



International Mission Board

SOUTHERN
BAPTIST
CONVENTION

Jerry A. Rankin, President

Leading Southern Baptists to be on mission with God to bring all the peoples of the world to saving faith in Jesus Christ

October 30, 2003

Dr. Keith Eitel
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Wake Forest, NC 27588-1889

Dear Keith:

I appreciate your responding to Dr. Patterson's request to share your paper on an assessment of the vision of the International Mission Board, though I cannot understand why we were not made aware of this analysis, why it was given such widespread circulation, and why no effort was made to confirm your premises and perceptions. We always welcome objective feedback and outside insights that help us see beyond our perspective within the organization, recognizing that periodic assessments and evaluations are essential to effectiveness. However, I fail to understand the rationale for disseminating your unfounded perceptions and these inaccurate implications without bringing them into an open forum of dialogue that should be representative of the partnership we have presumed to have with you and Dr. Patterson.

In spite of my disappointment and inability to understand the basis for these conclusions, it has been very helpful to me for your documents to bring to light the source of rumors that have plagued the IMB in recent years. Last November I made a report to our board on common "myths" regarding the IMB. I received a significant amount of response to this report when it was published in *The Commission* earlier this year. Not surprisingly, people indicated that they had heard these myths from Mainstream Baptists, the BGCT, and David Currie but also on the campus of Southeastern Seminary! I appreciate your sharing your communication with Curtis Sergeant and the memo sent to 2+2ers from SEBTS. I had wondered why so much criticism of our program and policies, disrespect of leadership, and even threatened litigation was being generated by students from Southeastern. Your memo, which I have attached, clearly indicates that they were being programmed to hear certain distortions out of context and encouraged to engage in a subversive response. I would have thought someone who is such a passionate advocate of Biblical teaching and practice would have advised them to follow the admonition of Matthew 18, and you would have modeled that for them!

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Keith, I cannot believe someone who would value academic excellence and Biblical integrity would succumb to hypotheses such as you have done without corroboration by primary sources. This was evident in your book on Paradigm Wars, published in 1999, in which you relied on the perspective of Mike Stroope and selected documents to misinterpret "New Directions" and misrepresent, if not malign, the motives of Avery Willis and me in guiding these strategic organizational changes. Why would you not consult with us if you were genuinely interested in the truth and were concerned about the effectiveness of the International Mission Board in the third millennium? I fail to understand, when we see each other often, have ready access to communication, and would presume to be committed to partnership in our mission task, that you would not check out your perceptions and impressions before formulating conclusions and distributing them publicly. Why would you tell your students that there are those who have been dismissed from MLC for disagreeing with presenters when there is no truth to that whatsoever, and it has never happened? As one who is often under attack for what others presume to be self-serving and ill-motives, I try to be very circumspect and avoid judging others motives when they appear to misrepresent truth and seem to deliberately create under-currents that spread doubt and suspicion. But it is difficult not to presume from your paper that truth is not the issue since innuendo serves one's purpose!

Keith, it is unfortunate that our time has to be consumed by a distraction such as responding to these unfounded accusations and implications, which I will do, but I would appeal to you to meet with me and IMB leadership to review every concern and discrepancy in your perceptions and information in the spirit of the Biblical injunction to which each of us is committed to following. It would be good if any members of our board that may be in collaboration with you would be present as they are the ones who share responsibility for the strategies and positions of the IMB. I would also suggest that Dr. Russ Bush join us, as your statements and actions must give us pause whether we can continue the 2+2 program and partnership with Southeastern Seminary. It is hard to see how we can continue such a partnership when disrespect for leadership and policies is being nurtured, non-Biblical subversive behavior is encouraged, and blatant disregard for truth is propagated. I will be contacting you regarding a convenient time you can come to Richmond to meet with our administrative team, overseas leadership and MLC program directors to hear and review your allegations.

You should be aware that I am also writing Dr. Patterson to seek an explanation as to why he would cast aspersions on our board relative to the conservative resurgence. The trustees of this agency are God-fearing, Bible-believing men and women, products of the conservative resurgence within our convention. They have worked hard to understand complicated issues of missiology, and, without exception, are firmly grounded in an absolute conviction about the authority of God's inerrant and infallible Word. To imply that they have overseen and embraced a failure that represents aberrant theology is not only a disservice but an insult to them as those who stand responsible to the Southern Baptist Convention for what we do. Apparently our staunch embracing of and adherence to the Baptist Faith and Message is not considered adequate from your perspective.

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I have no idea where your implications of Barlian theology come from since you did not bother to provide any specific examples or application of your accusations. We have never advocated the premise that missions is what unites us instead of doctrine or implied that doctrine was unimportant. I am perplexed as to your motive for even implying this. For the last ten years, Avery Willis and I have been the primary leaders of our direction, strategy and identification of the Biblical foundations for what we have done. We were the ones that identified in a new set of value statements, the basis of our vision and mission, including the first one, **"Our basic commitment is obedience to the Lordship of Christ and to God's infallible word."** In order to make the Biblical and theological basis of our missiology clear, our second statement is something that had never before been included in IMB documents, **"Jesus Christ is God's only provision for salvation and people without personal faith in Him are lost and will spend eternity in hell."** There is nothing neo orthodox nor is there any Barlian equivocation in these foundations for our missiology and strategy. I appreciate your final "Diagram C" as this precisely reflects our corporate culture, missiological convictions, policies and practices. I do not know where you came up with the other diagrams and any basis for applying them to the IMB.

Possibly you are so immersed in a theological community that when we profile our missions task in seeking to mobilize Southern Baptists and our churches to give and to pray and to go, that you feel we are neglecting the Biblical and theological foundations that drive our mission. The convention has given us ministry assignments that drive and shape all we do. You have to do some clever extrapolation to imply that the "catchy themes" and "marketing slogans" used in promoting missions are not solid in their Biblical basis. Please go back and read my sermon material and other promotions on "Finishing the Unfinished Task" and "That All Peoples May Know Him" that have been disseminated widely.

Why have you misrepresented our emphasis on seminary training and implied we are advocating an intentional move away from it? Why are there so many returned journeymen and others enrolled at Southeastern and in our other seminaries preparing for missionary service? It is because we encourage it and require it! We have not changed our criteria for missionary appointment with regard to seminary requirements nor do we have any intention of doing so. In fact, we have been discussing how we can increase theological training, even for our short-term people. Keith, you know enough about our creative access strategies for reaching restricted countries and people groups, and have appeared to be supportive of them, to not disparage an emphasis on business and secular training that provide this access. It is a blatant misrepresentation to juxtaposition those with other backgrounds as representing an anti-seminary bias on the part of the board. I was astounded to find in your communication with Curtis your position that the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 was intended only for the apostles instead of the body of Christ, and that you use that to advocate a dichotomy between clergy and laity that I have never known anyone to apply to the Great Commission.

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Is the lostness of a world without Christ so insignificant and unimportant that a gospel witness should be restricted only to those with formal theological training, and the Spirit cannot bring believers together into a church fellowship except a seminary graduate be available to provide monitoring and control? I can remember when our missionaries went out insisting that only ordained, seminary-trained individuals were qualified to pastor churches. Is this the Biblical ecclesiology and Baptist values you are advocating and would have us revert to that era of 1-2% church growth rates instead of the 20-40% we are seeing today?

It is amazing that you would cast aspersions on our research department and with ridiculous rationale try to link it to David Barrett. Barrett was dismissed in 1993, and one of the first things I did as president of the IMB was to meet with our overseas leadership and our communication staff to disclaim Barrett's data, indicating we were never to use references to World B and World C and other such definitions. How can you say that his influence still lingers in our strategic planning and research? In your footnote you failed to mention that we, too, were a part of that consortium of researchers that rejected Barrett's models. These innuendoes and accusations have continued throughout my tenure. Could the efforts to discredit our research department have anything to do with the unfulfilled aspiration of the SEBTS Global Mission Center to be the recognized repository of the evangelical database?

Well, we really need to get together to sort out all these perceptions and judgments, but since your paper and efforts to undercut the credibility of the IMB has been so widely distributed, I need to move on to state the facts relative to your concluding bullet points.

- The board has selected and approved each of our administrative leadership and has examined each in terms of their theological convictions and commitment to the Baptist Faith and Message. The need for "theological renewal" is a vague and ambiguous charge without any basis whatsoever.
- The board maintains its established criteria for requiring theological preparation of all candidates. Although more and more missionaries are going to the field for short term assignments, God is using this experience to call people to lifetime service. In the last two years, 43% of those appointed to career service have served in short-term assignments and been required to meet theological education requirements for appointment. Yes, we can encourage development of the 2+2/3 programs, as you suggest, but only if there is a partnership with our seminaries based on Biblical principles of relationship, respect and trust.

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- The development of curriculum at M.I.C. for our Field Personnel Orientation is a dynamic process that is constantly being adjusted to provide maximum effectiveness in the exit experience of new missionaries and preparation for cross-cultural immersion. It is only one of a four phase process of training and equipping of missionaries built around seven dimensions. To imply there is no coherence or inadequate Biblical foundations in these sessions is to reflect a lack of understanding of what is done, the purpose of the program and the background of preparation for these missionaries. Not only do the participants give strong, positive feedback regarding the family focus of the M.I.C. community and preparation for the entire family, emphasis on the family is one of our seven core dimensions of training and preparation. The peer review process is no longer being used as it was in the past, although each person is encouraged to understand the value of mutual submission, group accountability and the importance of objective feedback. We will not embrace the apparent position of SEBTS that only the husband is going as a missionary and the wife and children have no responsibility to participate in sessions nor to apply themselves to training for cross-cultural ministry.
- It was the previous office of strategic planning that embraced and promoted David Barrett's model of research; we do not endorse a fragmented, ivory-tower, Richmond-office approach to mission strategy but firmly believe in a vision-driven, Biblically-based, decentralized process of strategic planning in which those on the field are empowered and accountable. It would be helpful if you would identify any aspect of our thorough and professional research process that you see as shallow "trendy data analyses." I am amazed that you are unaware of the global scope of our research and strategy that embraces the harvest fields as well as the unreached. We have unequivocally eschewed ecumenical influences and do not have a clue regarding your basis for this innuendo.
- Partnership with other evangelicals is a significant paradigm shift under my leadership and a position that has been blessed of God to enhance unprecedented impact on a lost world. The reality is that many of these Great Commission Christians are far more conservative in their doctrine than Southern Baptists have been and would not have accepted us into partnership with them until recent years. I used to chide my Muslim friends in countries where government policy restricted a Christian witness, saying that if their Muslim faith was the truth, it should be able to stand on its own without government intervention prohibiting exposure to other beliefs. We believe that the foundational faith and Biblical truth that we represent is able to prevail among those who may not be as strong or sound doctrinally. Our leadership and influence has been formidable in propagating Baptist doctrine and practice where denominational distinctions may be denied and God has brought us together with others for the sake of His kingdom and His glory among the nations.

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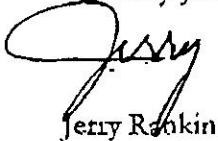
I regret the lack of confidence you have in our Baptist witness and the strength of our Biblical influence in situations of partnership, but we will not return to an exclusive, independent approach to global evangelization that would marginalize Southern Baptists and diminish our potential for a significant role in being on mission with God in what He is doing in our world.

- I sense several deficiencies in your statements regarding the issue of women in leadership roles. We fully recognize the Biblical limitation of women holding a church office, such as pastor, that clearly represents spiritual authority in a local congregation. However, to extrapolate that limited application to deny women the freedom to practice their giftedness and calling as a part of a team seeking to reach a segment of a lost world goes beyond Biblical teaching. You mistakenly seem to interpret a Strategy Coordinator role as one of spiritual and ethical authority rather than a servant role to coordinate and enable the team to work together in a synergy to fulfill collectively their individual calling. Is the model of leadership being taught and advocated at Southeastern one of authority instead of Biblical servanthood?
- I do not understand what is behind your reference to a transparent budget and planning process. We publicize and share readily the package of missionary support, which represents 70% of our budget. Details regarding ministry funds and capital projects and stateside administration are communicated clearly in our budget presentations and are available to Southern Baptists. Where is there any lack of accountability or evidence of failure to be open and transparent as implied in your paper?
- In advocating the need for synergy in the Board's culture that will minimize competitiveness and enhance a "koinonia" spirit, are you aware that we have moved deliberately to eliminate the "silo" organization of fragmented department functions, emphasized cross-office task groups and diminished the traditional dichotomy between home office and the field through missionaries-in-residence and rotation of staff to field assignments? It is not our own IMB culture but the constant barrage of unfounded attacks from outside persons and entities that create distractions from the unity and focus we strive to attain throughout the organization.

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Keith, the purpose and intent of your paper was difficult to discern. There were no specific examples and a lot of innuendos and perceptions that seem to be designed to discredit the IMB. We are readily available to discuss your concerns and perceptions, but your desire seems to be something other than offering constructive corrective advice in the context of Biblical partnership. It is difficult to understand how you could nurture a positive partnership between SEBTS and the IMB if you truly believed the slanderous and misleading statements you have written. We look forward to getting together to understand your motives and rationale for your perceptions and to resolve these misunderstandings.

Sincerely yours,



Jerry Rankin

cc: Dr. Paige Patteson
IMB Board of Trustees