MISSION OR BUSINESS?

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Category: Church: World

Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in the US gave an amazing lecture on the future of the Southern Baptist Convention last week. His words could apply to many churches, denominations and mission societies that I know.

> *Southern Seminaryâ€™s president said the SBC in 2009 continues to operate largely out of a model that the denomination adopted from corporate America in the early 20th century, a model that prioritizes efficiency over theological conviction in carrying out the task of missions.*
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> *â€œCertainly in business, efficiency can be a make-or-break word between profit and loss,â€ Mohler said, â€œbut when it comes to missions and the work of our churches and the work of the Gospel around the world, efficiency has a limited application.*
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> *â€œWhat this really marked, more than anything else, was an infusion of a business culture into the life of the denominationâ€¦ Churches were now concerned with efficiency; decisions were made on the basis of efficiency.â€*
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> *In the 1950s, the SBC underwent a restructuring calculated to bring greater denominational efficiency, Mohler pointed out; this led to the adoption of a programmatic approach to ministry based more on corporate management practices than theology.*
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> *The approach worked because in those days the SBC largely held the evangelical franchise in the deep South and its programs were so vast that a Southern Baptist would develop a â€œtribal identityâ€ that defined his church life from the cradle to the grave; Southern Baptist children would participate in all of the age-appropriate SBC programs from life until death, he said...*
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> *â€œAre the people who are actually in our churches today and the people we are trying to reach today, are they attracted to that kind of logic or does it seem like an age gone by?â€*
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> *Mohler said the SBC faces at least 10 questions, which he put in terms of dichotomies. He said Southern Baptists in the future will be either:*
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> *â€“ Missiological or bureaucratic. The denomination will be driven by the work of the Gospel mission as set forth in Scripture or it will die a slow death along a path clogged by bureaucratic red tape.*
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> *â€œThe missiological logic, I would suggest, is the only logic that fits the church of the Lord Jesus Christ,â€ he said. â€œUnless the SBC very clearly asserts an unashamed, undiluted and ruthless missiological logic, we are going to find ourselves out of touch with our churches, with the generation now coming into leadership and with the world we are trying to reach, because the logic of bureaucracy will never take us where we need to go.â€ ...*

> *â€“ Younger or dead. The SBC, Mohler pointed out, is losing two-thirds of its young people between adolescence and adulthood. He said Southern Baptists must reach the younger generation with a theologically robust vision of the Christian life to rescue them from a deadly therapeutic ethos that says God wants their lives to be worry-free, prosperous and happy.*

Read a digest of the lecture here or download the MP3.

Hat Tip: TC Robinson