

The Missional Creep of the PCA

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October 30,
2016

Written by Timothy J. Hammons | Sunday, October 30, 2016

The reason for this deteriorating effect is because the gospel was not given to convert the culture. It was given to save sinners. Yet, evangelical progressives, who love the idea that they are change agents for the Kingdom, are busy focusing on culture, instead of sinners. This is why the gospel has been made of no effect.

Sadly, in my current denomination, the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), the term “missional” is being used more and more. I first heard the phrase back in the 1990s while at seminary. The term is put forth as some new thing that we must *be* in order to reach the lost for Christ.

It really bothers me whenever I hear new terms like this because it implies that the language of the faith that has come down to us over the past 2,000 years was not good enough. Yes, I realize that really important terms like the “trinity” were new at one point. This is because we did not have an accurate term for the concept that God is three persons but one God; the term was necessary for helping our feeble minds understand such a great truth.

The problem with the term “missional” is that it is really quite unnecessary, unless of course, it means something very different than the normal language that we have used in reaching the lost, like the terms “evangelism” and “missions.” The problem is that those who use the term do mean something different when it comes to reaching the lost. A fellow pastor wrote about the term in 2009, and this is how he defined it:

As more popularly stated (as much as it can be discerned given the fluidity of its use), missional is a combination of classical liberalism, which promotes a social gospel; Neo-Orthodoxy, with its existential interpretations of Scripture; and the hermeneutics popularized in the New Perspective on Paul. These influences are so deeply rooted in the term “missional” that it makes it counterproductive to use it in churches that do not affirm these views; it has the effect of creating cognitive and theological dissonance...

...I am convinced that missional thinking, with the roots I have mentioned, is a philosophy and model of ministry that will in time have a deteriorating effect on the historic definition and application of the gospel. That is, the gospel will be stripped of its power, leaving the church, the people of God, impotent to be effective in a lost world with the gospel of grace (1 Cor. 1:18-2:16).

I believe these are prophetic words because they do seem to indicate the current drift of the PCA. As you know, an organization like the PCA is either moving toward God and His holiness via His word, or away from God and His precepts. Just the fact that there was a vote at the last General Assembly to study the issue of women in ministry, which passed by an overwhelming majority, shows that there is a drift away from the clear teaching of scripture. The proponents of this new study committee to look into the issue of ordaining women try to make the claim that the issue needs to be studied, as if the elders of the PCA had never done so, or are completely ignorant of the issues.

The PCA is adrift and being “missional” is a part of that drift. Being progressive and ordaining women is a part of the slide into liberalism. Just the fact that many consider themselves as “progressives” show that there truly is a drift in the PCA. This should not surprise us.

Every denomination, every seminary, every organization eventually drifts into liberalism. The same thing has happened to the people of God throughout redemptive history. There is a revival and the first generation of those saved have a strong commitment to God’s word and are even willing to die for the privilege of standing on that word. Then comes the next generation. They did not have to fight for the faith. It was graciously handed to them. In the transfer of power, they become less committed to the very thing that brought about the revival in the first place, the preaching of God’s word, and they start looking for “new” methods in reaching the lost because they feel a need to be more sophisticated than their fathers were. And the missional creep begins.

Many love to bandy these terms around, because they think it gives impression that they are more relevant than the average Christian. This term strokes the pride and ego because it deludes the ones using it into thinking they are somehow on the cutting edge of the gospel. One thing I learned early on in my ministry is that when people start using the words “new” and “cutting edge” in conjunction with the gospel you can be certain that heresy is not far behind. I’m not saying that those who use the term “missional” are into heresy. But give it another 10 years and let us see where they are.

Sadly, there are many men in my current denomination who love using such terms and think of themselves as “progressives” when it comes to the church. Again, this is a problem because it assumes that we needed to progress from the gospel as it was given to us in Scripture. Their premise in using the term is flawed because there is nothing wrong with the gospel we have been given. What hubris these men have.

So to understand what a progressive is, my pastor friend also gave a sound definition for a progressive:

A progressive is one who believes that the church needs to have its pulse on current cultural issues and seeks to accommodate to these current cultural norms. If we don't accommodate to culture the church will lose its credibility with culture and the message of the gospel will not be heard or received by the culture.

Progressives, missional-types and all, love going on about changing culture, reaching the culture, saving the culture. And since they have been marching, we have seen the culture adopt gay marriage, affirm cross dressers using women's bathrooms, and we have seen our military allow women to take on combat roles. The culture has not improved one wit since progressives started their march some 20 years ago.

The reason for this deteriorating effect is because the gospel was not given to convert the culture. It was given to save sinners. Yet, evangelical progressives, who love the idea that they are change agents for the Kingdom, are busy focusing on culture, instead of sinners. This is why the gospel has been made of no effect.

It is disturbing that the progressive-missional message of changing the world, redeeming the culture, being agents of change, is the same cockamamie message I hear in the public schools all the time. It's the same man-centered, pull-yourself-up-by-your-Spandex message that the humanists put forth for our children in the public schools. The missional church demonstrates very little dependence upon Christ, the Spirit, His word, and the reality that it is God that causes the growth, not progressives and their deep desires to be important.

The way we get back to being the church, focused on worshiping a holy God, is not be embracing a fallen culture, but by being the redeemed body of Christ that we are. He saved us to make a bride for His Son, so that we could worship Him in Spirit and truth. This does not remove our responsibility in reaching the lost, but it puts that responsibility in its proper place. When we, as the church, are faithful in the little things, then He will bless us with the greater.

There is really only one way to address the culture. ***Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.*** Any other attempt at reaching the culture is foolishness, especially when we look to the culture for our cues as to how to reach the culture. So let us put off this ridiculous notion of being missional and/or progressive, and quit trying to reach the culture. That was never our mission. Our mission is, as always, to make disciples in the midst of the culture. If we do that, God might bless us in our endeavors, and the rest will take care of itself. But even if He doesn't, our calling is to be faithful in the small things, and trust Him with everything else.

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