

Former SBC leader takes on 'emergent church'

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WINFIELD, Mo. (ABP) — Thirty years after ridding the Southern Baptist Convention of theological liberalism, the nation's largest non-Catholic religious organization now faces a different kind of liberalism from within, warns a Missouri layman and former member of the SBC Executive Committee.

Roger Moran, research director of the Missouri Baptist Laymen's Association, is printing pamphlets to distribute at the upcoming SBC annual meeting [warning](#) messengers about what he views as dangers in a church-planting movement known as the "emerging" or "emergent" church.

Moran says the movement, which aims to create churches that are culturally relevant to what proponents call a "postmodern" society, is making inroads in Southern Baptist life, particularly in seminaries and the SBC's publishing arm, LifeWay Christian Resources.

Moran's 47-page document lays out in detail how controversy over the trend wreaked havoc among Baptist leadership in his own state and warns that unless it is addressed, similar strife may lie ahead for the SBC.

"In the name of missions, ministry and evangelism, the SBC is now in danger of embracing a new liberalism — 'cultural liberalism' that claims to be theologically conservative," the pamphlet warns.

Unlike the battle for the Bible that united conservatives against the predominantly moderate-to-progressive SBC bureaucracy of the 1980s, Moran says, the emergent church crowd affirms the inerrancy of Scripture. As such, he says, many conservative Southern Baptists view it as nothing

more than an innovative way to win people to Christ.

But Moran says in attempting to re-invent the image of evangelical Christianity, the emergent church often compromises Baptist beliefs such as the SBC's traditional opposition to use of beverage alcohol.

Moran claims the emergent church is making particular inroads at Southeastern Baptist Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., which several times has invited to campus several times Mark Driscoll, a controversial figure in the movement whose penchant for off-color language earned him the nickname the "cussing preacher." One of those visits, he says, was during a "Preview Days" emphasis intended to attract new students to the campus.

Moran says Ed Stetzer, formerly a church-planting expert at the SBC North American Mission Board and now director of LifeWay Research, defends Driscoll and is also a former board member of [Acts 29](#), a network of pastors dedicated to planting new churches and reinvigorating old ones, that Moran says introduced the emergent church controversy in Missouri.

In December 2005, Moran says, upon recommendation of then-Missouri Baptist Convention Executive David Clippard, the MBC executive board approved a \$200,000 loan for a new church plant in St. Louis called The Journey.

Only afterward did members learn about unconventional outreach efforts by the group, including a monthly discussion about theology held at a St. Louis micro-brewery promoted on the church website with "grab a brew, give your view."

Both Daniel Akin, president of Southeastern Baptist Seminary, and Stetzer declined to comment for this story.

Moran says he sees little value in evangelism that professes conservative theology but doesn't match the talk with a Christian lifestyle.

"Our problem is not in our lack of conservative theological rhetoric, nor in our lack of efforts in evangelism, but in our increasing willingness to neglect what Christ said is the most important of all, the first and greatest commandment," Moran said. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind."

Moran says his organization has not issued a "Viewpoint" document since the days of Project 1000, a campaign against perceived theological and social liberalism within the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a moderate group that formed in reaction to the SBC controversy of the 1980s.

Speaking to the SBC Executive Committee in February 2007, Moran described the emergent church as "one of the most dangerous and deceptive movements to infiltrate the ranks of Southern Baptist life."

"Not since the stealth tactics of the CBF have we seen a movement operate so successfully below the radar of rank and file Southern Baptists," he said.

-Bob Allen is senior writer for Associated Baptist Press.