, contextualization occurs. Every generation contextualizes the gospel for its age grouping. In a sense, every time I meet a person on the street and present the gospel, I am contextualizing because I am placing the gospel in words that that person understands. The wording I use for a gospel presentation in the rich, Caucasian, suburban area of the city will be quite different than what I use for a person in the inner city. My point is that contextualization is a natural part of preaching the gospel.

While I believe the Emergent Church can teach us a great deal about engaging the culture, it has already gone too far in abandoning the orthodox truths of the faith. Those in the Emerging Church will always have a struggle to maintain orthodoxy in their beliefs and relevancy in their methodology. But, should not Christ's Church *always* be evaluating how it can maintain and defend the faith while at the same time contextualizing it for the culture?

In an attempt to answer this question, I wish to present my own illustration of how I believe this can be done. All illustrations fail when pressed too far; however, I want to offer the image of a three-legged stool on which the church must sit. One leg represents a theological aspect, another leg represents a historical aspect, and the last leg represents a missiological aspect.

The theological leg of the stool represents the unchanging truths of the Gospel. The Emergent Church has clearly moved away from the orthodox confessions of the faith. Emergents merely have reformulated old heresies for a new generation. One can clearly see the effects of postliberalism and anti-foundationalism in such Emergent thinkers as Brian McLaren. These<sup>7</sup> influences allow them to reformulate doctrines and beliefs in any form they choose. Jesus merely becomes one option out of many in choosing a way to heaven.

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<sup>6</sup>See Mark Driscoll's video on the Desiring God website: [http://www.desiringgod.org/media/video/2006\\_National/national2006\\_driscoll\\_interview3.mov](http://www.desiringgod.org/media/video/2006_National/national2006_driscoll_interview3.mov).

<sup>7</sup>A prime example of postliberal and anti-foundationalist theology can be found in George Lindbeck's book *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1984).

In similar fashion, many prefer to choose experience over truth and allow their experience to become the criteria for how they determine truth.

I admit that the descriptions I have just given are oversimplifications of Emergent theology. Nevertheless, the truth of Christ transcends any arguments over modernity/postmodernity and experience/truth. The gospel of Christ is both propositional *and* experiential. Emergents and postmoderns are longing to have a “spiritual experience” with a Higher Power of some kind. Christ, who is Lord over every other higher power, provides the ultimate experience. At the same time, Christ is also the grounding of all truth. He is the living embodiment of truth. Therefore, one cannot separate truth from experience. The two go hand in hand. The theological leg of this three-legged stool does not change, regardless of the culture and times. The truth and experience of Christ may be contextualized and communicated in a new way, but the foundational truths of the gospel will never change.

The historical leg of the stool represents the connection to the past that I believe contemporary churches must have. By connections to the past, I am referring most specifically to theology, liturgy, and history. The Emergent Church has both continuities and discontinuities with the past. For example, its tendency is to ignore the doctrinal traditions that have been passed from one generation to the next. At the same time, those in the Emergent Church often repeat the confessions of the past (especially the Apostle’s Creed), but ignore older hymns in favor of contemporary choruses. In either case, one cannot ignore the great truths and traditions that have been passed down.

In the same manner, church history cannot be ignored. Many Emergents want to go back to the times of the early church, as is exemplified in the book of Acts and shortly thereafter. They are attracted to the rawness and adventure of the first saints, especially the saints’ reliance upon the power and work of the Spirit before doctrine and heresy supposedly became debatable. But, a natural progression always exists to any movement or institution, and that is what I believe we see with the early church progressing from an organic movement to an organized church. We cannot ignore the other 1900 years of church history to get back to the early church because we miss important events and doctrinal formulations that came from those events. In time, those doctrinal formulations were expressed in the creeds and confessions, as mentioned earlier. It took several centuries just to express the doctrine of the Trinity in the correct terms, such as with the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Such a time period and the fruits of that time period do not need to be overlooked or else we will fall back into the same heresies.

The contemporary church can use history and traditions to show how to progress into the future. Regretfully we do not have a laboratory for theology and church planting. We go straight from the textbook to the real world for most applications. Nevertheless, history provides for us a laboratory to see the victories and mistakes of past generations that can help us move clearly into the future.

Last, the missiological leg shows us how to take the unchanging truths in the first leg, appreciate the heritage passed to us in the second leg, and apply all of it to our contemporary culture. The chief issue for the missiological leg of the church is how far we contextualize the gospel. Stetzer cited Gregg Allison’s paper given at the 2006 meeting of the Evangelical

Theological Society. Perhaps Allison's paper is one of the most helpful presentations that have been done to understand the Emergent Church. While I have no simple solution to offer as to how far is exactly too far in contextualizing the gospel (though I personally would not be comfortable with anything beyond C4), the point I want to draw is that we must be careful of the boundaries and limits. We cannot become too much like the culture to attract the culture to the gospel. The gospel is able to attract persons to faith on its own through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Regretfully, I feel that too many church planters and pastors believe that they have to become like the culture around them to attract persons from that culture. This leads to planters and pastors being something they really are not. Postmoderns are looking for authenticity and can see through the charade and contemporary styling of a church that is merely trying to be trendy with no substance. Yet, we will always live in the tension of bringing the unchanging truth of the gospel to an ever changing world.

The three-legged stool illustration becomes most important in the missiological aspects of the church because I believe we must keep all three legs in balance. We cannot be too heavy on the theological or historical legs or else we live in the past and never reach the present culture. We cannot be too heavy on the missiological leg because we fall into the dangers of over-contextualization and lose our ecclesiastical heritage.

In conclusion, I believe that the Emergent Church is a trend that will come and go. Church planters and pastors who have fallen into the "Emerg-ish" camps must remember that another movement will come to take its place. As mentioned before, we can always learn lessons from movements. I believe the Emergent Church teaches us to continually re-evaluate how we are reaching the culture. Nevertheless, we must maintain a balance on the stool so that we never compromise our Great gospel or our Great Commission.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

*A Theology for the Church.* Edited by Daniel L. Akin. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2007. 979 pages. \$49.99 cloth.

President Akin of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and his thirteen author-contributors have produced what is presumably designed to be a textbook for systematic theology in SBC seminaries and a major resource for Southern Baptist pastors (see Albert Mohler's "Conclusion"). The editor's claim that the book is "a unique approach to a systematic theology text book with multiple participants" (viii) is true among Southern Baptists but not generally true, as, for example, is made clear by two other volumes: Charles Webb Carter (Methodist), ed., *A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology* {ital}, 2 vols. (1983), and Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Lutheran), eds., *Christian Dogmatics* {ital}, 2 vols. (1984). But this project is indeed for Southern Baptists a notable venture. Three aspects call for specific attention: the structured proportion of the chapters, the theological positions taken, and the overall scope of the book.

### PROPORTION

The chapters have been designed to be written so as to consist of four constituent parts, each answering a question: (1) "What does the Bible say?" (biblical); (2) "What has the church believed?" (historical); (3) "How does it all fit together?" (systematic); and (4) "What is the significance of the doctrine for today?" (practical). Although nothing is said about the desired proportions of space to be allocated to each of the four parts, one might assume that there ought to be an approximate equality among the first three, if not among all four, parts.

In fact only Malcolm Yarnell (Holy Spirit), David Nelson (providence), and Russell Moore (eschatology) have approximated such balance. For Timothy George (God), Nelson (creation), and John Hammett (human nature) the biblical section is by far the longest, and for Akin (person of Christ) and Mark Dever (ecclesiology) the biblical section is longer than the other three sections combined. With David Dockery/Nelson (special revelation) the systematic section is longer than the other three sections combined, and with Kenneth Keathley (salvation) the systematic is twice as long as the other sections combined. For Paige Patterson (work of Christ) the biblical and systematic sections are much longer than the historical and practical, and for Moore (natural revelation) the biblical and historical sections are much longer than the systematic and practical. For Gregory Thornbury (prolegomena) the historical section occupies 43% and a philosophical introduction 21%. In the historical sections of the chapters, nine of the authors found Baptist authors worthy of mention, whereas Akin, Patterson, Yarnell, and Keathley did not.



## POSITIONS

Thornbury's opening chapter begins with the philosophical quest for truth, which is found to be ultimately theological, proceeds to the biblical claims relative to knowledge, and then traces in some detail the interaction of faith and reason and the use of prolegomena throughout Christian history. His systematic section focuses on worldviews, both as "cognitive apparatus" and as the construct of culture. Finally the efforts to restate the Christian faith in a postmodern context, Thornbury argues, must be carefully evaluated.

Moore finds numerous texts in both testaments relatable to natural (or general) revelation, and after an extensive review of natural revelation in Christian history, concludes that natural revelation does occur but is rejected by human beings and hence is not salvific. Moore thus follows John Calvin and Emil Brunner. He rejects inclusivism as to the unevangelized but affirms the cultural mandate.

Dockery and Nelson find special revelation to be particular, progressive, personal, and propositional. The doctrine of biblical inspiration must have the same kind of balance between the divine and the human that one finds in a proper Christology. They affirm the plenary-verbal view and also a concursive view. Their historical section does not include Protestant Scholasticism or Baptists such as W. N. Clarke, Carl F. H. Henry, or Bernard Ramm. Addressing the issues of unity and diversity in the Bible and of the phenomena of the Scriptures, Dockery/Nelson proceed to a carefully nuanced view of the trustworthiness/inerrancy of the Scriptures together with a coherence view of truth and recognition of the canonical context.

George, whose chapter has a certain literary quality, following the later Calvin and Karl Barth as systematicians, begins his biblical section with the Trinity, both economic and immanent. The rest of the biblical section is organized topically, not according to biblical writings, whereas the systematic section is framed according to divine attributes: holiness, love, eternity, omniscience, omnipresence, and almightiness. George seeks to represent the best of Gill, Spurgeon, and Henry.

Nelson's biblical section on creation passes muster, and so does his historical section except for Baptists. One misses reference to Ramm or Dale Moody. The Elliott Controversy did not center in the denial of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch or the use of historical-critical method but in Elliott's handling of Genesis 1-11 as parabolic and of Melchizedek. Also the Broadman Bible Commentary {ital} Controversy centered in Genesis 22, not in creation. On providence Nelson adequately treats the biblical material, but in his historical review he is weak on Baptists and the modern era. He responsibly expounds providence under preservation, concurrence, and governance and connects it with the question of divine sovereignty and human freedom, coming to a compatibilist conclusion, and with the problem of evil.

Whereas Peter Schemm (angels) builds a strong case for the Christological interpretation of "the angel of the Lord," while acknowledging that there are other views, and whereas he argues well for the Sethite-Cainite interpretation of "the sons of God" and "the daughters of men" (Gen. 6:1-4), while treating other views, he singularly adopts, sans careful exegesis and without acknowledging other views, especially as expressed in twentieth-century commentaries, the dispensationalist position that Isa. 14:12-20 and Ezek. 28:11-19 refer to Satan, either typologically or literally.

Hammett, in holding that the image of God in humans was "defaced" or "damaged" but not lost as a consequence of the fall, must face the problem, as did John Calvin, of the paucity of exegetical support. Then he is less than decisive as to the nature of the *imago Dei* {ital}. Hammett is clearly complementarian on male-female issues, adopts dichotomy, and inclines to traducianism and to special creation. Human beings are created for work and for rest and for community.

R. Stanton Norman (human sin), after a detailed examination of the biblical terms for sin, concludes that idolatry most fully embodies the essence of sin and affirms total depravity. Moving away from Mullins and Conner and toward Strong, he, recognizing that Augustine used a mistranslation of Rom. 5:12c and opting for a constative aorist tense, adopts Millard Erickson's adaptation of the natural headship theory, whereby the newborn child inherits the guilt of Adam's sin ontologically for having been "present in undifferentiated form" in Adam but not existentially until he/she does "accept or approve of" his/her "corrupt nature," even before any personal sinning (Erickson, CT {ital}, 1st ed., 2:638-39). Ignoring all non-imputational theories, Norman, drawing a conclusion not required by the 2000 BF&M (SBC), leaves young children with this ontological-existential dilemma.

Akin, desiring to avoid either a "Christology from above" or a "Christology from below," opts for a "Christology from before," i.e., starting with the Old Testament Messianic story line, but in treating the New Testament he falls back on both Christology from above and Christology from below. He affirms the incarnational two-nature, one-person Christology of Chalcedon, holds to the impeccability of Jesus, and uses C. S. Lewis's options for Jesus: "Liar, Lunatic, Legend, or Lord."

Patterson presents an unambiguous exposition and defense of the penal substitutionary view of the atonement, building especially on Old Testament sacrifices, Psalm 22, Isaiah 53, Romans, and Hebrews. He does allow for elements of truth in other theories: classical, satisfaction, governmental, moral influence, and example. Relative to the extent of the atonement he accepts the sufficient-efficient distinction, and he denies that physical healing is guaranteed by the atonement.

For Yarnell the Holy Spirit is both divine and personal, and, following Gill and Dagg, Yarnell includes the Holy Spirit in the eternal covenant. The Spirit is, as Augustine said, "the bond of love" between the Father and the Son, but Yarnell does not commit himself to double procession (*filioque*{ital}). The Spirit was at work in biblical canonization as well as biblical inspiration and illumination. The baptism with the Spirit is contemporaneous with conversion (cf. 2000 BF&M), and extraordinary spiritual gifts have not clearly ceased and are not all guaranteed to continue. The Spirit is both the subject of worship (enablement in prayer) and the object of worship (the Spirit as God). Yarnell's magisterial comprehensiveness lacks only a fuller treatment of Pentecostals, Charismatics, and the Third Wave.

Keathley argues for union with Christ as the central soteriological concept, it being both positional and experiential. He adopts the concurrent or congruous view of election whereby divine choice and human response coincide. He finds no need for a system of divine decrees.

Conversion consists of repentance and faith and leads to regeneration. Justification by grace through faith is declarative in nature and is based on the imputation of the righteousness of Christ. Sanctification is progressive, not perfectionist, and continuance in Christ involves both God's preservation and our perseverance.

Dever's treatment of the *notae ecclesiae* ("one," "holy," "universal," and "apostolic") with their roots in the Donatist Controversy and of the marks of the true church (right preaching of the Word of God and right administration of the two ordinances) with their roots in the Magisterial Reformers would be better placed in his historical section than in his biblical. Working through numerous New Testament texts, Dever argues carefully for plural elders within a congregationally governed church, with some inferential evidence for one of these as the senior elder or pastor, but he does not tell his readers that the great majority of Baptists for four centuries have disagreed with him on plural elders. Dever is clear on a regenerate church membership, believer's baptism by immersion, and corrective church discipline and insists that Baptists have been both Zwinglian and Calvinist on the Lord's Supper. His best presentation may be his argument that "a biblically faithful church" is a Protestant church, a gathered church, a congregationally governed church, and a Baptist church. Dever is concerned about early childhood baptisms but bypasses the whole question of open or close communion. His treatment of Landmarkism (12 lines in 90 pages) is miniscule, and he does not utilize E. C. Dargan's monumental *Ecclesiology*.

Moore vividly expounds the eschatology of the Old Testament as cosmic, covenantal (from Abraham), and kingship and that of the New Testament under two rubrics: the "already" and the "not yet," with a constant interweaving of the testaments. He seems to employ a futurist hermeneutic of Revelation 4-19 without any suggestion that there are other interpretations. Moore's historical survey is marked by completeness and accuracy, but in the Baptist phase the focus is entirely on the millennium. Mullins and Conner are given an unnuanced treatment that does not point to their shifts: Mullins from premillennialism toward amillennialism and Conner from postmillennialism to amillennialism (with Ray Summers, E. A. McDowell, and Russell Bradley Jones omitted, and J. Frank Norris and John R. Rice unmentioned). Moore is a historical premillennialist, and following progressive dispensationalist Craig Blaising, opts for a "new earth" model rather than a "spiritual vision" model, but he does not report that a "new earth" model can be joined to an amillennial interpretation of Revelation 20. In his systematic section Moore explicates under "the kingdoms of this world" death, the great tribulation, the antichrist, and hell and under "the kingdom of Christ" heaven, the second coming (including the rapture, which receives more space than the second coming), restoration of Israel, the millennium, and the new earth. Perhaps without intending to do so, Moore has relegated to a subordinate place eschatological resurrection, which, according to the Apostles' Creed, is primary. His practical section is one of the best.

### SCOPE

Although there are from ten to twelve basic Christian doctrines that tend to be treated in all systematic theologies, there are variations in the scope of systematic theologies. This multi-authored volume has a scope that is more akin to that of the nineteenth-century theologies of Charles Hodge and A. H. Strong than to that of the end-of-the twentieth-century theologies of Erickson, James W. McClendon, and the present author. Erickson included biblical criticism and theological language in his doctrine of revelation and the Bible, and the present author included both biblical criticism and biblical hermeneutics. McClendon and the present author included missiology as an integral part of ecclesiology. The present author had major chapters on prayer and stewardship as aspects of the Christian life. These alterations in scope came as a result of what was happening in the churches and in the culture.

For a denomination heavily impacted by influences on the Bible in the modern era, is not a fully developed doctrine of Scripture highly desirable? For one that recovered biblical giving only to be overwhelmed by consumerism and environmental challenges, should not stewardship of things material be in its theology? For one that has claimed a prayer-centered piety, especially among its women, should not prayer be central to its theology, not marginal? For one supporting more than five thousand overseas missionaries, should not missions finally be integrated into its theology?

This groundbreaking volume should be gratefully recognized for what it is. Its production gives evidence that theology is alive and well among Southern Baptists. A second revised and enlarged edition might indeed make likely its greater usefulness and longevity in print.

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*How Much Does God Foreknow? A Comprehensive Biblical Study.* By Steven C. Roy. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006. pp. 312. \$22 paper.

God's foreknowledge is a crucial doctrine because it is foundational to so many other issues in theology, soteriology, and anthropology. In this work Steven Roy, associate professor of pastoral theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, offers a thorough survey of the biblical materials relating to God's foreknowledge.

The primary focus of this study is the recent discussion among evangelical Christians between open theists (who deny that God foreknows future free human choices) and the majority of evangelicals (who affirm that God has exhaustive foreknowledge of all events, including future human choices). A quick survey of the names referenced in the book illustrates this rather narrow focus. Open theists such as Gregory Boyd, John Sanders, Clark Pinnock, and Richard Rice are referenced over twenty times each, and evangelicals who have opposed this perspective such as D. A. Carson, Millard Erickson, and Bruce Ware receive significant attention as well. The narrow focus of this approach has the concomitant weaknesses of lacking both historical perspective and breadth of theological perspective. Amazingly, Boethius is referenced only once in this work (but not in reference to his pivotal position on divine foreknowledge), and Augustine's perspective on foreknowledge is never mentioned.

A key factor in this discussion is the affirmation of either a libertarian or compatibilistic view of human freedom. Since the libertarian view affirms that humans are genuinely free to choose from a range of alternatives, open theists question whether such future human choices are knowable even by God. On the other hand, since the compatibilistic view (held by many evangelicals with Calvinistic theology) affirms that God perfectly knows and foreordains human choices, it appears

that humans have no real freedom to choose alternatives because to do so would depart from God's foreordained script. Unfortunately, standard mediating positions which affirm both human libertarian free will and divine exhaustive foreknowledge get short shrift in this somewhat polarized discussion. Since this view is widely held among Baptists and other evangelicals, it is disappointing that this perspective received so little representation.

The main strength of this book is the thorough examination it provides of all the key biblical teachings addressing the issue of divine foreknowledge. It also provides contrasting interpretations offered on these passages by those affirming and denying God's exhaustive foreknowledge of human choices. Roy draws primarily from evangelical commentaries and theological books; surprisingly rarer are references to more technical language tools such as Greek and Hebrew lexicons and theological dictionaries. Nevertheless, every key Scripture passage addressing the issue of foreknowledge receives a thoughtful and balanced examination.

The book also offers two chapters which address issues related to the topic of foreknowledge. The first chapter seeks to answer two key interpretive questions: (a) Has the influence of Greek philosophy shaped our reading of biblical texts concerning foreknowledge? and (b) Does the Bible teach that God foreknows some future events but not all future events? A second chapter spells out the practical implications of an exhaustive view of divine foreknowledge for worship, prayer, divine guidance, the problem of evil and suffering, and hope in the final triumph of God. These chapters provide both an in-depth analysis of the theoretical aspects of contemporary divine foreknowledge discussions and a practical application of their implications in the life of the church.

Notwithstanding its limitations, *How Much Does God Foreknow?* has much to offer. It affords a helpful survey of all the biblical materials relating to divine knowledge, and Roy adds insightful commentary with contrasting perspectives. This is a useful focused Bible study for a theologian or any thinking Christian.

-- Steve W. Lemke

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*Jim and Casper Go to Church: Frank Conversation about Faith, Churches, and Well-Meaning Christians.* By Jim Henderson and Matt Casper. Carol Stream, IL: BarnaBooks, 2007. 169 pp., \$16.99.

How would an unchurched visitor respond to your church's worship service? *Jim and Casper Go to Church* compels you to ask this question. Jim Henderson is a Christian minister who has served in a variety of church settings, from church plant to traditional church to megachurch. He recruited Matt Casper, a self-professed atheist, to attend the worship services of a variety of churches and provide his feedback. The book records the perceptions that Jim and Casper had as they attended the worship services of these various churches. Jim Henderson's larger interest is for Christians to listen to and dialogue with unbelievers, rather than merely preaching at them. He prefers to call unsaved persons "missing" rather than "lost" because being lost has the connotation that all hope is gone, but we still search for the missing (xvii).

The churches that Jim and Casper visited extend across the spectrum, including many of the best-known churches in America – evangelical megachurches (Saddleback Church and Willow Creek Community Church), health/wealth churches (Lakewood Church in Houston and Potter's Field in Dallas), Emerging/Emergent churches (the Mosaic church in Los Angeles, Imago Dei in Portland, and Mars Hill Church in Seattle), inner city social ministry focused churches (Lawndale Community Church in Chicago, the Dream Center in Las Angeles, and the Bridge in Portland), a house church (Jason's House in San Diego) and a traditional mainline church (First Presbyterian Church of River Forest, IL).

Obviously, this book is very subjective and anecdotal. It affords the perspective of one atheist at one worship service. The authors/visitors had the opportunity to hear some ministry superstars such as Erwin McManus, Mark Driscoll, and Joel Osteen, but unfortunately their perspective on some of the churches may have been skewed slightly because the pastor was not present when they attended (for example, they missed T. D. Jakes at the Potter's Field and Rick Warren at Saddleback). Obviously, a poll taken of a larger and more diverse test group would have provided more reliable information. However, the insights and questions of Casper are interesting and illuminating.

Casper's observations about contemporary worship style were particularly interesting because (a) Casper is himself a guitarist and singer in a rock band and (b) contemporary worship services are designed to attract just such a secular person as Casper. However, Casper was often unimpressed with some of the most professionally done contemporary worship services. For example, Casper found the worship band at Saddleback to be excellent in musical technique, but was "too contrived, too slick, *too* professional" – technical polish without soulful worship (pp. 3-4). Likewise, Casper could not forget the visual disjunction of a woman in the praise team at Willow Creek Community Church smiling broadly while she sang, "This world holds nothing for me" (p. 67). Casper was troubled by the overemphasis on a glitzy Hollywood quality production – for example, the amount spent at the Dream Center and other churches on camera cranes, fog machines, flashing lights, and multiple screens (pp. 18, 20, 39, 67). Casper also found the lyrics of the contemporary songs to be vacuous: "Hope Changes Everything?" What does that mean? Hope changes nothing except your own feelings. *Action* changes everything" (p. 4). Casper tended to dislike worship services that were more concerts than participative worship – at times he found the worship services to be indistinguishable from the Times-Warner ads for praise and worship CDs (p. 83). He found the less pretentious music and lyrics at the Bridge and Lawndale Community Church to be more heartfelt and genuine (pp. 67, 108-109). Surprisingly, Casper also enjoyed the more formal worship and traditional hymns at First Presbyterian Church, in part because it reminded him of attending church as a child.

Casper's response to the sermons he heard is textbook advice for students in any sermon lab class. He noted with disdain that Joel Osteen never mentioned Jesus anytime in his sermon (p. 126), he appreciated the use of the Bible in the Presbyterian church (p. 60), and he responded to practical application rather than pious platitudes (p. 6). As Casper put it, "After the sermon . . . 'I want to hear one answer to one simple question: 'What do you want me to do?'" (p. 33).

Both Casper and Jim found the overt, blatant appeals for contributions at Lakewood Church and Potter's Field to be manipulative and offensive (pp. 120-125, 137-138). Casper also objected to the way that most churches greeted visitors. He disliked being greeted by overly friendly greeters at entries to the church, or by church members who greeted guests only after they were instructed to

by the pastor (pp. 3, 57-58). In none of the churches were Jim and Casper greeted by church members who were not official greeters or doing so without special instructions. Casper did pay attention to whether there was genuine community in the worship center, judged by whether people hung around to visit with each other and with guests after the worship services (p. 82).

The most haunting question raised by Casper is a crucial one: “Jim, is this what Jesus told you guys to do?” (p. 147). He wondered if the things that churches focused most on were the things that Jesus focused most on. Casper was more open to listening to sermons in churches that were obviously involved in meeting direct human needs. Casper disdained all the operation that went into the production of the worship services produced with Hollywood-style professionalism, but was impressed with churches that practiced what they preached. Perhaps Jesus feels the same way.

How would Casper evaluate your church or mine? It is a valuable thing to get outside our churchly thinking and understand how unbelievers respond to our worship services. *Jim and Casper Go to Church* offers insights to help us all begin to understand these issues.

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