

The Emerging Church

Darryl Dash - June 23, 2005

1. Defining the Emerging Church - not an easy task!

1.1. Conversation or movement?

1.2. "Emergent" is a name that is being used at the moment, to describe the church's response to the current emerging culture, and the peculiar aggregation of believers being called up out of this culture to follow Jesus back into it. (Andrew Jones, <http://tinyurl.com/b8r6w>)

1.3. The Emerging Church developed in the late 20th Century into the 21st Century as a conversation in Western Europe, North America, and the South Pacific concerned with the deconstruction and reconstruction of protestant Christianity. Its development stemmed from a mix of a lack of growth in protestant churches, particularly amongst generation x; concern over how the Church would adopt to post-modernity; opposition to fundamentalist doctrines and practices in the modern church; a neglect of ancient Christian tradition and practices; the need for an ecumenical, catholic Church; and increasing suspicion of the missiology of the market-driven, mega-church, and institutionalized Christianity. By 2005, the Emerging Church was also occurring to some extent in Asia, Africa, and South America. Some ecclesial scholars, thinkers, and practitioners affirmed the conversation had become a movement. Since there was no central leadership and no communal doctrines or order, the Emerging Church as a movement was highly debated. Opponents of "movement" argued the emerging church was still a gathering in conversation. (Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emerging_Church)

1.4. My attempt - At the heart of the emerging church is a reexamination or deconstruction of the assumptions of modern Christianity. The emerging church asks if we are practicing and understanding authentic Christianity, or if we have baptized rationalism and the enlightenment and created a pragmatic version of Christianity.

2. Context - reaction to:

2.1. The modern church

Emergent is a reaction to what the Church has to offer and what the Church is today, and what it has to offer is not enough, not good enough, not biblical enough, not spiritual enough, not radical enough, not relevant enough, not in touch with a new generation of young adults who simply will not let the "same old, same old" be what they will tolerate for the Church (which is theirs too)...

...what they see in current Evangelical churches is too much Bible study without changed lives and churches, too much money spent on church buildings and not enough in missional work, too much apologetical articulation and not enough apologetical embodiment, too much old music and not enough edgy music, too much superficiality and not enough honest-to-goodness radical confession and admission of where we really are, too much "get me to heaven" gospel and not enough "Shalom is for the world too" gospel, and too much hierarchy and not enough spreading the gifts to the people. (Scot McKnight, <http://jesuscreed.blogspot.com/2005/05/emergent-reaction.html>)

2.2. The emerging culture - If the Gospel is always communicated within a cultural context, how can it be communicated faithfully in an emerging culture? What were some of the mistakes we made in communicating the Gospel within modernism?

3. History

3.1. Alternative counter-cultural expressions of the church over the past 40 years (e.g. Jesus movement, others globally)

3.2. People and groups have experienced a growing dissatisfaction with modern Christianity, and have grappled with the declining influence of the church within secular cultures (e.g. Canada, U.K. Australia, Poland)

3.3. Theologians fueled debate on some of the issues (e.g. Stanley Grenz, Walter Bruggeman)

3.4. The Internet (especially "blogs") and books like *New Kind of Christian* have spread this conversation

4. Characteristics

- Attract vs. Submerge [or "to the church" vs. "from the church"]
- Church Buildings vs. Proxy Spaces
- Programs vs. Community
- Greek Thinking vs. Hebrew Holistic Thinking [sacred and secular]
- The Event vs. The Process [or "decisions" vs. "the journey"]
- Professional Clergy vs. Empowered Laity [everybody's equal]
- Autocratic vs. Relational Leadership
- Modernism vs. Postmodernism
- Bounded Set vs. Centered Set [or "rigidity" vs. "fluidity"]
- Dated vs. Ancient
- Rule Book vs. The Story

(From Pernell Goodyear,
http://pernell.typepad.com/pernellog/2005/05/lecture_shmectum.html)

5. Strengths

5.1. Authenticity

Carson writes on the value of authenticity as it relates to the traditional church:

We start attending meetings because it is a habit, or because it is the right thing to do, or because we know that the means of grace are important, but not out of a heart-hunger to be with God's people and to be fed from God's Word. Sermons are filled with mere cliches. There is little intensity in confession, little joy in absolution, little delight in the gospel, little urgency in evangelism, little sense of privilege and gratitude in witness, little passion for truth, little compassion for others, little humility in our evaluations, little love in our dealings with others. To expose such inauthenticity is a good thing; to hunger for authenticity in all our existence, not least our walk with God and with other Christians, is a good thing. (Becoming Conversant p.50)

5.2. Emphasis on mission - key word: missional

5.3. Rethinking theology - What is the Gospel? The Emerging Church excels at asking great questions and stimulating discussion (e.g. McLaren), more than providing the answers.

5.4. Rethinking church - ecclesiology, preaching

5.5. Emphasis on justice

5.6. Emphasis on orthopraxy - embodying the Gospel

5.7. Recovery of the arts

6. Concerns

6.1. The pendulum effect

6.2. Fads

6.3. Attitudes - see

http://emergent.typepad.com/jasonclark/2004/08/lovehate_the_em.html

6.4. Hesitancy to challenge culture

6.5. Hesitancy to critique post-modernism as much as it has modernism

6.6. Too generous? - "At what point does an 'orthodoxy' that is more 'generous' than God's become heterodoxy?" (Carson p. 208)

7. Misconceptions

7.1. “The emerging church embraces postmodernism”

I have to keep reminding myself: it's not that modern is bad and postmodern is good. No doubt there are seeds of evil in post-modernity just as there are in modernity. I remember hearing a saying somewhere that he who marries the spirit of the age is sure to be a widow in the next. Give us a century or two of post-modernity and we'll see its fatal flaws as clearly as those of modernity are becoming to us now. (*New Kind of Christian* p. 22)

7.2. The emerging church rejects truth claims

The truth that we know can be called objective, absolute, universal, as long as we recognize that those adjectives describe the truth itself, and not our knowledge of it. We know fallibly and finitely, but we know nonetheless, and what we know we can know truly. (Mills p. 24)

7.3. Brian McLaren or Emergent US = the emerging church

8. Conclusion

8.1. You don't need to become “emerging”

8.2. We can learn from the best of the emerging church - to be authentic, missional, etc.

8.3. Traditional churches have a role in resourcing, blessing, and correcting the emerging church

CHALLENGE 1: I challenge traditional and modern evangelical churches to put your 3 point propositional alliterated ideas on a level LOWER than the Scriptures in your preaching, just as we have done. Its time to come back to the simple, organic, unadulterated words of the Bible, which fade not. Trust me on this one. The Bible speaks more profoundly than our books or sermons or fancy powerpoints. Let God's word be God's word again.

CHALLENGE 2: I challenge Trainers and Educators to move away from the philosophical psychological How-To teaching series and choose instead to just ground people in the Bible - Stop being a motivational speaker and start being a preacher of the Word. Stop your pycho-babble and start giving out the pure word. Less sermon giving and more Bible reading. (Andrew Jones, http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/2005/03/are_we_a_threat_1.html)

I remain convinced that the future of the Church in the West doesn't lie in the Emerging Church movement. The value of this movement is to influence and

provoke the inherited church forms into change rather than to replace them. Still a vital role. (Mark Pierson, <http://tinyurl.com/bt6hl>)

9. Resources

9.1. Websites

<http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/emergant/> - "The skinny on the emerging church - all on one page!"

<http://emergentno.blogspot.com/> - "Exposing and examining those things which are connected to, and promoted by, the 'emerging church' movement" (started by a Fellowship Baptist)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emerging_Church - This entry has been disputed and changed quite a bit lately

<http://www.emergingchurch.info/>

http://emergent.typepad.com/jasonclark/2004/08/lovehate_the_em.html - Some criticism from within

9.2. Books

[Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church](#) by D.A. Carson (Zondervan, 2005)

[The Younger Evangelicals](#) by Robert Webber (Baker Books, 2002)

[A New Kind of Christian](#) by Brian McLaren (Jossey Bass, 2001)

[The Emerging Church](#) by Dan Kimball (Zondervan, 2003)

9.3. Articles

"The Emergent Mystique" (*Christianity Today*, November 2004)

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/011/12.36.html>

"The Emerging Conversation: Unabridged" (*Worship Leader*, March/April 2005) http://www.worshipleader.com/feature_o.htm

"The Emerging Church: Another Perspective - A Critical Response to D.A. Carson's Staley Lectures" by David M. Mills

http://people.cedarville.edu/employee/millsd/mills_staley_response.pdf

http://www.theopedia.com/Emergent_church - Excellent resource!