

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Introducing the Emerging Church, Part 2

Code: A185

Introducing the Emerging Church, Part 2

John MacArthur

The Emerging Church Movement is made up of an admittedly broad and variegated collection of pastors and church leaders, with a common concern for Christian mission within a postmodern generation.

As one author explains:

At the heart of the "movement"--or as some of its leaders prefer to call it, the "conversation"--lies the conviction that changes in the culture signal that a new church is "emerging." Christian leaders must therefore adapt to this emerging church. Those who fail to do so are blind to the cultural accretions that hide the gospel behind forms of thought and modes of expression that no longer communicate with the new generation, the emerging generation. (D.A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005], 12)

Mark Driscoll, an "emerging" pastor himself, defines the movement this way:

The emerging church is a growing, loosely connected movement of primarily young pastors who are glad to see the end of modernity and are seeking to function as missionaries who bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to emerging and postmodern cultures. The emerging church welcomes the tension of holding in one closed hand the unchanging truth of evangelical Christian theology (Jude 3) and holding in one open hand the many cultural ways of showing and speaking Christian truth as a missionary to America (1 Cor. 9:19-23). Since the movement, if it can be called that, is young and is still defining its theological center, I do not want to portray the movement as ideologically unified because I myself swim in the theologically conservative stream of the emerging church. (Mark Driscoll, *Confessions of a Reformation Rev.* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006], 22)

In asserting himself as a theological conservative, however, Driscoll is in the minority among ECM leaders. The neo-liberal thrust embraced by the majority of those in ECM is spearheaded by

Emergent, an organization begun in 2001, which is deliberate in its desire to impact the entire movement.

By 2001, we had formed an organization around our friendship, known as Emergent, as a means of inviting more people into the conversation. Along with us, the "emerging church" movement has been growing, and we in Emergent Village endeavor to fund the theological imaginations and spiritual lives of all who consider themselves a part of this broader movement. (Online Source)

Because of the influence of Emergent, many have seen the term as synonymous with "emerging," referring to the movement as a whole as the Emergent Church Movement. Those who are more conservative, however, differentiate between the terms. As Driscoll writes:

I was part of what is now known as the Emerging Church Movement in its early days and spent a few years traveling the country to speak to emerging leaders in an effort to help build a missional movement in the United States. The wonderful upside of the emerging church is that it elevates mission in American culture to a high priority, which is a need so urgent that its importance can hardly be overstated.

I had to distance myself, however, from one of many streams in the emerging church because of theological differences. Since the late 1990s, this stream has become known as Emergent. The emergent church is part of the Emerging Church Movement but does not embrace the dominant ideology of the movement. Rather the emergent church is the latest version of liberalism. The only differences is that the old liberalism accommodated modernity and the new liberalism accommodates postmodernity. (Driscoll, Confessions, 21)

It is this particular segment of ECM, the *Emergent* Church, that has most blatantly attacked the clarity and authority of the Scripture. And of all the voices that make up Emergent, the most prominent belongs to Brian D. McLaren.

McLaren has been called "the emerging church's most influential thinker," as well as "the *de facto* spiritual leader for the emerging church." He currently serves as the chair of the board of directors for Emergent Village, and is a frequent guest on television programs and radio shows. In February 2005, he was listed as "One of the 25 Most Influential Evangelicals in America" by *Time* Magazine. His books include *A New Kind of Christian*, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, and most-recently *The Secret Message of Jesus*. Though the ECM is admittedly diverse, McLaren has emerged as its most prominent spokesman.

Other ECM leaders include Spencer Burke, Eddie Gibbs, Tony Jones, Dan Kimball, Doug Pagitt, Chris Seay, and Leonard Sweet.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).