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95-58

KENTUCKY--Role for Anglos cited in outreach to Hispanics
KENTUCKY--Increasing Hispanic population one of many contemporary trends.
ATLANTA--Blackaby: America crying for spiritual revival.
ATLANTA--Pre-registration now open for SBC Missions Day Camp.
ARKANSAS--Ark. Baptist executive director Don Moore announces retirement.
NORTH CAROLINA--ANALYSIS Proponent-pastor defends 'seeker-targeted' churches.
NORTH CAROLINA--FIRST-PERSON Does contemporary worship reflect churches or coliseum?

Role for Anglos cited
in outreach to Hispanics

By Ken Walker

Baptist Press
4/5/95

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Evangelists who have ministered to Hispanics for decades say this rapidly growing segment of America's population is ripe for the gospel message.

Thus, Christians of Anglo descent, including the predominantly white Southern Baptist Convention, should not let cultural differences throw up witnessing roadblocks, these evangelists say.

"Any Hispanic, be that a newsman, one who handles your car or works in your yard or your home, ... would love to talk to an Anglo Saxon, face-to-face, one-on-one," said international evangelist Luis Palau. A native of Argentina, he began preaching tent revivals in the 1950s and now has his headquarters in Portland, Ore.

"Anglo evangelicals need to know they have a mission field ready, non-resistant and open to the gospel," he said. "Hispanics are ready to listen. They have all the knowledge they need except a risen Christ who must be received by faith."

"Man's problems are universal and the message is universal," said Paul Finkenbinder, whose daily Spanish-language program reaches 300 radio stations. "The same answer can be applied to evangelical-Hispanic relations. Some already know God, others don't. If not, they need to make Christ Lord of their life."

Finkenbinder is a good example of crossing cultural barriers. Though of German descent, his parents were missionaries to Puerto Rico. He spent his first 15 years there and later lived in El Salvador 21 years. Now based in Costa Mesa, Calif., he still beams many of his messages into Latin America.

"The message applies to everyone across the board," said a 40-year radio veteran known to his audiences as Pablo Hernando. "I can imagine asking Christ how you speak to Jews and him answering with John 3:16. Among all those cultural, national and generational problems, the answer is the same. The problem of the heart goes to selfishness and pride."

In addition, this universal solution can often be delivered in English. Southern Baptist evangelist Rudy Hernandez said a poll in San Antonio, Texas, showed 57 percent of Hispanics listed English as their only language. Some 37 percent were bilingual, leaving a small fraction who speak just Spanish.

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"And yet the ministry of most evangelicals among Hispanics is only in Spanish," he said. "So one thing the Anglo-American brother needs to know is that an Hispanic may be a prospect for an English-speaking church and not just the Spanish congregation."

Hernandez said when he founded Metro Baptist Church in San Antonio, he used only English during services. He said that created resistance, since he speaks often in Spanish and has traveled to most countries in South America. To his critics' surprise, he said, in less than 18 months the church had 180 members.

It also met its \$105,000 budget and baptized converts every Sunday in spite of his constant evangelistic travels. Though the congregation merged with another, he said his experience shows the soundness of including an English approach in Hispanic areas.

"We have Hispanics in America who really need to hear the gospel and a 'welcome' is not enough," said Hernandez. "An invitation (to receive Christ) is important. There is a difference between a welcome and an invitation."

One reason Anglos should reach out to Hispanics, he said, is that the time is ripe for the gospel. Responses at his crusades and conventions are more fervent than ever, he said, and the fading of past hostilities between whites and Hispanics has opened doors.

"There's a respectable culture and they will listen if (whites) approach them in a proper manner," said Hernandez, whose messages are broadcast on radio and TV in the United States and overseas. "There's never been a day for evangelism among Hispanics like today."

Nor should Southern Baptists make the mistake of assuming that this ethnic group is incapable of supporting its own churches, he said. He said evangelicals who work with Hispanics should place an emphasis on rapidly transforming missions into self-supporting works.

Hernandez said that means training converts in "all the counsel of God," especially tithing. The evangelist said he is glad someone taught him to tithe when he was a child, because he has been doing it ever since and seeing God's blessings.

"Yes, we have had a lot of poverty among Hispanics but that's changed a lot," he said. "Let's not make the mistake of some missionaries of old who went down to Mexico and tried to hand everything down to the people. Money talked. It told them: 'You don't worry about it, we'll take care of it.' That's not the message I want to send to my people. They need to understand they can be self-supporting."

Ultimately, the evangelists say, many bridges are open for understanding. Palau illustrates this with three key points that Anglos need to understand about their Hispanic counterparts:

-- Most are anxious for acceptance in this country. Hispanic immigrants don't come to America with a chip on their shoulder or the attitude that they are hated, he said. "The general attitude is they long to be accepted. They want to take advantage of every opportunity America has to offer."

-- Most Hispanics don't feel American society owes them anything. He said the rhetoric of "the old left" -- which he defines as communists and some university students -- shouldn't be confused with the feeling of gratitude the vast majority of Hispanics have for the United States.

-- The respect most feel for Anglos creates great evangelistic opportunities.

"Hispanics have all the knowledge they need in the back of their heads to become Christians," said Palau. "The only thing they need is someone to tell them, 'Jesus is alive and if you surrender to him, your sins are forgiven. Once and for all, you become a child of God and your home is in heaven, forever.'"

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Walker is a free-lance writer based in Louisville, Ky.

Increasing Hispanic population
one of many contemporary trends By Ken Walker

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Demographic trends show that Hispanics and Asians will be America's fastest-growing ethnic groups during the 1990s -- a symbol of a rapidly changing culture that poses a challenge for modern evangelistic outreaches.

There are an estimated 25 million Hispanics in America, close to 10 percent of the nation's population, and California researcher George Barna forecasts their numbers (and Asians) will increase by 40 percent this decade. That compares to a projected 15 percent increase in the African American population and a growth of whites of 3 to 5 percent.

"Go to New York, Miami, Dallas, San Francisco or Chicago and the Caucasian population is no longer the majority," said Barna, who has written several books based on his national studies of religion and culture. "In Los Angeles, the schools are only 11 percent white."

This shift in ethnic makeup mirrors a change in the nation's traditions, according to the president of the Barna Research Group. Lifestyles change every three to five years, he said, which means new evangelistic methods must be used to reach the unsaved.

"One size fits all" is no longer valid in evangelism because of changes in morality, ethics and biblical knowledge, he added. Christians need to be aware that every year one of every six households changes locations, making America one of the most mobile societies on earth. The latter also means we are isolated, lonely and lack a sense of community, Barna said.

Some other important factors in the nation's makeup he outlined include:

-- The nation's population is increasingly urban. The idea that people are leaving cities for a simpler life in the country is a myth, he said.

-- One in four high school students fails to graduate, and 1 million graduates in 1993 couldn't read at a second-grade level. In addition, 49 percent of adults over 25 are functionally illiterate, meaning they can't read at an eighth-grade level. Yet the majority of churches still use the King James Version of the Bible, he said, which requires a minimum 12th-grade reading comprehension.

-- The two largest age groups are "baby boomers" (those born from 1946-64), 76 million, and "baby busters," with 68 million born between 1965-83. Busters are largely lacking in Christian training, he said, and evangelistic meetings will rarely appeal to both age groups.

-- There is a tremendous amount of poverty in America. Government statistics show there are 40 million poor people, and the richest 1 percent of households control 33 percent of the wealth.

-- In recent years violent crime has shown a 500 percent increase. In urban areas there used to be three cops for each crime committed. Now there are three crimes per police officer.

-- Seventy-five percent of people say when it comes to morals and ethics there is no absolute truth, including 64 percent of those identifying themselves as born-again Christians. That translates to a large mission field in the church pew.

"The majority of people in Protestant churches are not Christians," Barna said, "meaning they aren't trusting Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. In the 'Information Age' there are so many faiths ... people take a little bit out of many things. Orthodox Christianity is rare. The wakeup call doesn't get any louder than this."

**Blackaby: America crying
for spiritual revival**

By David Winfrey

ATLANTA (BP)--Students of spiritual revival are more interested in ways to accomplish it today than learning about such incidents in the past, says Henry Blackaby, Southern Baptist Home Mission Board director for prayer and spiritual awakening.

"There's an urgent cry for the practical outpouring of the presence of God in our day," said Blackaby, who will host two national conferences this spring on that topic for Southern Baptist pastors and lay leadership.

This is the 15th annual meeting on prayer and spiritual awakening, and Blackaby says the attitudes of those attending have changed, resulting in a shift of the conferences' theme.

"The major shift would be from conferences that focused on telling of the historical revivals of the 18th and 19th century to a heart cry for revival happening in the here and now," he says.

"I don't think there's ever been such a heart cry for revival, not just to hear the stories again, but to say, 'Is there any hope for revival today and if so what do we need to do?'"

Both meetings, at the Ridgecrest, N.C., and Glorieta, N.M., conference centers, will include opportunities for several leadership groups, including state leaders, women and ethnic groups, to discuss ways of execute the ideas learned, he said.

"These are resource meetings to help give biblical and practical and historical guidance to the nature of true revival," he said. Blackaby noted that many Southern Baptists theologically understand spiritual revival, "but we often lack some practical handles of implementing what we believe."

Reports of revival in Texas are "probably the deepest touch of revival since the Asbury movement of God in the early '70s," Blackaby said.

"What I'm hearing has all the earmarks of genuine revival. There's great repentance, which is the hallmark of revival," he said, adding the two conferences will include participants from those to share their experiences.

Roy Fish, professor of evangelism at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, will lead sessions at the Ridgecrest conference. The Glorieta conference will feature Avery Willis, overseas vice president of the Foreign Mission Board, and Richard Owen Roberts, president of International Awakening Ministries, Inc., Wheaton, Ill.

Both conferences will also feature Ron and Patricia Owens. Owens is associate director of the Home Mission Board's office of prayer and spiritual awakening. He and his wife are the former directors of the International Congress on Revival.

The sessions on returning to worship will focus on the "who" of worship, according to leaders. Practical helps also will be offered on such topics as training children to worship, planning a service, the power of music and turning a spectator into a participant.

The Ridgecrest conference will be April 24-28; the Glorieta conference will be May 1-5. The registration and program fee costs \$60 per person, excluding meals and housing. Registration should be done directly through the conference centers, which offer housing and meal options. Additional information is available from the Home Mission Board's office of prayer and spiritual awakening at (404) 899-7779.

**Pre-registration now open
for SBC Missions Day Camp**

By Charlotte Teas

ATLANTA (BP)--Special activities are planned again this year for children of parents attending the Southern Baptist Convention in Atlanta at the SBC Missions Day Camp.

Sponsored by the Children/Royal Ambassador department of the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission, SBC Missions Day Camp is for boys and girls who will have completed grades one through six by June of this year.

In addition to the regular missions education emphasis, the day camp will include field trips to the Fernbank Museum of Natural History, the Fernbank Science Center and the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. Missionary speakers and convention tours will be added features.

Volunteers from First Baptist Church, Huntsville, Ala., will provide assistance.

"We ask all parents to pre-register again this year," said Tim Seanor, SBC Missions Day Camp coordinator. Registration will be open to the first 250 children.

Parents should secure a registration packet by writing SBC Missions Day Camp, Brotherhood Commission, SBC, 1548 Poplar Ave., Memphis, TN 38104, or they may call (901) 272-2461. No telephone registrations will be accepted. There is no registration guarantee after May 30, 1995.

Parents or guardians of children who attended SBC Missions Day Camp over the past three years will receive registration packets automatically.

A three-day package price of \$62 per child is available. Two different two-day packages are \$52 (Tuesday and Wednesday) and \$35 (Wednesday and Thursday). The individual day cost per child per day is \$35 for Tuesday; \$24 for Wednesday; and \$17 for Thursday. Prices include admission fees, transportation, accident insurance, lunch (Tuesday only), snacks, learning materials, a day camp T-shirt and wristband.

Missions Day Camp operates during all daytime sessions of the convention, Tuesday through Thursday.

Youth who wish to serve as day camp workers must be at least 14 years of age or must have completed eighth grade. They should contact Seanor at the Brotherhood Commission in writing before Tuesday, May 30. A special registration form will be sent to the prospective worker.

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Teas is editor of Lad materials at the Brotherhood Commission.

**Arkansas WMU executive director
questions SBC restructuring plan**

**Baptist Press
4/5/95**

By Russell N. Dilday

CONWAY, Ark. (BP)--Using her annual executive board report to analyze a proposed Southern Baptist Convention restructuring plan, state WMU executive director Julia Ketner questioned whether grassroots Southern Baptists were represented in the planning process.

"My first concern is the make-up of the committee itself," she said. "It was all white, Anglo men from large churches.

"If we were looking to the future, then why wasn't an African-American or a non-English-speaking person appointed to represent those areas in which Southern Baptists are growing?" she asked. "Or where was the representation of probably more than half of our membership -- women?"

"The restructuring committee's report, 'Covenant for a New Century,' has proposed that SBC agencies be cut from 19 to 12. Under the proposed changes, responsibility for the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for home missions and the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions, both founded by the national WMU, would be transferred to the SBC's home and foreign missions agencies.

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Ketner also emphasized that the proposal was approved by the SBC Executive Committee "after only 45 minutes of discussing the most massive restructuring in the 150-year history of our convention."

Reviewing changes made by the national WMU in 1993 "aimed at helping WMU be relevant as a national missions organization in the 21st century," Ketner added, "You remember the responses: The analogy that WMU had committed adultery, that we had 'declared independence from the Southern Baptist Convention, that our real goal was to promote ordination of women.' These and other rumors surfaced in an attempt to discredit the work of WMU, to bring them under the control of the Southern Baptist Convention.

"The issue then and still is the matter of control," she declared. "WMU did not yield to the threats in 1993 but courageously chose to remain an auxiliary. So what steps have now been taken to 'punish' us for not submitting to control?

"Woman's Missionary Union has been stripped of her work as missions educators with the assignment of missions education given to the North American Mission Board," she answered.

Ketner also noted that committee members "reported they did not assign any ministry statements for WMU out of respect for the organization's status as a self-governing auxiliary. That sounds good if you don't look at the total picture.

"Is respect being shown by taking from us the previously convention-adopted program statements?" she asked. "By taking away that which we started, the promotion of the Lottie Moon and Annie Armstrong offerings? Is it respect when they chose not to even develop a written statement to define the relationship between the SBC and WMU?

"Respect? Hardly," she insisted. "Yes, it may sound good, but for all practical purposes, WMU may have no assigned role to play in the Southern Baptist Convention should the report be approved as is.

"While there is much talk about how the relationship between WMU and the SBC do sn't have to be different," she explained, "without a statement to define that relationship, there is a strong possibility that WMU will eventually have no place in the life of the Southern Baptist Convention. I believe the committee has taken measures for that to happen without any concern for Southern Baptist missions."

Ketner also predicted that if the report is approved by Southern Baptist Convention messengers in 1995 and 1996, "the future of Woman's Missionary Union is very much in doubt. If WMU is not acknowledged as an SBC missions organization, then most likely there will be no state WMU organization."

She told participants, though, that "the concern is greater than whether WMU will continue to exist or if we in the state WMU office will have a place of ministry. The real concern is missions.

"We know who truly is the missions conscience of the church" she said. "It's you, members of Woman's Missionary Union. You, along with all the women since 1888, have been faithful to the task.

She recalled how WMU has helped raise more than \$2 billion for world missions and helped with SBC fund-raising efforts. "Have we made a difference in SBC life?" she asked. "Indeed we have and continue to do so. But now, apparently we may no longer be needed or more accurately, wanted by those who must have control over all.

"It is time to speak out and stand up for what we began, what we believe in and what we know is vital to the ongoing mission program of Southern Baptists," Ketner said. "It is not a time to be silent and let the missions task be taken away from WMU."

She urged WMU members to "pray for the leadership of the Holy Spirit in interpreting and understanding th r port," become informed, write letters of concern, "go to the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Atlanta and vote your conscience" and "remain faithful in your missions service.

"These days and months will not be easy," Ketner concluded. "I urge you in the midst of uncertainty to stay true to the task, to press on for the cause to which God has called us. We must not become discouraged, for we are truly laborers together with God."

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ANALYSIS

Proponent-pastor defends
'seeker-targeted' churches

By James Emery White

Baptist Press
4/5/95

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (BP)--A label has appeared on the religious landscape that simultaneously draws both criticism and praise: the user-friendly church. Popularized by George Barna's book, "User Friendly Churches," the classification is often used to represent those churches that have moved toward a contemporary format in their style of worship in order to attract the unchurched.

A step beyond the "user-friendly" tag, and perhaps the most influential movement in local church evangelism today, is the "seeker-targeted" approach, modeled most clearly by Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Ill. Begun in 1975 from a youth ministry called "Son City," Willow Creek has become one of the largest churches in America, currently averaging 15,000 people per weekend. A remarkable 70 percent of those in attendance come from an unchurched background.

In July 1992, I resigned from my position as the leadership consultant for preaching and worship at the Baptist Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention to plant a similarly styled church in the growing northeast section of Charlotte, N.C. Since its first service in October 1992, Mecklenburg Community Church has proven to be one of the fastest-growing new churches in the United States. After only two and a half years, our attendance is reaching 700. Eighty percent have come from an unchurched background, and of that number, 50 percent through conversion.

What is unique about the approach of churches like Mecklenburg and Willow Creek? What does it mean to be "user-friendly," or even more, "seeker-targeted?" The length of this article does not allow for a detailed discussion, so let the following three distinctives serve as an introduction to what sets seeker-targeted churches apart from traditional approaches.

1) Most simply put, seeker-targeted churches target seekers. Every church, consciously or not, has selected a primary "customer." For most churches, it is the "already convinced." I'll never forget one pastor informing me that his Baptist church could not grow any larger because there were no more Baptists in the area.

Most denominational statistics would report that over 80 percent of their church growth falls into two camps: biological growth and transfer growth. Biological growth is essentially "winning your own." The children of members and regular attenders become believers and follow in their parent's footsteps. Transfer growth is when a Christian moves into the area and chooses to join a church or when a local Christian makes the decision to change from their present church to another church.

Seeker-targeted churches celebrate both of these types of growth but, in terms of their own sense of mission, have consciously made a different selection. Rather than grow primarily through biological growth or transfer growth, seeker-targeted churches strive for prodigal growth and conversion growth.

Prodigal growth is reaching someone who has consciously given up on church, but may have a general belief in Christianity intact from their youth. Conversion growth is reaching the person who is not interested in spiritual things or who has rejected Christianity altogether.

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Therefore seeker-targeted churches have consciously decided to grow by reaching out to a specific customer -- the seeker. As a result, many "front-door" efforts, such as weekend services, are designed with the seeker in mind. This is the idea of being "seeker-sensitive." Rather than begin with the needs of believers, and letting those needs dictate the life and ministry of the church, seeker-targeted churches begin with the needs of seekers and let those inform the life of the church as well. This means that the believers in seeker-targeted churches have chosen to prioritize the lost in terms of their outreach.

Targeting seekers for church growth is far different than allowing seekers to set the theological menu for the church. This has been a frequent criticism, and it is a caricature. When you listen to the unchurched, you will find that they do not ask for or require a removal of commitment or a devaluation of truth. What they would like to experience in a church is simply a change in style and format. Seeker-targeted churches are not out to make the audience sovereign, nor do they let the marketplace become the barometer for which ideas are valid. They simply wish to target their method and style in such a way as to reach out to the unchurched. Jesus always approached people within the distinctives of their cultural context. Indeed, that is what the incarnation itself represents.

2) There is an understanding in the seeker-targeted approach that evangelism is both process and event. In other words, there is an adoption process that is present in every person's spiritual journey toward Christ. The "event" of accepting Christ as Lord and Savior is but the culmination of a spiritual pilgrimage as a "seeker."

As a result, seeker-targeted churches intentionally strive to cultivate and support this process. The most important dynamic of this conviction is an active effort to build relationships with non-believers in order to share a verbal witness.

The most publicized dynamic of this conviction, however, is that a context is created through "seeker services" to allow seekers to explore Christianity in a way that is conducive to the process leading to the event. Dynamics such as anonymity, time to decide, practical messages, the encouragement of spiritual questions and even casual dress have been found to be helpful components for this seeking process.

In essence, a safe place is created for seekers to hear and explore a very unsafe message. The biblical basis for such an effort can be found in Jesus' parable of the soils and Paul's warning to the Corinthian church to be seeker-sensitive in their charismatic worship (1 Corinthians 14).

Churches that have developed this strategy into a full "seeker service" usually, and appropriately, develop a separate worship service for believers. Which diffuses another misunderstanding, namely that seeker services devalue authentic Christian worship. What is at hand is simply the strategic separation of emphasis in regard to evangelism and edification/worship within the church's services.

3) A third distinctive of seeker-targeted churches is the bias that the gospel must be contextualized in its presentation.

When Jesus spoke to the women at the well, he talked of water; when he dialogued with fishermen, he talked of fishing; when he conversed with tax collectors, he spoke of money. The apostle Paul, when confronted with Greek philosophers on Mars Hill, responded with a conversation rooted in Greek philosophy. His driving passion was to become all things to all men in order that some might be saved (see 1 Corinthians 9:22).

Seeker-targeted churches believe that the approach, method and style of the contemporary church must be brought into the 21st century, else we will lose this generation for Christ. This has nothing to do with cultural accommodation, but everything to do with contextualization.

While the message is timeless, the method is not, and the church has often confused traditionalism with orthodoxy. It is a conviction of seeker-targeted churches that one of Christendom's problems is that it is entering the 21st century with churches designed during the 19th century to work well in the 20th.

As a result, seeker-targeted churches attempt to convey the message of the gospel in a manner that is understandable and relevant to contemporary culture. This may entail the use of a modern translation of the Bible, up-to-date illustrations and vocabulary, multi-media, contemporary music and drama. The key is to build effective bridges of communication and understanding between believers and non-believers in order to communicate the message of Christ.

The central criticism of the seeker-targeted approach is that inherent within such an innovative approach is theological compromise. In the process of contextualization, critics contend that compromise -- almost by necessity -- takes place.

Is this valid? Certainly there are churches and leaders who have overstepped the biblical parameters in their zeal for relevance, yet many theologians forget their responsibility to find points of contact between their academic formulations and the life of ordinary people.

Well-known evangelical theologian Millard Erickson, now professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, offers a helpful distinction in the use of the terms "translation" versus "transformation." Every generation must "translate" the gospel into its unique cultural context. This is very different than "transforming" the message of the gospel, however, into something that was never intended by the biblical witness. Transformation of the message must be avoided at all costs. Translation, however, is necessary for a winsome and compelling presentation of the gospel of Christ. The mere use, then, of cultural mediums should not be unthinkingly dismissed as compromising with modernity.

Far too many observers of seeker-targeted and seeker-sensitive churches confuse the method with the message, and tradition with orthodoxy. This is a dangerous mind-set, for the willingness to be innovative in the translation of the gospel into the forms of contemporary culture has been in the vanguard of every great evangelical movement, beginning with the nontraditional methodology of Jesus himself.

Martin Luther translated the Bible into the common language of the people and used "drinking" songs for hymns; Ira Sankey used contemporary music (the "waltz") to draw crowds for Dwight L. Moody's crusades; and Billy Graham bravely went forth with his New York City crusade in the 1950s that crossed Protestant/Catholic lines. Politically correct? Hardly. Misunderstood and roundly criticized by the religious establishment? Most certainly. Used by God? Without question.

At times, one cannot help but feel that the negative reaction to much of the seeker-targeted, user-friendly movement is not truly a matter of feared doctrinal compromise, but rather an emotional reaction to a method or style that is not understood and threatens favored methods and styles. Sadly, most critics have never even attended the type of church they so roundly condemn. As a result, caricatures and "straw men" abound. While I am convinced that many of the critics are well-intentioned, they are not well-informed.

Seeker-targeted churches are not the only churches being used by God. It takes all kinds of churches to reach all kinds of people. But there is a fresh movement of the Spirit that is prompting many churches and their leaders to explore innovative approaches to ministry, evangelism and organization. And that is at the heart of the movement --- not a devaluation of doctrine, a compromise of the gospel or a market-driven frenzy to be faddish. The goal is the transformation of culture through an effective translation of the message. Eschewing traditionalism while remaining captive to the authoritative Word of God, such churches reflect an unbridled passion and mission to seek and to save the lost. As such, they should be accepted, supported and celebrated.

White is the founding and senior pastor of Mecklenburg Community Church, a Southern Baptist church in Charlotte, N.C., and the author of "Opening the Front Door: Worship and Church Growth" and "What is Truth?"

EDITORS' NOTE: The following article appeared in the March 25 edition of the Biblical Recorder, North Carolina Baptists' newsjournal, as a "guest viewpoint."

FIRST-PERSON

Does contemporary worship
reflect church or coliseum?

By W. Randall Lolley

Baptist Press
4/5/95

GREENSBORO, N.C. (BP)--On the same day last week two articles crossed my desk. One explained how Matt Brown and his colleagues were readying the Greensboro (N.C.) Coliseum to please fans at the ACC Basketball Tournament, and hopefully, to attract the games back to Greensboro for good. The other article was written by a church-growth expert, explaining "thirty-one ways to make your church more user-friendly."

These articles sounded exactly alike -- crammed with marketing and consumerism. Together they demonstrated just how blatant and subtle inculturation of the church is.

The entire divine/human equation which is worship started with God, not with man -- with the Creator, not the creature -- with the worshiped, not the worshiper.

God doesn't adapt in order to be worshiped. It is the worshiper who adapts in order to worship.

Entering a sanctuary ought to be different from entering a coliseum. Something called awe, bordering on mystery, is indispensable in authentic encounter with God.

Consumer-oriented, user-friendly, entertainment-dominated gatherings which pass as worship start at the wrong place. They aim to please rather than to change people.

Worship -- the celebration of the "worth-ship" of God in Jesus Christ -- confused with secular consumerism may in the short term build something, but it will be neither the church of Jesus nor the kingdom of God.

The truth is that it will take 20 years to reap fully the results of "pop religion." By then, coliseums and churches may be jammed with people doing the same things -- having fun, feeling good and pleasing fans.

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Lolley is a former president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C., and currently pastor of First Baptist Church, Greensboro, N.C.

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