

Theology of Mission and the Emerging Church

Terrance Steele

A fairly new church movement, identified as the “emerging church movement,” claims to be concerned missiologically with how to reach the Postmodern culture, especially the unchurched. Leaders of the emerging church criticize the traditional church for doing a poor job missiologically of reaching postmoderns in our society. The emerging church has devoted its efforts to articulating new models of ministry through redefining Christian beliefs, morality, and methodology to fit the postmodern culture. They claim these changes will make the emerging church more effective in reaching Postmoderns. This paper describes the emerging culture and presents the foundational missional beliefs of the emerging church movement.

Definition of Terms

Post-Christian or Post-Christendom: The current condition of the West in which the church no longer plays a pivotal role in the direction of the culture. Christian beliefs and the stories of the Bible are largely unknown, and the church is a foreign institution that plays no part in the day-to-day activities of most people (Murray 2004, 1).

Emerging Culture: Post-enlightenment culture mostly found in North America, the UK, New Zealand, and Australia. It has been heavily influenced by the technological revolution, postmodernism and post-Christendom (Kimball 2003, 13; Gibbs and Bolger 2005, 8-9).

Emerging Church: A diverse movement or “conversation” of Christians and non-traditional churches that seek to effectively evangelize the emerging culture in appropriately contextualized ways. It is characterized by innovative worship forms and protest against

a church culture perceived to be compromised by modernity (Carson 2005, 12-13; Kimball 2003, 13-17; Gibbs and Bolger 2005, 29-30, 41-42).

Missional Theology: Theological discipline whose intent is to apply the

church of the West had become compromised, failing to address the real issues affecting its culture (Newbigin 1986, 3). Scholars in this field claim that the church has developed a subculture closely tied to modernism and that

WHILE THE EMERGING church movement is a broad umbrella most of these churches fit within two broad groups: The Emergent Village and emerging evangelicals.

biblical doctrine of God’s universal mission contextually so that the message of the gospel might be communicated in an appropriate manner (Hiebert and Tienou 2006, 224).

Mission to the West: The study of the western world as a mission field rather than primarily the sender of missionaries. Initiated by Lesslie Newbigin, mission to the west believes that the

the West is in need of reevangelization (Hunsberger and Van Gelder 1996, 54).

While the emerging church movement is a broad umbrella under which many young Christians and churches actively engage in experimentation with forms of worship, mission, and church polity, most of these churches fit within two broad groups: The Emergent Village and emerging evangelicals. The classifi-

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cations of these streams of the emerging church are based upon the degree of experimentation with doctrine and form compared to the traditional evangelical church. The emerging evangelicals are concerned with communicating the gospel in contextually appropriate forms without compromising doctrine and biblical authority, thereby be-

experimentation is based upon the belief that western cultural forms and beliefs have become church dogma and have taken precedence over the mission of God. The most conservative of the emergent group is Brian McLaren.⁴ The most experimental leaders of this group are Doug Pagitt⁵, Steve Chalke,⁶ and Tony Jones.⁷

emerging church's missional theology and its expression in nine broad categories.

Foundational to the understanding of missional theology is the belief that the Bible is divine revelation. (Hiebert and Tienou 2006, 219, 221) Although theology of mission is based upon Scripture, the authority of Scripture and exact role of the Bible plays in developing the theology of mission are part of the current discussion in the emerging church. (Pagitt 2007b, 125; McLaren 2004, 182-183, 185, 190; Jones, 2007, 14; Carson 2005, 150)

Leaders of the Emergent Village (Brian McLaren, Doug Pagitt and Tony Jones), using a Postmodern hermeneutic⁸ to read Scripture, believe in the Bible's practical message to the various contexts within which its books were written. In addition, these leaders believe that the messages of these books were only for the particular situations to which they were addressed. They feel that to take the meaning of the various books of the Bible out of the context in which they were written is to make the Bible serve a context it was never in-

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ing culturally liberal but theologically conservative. (Driscoll 2006, 16) The most conservative leader of this stream is Mark Driscoll¹, while Dan Kimball² and John Burke³ are more experimental. Those in the emergent church, also known as the Emergent Village (www.emergentvillage.com), are more willing than other emerging churches to experiment with form and some doctrine in order to be relevant to the surrounding culture. (Driscoll 2006, 15) Doctrinal

The discussion of the emerging church's missional theology follows a five-point outline. First is the authority of Scripture in the emerging church. Second is the meaning of gospel to various streams of the emerging church. Third, in light of the definitions of gospel is the understanding of sin and salvation. Fourth is discovering the distinctives of the emerging culture in order to appropriately contextualize the gospel. Fifth is the application of the

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tended to address and eliminates the context, places and people to whom it was intended. (Pagitt 2007b, 124-126) The emergent group challenges ideas such as authority, inerrancy, infallibility, objective, and absolute as extra-biblical words that modernism has attached to the Bible, ruining its intent and message. (McLaren 2004, 182-183) Finally, they believe that the Bible is not a static book of facts and principles, but that it is the progressive story of God's intervention in human history. (McLaren 2004, 190; Pagitt 2007b, 44) This view esteems the authority of Scripture highly enough to find the use of the Bible that serves, "our context" as a departure from the intent of the biblical authors.

The emerging evangelicals, led by pastors like Tim Keller,⁹ Mark Driscoll, and Dan Kimball, hold a view of the Bible similar to the orthodox or reformed view. In this view the Bible is God-breathed, fully inspired, a guide for the Christian and authoritative. (II Tim. 3:16) (Kimball 2007b, 189) The basis of their belief is the Scripture's testament to its authority. (Driscoll 2007b, 22) Experience, tradition, or archaeology are valid in understanding life but are under the authority of Scripture. (Driscoll 2007b, 25) The emerging reformed and emerging evangelical groups, then, hold the Bible in high authority without modification from cultural influences.

Two foundational questions in the construction of the theology of mission are what does God's Word mean to humans a particular situation (Hiebert and Tienou 2006, 225) and if the mission of the church is to spread the gospel, what is the message of the gospel? These questions assume that God is a missional God and that God's mission is central to His working on the earth. Secondary to this presupposition is that all Christians are to be participants in God's mission.

Historically the church has understood the gospel as the central theme of God's work in human history that reaches its climax in the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and will come to its finale in the

end times (Guder, et. al. 1998, 4; Bosch 2003, 412). The early church expressed the gospel as, "Jesus is Lord" (Hirsch 2006, 24) as does the emerging church. They add that a life-long embodying of the gospel is foundational to the task God has called the church to. Many in the emerging church believe that gospel should lead to a missiology that emphasizes a "commitment to social justice, relational righteousness and evangelism," in order to reflect God's design for his creation. (Hirsch 2006, 284)

Emergent Village and emerging evangelicals differ in their definition of gospel. While the gospel has often come to mean save from hell or gain eternal life (McLaren 2004, 101), leaders of the Emergent Village believe the gospel is discovering where God is working and working alongside of him as opposed to taking God to the world. (Gibbs and

30, 32, 113). Instead, the gospel must emphasize freedom for humankind (McLaren 2006, 10, 11), good news for the poor (McLaren 2004, 120), and the creation of community "for the good of the world" (McLaren 2004, 117, 118, 119). As a result, the Emergent Village emphasizes social justice and peace-making above conversion practices.

The gospel according to emerging evangelicals is that because God is holy and humans are fallen, not only through original sin, but also by choice, Jesus, who is divine, came to save sinners from their sins by dying as a substitute for the penalty of humanity's collective sins (Driscoll 2007a, 136-137; Kimball 2007a, 100-101). Therefore, men and women throughout history can rejoice in the work of Christ because his spilt blood was a sufficient payment for sin (Kimball 2007a, 100).

ONE'S UNDERSTANDING OF gospel is affected by one's definition of sin; how one understands what sin is determines what the mission of God is.

Bolger 2005, 52-53) In this view the gospel is God's "active participation in the redemption of the world," leading to the repair of creation through the kingdom of God (Gibbs and Bolger 2005, 53). The understanding of many emerging church leaders is that Jesus' message was to embrace the coming kingdom of God and that the message of the cross is incomplete without the inclusion of justice and the global impact of the church for the betterment of mankind (Gibbs and Bolger 2005, 54; McLaren 2004, 78; 2006, 7). Furthermore, this view of the gospel seeks to correct what they see as the overemphasis placed on "the eradication of sin and freedom for humankind through Jesus" (Pagitt 2007b, 42). Substitutionary atonement, while biblical, is based on a first century middle-eastern legal code of sacrifices and substitutions not recognized or readily understood by western culture (Green and Baker 2000,

This understanding of gospel remains consistent with the orthodox and reformed views and, as such, retains the backing of history.

One's understanding of gospel is affected by one's definition of sin; how one understands what sin is determines what the mission of God is. The discussion of the nature of sin is key to the development of theology of mission. For the most part both sides of the emerging church agree that humanity is fundamentally flawed and needs healing (Burke 2007, 68; McLaren 2004, 320; Driscoll 2007b, 29, 145; Kimball 2007a, 100-101); sin is separation from God, rebellion and spiritual death. Because of our rebellion and separation from God only the sacrifice of Jesus could reconcile us to God (Driscoll 2007b, 72).

Some leaders in the Emergent Village broaden the definition of sin by saying that sin mars God's purpose for

creation by corrupting physical desire, the mind, the will, relationships, social structure, and leads to an immature soul. The focus on God's original intent for creation and sin's corrupting effect moves away from the centrality of the concept of original sin due to the perception that to focus on "the fall" creates "an exaggerated understanding of the doctrine of 'original sin'" (McLaren 2004, 265) and distorts the understanding of the goodness of God's original creation (McLaren 2004, 265).

Another group within the Emergent Village rejects the doctrine of original sin because it ignores social sins and generational sins that pass from parent to child. This group defines sin as anything that "dis-integrates life" so that God's intention in salvation is to in-

tegrate, bring about his original intent for creation, and thus bring life (Pagitt 2007b, 136). This view of sin proposes that dis-integration is a lack of participation in God's full integrating with the world (Pagitt 2007b, 132). In contrast to the traditional model of salvation which bridges the gap between God and humanity, God's integrating work involves humanity working together with one another and God in order to restore creation (Pagitt 2007b, 134). This view rejects the presupposition based on the Greek judicial model of separation, that God is repelled by sin (dis-integration). He rather draws close to humanity in the midst of their sin because he desires integration. (Pagitt 2007b, 134) The final element to this view of sin is the belief in a progressively sinless society (Pagitt 2007b, 128) that proposes that the traditional view of sin, guilt and salvation no longer communicate to a society that is progressively improving (Mann 2005,

47, 53-54). In this understanding of sin the fallen nature of humanity does not see sin as inevitable, but that humanity is increasingly able to choose to act correctly to benefit humanity, creation and the intent of God to bring about integration. The final task of missional theology is to present the gospel in a culturally appropriate manner so that it communicates "in the language and culture of real people in the particularities of their lives so that it may transform them, their societies, and their cultures into what God intends for them to be." (Hiebert and Tienou 2006, 225) As a result missional theology "seeks to build the bridge between Biblical revelation and human contexts. It seeks to remove the gap between orthodoxy and or-

thodoxy." (Hiebert and Tienou 2006, 225) The emerging church as a whole attempts to comprehend the culture in which they live in order to understand the reception of Christian witness, theology, and church. (Carson 2005, 45). Furthermore, the emerging culture has brought about an expectation of spirituality that engages in social activism and fosters an experiential spirituality (Frost and Hirsch 2003, 6). In defining the emerging culture, from a populous standpoint, several trends have become evident. They are highly interactive and desire a spirituality that fosters participation rather than passivity. They are highly intelligent and desire their intelligence to be respected. They desire belonging, love and acceptance despite differences or even moral flaws. They are environmentally active, oppose war, and care for the poor (Kimball 2007b, 218-228; McLaren 2007, 5). They are highly spiritual-ly aware, inquisitive and experimen-

tal (Kimball 2007b, 218-228) and often described as "spiritual but not religious" (McLaren 2007, 3). They tend to be drawn to a more mystical and experiential spirituality over a more rational faith. (Kimball 2003, 63) They like Jesus (Kimball 2007b, 218-228) but are unsatisfied and uncomfortable with the spirituality they grew up with (McLaren 2004, 20; Driscoll 2004, 18). The emerging culture is technologically dependant, which affects communication, sight, sound, activities, rituals, and stories (Gibbs and Bolger 2005, 20). It is critical of old authority structures, including the Christian church. (Guest and Taylor 2006, 50) The emerging culture is fueled, "by playful imagination and openness to change." (Guest and Taylor 2006, 49-50) They seek true community (Pagitt 2007b, 127) in an individualistic society. From a statistical standpoint members of the emerging culture are delaying marriage, opting instead to remain single, cohabitating, or divorcing. (Wuthnow 2007, 22) They are having fewer children and having them later in life than previous generations of Americans. (Wuthnow 2007, 24) The emerging culture statistically has fewer social relationships than previous generations. (Wuthnow 2007, 37-38) The emerging culture has a higher level of education than previous generations of Americans, (Wuthnow 2007, 36) yet they live with uncertainties of work and money due to the "heightened financial pressures, economic uncertainty, a "climate of consumption, debt, work, stress, efforts to save, and increasing inequality" (Wuthnow 2007, 28). The emerging culture is powerfully impacted by the forces of globalization due to access to information technologies on a daily basis (Wuthnow 2007, 42) and the access to volumes of factual information and arts previously unknown to any generation of Americans (Wuthnow 2007, 44-45).

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It has been called a time of social dysfunction and cultural decay in which there is an “unraveling of the past era.” (Webber, 2007, 15) Robert Wuthnow says they are struggling to find a distinct identity during a period of “coming of age” yet have no clear identity (Wuthnow 2007, 5-6). This period of transition is seen by some as an important point in the development of the emerging culture (Edson, 2006, 30; Partridge 2004, 58).

In response to these cultural distinctives of the emerging culture the missional activity of the emerging church is diverse. Nine missiological practices of the emerging church have been identified by Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger and others. The manner in which these practices are implemented depends upon each church’s missional theology.

The first of the nine missional practices is identifying with the life of Jesus (Gibbs and Bolger 2005, 45). Those in the Emergent Village emphasize the teachings of Jesus rather than only focusing on his death. This affects how members share their faith, emphasizing the good news of the kingdom of God that Jesus taught about. The emerging evangelicals identify with the life of Jesus by living as Christ’s representatives to the earth. Incarnational-missional ministry focuses on going out to the world and representing the body of Christ in their context rather than bringing them into a church context in order to hear the gospel (Hirsch 2006, 128).

The second missiological practice is transforming secular space to make any location conducive to spiritual activity. Rather than continuing to perpetuate the secular/sacred dichotomy, the emerging church seeks to engage spiritually wherever they go (Gibbs and Bolger 2005, 66). This assumes an organic, holistic approach to all activities of members and an ability to discover spiritual experiences in all settings. The practical application is three-fold. There is a move away from church as a building or location and embracing the church as the people of God gathered in a variety of set-

tings, from warehouses to bars to coffee shops. Worship is intricately connected to all of life rather than trendy worship. The practice of evangelism and mission is a lifestyle rather than an event or a script (Gibbs and Bolger 2005, 68-82).

The third missiological practice of the emerging church is living highly communal lives. Not only does this include living in communal houses but also becoming an active member of the community. Highly communal living changes church practice from a series of meetings on specific days to a family gathering, emphasizing the fostering of genuine relationships. This is most commonly done in the form of small group meetings in which Christians and non-Christians alike can find spiritual meaning and relational growth (Gibbs and Bolger 2005, 99-107).

The fourth missiological practice is welcoming strangers. The church is not only for Christians, but also for non-Christians. As a result, the activities of the church are highly experi-

(Acts 29 network), short term mission projects, supporting career missionaries, global advocacy for justice, and missiological training. The Emergent Village is more likely to be involved in protests against war or globalization, relief for the oppressed or environmental activism (McLaren 2004, 101, 122).

The sixth missiological practice in the emerging church is having mutual ownership of and participating in the ministries of the church. This assumes that all who attend have a responsibility and a place to participate in the church, including non-Christians (Gibbs and Bolger 2005, 156-157).

The seventh is creative worship, which sees true worship as the ultimate evangelism tool. Worship is highly interactive and participatory, emphasizing experiential mysticism (Gibbs and Bolger 2005, 176-179; Kimball 2003, 127-170). The degree of experimentation in worship is relative to the stream of the emerging church movement a particular church is a part of.

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ential with an emphasis on inclusivism (Pagitt 2007a, 19). The distinction in practice of inclusion between Emergent Village and emerging evangelicals is how much responsibility and investment non-Christians have in the church community. The emerging evangelicals are welcoming to all but restrict non-Christians involvement to non-leadership ministries in the church (Kimball 2007b, 160-161). Many in the Emergent Village give no such restrictions.

The fifth is serving generously in the church and in the community. Both emerging evangelicals and Emergent Village engage in activities like giving to the needy, reaching out to the poor, and participating in community activities. Emerging evangelicals also practice service through church planting

Doctrinal flexibility allows for a higher degree of experimentation, whereas more traditional doctrinal beliefs restrict the level of experimentation.

The eighth missiological practice is communal leadership in the church. This practice is mostly associated with those in the Emergent Village, who, in large part, are egalitarian rather than hierarchical (Gibbs and Bolger 2005, 194-198; Morgenthaller 2007, 175-188).

The ninth is discovering a deep sense of humility and brokenness (Kimball 2007, 239-244). This missiological practice is most prevalent among emerging evangelicals and has been significant in reconciliation with those who have been hurt by the church.

The emerging church’s expression of

theology of mission is as diverse as the representatives of the movement. The branch led by McLaren, Pagitt, Jones, and Chalke have a theology of mission that allows for a flexibility of biblical interpretation in order to make the message of the gospel relevant to the emerging culture. The gospel taught by this group is a salvation that seeks personal, corporate, and global restoration with God, for some through humble activism, and others through coming alongside God working toward his goal of the fulfillment of creation. This leads to churches that are theologically flexible and socially active. The branch of the emerging church led by Keller, Driscoll, Burke and Kimball have a theology of mission that holds tightly to biblical authority, the total depravity of humanity, and the sacrificial atonement of Jesus to pay for the sins of humanity in order to restore relationship with God and transform lives. This leads to churches that are taught biblical truth that results in social action. The practical expression of the emerging church's theology of mission is resulting in effective outreach to the postmodern, emerging culture.

Endnotes

1. Pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle, Wash.
2. Pastor of Vintage Faith Church in Santa Cruz, Calif.
3. Pastor of Gateway Community Church in Austin, Tex.
4. Former Pastor of Cedar Ridge Community Church in Baltimore, M.D.
5. Pastor of Solomon's Porch in Minneapolis, Minn.
6. Founder of Oasis Trust in the UK.
7. National coordinator for the Emergent Village.
8. A form of subjective interpretation of the Bible based upon the postmodern critique of the metanarrative.
9. Pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York.

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To get the best hotel rate, the annual 2011 EMS conference has been moved back one week. The conference dates will be September 29–October 1, 2011. The venue is the Doubletree Paradise Valley Resort in Scottsdale, Arizona.

Trends, Trials and Triumph

*Jerry Rankin, President Emeritus
International Mission Board, SBC*

I recently read an article that alluded to an incident in which Peter Drucker, the late organizational and management guru was meeting with a group of executives representing prominent Fortune 500 companies. Drucker asked them to identify the most important factor in successful leadership. The group suggested the normal expected responses of vision, strategic thinking, creativity, personal charisma and others. Drucker pointed out that no one mentioned the most essential factor—ability to discern reality. Failure to discern reality results in many strategic decisions being made on the basis of false assumptions.

There also is a tendency to presume what is reality today will be the reality of tomorrow. If one does not discern reality budget resources are wasted, market shares are lost and once-popular brands lose their appeal. If this is critical in the corporate world, it is no less so in the task of missions.

In 1995 Jim Engels launched a research project sponsored by the Evangelical Fellowship of Mission Agencies (now Mission Exchange) on missions in the 21st century. In summarizing the survey and research Engels entitled his published report, “A Clouded Future.” Everyone recognized the world was changing but reflected little insight into how these changes would affect their organization and strategy. Few were able to articulate a vision of what their agency would look like and how it would function in a future world that was different. Engel’s conclusion was that many agencies would not survive while others would be forced to consolidate in order to weather the trends. An alarming prediction was that mission agencies that would most likely find themselves irrelevant and ineffective were those which had been the largest and most successful in the latter half of the 20th century. This is due to the tendency to presume upon one’s continued success while failing to recognize the trends of a changing world.

Following 23 years of missionary service and field leadership overseas, I had the privilege of serving as president of the Southern Baptist International Mission Board for 17 years prior to retirement in July 2010. During my tenure as president, we went through two radical organizational changes in order to imple-

ment new strategic paradigms. Neither of these were motivated out of the need for corrective action and ineffectiveness, but in order to position us for the future. Indeed, we had experienced consecutive years of record missionary appointments and impressive advance in the engagement of new fields when “New Directions” was initiated in 1997. Change was driven by being confronted with the issue of what we should look like and what

position to weather the trials and confidently embrace the victory of claiming the kingdoms of this world as the kingdoms of our Lord.

I am not a prophet and do not have the ability to predict the future, but it is an awesome experience to be in a position to have an overview of what God is doing in the world. As a student of history, self-identified mission strategist and obsessive follower of current events, I can

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we should be doing in three years to be aligned with what God was doing in the world as we entered a new millennium.

The first decade of the 21st century saw the world changing more rapidly than anyone envisioned; global events enabled us to surpass all expectations in terms of impacting mission advance in our particular niche of the global task. We saw an accelerating harvest as reported baptisms more than doubled. Church planting went from a record 4,000 in 1999 to more than 24,000 annually in recent years, and creative access strategies enabled us to engage more than a thousand unreached people groups. “Revisioning”—the change initiated in 2008 was an acknowledgement that current methods and strategy would not necessarily be effective in the future. If we waited until a changing world and society mandated changes be made, it would be too late. Like the Sons of Issachar, we must discern the times, read the trends, be in

grasp how past methods and events have led to the present and sense where these may be leading in the future.

Trends

It was said after September 11, 2001, “Our world has changed, never to be the same again.” If anything, that was an understatement following what we have now observed following the tragic terrorist attacks on the United States. Our international relations have been strained, our economy is in disarray, and we find ourselves engaged in warfare against an elusive, global terrorist enemy. We have mortgaged the future through irresponsible financial management and will be unable to pass on greater prosperity to successive generations as we have in the past. Life is characterized by fear and paranoia, and traditional moral values have vanished as the norm in American society. Inter-personal relationships and community have been replaced by imperson-

al social networking

Unfortunately, we plan and carry on our work as if the present would always be the status quo. As a new missionary in Indonesia in 1970 I desired to make a survey trip and learn from missionary colleagues throughout Java. My veteran missionary mentors advised me not to drive as there were vast gaps in the highway network and gas stations were non-existent in many areas. Against their advice we took off on our trip and found upgraded road systems and gas available everywhere. Older missionaries were locked into perceptions of conditions the way they found them years ago upon their arrival in the country.

A handful of pioneer personnel responded to the breakup of the Soviet Union in the early 1990's to establish a presence in the republics of Central Asia. Several years later, in a regional meeting with a growing missionary force, I found they were still developing strategies based on how things were when the frontliners arrived. Things were changing fast in society and government policies as these republics struggled with independence and relating to an outside world. Some had

ity of missionaries in what was then the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. No one dreamed that an unprecedented harvest was beginning to emerge in China and that the opportunity would develop to have more personnel engaged in a movement there than in our entire past history. In both situations we missed cutting edge initiatives because of our tendency to become entrenched in current realities.

We are entering an era of unprecedented harvest and expansion as God is using global events to turn the hearts of people all over the world to a search for hope and security. Warfare, ethnic violence, political disruption, economic uncertainty and natural disasters are all being used in God's providence to open people to spiritual answers that only the gospel can provide. They are finding their cultural traditions do not provide solutions to the problems, chaos and insecurity brought about by modernization, internal ethnic divisions and internationalization.

Mission strategies will move from traditional missionaries being deployed around the world to marketplace ministries being on the cutting edge of kingdom growth. More and more countries

highly organized mission agencies as a spontaneous development of churches and individuals compelled to obedience to the Great Commission task. I recently spoke at a conference of mission leaders in Korea whose churches and agencies had already sent out more than 15,000 foreign missionaries. The "Back to Jerusalem" movement in China, with a vision for 100,000 Chinese Christians to flow across the Muslim world, is indicative of how the Spirit of God will move upon His people to be aligned with His mission, from everywhere to everywhere.

American Christians, infected with humanistic, post-modern provincialism will find their spiritual and theological foundations eroding and will begin to look more and more like post-Christian Europe today. The dominant force for world missions will be led by Koreans, Chinese, Latin Americans and South Asians. Field strategies will reflect a new level of collaboration, partnership and multi-cultural teams working together.

Just as radical political change has characterized the last two decades, changes in the future should be anticipated in long-range mission planning. China will

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become quite liberalized in recognizing freedoms that in turn created an environment for witness and church growth. On the other hand, some reverted to even stricter totalitarian control and restrictions. Yet, influenced by the earlier arrivals, missionaries were approaching the situation as a monolithic cultural context just as they found it a few years earlier.

During the 1980's the International Mission Board was a guided by a group of administrators and field leaders organized as the Global Strategy Group. These were the visionaries and strategists who attempted to anticipate the future and formulate long-range strategies. They had already outlined objectives and goals for the remainder of the 20th century and beyond. Yet no one envisioned the possibil-

are closing their doors to Christian missionaries, their proselytizing perceived to be a threat to religion and culture. Growing hostility to the gospel will require a more subtle approach of lay Christians being trained and equipped to use business, education and medicine to incarnate the gospel among unreached peoples. A plethora of tentmaker options that find value-added acceptance in closed societies will be the wave of fulfilling a missionary calling in the future.

Western missionaries as the dominant emissaries of the gospel will radically diminish to be replaced by a growing missionary force going out from the majority world, crossing boundaries and penetrating cultures with a Christian witness. This will be a movement not so much of

eventually succumb to its growing Christian population and role in international relations to liberalize its repressive policies, resulting in even greater evangelical growth internally and global impact externally. With its massive resources and labor force, it will become the dominant economic power as the U.S. mortgages its future and financial stability. Economic development in Vietnam and Indonesia will ride the coattails of China to claim prominent roles in world trade and commerce. North Korea will finally implode and experience peaceful reunification with South Korea or be assimilated by China.

The Muslim world will change from within as moderates become more assertive, radical elements are marginalized

and Islamic societies will gradually evolve into more compatible relationships internationally. There will still be restrictive policies and resistance to a Christian witness, but persecution will lessen and the gospel will find an increased response, reflecting significant growth rates as churches multiply in a more tolerant environment.

African and Latin American countries will continue to be responsive, but church growth will be inhibited by increased secularization and syncretism as these continents flounder under continuing political and economic crises. Likewise, Russia and the republics of the former Soviet Union will become more and more dysfunctional politically, socially and economically, leading to a declining influence and role in international affairs.

Europe may have regressed to a level of secularism that the extreme humanism and lostness may actually feed a return to orthodox faith. The impact of immigration and population decline due to the graying of indigenous Europeans will radically change the culture. Responsiveness among the multi-cultural Africans, Middle Easterners and South Asians may eventually lead to Europe becoming the harvest field of the future.

Trials

As Jesus prepared his disciples for the mission that would be relegated to the them when He returned to the Father, He reminded them, "In this world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." Making disciples of all nations will not be without cost. Opposition and suffering go with proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom. It is guaranteed. Satan is not going to roll over and relinquish the kingdoms of the world to become the kingdoms of our Lord without a fight.

Even in the context of effective creative access strategies and unprecedented Christian growth there will be an increasing hostility to a Christian witness, particularly toward that of missionaries coming from alien cultures. Persecution, and even martyrdom, will be widespread but will feed receptivity to the gospel as people see it is not just a belief system some have chosen to live by but a conviction worth dying for. Opposition to the gospel

will be driven by animosity toward American political dominance and resentment of Western influences as much as conflicting religious worldviews. This will necessitate expansion of Christianity coming more from internal indigenous witness than missionary proclamation.

Shifts in economies and limited financial support will create even greater crises for traditional mission programs and strategies in the future. The decline in charitable giving is a trend that is not likely to be reversed. Massive indebtedness brought about by a society living on credit and mortgaging its future will diminish available resources that used to support mission endeavors. The instability of the U.S. dollar against global currencies has steadily reduced the buying power of missions support overseas.

Fragmentation and independency will erode the power and potential of mission agencies which served the churches in the past. Disintermediation is rejection of the "middle man" as churches want to be more directly involved in mission strategies and have ownership of what they support. While this could be a positive trend in terms of massive mobilization of personnel and resources, it will splinter the synergy of a sound strategic focus as "everyone does what is right in their own eyes."

Accelerating political upheaval, a volatile and fragile global economy and difficulty of sustained support at home will make long-range planning difficult. Only a small portion of missionaries are serving a lifetime until retirement. Increasing mobility and rapidly changing personal values will result in a focus on short-term gains rather than large-scale global goals.

Triumphs

In spite of the trials and challenges to missions as we have known it in the past, we will continue to witness an unprecedented advance of the gospel toward that future vision of a multitude from every tribe, people, tongue and nation gathered around the throne and worshipping the Lamb of God. In the midst of greater hostility to the gospel, the irony of a greater harvest will emerge. The Prophet Haggai recognized that we serve a God who is sovereign over the nations and is work-

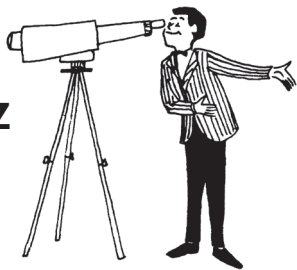
ing in human events to bring about His ultimate purpose—"God will shake the heavens and the earth, destroy the powers of nations and overthrow the thrones of kingdoms (Hag. 2:21-22). We can be assured that God is moving in providence and power to fulfill His mission.

Totalitarian powers who presume to close their doors to a missionary witness cannot thwart the power and potential of media and technology to plant the gospel among their people. Previously unengaged people groups are systematically being reached with the gospel. Fifteen years ago at the Global Consultation on World Evangelization more than 2,000 people groups were identified, each with a population of more than a million, where there were no churches, no Christian believers, no Scripture in their language and no missionary engaging them with the gospel. That number is now down to a handful and only a few hundred population groups with more than 100,000 have yet to hear the gospel.

The prophetic words of Jesus in Matthew 24:14 are being fulfilled in this generation—"The gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a witness to all nations, and then the end will come." That is not an assumption that we will hasten the return of Christ, but it gives us assurance that the vision of reaching all peoples with the life-transforming message of Jesus will become a reality. It is not for us to know the time-frame of Christ's return or to presume God's criteria for fulfillment of the Great Commission, but He calls us to faithfulness and obedience. In spite of accelerating societal and global changes and increasing opposition we are given the privilege of serving God's mission at a time of unprecedented hope and opportunity.

God has said, "I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted on the earth (Ps. 46:10). The Psalmist goes on to say, "All the nations You have made will come and bow down before You, Lord, and will honor Your name" (Ps. 86:9). With these declarations in mind, we can gain confidence in the words of Isaiah, "The Lord of Hosts has sworn, saying, 'Surely, as I have thought so it shall come to pass, and as I have purposed so it shall stand'" (Is. 14:24). The triumph of His kingdom is assured. ■

As seen
through
the **LENZ**



I have asked Dr. Terrance Steele to give us insights on the Emergent Movement, and he has proposed helpful insights for us to define and understand the movement as it is presented to us today. Making the distinction between the Emergent Village and emergent evangelicals, Dr. Steele goes on to give us nine missiological practices of emergents as noted by Ed Gibbs and Ryan Bolger. There is an audio transcript of this topic as presented by Lloyd Rodgers and Dr. Steele.

Dr. Jerry Rankin supplements our issue with great insights from his perspective on the trends, trials, and triumphs of the missionary movement. As former president of the International Mission Board for the Southern Baptists, and having traveled extensively around the world, he is very optimistic of the future of our endeavors to win the world to Christ. You will be encouraged by his insights.

Please note the important change of dates for the next EMS annual conference which is included in this issue. ■

FROM THE DESK OF EMS PRESIDENT

New Year greetings to the readers of *OB* and EMS members!

As I am to finish my term by this summer, I want to take the occasion of the release of the first issue of *OB* of 2011 to acknowledge the following:

- The faithful work of Bob Lenz and Dona Diehl whose collaborative labor of love has served readers of *OB* for years. We are grateful for their ministry to us.
- The fruitful work of all our regional VPs who mobilize EMS members at the local level in 8 regions. Your participation at regional meetings will be a concrete way of showing your support to them. We are thankful for their service to us & EMS.

In 2010, we witnessed four exciting events as centennial celebration of Edinburgh 1910. Not sure what will take place in 2011 for the centennial celebration of Rolland Allan's classic piece on missionary strategy. One thing we can be sure: our Lord's faithfulness will go before us in terms of protection and provision.

Looking forward to the sweet Christian fellowship with you all at the EMS national conference in September 29-October 1, 2011 in Scottsdale, Arizona.

By then all EMS members will receive the EMS annual publication as part of the membership benefits, in addition to the enjoyable reading of *OB* regularly.

—Enoch Wan

The New Look

We are excited about entering a new publication phase for the *Bulletin*, both in the way we deliver content and increased opportunities for dialogue. The purpose of the *Occasional Bulletin* is to present articles and information that are on the cutting edge of missiological issues and thinking, as well as to foster dialogue within the EMS family. We invite you to join us. We are looking for help with posting and editing of podcasts, video interviews, and comment section monitoring. EMS brings together evangelical missiologists to dialogue in face to face workshops, presentations, and informal gatherings both on a regional and national level. *OB* seeks to continue and expand that dialogue throughout the year, giving EMS members the opportunity to connect with *OB* authors and each other. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact Lloyd Rodgers (lrodgers@imb.org). We look forward to hearing from you.