

THE EMERGENT CHURCH Oct 17, 2010.

Postmodernism: The tendency in contemporary culture to reject absolute truth. Postmodernism attacks the use of sharp classifications such as male versus female, gay versus straight, white versus black and imperial versus colonial.

The Emerging (emergent) Church: is a Christian movement of the 20th & 21st century that crosses a number of theological boundaries. Participants can be described as evangelical, protestant, roman catholic, post evangelical, Anabaptist, Adventist, liberal, post liberal, reformed, charismatic, etc...Proponents believe the movement transcends 'modernist' labels like "conservative" or "liberal," calling the movement a "conversation" to emphasize its developing and decentralized nature, its vast range of stand points and commitment to dialogue. What those involved in the conversation tend to agree on is their disillusionment with the organized and institutional church, and their support for the deconstruction of Christian worship, modern evangelism and the nature of modern Christian community. The emerging church favors the use of simple story and narrative. Members of the movement often place a high value on good works or social activism including missional living. While some evangelicals emphasize eternal salvation, many in the emerging church emphasize the here and now. (Wikipedia)

Modernism seeks to find foundations on which to build knowledge then proceed with methodical rigor; postmodernism denies that such foundations exist, and believes we come to know things in many ways, Modernism is hard edged and in the realm of religion focuses on truth versus error, right versus wrong belief; postmodernism is gentle and in the domain of religion focuses upon relationships, love, shared tradition and integrity in discussion.

At the heart of the Emergent Church 'conversation' is the conviction that changes in culture signify that a new church is 'emerging.' Christian leaders must therefore adapt to this emerging church. Those who fail to do so are blind to cultural accretions that hide the gospel behind forms of thought and modes of expression that no longer communicate to the new (emerging) generation. (both quotes, D.A. Carson)

Some Emergent VALUES & PRACTICES – (from emergentvillage.com)

- 1) Commitment to God in the way of Jesus: 'We are committed to doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with God. We seek to live by the Great Commandment: loving God and our neighbors – including those who might be considered the 'least of these' or our enemies.
- 2) Commitment to the church in all its forms: We are committed to honor and serve the church in all its forms (denominations) - every form of the church has weaknesses and strengths. We believe the injustice and sin in our world requires sincere wholehearted response of all Christians in all denominations. We seek to be inclusive of all our sisters and Christian brothers. We seek to be inclusive rather than elitist and critical.
- 3) Commitment to God's world: We do not isolate ourselves from this world, but follow Christ into the world. We believe the church exists for the benefit and blessing of the world at large.

- 4) Commitment to one another: In order to strengthen our shared faith and in order to encourage and learn from one another through respectful sacred conversation we value time and interaction with other friends who share this rule.

Some CHARACTERIZATIONS OF THE EMERGENT CHURCH-

Protest against the traditional church: Many in the movement were raised in evangelical, conservative or fundamentalist churches. They've come to reject 'seeker sensitive' mega churches and all that entails, such as 'bigger is better' churches, clear lines of authority and/or CEO Pastors, traditional evangelicalism, etc.

Protest against modernism: Modernism is defined as pursuing truth, absolutism, certainty, the cerebral as opposed to the affective - which in turn breeds arrogance, inflexibility, and a lust to be right, the desire to control. Postmodernism by contrast recognizes how much we 'know' is shaped by the culture in which we live, is controlled by emotions, aesthetics and heritage, and can only be intelligently held as part of a common tradition, without overbearing claims to be true or right.

Protest against the mega-church movement: The Emerging Church is defined over against the massive megachurch models and the seeker-sensitive approaches popular among baby-boomer pastors. The formative leaders of the Emerging Church movement argue that they are trying to recover a primitive sense of Christian community that, while keenly aware of contemporary culture and deeply engaged with the culture, avoids consumerism, entertainment-centeredness, and superficiality of mainstream evangelical churches. (R. Albert Mohler Jr.)

Emergents are for deconstruction: Emergents have not sought to be movement builders because that would defy their essential posture of pulling away from everything else. What they are against is often clearer than what they are for. However, they are united in thinking that classical evangelicalism, especially in its Reformed configuration, is part and parcel of modernity. By that they mean it is rationalistic. And by that they mean it imagines that people can know the truth with some certainty. That, they believe, is pretentious, fraudulent and arrogant.

Emergents are doctrinal minimalists. By their very nature emergent are resistant to doctrinal structure that would contain and restrict them. (Both quotes, David F. Wells)

Some INFLUENCES WITHIN THE MOVEMENT-

Dan Kimball's *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* has been well received by many pastors in the seeker sensitive movement. In it Kimball suggests new ways to reach younger generations he believes have moved on generationally and culturally from those who animated the seeker-sensitive movement of the recent past, the so called 'post seeker generation.' Ways Kimball

suggests to reach these new generations are through services with much more symbolism and greater stress on the visual. 'We should have crosses and candles. Perhaps a communion service without a sermon. The entire geography of the room could be different; different groups doing different things the experience should be 'multi-sensory'..." Worship in the emerging church is more about moving back into our spiritual center with Jesus as sole focus" Kimball said

From 1990 to 2000 weekly church attendance dropped from 28% to 8%, but those who said they had spiritual experiences rose from 48% to 76%. There has been a surge in spiritual appetite that is either hostile to religion or has at the least lost confidence in institutionalized religion. This new spirituality is about the *private* search for meaning, it is a self-constructed spirituality. This is because postmoderns trust direct experience but distrust what is mediated. (David Wells)

Rather than large empty church structures emergents have gone to small connected groups, to networking, to being deinstitutionalized, if that's what it takes, to relationships. This resonates with loss that is very deep and painful in the (post) modern psyche. People want to connect and be connected.

Some CRITICISM & POINTS OF CONCERN:

(Common characteristics of emergent conversations)

- 1) The tendency of the emergent church to distrust sure doctrinal convictions, which they believe the church has historically used to wield authority and oppress the weak.
- 2) The belief that all theological convictions and points of doctrine should be held with "humility" (i.e. uncertainty) we should be open to ongoing dialog, in which all opinions and perspectives should be embraced and affirmed.
- 3) The belief that doctrine gets in the way of an interactive relationship with Jesus.
- 4) The belief that salvation has little to do with atoning for guilt and a lot to do with bringing the whole creation back into shalom with its Maker.
- 5) The belief that following Jesus means not believing the right things but living the right way.
- 6) The tendency to act upon the belief that Christianity is not about faith in the Christ that saves but about finding salvation through being a good and loving person.

These characteristics have led to a downplaying of important historic Christian doctrine & thought:

- 1) Substitutionary atonement has often been denied.
- 2) Hell and eternal punishment have been denied.
- 3) It has been suggested that "good moral people" of other faith traditions such as Islam and Hinduism are true members of the Kingdom.
- 4) There has been an acceptance of homosexuality in a loving relationship as a loving moral thing.

The gospel is what Christ has already done for us as Savior, as opposed to what we are to do for God. The primacy of His accomplishment is the essence of our faith. The gospel is good news, not good advice.

Paraphrase, Response to Recent Criticisms from Emergents:

- 1) Thanks to our critics for honest feedback, we readily acknowledge our work like all human endeavors is still flawed.
- 2) We have much to learn from these criticisms, we hope to not react in defensiveness or to respond in kind. We have invited attempted to make personal contact with our critics.
- 3) We have been at times less than charitable in our writing thought and speech; we will try to correct where possible in future editions of our books.
- 4) We respect the desire of our critics to warn those under their care about ideas they consider wrong or dangerous.
- 5) As local church practitioners we ask that the peers of the professional scholars who criticize our work respond to their criticisms; if few come to our defense then we have reason to believe we are mistaken in our thinking.
- 6) We do believe there is such a thing as truth and that truth matters; we are not moral relativists, we believe radical relativism is absurd as is arrogant absolutism, we affirm the historical Trinitarian Christian faith and creeds. We honor the church's great teachers and leaders from the east, west, north and south, we believe no one comes to the father except through Jesus, we strive to teach the scriptures accurately. We regret having been unclear about that. We find great joy in dialogue; throughout church history followers of Jesus came to know what they believe and how by being open to honest critique, we are convinced that open dialog rather than chilling criticism offers the greatest hope for the future of the church. We regret that some of our critics have drawn erroneous conclusions based on selective data. We think many would find suspicions relieved when they visit our churches and see our high regard for the Scripture, truth, worship, evangelism, fellow Christians and our critics.
- 7) There is no single spokesman for our conversation. We define emergent as conversation and friendship. We can't be held responsible for everything said or done by people using terms "emergent" or "emerging church." The conversation is increasingly global and cross-cultural, North American is only a small part. The conversation involves Africa, Asia, Europe and First Nations.
- 8) We are aware some debate whether we are evangelicals; we understand some define the term more narrowly than we do. We will love and respect evangelical Christians whether or not we are accepted by them as evangelicals ourselves. We will affirm a wholehearted devotion to Christ and his gospel, and call people to follow God in the way of Jesus. (Some in some evangelicals ranks want to narrow and politicize the term evangelical to mean strict Calvinist, conservative Republican, hold a specific US, domestic or foreign view, etc...).

Notes:

PERSONALITIES: Probably the 'conversation's' best known author/speaker is Brian McLaren; (author *A New Kind of Christianity, A Generous Orthodoxy*). McLaren's aim in his books and lectures appears to be exploding certainties he thinks controlled too much thinking of Western Christian people in the past.

LABELS: Some in the movement use the terms "emergent" and "emergent village" as part of the emerging church movement, but prefer to use the term "emergent" in a more limited way –referring to Brian McLaren and emergent village. Those within the emerging church movement who do not closely identify with "emergent village" tend to avoid that organization's interest in radical theological reformulation. Some have voice concerns over Brian McLaren and the "emergent thread."

Sources: www.emergentvillage.com, Emerging Church@Monergism.com, *Why We're not Emergent (By Two Guys Who Should Be)*, *The Emerging Church* by D.A. Carson, *Response to Recent Criticisms* by T.Jones, D.Pagitt, S. Burke, B. McLaren, D.Kimball, A. Jones, C.Seay