

Elmer L. Towns

abstract

This paper attempts to summarize the overarching movements of evangelism in the past 70 years in the United States, most of which this author has personally observed and influenced. While there has always been evangelism in various expressions and to some degree, certain expressions of evangelism have been more effective than others. The primary emphasis of evangelism has gone from soul-winning evangelism (pre-1950), to Church Growth evangelism (1960–1990), to missional evangelism (2000-to the present). Each of these categories will be explored with concluding observations made as to the continued import of evangelism as a priority.

This paper attempts to summarize the overarching movements of evangelism in the past seventy years in the United States (the time span of my personal observations and interactions with the American church scene.) While there has always been evangelism in some expression and to some degree, some expressions of evangelism have been more effective than others; the primary emphasis of evangelism has gone from soul-winning evangelism (pre-1950), to Church Growth evangelism (1960–1990), to missional evangelism (2000-to the present).

The above three emphases do not mean these were the only expressions of evangelism, nor does it mean that these expressions were worldwide, nor does it mean these expressions were widespread among all types of Christian groupings (i.e., Roman Catholic, Orthodox, liberal, etc). These expressions of Christianity were primarily observed in evangelical Christian bodies.

Sometimes it's hard to see and identify movements when standing in the middle of dynamic changes, but the transitions of the three above named emphases in evangelism can be noted by several objective indicators.

soul-winning evangelism prior to the 1950's

I began teaching evangelism at Midwest Bible College in St. Louis, Missouri, in the fall of 1958. I used the only textbook I thought was available: *Personal Work* by R. A. Torrey.¹

When I taught the course, I emphasized only personal evangelism, which was approaching people: (1) outside the church building, (2) not part of a local church program, and (3) confrontationally to bring that person to a decision for Christ.² I automatically applied personal evangelism to local church front-door evangelism, i.e., getting people into a local church to make a public profession of faith.

Note the emphasis was on the recipient of salvation, i.e., the one getting saved. Little was noted on the results of evangelism, i.e., growing the church or church growth. Little was emphasized on the mission of evangelism, i.e., we are on a mission *sent by* Christ, and we are on a mission *with* Christ.

Soul-winning evangelism was noted in the smaller evangelical denominations, interdenominational organizations, Bible colleges, seminaries and perhaps its greatest expression was in Southern Baptist churches.

Perhaps the individual most responsible for the growth of the Southern Baptist Convention from 1900 to 2000 A.D. was Arthur Flake, the Sunday school

¹ R. A. Torrey, *Personal Work 4 Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming-Revell, 1909). Later I began to research the types of books available on evangelism, and the earliest I found was *Taking Men Alive* by Charles G. Trumbull, Young Men's Christian Association Press (New York), 1907. This book didn't have many principles of soul winning; it told many stories of Trumbull as a Civil War chaplain winning soldiers to Christ.

² Later the Church Growth movement (a scientific and theological discipline) would examine evangelism to classify the many types of evangelism, i.e., crusade evangelism, media evangelism, bus evangelism, Internet evangelism, billboard evangelism, etc. Today, an introductory course in evangelism at a college or seminary would include a much broader introduction to evangelism and have a wide variety of textbooks on evangelism for pupil study.

secretary from 1900 to 1936³ and the author of a number of books on personal evangelism through the Sunday school.⁴

Arthur Flake was a strategist who devised a formula for growth, i.e., the Flake Formula. It involved ten points called the “Standard of Excellence.” This included the following: (1) church leadership (officers and reports), (2) enlargement (through evangelistic visitation), (3) grading (age-group classes), (4) Baptist literature (use of Baptist-published materials), (5) use of the Bible (as the main text), (6) emphasize preaching attendance (attending church as well as Sunday school), (7) evangelism (attempting to lead pupils to Christ), (8) standardize meetings, equipment, and records, (9) training (ongoing education for teachers and leaders), and (10) stewardship and missions (promotion of needs and projects for giving).⁵

According to tradition, Flake held Sunday school revivals in a church where he preached on the importance of Sunday school reaching lost people in their neighborhood. He surveyed the church facilities to locate potential Sunday school rooms. Then he surveyed the Sunday school records to determine what classes could be started. He gave an invitation at the end of his sermon for individuals to “surrender” to teach a class. Then Flake gave them a brief training session in soul-winning and took the teachers out visiting in the neighborhood with the promise,

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³ In 1922 Arthur Flake wrote *Building a Standard Sunday School*. In this book Arthur Flake expounded the basic principles of Sunday school growth in the early 1900s. These continue to provide an effective foundation for Sunday school in the new millennium. Flake's Fivefold Formula, as they became known, formed the foundation of the Southern Baptist program leading to 75 straight years of growth using the Sunday school as an entry point for worship service growth. See Flake's Fivefold Formula (1) Find the People: The Constituency For the Sunday School Should be Known, (2) Equip Leadership and Teachers: The Organization Should Be Enlarged, (3) Provide the Space: A Suitable Place Should Be Provided; (4) Enlarge the Organization: Expand the Number of Classes or Units, The Enlarged Organization Should Be Inaugurated; (5) A Program of Visitation: A Program of Visitation Should Be Maintained. (See <http://cbti.faithsite.com/content.asp?CID=11535>; accessed 12 October 2009).

⁴ Listed are a number of books written by Arthur Flake:

Arthur Flake, *Baptist Young People's Union Administration* (The Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 4th edition, 1952).

———, *Building a Standard Sunday School* (Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1956).

———, *The Department Sunday School* (Nashville, TN: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1924).

———, *The Pastor of the Sunday School* (Nashville, TN: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1936).

———, *Sunday School Officers and Their Work* (Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1956).

———, *The Sunday School Secretary and the Six Point Record System* (Nashville, TN: The Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1925).

———, *The Sunday School Task of Southern Baptists* (Nashville, TN: Dept. of Sunday School Administration, Baptist Sunday School Board, 1921).

———, *The Sunday School Under Church Control* (Nashville, TN: Dept. of Sunday School Administration, Baptist Sunday School Board, 1936).

———, *The True Functions of the Sunday School* Rev. Ed. (Nashville, TN: The Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1930).

———, *Young Peoples and Adult Departments* (Nashville, TN: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1925).

⁵ Reprinted from *Building a Standard Sunday School* (Nashville: Convention Press) by Arthur Flake. Copyright 1922. Used by permission, 11–35.

“Eight home visits will produce one church visitor the next Sunday.”⁶ If Flake organized ten new classes, the attendance grew by approximately one hundred in the next few months.

Many great Sunday schools were built on the Flake Formula. I attended the First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas, from 1954 to 1955 in the “glory” days of its Sunday school growth. Dr. W. A. Criswell, pastor, would plead with people to show up for visitation on Monday night to go visit prospects with a view of winning them to Christ and getting them in his growing local church.

Later, I heard Dr. Lee Roberson, pastor of Highland Park Baptist Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Dr. Jerry Falwell of Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia, tell how they made one hundred home visits a day to build their churches in the 1950s.⁷

Toward the end of the “personal evangelism” era, other books began to appear to teach soul-winning evangelism and principles of other types of evangelism. Bill Bright, founder and President of Campus Crusade for Christ, published *The Four Spiritual Laws* that began, “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.”⁸ Later Bright published a number of other popular books, among them includes *How You Can Introduce Others to Christ*⁹ and *Witnessing Without Fear*,¹⁰ a textbook used by many educational institutions.

Church leaders pointed to examples of personal evangelism in Scripture that gave credibility to the movement, such as Jesus with Nicodemus, with the Samaritan woman, and with the demonic man from Gadara. They also used illustrations of Philip leading the Ethiopian eunuch to Christ and Paul’s influence on Timothy, Priscilla, and Aquila.

Then, too, those who emphasized personal evangelism interpreted the various giving of the Great Commission to mean evangelize to every person individually (Mark 16:15). Also, personal soul-winners interpreted the church in Jerusalem going “house to house” (Acts 5:42), implying confrontational evangelism outside the local church assembly in which individuals and families were won to Christ.

Personal evangelism—also called soul-winning—spread to the liturgical church. D. James Kennedy, the pastor of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in

⁶ See footnote 4.

⁷ When the *10 Largest Sunday Schools* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House), was published in 1966, the First Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas, averaged 2,699 adults; Highland Park Baptist Church of Chattanooga, TN, averaged 2,050 adults and Thomas Road Baptist Church, Lynchburg, VA, averaged approximately 1,300 adults. Not sensational in our day, but noteworthy in 1969.

⁸ See *The Four Spiritual Laws* written by Bill Bright, Campus Crusade for Life International; available from <http://www.ccci.org/wij/index.aspx>, accessed 13 October 2009.

⁹ Bill Bright, *How You Can Introduce Others to Christ* (Orlando, FL: New Life Publications, 1998).

¹⁰ —, *Witnessing Without Fear* (Orlando, FL: Here’s Life Publishers, 1987).

Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, wrote *Evangelism Explosion*.¹¹ Kennedy became famous for the introductory question: “If you were to die today and appear at the door to heaven, and God were to ask you, ‘Why should I let you into heaven,’ what would you say?”¹²

Why were evangelicals in America ready to move from an emphasis on soul-winning to something new? Maybe it was the fact that many who made decisions for Christ outside a local church were never brought into a church where they were nurtured and could serve Christ. Maybe it was an overemphasis on a one-time decision for salvation, sometimes without an understanding what that decision entailed. Maybe it was an emphasis on what the soul-winner did—he led them to Christ—and not what the convert did. So to correct the overemphasis, Campus Crusade for Christ began describing the situation with emphasis on the convert—“He prayed to receive Christ” rather than “I led him to Christ.”

150 Perhaps too many people made decisions outside the church, but didn’t “stick” to their decision. “Were they really saved?” some asked. Others asked of a decision made apart from gospel preaching and Bible teaching, “Was it really a biblical conversion?”

Perhaps it was the pervasiveness of the Church Growth movement and America’s love affair with “growth” in the 60s and beyond that changed the mood of the evangelical public.

church growth 1970–1990

Technically, the Church Growth movement began with the publication of the book by Donald McGavran in 1955, *The Bridges of God*.¹³ While McGavran was attempting to win lost people of India to Christ, little did he know he was introducing a new sociological and theological science (discipline) into the world.¹⁴ However, for the next fifteen years, the principles of Church Growth were considered a foreign mission strategy.

C. Peter Wagner was hired in 1970 by Donald McGavran to be Professor of Church Growth at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, and teach

¹¹ D. James Kennedy, *Evangelism Explosion* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1966).

¹² *Ibid.*, *Steps to Life*.

¹³ Donald McGavran, *The Bridges of God: A Study in the Strategy of Missions* (United Kingdom: World Dominion Press, 1955).

¹⁴ I personally think Donald McGavran was the most influential foreign missionary of the 1900s, while Mother Teresa and some other foreign missionaries might be more famous; McGavran changed the way mission boards and missionaries planned their strategy to evangelize lost people. Dr. Robertson McQuilkin, former president of Columbia Bible College, summarized the contribution of McGavran, and the Church Growth department of Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, into five points, primarily by planting churches rather than emphasizing the other methods of evangelism. See Robertson McQuilkin, *Measuring the Church Growth Movement: How Biblical Is It?* 2nd, revised edition (Chicago, IL: Moody Press Publishers, 1974), n. p.

Church Growth to the American church. Wagner said my book in 1969, *The 10 Largest Sunday Schools*,¹⁵ introduced Church Growth principles to America. Through research, I found the ten largest Sunday schools in attendance and applied the social science principles of case study research to a data pool of ten churches, and from that information determined the principles by which a church could grow. Little did I realize I was introducing social science as a means to determine the principles of church growth.

In 1969 when the book on the 10 largest Sunday schools was published, only 98 of the 100 largest Sunday schools in America had an attendance over 1,000. Twenty-five years later, there was an estimate of 8,000 to 10,000 churches in America with attendance over 1,000.¹⁶

Church Growth emphasized numerical growth, and of course personal evangelism was emphasized; but there were many other evangelistic means used to win people to Christ. I've used the following classification to describe the changes in the dominant expression of evangelism in each decade:

- 1950 Personal Evangelism (W. A. Criswell)
- 1960 Sunday school bus evangelism (Jack Hyles)
- 1970 Saturation Evangelism (including radio, television, mailings, billboards, newspapers, flyers, etc.) Jerry Falwell defined it, "Using every available means to reach every available person, at every available time."¹⁷
- 1980 Preaching Evangelism (John MacArthur)
- 1990 Seeker Evangelism (seeker-friendly—Bill Hybels, and seeker-sensitive—Rick Warren).
- 2000 Worship Evangelism (contemporary praise and worship introduced by Jack Hayford in the book, *Worship His Majesty*.¹⁸

Many have asked if the evangelism that best defines 2010 will be Servanthood Evangelism, or will it be small group evangelism (cells, home groups, house churches, etc.). Or could it be relationship evangelism? Perhaps the best term is Missional Evangelism.

Do you see that the emphasis in 1960–1990 was on the local church, its strategy, its purpose, and its programs? Emphasizing the church is a biblical mandate because: (1) Jesus loved the church and gave Himself for it (Eph. 5:25); (2) Jesus promised the gates of hell wouldn't stop the church (Matt. 16:18);

¹⁵ Elmer Towns, *The Ten Largest Sunday Schools* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1969).

¹⁶ ———, *Ten of Today's Most Innovative Churches* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1990), n. p. Dr. John Maxwell and Dr. Bill Hybels made the estimate of 8,000 to 10,000 churches with attendance over 1,000.

¹⁷ Elmer L. Towns, gen. ed., *A Practical Encyclopedia of Evangelism and Church Growth* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1995), 218.

¹⁸ Jack Hayford, *Worship His Majesty* Rev Exp edition (Waco, TX: Word Publishing, 1987).

(3) Jesus promised, “I will build my church” (Matt. 16:18); and (4) the end result of the Great Commission was the growth of the local church when converts were baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19), then added to the church (Acts 2:38, 42).

Also, those emphasizing Church Growth felt they were carrying out a New Testament practice because the early church emphasized numerical growth. The church had about 120 praying in the upper room (Acts 1:15), and about 3,000 were added after Peter’s sermon on Pentecost (Acts 2:41). Then about 5,000 men were added in Acts 4:4, and after that, growth was measured by “multitudes” (Acts 5:14). Then growth was measured by multiplication (Acts 6:1) and “multiplied greatly” (Acts 6:7). Finally growth was measured by the number of churches being multiplied (Acts 9:31). Since the Scripture emphasized “growing churches,” why can’t the contemporary evangelical church?

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A list of America’s largest churches appeared in *Christian Life Magazine* in 1968. The list only included the twenty largest Sunday schools because in those days not many churches kept a record of church worship attendance, so no valid comparison was available. The following year the list expanded to one hundred Sunday schools, but the first list caused such uproar of discussion that the following year editor Robert Walker described the release as a “bomb shell across America’s church scene.”¹⁹

After I released *The 10 Largest Sunday Schools and What Made Them Grow*, I developed a sermon by the same title, and in a three year period, I preached that sermon in 87 of the 100 largest churches in the United States. The book stayed on the bestselling list for approximately two years.

The “largest list” was published for ten years, from 1968 to 1978. Next, a list of the fastest growing churches was published from 1964 to 1975 when that list was then dropped. The list was turned over to John Vaughan in 1965, then a professor at Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Missouri.

Beginning in 1990, Larry Gilbert, President of Church Growth Institute, Inc., noted a decline in the sales of Church Growth books, resource packets, and a decline in attendance at the various Church Growth seminars the company sponsored. He felt the ministerial public was losing its love affair with the name “Church Growth.”

I sensed Gilbert’s opinion, so when I was the general editor of *A Practical Encyclopedia of Evangelism and Church Growth*, instead of putting the name “Church Growth” first, I put *Evangelism* first. Two or three of the schools in

¹⁹ Towns, *A Practical Encyclopedia of Evangelism and Church Growth*, n. p.

Southern Baptist theological seminaries didn't put the name Church Growth first in the listing of their School of Missions and Evangelism and Church Growth.²⁰

Perhaps the criticism from several sources that churches were interested in "numbers" only motivated some to move away from the term "Church Growth." Perhaps some were turned off by the "ego trip" of some pastors to be the biggest. Some might have even lied about their numbers to get larger attention. Then also, some might have used unscrupulous techniques to inflate the "church growth."²¹

But perhaps the greatest weakness of the Church Growth movement was its emphasis on an institution (the church) and not on individuals. Did it use people to get numbers and fulfill its identifiable strength, rather than counting people because people count?²²

the missional church 2000–?

The rise of the missional church was influenced by several factors. There was the growing focus on the unsaved, in opposition to the Church Growth movement where people were primarily a statistic. The seeker movement changed the traditional church services to attract unsaved into the church to hear the gospel in a comfortable setting.²³ Therefore, a general discomfort with the traditional worship service seemed to begin the movement. However, the missional emphasis was not on bringing the unsaved into a church service, but going to them as a Christian expression of concern.

Another influence to introduce the missional church was the influence and popularity of the successful Vineyard Church of Cincinnati, Ohio, led by Steve Sjogren. His well-read book, *Conspiracy of Kindness*²⁴ even led to the copyright of registering as a trademark "Servant Evangelism." It is defined: "We believe 'small things done with great love will change the world.'²⁵ Sjogren did not emphasize

²⁰ See The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, 'Evangelism and Church Growth,' available at <http://www.sbts.edu/dmin/concentrations/evangelism-and-church-growth/>, accessed 13 October 2009.

²¹ Jack Hyles of First Baptist Church, Hammond, Indiana, had the college students from Hyles-Anderson College go to Chicago city parks on Sunday mornings to gather children with the bribe of food or ice cream and preach the gospel to them. They were counted as part of the church's Sunday school attendance. While preaching to unchurched children is commendable, counting them in church attendance is questionable.

²² I'm not sure of the order. Did the Church Growth movement begin to decline so emphasis on the missional perspective could move in to take its place? Or did the rise of the missional emphasis push Church Growth out of its prominence?

²³ In 1986 Bill Hybels and I conducted a Church Growth Conference in San Diego, CA, where I first heard a full explanation of the seeker church. He said something like this: "The unsaved don't like traditional church music, so I use a band with drums and electric guitars that is familiar to them and so these seekers will be comfortable hearing the gospel. I don't want my auditorium to look like a church, but like a civic center so they will be comfortable. I don't want them to stand up to be introduced, or sign a visitor's card." Hybels focused on the "seeker" rather than on the traditional worshipper.

²⁴ Steve Sjogren, *Conspiracy of Kindness* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2008).

²⁵ Elmer Towns and Warren Bird, *Into the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming-Revell, 2000), 56; as stated by Steve Sjogren.

the title *missional*, but looking back in retrospect, he was introducing the missional church in concept.

But there's a third factor that gave rise to the missional church: society has turned against the church. During the previous soul-winning era of the 1950s and before, the American culture revered, or at least tolerated, the institutional church. And when it had to, culture used the institutional church for its purposes.

During the Church Growth era, many evangelical churches became involved in the political process and/or the Moral Majority. They helped elect Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush. Did naïve evangelicals think they could support one side of a political process without getting lambasted from the opposing side? Those who were for abortion rights and same gender marriage took aim at evangelicals. And from there, criticism against the church has grown; primarily from the liberal left media, Hollywood, and political sources.

154 Today the church in general, and evangelicals in specific, are criticized and attacked (soft persecution) from sources in media, government, and society in general. Therefore the missional church attempts to return to an earlier emphasis of showing compassion on the needs of the world for several reasons. The first reason is to establish the credibility of the church to gain a "hearing" for the gospel we preach. In this endeavor, the missional church recognizes the growing critics toward the local church and wants to rebuild credibility by giving or serving those outside the church.

The second reason is to demonstrate how Christ would respond to them and to needy people, i.e., to be "Christ" when presenting the gospel.

The third reason is to go to where people are, rather than invite them into our building as a spiritual "customer" to buy our spiritual "products."

The fourth factor to give rise to the missional church era is the emergence of the Emergent Church movement. While the missional church is not the emergent church, and *vice versa*, both have some similar characteristics that link them together. Note the following explanation accessed from the web page of *Leadership Network* in Dallas, Texas:

History

Emergent Village began as a group of friends who gathered under the auspices and generosity of *Leadership Network* in the late 1990s. We began meeting because many of us were disillusioned and disenfranchised by the conventional ecclesial institutions of the late twentieth century. The more we met, the more we discovered that we held many of the same dreams for our lives, and for how our lives intersected with our growing understandings of the kingdom of God.

Friendships

Above all, we became convinced that living into the kingdom meant doing it together, as friends. Thus, we committed ourselves to lives of reconciliation and friendship, no matter our theological or historical differences. As time passed, others joined the friendship, and the friendship began generating things like books, events, websites, blogs, and cohorts.

Organization

By 2001, we had formed an organization around our friendship, known as Emergent, as a means of inviting more people into the conversation. Along with us, the “emerging church” movement has been growing, and we in Emergent Village endeavor to fund the theological imaginations and spiritual lives of all who consider themselves a part of this broader movement.²⁶

The basic premise of a missional church is that the church is not primarily *about us*, but about God’s mission in the world.

Originating from the Latin phrase *missio dei*—which means “the sending of God”—“missional” conceives of the church as a primarily *movement-oriented* body that was not created for itself, but for the glorification of God through the spreading of His gospel to others.

Proponents of the missional movement say they seek a return to the mission-mindedness, which has been gradually lost as churches have become more *inward-focused*.

More pastors now believe that the gospel is advanced by *demonstration* and not just proclamation. Missional is about bringing the church and mission *back together*.

Rather than a *mega church mindset* of building bigger churches and attracting larger crowds, evangelical pastors are increasingly focused on making and sending disciples and establishing partnerships with other churches to advance the gospel in a more cooperative, flexible, mobile manner.

The term “missional” can be dated to the release of the book *Missional Church* in 1998, written by Darrell Guder of the Gospel and Our Culture Network.²⁷ Another book written in 2005, *The Community of the Word: Toward an Evangelical Ecclesiology*, describes missional this way: “Rather than seeing missions as, at best, one of the necessary prongs of the church’s calling, and at worst as a misguided

²⁶ Dr. Jerry Falwell, ‘The Emerging Church or Slippery Slope,’ preached in Convocation, Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, 11 April 2007, available from <http://www.liberty.edu/index.cfm?PID=9002>; accessed 12 October 2009.

²⁷ Darrell Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998).

adventure, it must be seen as the fundamental, the essential, the centering understanding of the church's purpose and action."²⁸

what the missional church looks like

The missional church demands that we identify with Jesus Christ who was sent into the world, i.e., "For God so loved the world that He *sent* . . ." (John 3:16, emphasis added). Also notice that "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45, *NKJV*). So, just as Jesus was sent to minister to others, so the church must go out of its doors and minister to needy people. Does not the Scripture say, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10)?

The missional church reacts to the Church Growth movement by stating that the local church is not the center of God's plan. Jesus is the center; however the church is central to Jesus' plan. So everything must go back to the Lord Jesus Christ. Ed Stetzer says, "The Holy Spirit is awakening the idea in us that any church that does not affect real change in its community, country, and the world is severely neglecting its true purpose."²⁹

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observations

1. *We must support evangelism, no matter what the name, i.e., soul-winning, church growth, or the missional church.* We must get our eyes on God's larger picture of evangelism and the command Jesus has given to go into all the world. There are differences in evangelism because people read their background and culture into the biblical commands and then apply evangelism according to their perceived needs or real needs. When that person is absolutely sure what the Lord told them to do, and they are doing it the way He told them to do, they tend to minimize other methods or approaches to evangelism. However, we must look at evangelism from a broader perspective. We must support all evangelism when souls are won to Christ. Let's ask God to help us see evangelism from His perspective.

2. *Each of the eras we are examining reflects the needs of that era, and purposes to meet the needs of that era.* In the pre 60s, it seemed like we had an institutional church that believed the gospel, preached the gospel, and recognized the mandate of the Great Commission.

²⁸ Mark Husbands and Daniel Treier, *The Community of the Word: Toward an Evangelical Ecclesiology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), n. p.

²⁹ Ed Stetzer, *Sent: Living the Missional Nature of the Church* (Nashville, TN: LifeWay Press, 2008), 11.

However, it didn't seem like many souls were being won to Christ. So, the emphasis on soul-winning evangelism brought the focus of outreach to individuals who could be reached for Jesus Christ.

The Church Growth era validated the Great Commission. Since we were told to win people to Christ, baptize them, and teach them, obviously when that command was carried out, the church would grow because people were being added to it. Hence the Church Growth movement validated evangelism, if not to Christianity itself.

With the rise of the missional church, the Christian public focuses on the mission of the church, i.e., to go out to lost people rather than bring them in. The missional church is on a mission with Christ to "serve and not be served." And to get credibility for the gospel, many are reverting to servant evangelism. However, the missional church is much larger than servant evangelism. It involves an attitude of outreach, and followed up by actions of outreach into the community.

3. *Each of the generational eras we have examined tends to reflect a different methodology in reaching people for Christ.* Remember, a method is the application of an eternal principle to culture. And what is the eternal principle? This is the biblical rule or law given by God to reach and evangelize with the gospel message, both people in a church's immediate neighborhood and others around the world. Principles are transcultural and transtemporal. The following phrase explains the difference.

Methods are many,
Principles are few;
Methods may change,
But principles never do.

If we examine the three strategies of each generational era, we will probably conclude that there was in fact a methodology. Then we understand that a methodology could be "hot" for a period of time, i.e., a decade or longer; but also, we understand that when a methodology "cools" it becomes less effective. Why is that? Methods change when culture changes.

4. *We must be aware of the inherent weaknesses in each era.* The above discussion of each era suggests some weaknesses in each era that probably led to its decline. Let's not be so naïve that the missional church has no weaknesses, just as many were naïve to think that the Church Growth movement did not have any weaknesses. Anything that man conceives or works out in ministry will have weaknesses.

5. *There may be implied weaknesses in the missional era that could have danger for the local church.* The missional church must be aware of its similarities to the

social gospel movement of a hundred years ago. (But at the same time there are vast differences between the social gospel and the missional church.)

The social gospel was the application of Christian ethics to the perceived social problems in the American society, especially slavery, poverty, alcoholism, crime, racial tensions, child labor, war, and natural calamities.

It seemed that the social gospel was cool to the idea of soul-winning evangelism and/or any form of preaching the gospel to get people saved that was represented in fundamentalist³⁰ churches of that day. It was held that the social evils of society could be influenced by the church, and its problems could be overcome by corporate actions of the church. Eventually the social gospel was attached to the rising tide of theological liberalism that denied the authoritative inspiration of Scripture and the supernatural experience of conversion. The social gospel that began with deep conviction that it was doing God's will and equally deep comparison to helping people was eventually captured by theologians who turned the movement to their own theological convictions. Walter Rauschenbusch³¹ and other writers represented the liberalizing of the social gospel movement.

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One of the greatest Christian evangelistic organizations in the late 1800s was the Salvation Army, using the brass bands and drums in street meetings where they called people to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. A second great Christian evangelistic organization was the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association), and later followed by the YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association), who ministered to homeless or street young people by giving them a home away from home in a Christian environment. The evangelistic nature of the YMCA is best illustrated by Billy Sunday, later a nationally known evangelist in the United States, who began his ministry by accepting a position as Assistant Secretary with the Chicago YMCA, which was good preparation for his later evangelistic career.³²

Today, these two organizations are primarily known for their great humanitarian work, and in a few cases some of them still have an evangelistic and/or Christian emphasis. However, over time their evangelistic outreach has softened so that it almost is ineffective as an evangelistic tool. The missional

³⁰ A term to identify those who: (1) accepted the authority of Scripture based on verbal plenary inspiration; (2) believed salvation was expressed in a born-again experience of belief in Jesus Christ; and (3) the mandate to win the lost to Jesus Christ.

³¹ See Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity in the Social Crisis 1907* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2008) and *Christianizing the Social Order 1912* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, LLC, 2007).

³² See Billy Sunday, available from <http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/BillySunday>; accessed 26 October 2009.

church must heed the warning from Stephen R. Covey, “The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.”³³

6. *Will the emphasis of the missional church pass off the scene eventually?*

Probably yes! Because it closely associates with a cultural method of doing evangelism, and because it is a close extension of the culture in which it ministers, its emphasis will probably one day pass off the scene and something new will take its place. As of yet, we don’t know what will take its place, because we can’t predict what culture will look like in ten or twenty years.

7. *The principle of seed-truth continuity: the truth of a method that is predominant in one period of time will be expressed to some degree in other periods of time because it represents eternal truth.* There has always been evangelism one-on-one, just as there has always been charity—missional evangelism—as well as church institutional evangelism. This paper highlights the dominant emphasis of evangelism in three significant periods of time, but that does not mean these dominant expressions are eliminated at other times.

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8. *Let’s make the most of the missional church while its emphasis is here.* One of the best illustrations I know of wherein a church has changed its evangelistic strategy with changing culture is Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia. During the 1950s, Jerry Falwell built this church to national prominence by making one hundred home visits a day attempting to win people to Jesus Christ, i.e., soul-winning evangelism. Then with the emergence of the Church Growth movement, Falwell became a leader in the national Church Growth movement. He started using bus evangelism, radio and TV evangelism, mailings evangelism, billboard evangelism, phone evangelism, etc.³⁴ His emphasis was on using “every available means,” to cause the church to grow.

However today, Thomas Road has a full-time missions director who directs servant evangelism into the immediate neighborhood, across the state, and around the world. The listing of endeavors takes three typed pages, in two columns. The church attempts to build credibility for the preaching of the gospel through charity or social action done for people in the community with such activities as Habitat for Humanity, replenishing city parks at \$10,000 each, helping widows and single moms, a free medical clinic every Wednesday night for those with no health insurance or Medicaid/Medicare, rebuilding churches in Houston after Hurricane Ike and churches in southern Mississippi after Hurricane Katrina, and taking

³³ See quote by Stephen R. Covey, available from http://www.quoteworld.org/authors/stephen_r_covey; accessed 26 October 2009.

³⁴ Towns, *A Practical Encyclopedia of Evangelism and Church Growth*, 218.

mission trips yearly (Liberty University and Thomas Road will make 1,000 trips abroad each year).³⁵

conclusion

If the church of Jesus Christ had not used the methods available in every generation to reach as many people as possible with the gospel, where would the church be today? If the church had used every available means that has been used in every generational era, where could the church be today?

About the author: Elmer L. Towns is the Co-Founder of Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia and the author of over 100 books (7 of which are listed in the Christian Booksellers Best Selling List and one which was named "Book of the Year" in 1995). His writings also include over 2000 articles, two encyclopedias and 20 resource packets for education. He holds an earned doctoral degree as well as six honorary doctoral degrees and holds visiting professor rank in five seminaries. He is a popular lecturer, Sunday School teacher, and researcher. (E-mail: eltowns@liberty.edu).

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³⁵ According to Don Fanning, director of Cross-Cultural Ministries at Liberty University, over two and a half million Americans go abroad each year to perform foreign missionary endeavors for evangelical churches. They take approximately 250,000 mission trips yearly, and these endeavors spend over \$25 million on foreign projects.