

[the emergent church]

:: misc ::

We're here tonight to talk about the Emerging Church.

The Emerging Church is a growing and popular movement in Christianity today. If you haven't already, you *are* going to be exposed to this movement, either in a book like *Velvet Elvis* or *Blue Like Jazz* or *The Shack*, in a video teaching by Rob Bell or Erwin McManis or Tony Campolo, maybe a family member or coworker or friend whose church is adopting some of the practices. It's out there and this movement isn't like, say the Mormons, which you can identify immediately when they ride up to your door.

Our desire is to be prepared to defend our faith, as commanded in the Bible, and to have a basic understanding about this movement so that we can protect ourselves from being drawn off by it and that we might lovingly speak with those around who may be influenced by these teachings.

We have a very limited amount of time so let me make a couple initial disclaimers to get a few clarifications and parameters out of the way. By the end of this session, I think you will find that this particular movement is one of the most difficult to quantify and analyze, so for our study this evening, I must make the following statements:

First - Like most apologists who look at this movement, I will be using the words *Emerging* and *Emergent* interchangeably. Some people argue that there is a difference. Some within the movement prefer to be called one over the other, but for all intents and purposes, these words signify the same thing, the same movement, which we will define in just a few moments.

Second - The Emerging Church is not centralized. It is not a denomination or an organized group. Because of this, there are elements of the movement throughout almost every branch of Christianity today. Some churches might have many of the methods and beliefs of the Emerging Church movement, some may have a few, others may have none. It is the leaders, authors, beliefs and methods that we are discussing, not necessarily particular churches or congregations. Our goal tonight is to use a broad brush and paint an overall picture as much as possible.

Third - We are not concluding that members of this movement are not saved. I *will* say that the teachings of the Emerging Church movement **do not lead to the Jesus we find on the pages of Scripture**, but we would not necessarily define this movement as a cult. Instead, what we find is that it is a movement within the protestant, Christian Church that is rife with errors and heresies, but adhering to parts of the teachings or certain methods in the movement does not necessarily mean a person is not saved.

Fourth - Since we are critiquing this movement, our desire is to use source texts as much as possible. I will be referring to 3 critical texts: *Faith Undone*, *Why We're Not Emergent*, and especially *Becoming Conversant With The Emergent Church*, but I will also be citing source texts, quotes and authors as much as time allows. As for specific source texts, I am familiar with a number of books, but during the question and answer period, I will be *most* familiar with Rob Bell's books, *Velvet Elvis* and *Sex*

God, Donald Miller's, *Blue Like Jazz* and William Young's, *The Shack*. I can answer questions about a number of the others, but I have not read all of them in their entirety.

Finally - Our goal in this study, again, is to train ourselves to prepare a defense for our hope and to reach out to friends, family and strangers who have been enticed by this movement. Our desire is to love Emergents and to demonstrate to them the assurance we can have in the Bible, the absolute truth that God has revealed to mankind and the importance of the pure Gospel, delivered once and for all by the Spirit of God.

So, if we're clear on those matters, let's get into it.

First, we need a definition of this movement.

Believe me, this is no easy task. I agree whole-heartedly with author and pastor Kevin DeYoung who writes:

Defining the Emerging Church is like nailing Jell-O to the wall. The "what" and "who" of the movement are almost impossible to define.¹

That said, we need to get a working definition of what this movement actually is.

In his excellent book, *Becoming Conversant With The Emerging Church*, D.A. Carson defines the movement this way:

At the heart of the 'movement' - or as some leaders prefer to call it, the "conversation" - lies the conviction that changes in the culture signal that a new church is "emerging."²

Kevin DeYoung says in his book, *Why We're Not Emergent*:

We are talking about a movement led and inspired by a cadre of authors and pastors, who express many of the same concerns with the evangelical church, hit on many of the same themes, and often speak as the most influential voices in the emergent conversation.³

Wikipedia defines the movement this way:

The emerging church (sometimes referred to as the emergent movement) is a Christian movement of the late 20th and early 21st century that crosses a number of theological boundaries: participants can be described as evangelical, post-evangelical, liberal, post-liberal, charismatic, neocharismatic and post-charismatic. Participants seek to live their faith in what they believe to be a "postmodern" society. Proponents of this movement call it a "conversation" to emphasize its developing and decentralized nature, its vast range of standpoints and its commitment to dialogue. What those involved in the conversation mostly agree on is their disillusionment with the organized and institutional church and

¹ Deyong, Kluck *Why We're Not Emergent* pg. 17

² D.A. Carson *Becoming Conversant With The Emerging Church* pg. 12

³ *ibid.* pg. 16

*their support for the deconstruction of modern Christian worship, modern evangelism, and the nature of modern Christian community.*⁴

Crystal clear, right? Let's hear from the emergent leaders themselves:

Brian McLaren

*We are "exploring off the map" - looking into mysterious territory beyond our familiar world on this side of the river, this side of the ocean, this side of the boundary between modern and postmodern worlds. We are looking into an exciting, unmapped world on other side of **all we know so far**. (emphasis added)*⁵

Leonard Sweet

*I foresee a renaissance, "a rebirth based on a spiritual initiative" ...This new birth will cut through all cultures and all religions and indeed will draw forth the wisdom common to all vital mystical traditions in a global religious awakening I call "deep ecumenism."*⁶

Doug Pagitt

*Perhaps we as Christians today are not only to consider what it means to be a 21st Century Church, but also and perhaps more importantly, what it means to have a 21st Century Faith.*⁷

Rick Warren

*I'm looking for a second reformation. The first reformation of the church 500 years ago was about beliefs. This one is going to be about behavior. The first one was about creeds. This one is going to be about deeds. It is not going to be about what does the church believe, but about what is the church doing.*⁸

Here are a few quotes from participants in the movement:

It's really not a rebellion so much as it's just finding a new set of answers, a different way of being Christian.

I think it's a new reformation. I think it's a new way of looking at the Bible.

*I think it is a movement that will have an impact on all church in the United States.*⁹

Boiling down the quotes I've read from participants, emergent leaders and critics of the movement, along with my understanding of source material, meaning emergent books and sermons, this is my *personal* definition:

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emerging_church

⁵ Roger Oakland *Faith Undone* pg. 14

⁶ Roger Oakland *Faith Undone* pg. 33

⁷ Roger Oakland *Faith Undone* pg. 39

⁸ *ibid.* pg. 49

⁹ Roger Oakland *Faith Undone* pg. 12

The Emergent Church is a current movement within Christianity to redefine the beliefs and practices of the Christian faith. It's desire is to join a multitude of faiths and denominations in a new 'reformation' that challenges the authority of scripture, the traditional structure and doctrines of the Church, discounts prophecy and encourages a socio-economic agenda above salvation through believing on Jesus Christ.

What we need to understand is that the Emerging Church movement sees itself as a new reformation. It says that the current evangelical Church has failed to adapt to the changing world and therefore has become obsolete, intolerant and contrary to what they call the 'true' message of Jesus.

The leaders of the movement are calling for a new reformation where everything we know and do changes so that the Church can stay 'relevant' in the 21st century. They offer a lot of different ways to do that, some we'll see tonight, but there are a lot of them. Brian McLaren offers a 12 step plan for reform, others have different ideas, and others still in the movement say the Church needs to be abandoned altogether and completely redesigned to meet the current times.

The different ideas and theories that the leaders have to 'fix' the Church are often called 'streams.' I tell you this because it is a term you will encounter if you start studying this movement. I don't want to get bogged down, but I want you to know what people are talking about if you start reading up.

For example, Christianity Today identifies 5 streams, in the Emergent Church.¹⁰

Pastor Tim Chaddick has a great study on the movement from a recent pastor's conference. You can find that by Googling 'Tim Chaddick Emergent Church.' He identifies 4 different streams.¹¹

So now that we know what we're talking about, let's get a wide angle picture of what this Movement is all about.

HISTORY

First of all, a brief history. I will say that the history of the Emerging Church is relatively simple.

There are 2 main developments that I think are important to know.

The first is how the term 'emergent' was originally adopted.

Back in the 1990's,¹² there was a conference hosted by the *Leadership Network* to talk about how to minister to Generation X. After that conference a small team was formed to continue **conversing** about Generation X, post-modernism and the church. Thus, the birth of the *Conversation*, what Emerging Church leaders first called their movement and continue to call it today.

This conversation group grew to include Mark Driscoll, Doug Pagitt, Brian McLaren, Chris Seay, Tony Jones and Dan Kimball, among others. Those are some higher profile names in the Church today.

¹⁰ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/february/11.35.html>

¹¹ <http://www.genepensiero.com/jr/blog/2008/07/16/who-are-those-guys-tim-chaddick/>

¹² Roger Oakland *Faith Undone*

Brian McLaren, who, like I said is held by many as the most influential and important leader in the movement, soon rose to team leader of this conversation group, and then, eventually, that group morphed into what they eventually renamed: *Emergent*.¹³

That's the first development we need to know about it.

The second is a bit more subtle, but to me it is very significant.

In the late 1960's two youth workers, named Mike Yaconelli and Wayne Rice, authored a book called *Ideas*, which sought to change the way youth ministry was done.¹⁴

In 1970 these authors held a conference, calling their company *Youth Specialties*. The conference became an annual event and soon Zondervan publishers started distributing the work of these two authors.¹⁵

Over the next 30 years, Zondervan and *Youth Specialties* would partner together to publish over 500 resources for youth ministry.

By 1984, the conference had gone national and sprouted what was called the *National Youth Workers Convention* and the *National Pastors Convention*, along with 100 seminars around the country.

By 1996 *Youth Specialties* formed the *Youth Ministry & Spirituality Project* and contacted the new emergent leaders to work together to share their ideas with pastors and church workers across the nation.¹⁶

Because of *Youth Specialties'* partnership with Zondervan, Emerging Church authors received and continue to receive a wide distribution. This is how they went from obscurity to the national stage.

Now, not all Emergents are part of these 2 groups, but this is simply a condensed Genesis of their popularity.

CORE VALUES

I think the best way to understand the mindset of the movement is to focus on a few core values.

The first and primary idea that you will encounter in Emergent Church literature is the dependence on what they call post-modernism.

Post-modernism means a lot of different things depending on who you're talking to.

¹³ Roger Oakland *Faith Undone*

¹⁴ Roger Oakland *Faith Undone* pg. 35

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ *ibid.*

For the Emerging Church, post-modernism is about **how we know things as human beings**.

Roughly put, we can identify 3 major periods in human history: Pre-modern, Modern and Post-modern. I tell you this because it is a foundational idea and point of discussion in many Emergent books and articles.

In his book *Becoming Conversant With The Emerging Church*, D.A. Carson does a wonderful and thorough job explaining these 3 periods.

Post-modernism is the idea that truth can not be exhaustively or absolutely known. A post-modern looks at science or philosophy or theology and says that since we can not know truth exhaustively, we are not omniscient or all-knowing, since we can not know something exhaustively, then truth is not absolute and it is not objective. Truth, then, is *subjective*. And our understanding of 'what is true' must be based on our culture, the era in which we live and the socio-economic class in which we find ourselves.

Emergents embrace post-modernism because they say that modernism, which values the idea that truth is absolute, has been the cause of incredible evil in the world. They say that absolutism led to the Crusades and the World Wars. They look at modernism and cite it as the root of the evil in corporate greed in capitalism or African genocide or political corruption.

Post-modernism means rejecting the idea that truth is absolute and objective and adopting the idea that truth is relative depending on who, where and when you are. Thus, the goal of human beings then is to discover what is true for them and live by that truth.

Rob Bell

Our words aren't absolutes. Only God is absolute and God has no intention of sharing this absoluteness with anything, especially words people have come up with to talk about Him.¹⁷

God meets people where they are and invites them to the next stage of enlightenment. And then, when they've reached that stage, God invites them to the next stage after that.¹⁸

Brian McLaren

I believe people are saved not by objective truth, but by Jesus. Their faith isn't in their knowledge, but in God.¹⁹

Since truth is not objective, then relating to God must NOT be through beliefs or knowledge, but instead it is by personal experience, as we become more 'enlightened' and in tune with the undefinable presence of God. This is the conclusion of a post-modern.

Leonard Sweet

The Way is not a method or a map. The Way is an experience.²⁰

¹⁷ Velvet Elvis pg. 23

¹⁸ Sex God pg. 136-137

¹⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brian_McLaren

²⁰ Leonard Sweet *SoulTsunami*

*A spiritual tsunami has hit post-modern culture. This wave will build without breaking for decades to come...The wave is this: people want to **know** God. They want less to know **about** God or know **about** religion than to know God. People want to experience the 'beyond' in the 'within.'*²¹

So, since truth is not absolute, then knowing God becomes about my personal experience and my opinions about Him. That means that I, the individual, become authority on who God is and what He wants. Of course, what is true for me may not be true for you. This is called relativism and it is the attitude that emergents share to either a greater or lesser degree.

This is the foundation of how the Emerging Church movement works. This is the foundation of their methods and teachings.

Now, when we take a group of people who believe that truth is relative and bring them into a conservative evangelical church, what do you think the result is? The result is another core value: **disapproval of the evangelical Church.**

Emergents are disenchanted with the Church, especially in America. The problem is that one group is saying that God has revealed Himself and has made truth very clear to us and another group is saying that truth can't really be known and who are we to judge the beliefs of others? After all, God cares only about our experience, not knowledge or belief.

So emergents accept almost every other faith and denomination other than the conservative, evangelical Church, who they see as intolerant, bigoted and capitalistic. They say that we do not help the poor or love others. They say a lot of things, but let me let them speak for themselves:

Erwin McManus

*My goal is to destroy Christianity as a world religion and be a recatalyst for the movement of Jesus Christ.*²²

Rob Bell

*God is bigger than the Christian faith.*²³

Dan Kimball

{describing fundamental Christians}

*[they are] always saying negative things about the world, [they are] anti-gay, take the whole Bible literally, are card-carrying Republicans, are pro-Israel, read end-times novels, endorse snake handling and fire-and-brimstone preaching. [They are] finger-pointing...vengeful people who credit God for using natural disasters to punish people for sin and who use Christian jargon and are arrogant and unloving toward anyone but themselves.*²⁴

Donald Miller

²¹ *ibid.*

²² Faith Undone pg. 166

²³ Rob Bell *Velvet Elvis* pg. 27

²⁴ Dan Kimball *They Like Jesus But Not The Church* pg. 191

I was a fundamentalist Christian once. It lasted a summer...I was a real jerk I think. I hit my self-righteous apex while working at a fundamentalist Christian camp in Colorado...I am absolutely ashamed to admit this now.

For me, the beginning of sharing my faith with people began by throwing out Christianity and embracing Christian spirituality, a nonpolitical mysterious system that can be experienced but not explained.²⁵

Interestingly, a majority of Emergent authors and leaders came from incredibly conservative denominations or churches. Many felt abused at those churches or were abused by them in one way or another.

So, we know that emergents believe that truth can not be objective or absolute. We know that they are disenchanted with the American evangelical church.

A third important value in this movement is **doubt of the Biblical text**.

Emergents see the Bible not as a literal, inspired book, but as an 'unfolding narrative' about God, which may or may not contain inconsistencies and errors. It is a narrative, not a guide to life. It is a narrative, not a comprehensive revelation of God to man.

Brian McLaren

This narrative approach does not lessen the agony one feels reading the conquest of Canaan with the eyes of one taught by Jesus to love all...but it helps turn the Bible back into what it is, not a look-it-up encyclopedia of timeless moral truths, but the unfolding narrative of God at work...calling people...into a new way of life.²⁶

Although I do find the term inerrancy useful...I would prefer the word 'inherency' to describe my view of the Scripture.²⁷

Donald Miller

Now, some people process the account of original sin in the book of Genesis as metaphor, as symbolism for something else that happened; but whether you take it metaphorically or literally, this serves as an adequate explanation of the human struggle that every person experiences: loneliness, crying yourself to sleep at night, addiction, pride, war, and self-addiction.²⁸

Will Sampson

A rallying cry of the Protestant Reformation was 'sola scriptura', or Scripture alone. And while this doctrine may have arisen as a necessary corrective to abuses of church leadership in the Reformation period, it is in full effect today. Preachers speak of the Bible as an instruction book or as the only data necessary for spiritual living. But this diminishes some critical elements of theological knowledge...'Sola scriptura' also tends to downplay the role of God's Spirit in shaping the direction of

²⁵ Donald Miller *Blue Like Jazz* pg. 79, 115

²⁶ D.A. Carson *Becoming Conversant With The Emergent Church* pg. 163-164

²⁷ svchapel.org *The Emerging Church part 3*

²⁸ Donald Miller *Blue Like Jazz* pg. 32

*the Church.*²⁹

Rob Bell

*The more people insist that they are just taking the Bible for what it says, the more skeptical I get. Which for me raises one huge question: Is the Bible the best God can do?*³⁰

...the Bible is open-ended.

*It is not possible to simply do what the Bible says. We must first make decisions about what it means at this time, in this place, for those people.*³¹

*...the Bible itself...is a book that constantly must be wrestled with and re-interpreted.*³²

Erwin McManus

*I build my life not on the Word of God, but the voice of God. The Scriptures are to me the instrument that God has placed in history for me to learn the voice of God. I treasure the Scriptures.*³³

B.J. Woodworth

*We need to rediscover what it means to read the Bible existentially and experientially.*³⁴

For Emergents, the Bible is starting point where we can find things that may or may not be true for us. They focus on the teachings of Jesus, largely neglecting the Old Testament or rejecting sections that they feel are not aligned with their social justice stances or ideas about tolerance. The Sermon on the Mount is especially revered and is seen as the foundational platform for human and governmental behavior.

Now, when you mix relative truth with a view of the Bible that is not literal or authoritative, you find yourself believing a lot of things that are neither Biblical or orthodox.

Let's take a fast look at a couple important issues.

CONCERNING GOD

The popularity of William P. Young's novel *The Shack* has brought about an acceptable version of modalism and a breakdown of the orthodox view of the Trinity, a God who changes depending on our needs and terms.

The sentiment is echoed in this quote from Rob Bell:

²⁹ Roger Oakland *Faith Undone* pg. 48

³⁰ Rob Bell *Velvet Elvis* pg. 44

³¹ *ibid.* pg. 46

³² *ibid.*

³³ Relevant Magazine *In That Smoky Room*

³⁴ appraising.org *Emerging With A Christian View Of Scripture*

Take for example the doctrine...called the Trinity. This doctrine is central to historic, orthodox Christian faith. While there is only one God, God is somehow present everywhere. People began to call this presence, this power of God His "Spirit." So there is God, and then there is God's Spirit. And then Jesus comes among us and has this oneness with God that has people saying things like God has visited us in the flesh. So God is one, but God has also revealed Himself to us as Spirit and then as Jesus.

The word Trinity is not found anywhere in the Bible...it was added later. We can take it out and examine it. Discuss it, probe it, question it. It flexes and stretches.³⁵

Steven Chalke

The Bible...in fact never defines Him as anything other than love. But more than that, it never makes assertions about His anger, power or judgment independently of His love.³⁶

Christian Mystic

God cannot be reached by logic or captured by thought.³⁷

CONCERNING JESUS

Rob Bell

Jesus at one point claimed to be "the way, the truth and the life." Jesus was not making claims about one religion being better than all other religions. That completely missed the point, the depth and the truth. Rather, he was telling those who were following him that his way is the way to the depth of reality.³⁸

CONCERNING THE CROSS

Brian McLaren

The cross isn't the center [of Jesus' message]...the cross is almost a distraction and false advertising for God.³⁹

[speaking of the Cross]

That just sounds like one more injustice in the cosmic equation. It sounds like divine child abuse.⁴⁰

The cross shows God's rejection of the human violence and dominance and oppression that have spun the world in a cycle of crisis.⁴¹

Steven Chalke

A dying savior is no savior.

³⁵ Rob Bell *Velvet Elvis* pg. 22

³⁶ D.A Carson *Becoming Conversant With The Emerging Church* pg. 183

³⁷ www.christianmystics.com

³⁸ Rob Bell *Velvet Elvis* pg. 21

³⁹ Roger Oakland *Faith Undone* pg. 192

⁴⁰ D.A. Carson *Becoming Conversant...* pg. 166

⁴¹ *ibid.* 167

The Church's inability to shake off the **great distortion** of God contained in the **theory** of penal substitution...has cost us dearly.⁴²
 (emphasis added)
 ...such a concept stands in total contradiction to the statement 'God is love.'⁴³

CONCERNING THE SIN NATURE

Donald Miller

I have always agreed with the idea that we have a sin nature. I don't think it looks exactly like the fundamentalists say it does, 'cause I know so many people who do great things, but I do buy the idea we are flawed, that there is something in us that is broken.⁴⁴

Rob Bell

I can't find one place in the teachings of Jesus, or in the Bible for that matter, where we are to identify ourselves first and foremost as sinners.⁴⁵

On a May 16, 2007 radio interview, emergent leader Doug Pagitt says that he disagrees with "the concept of the depravity of man."⁴⁶

CONCERNING HEAVEN/HELL

Rob Bell

To the Jewish mind, heaven is not a fixed, unchanging geographical location, somewhere other than this world. Heaven is the realm where things are as God intends them to be...And that place can be anywhere, anytime with anybody.

There must be a realm where things are not as God wants them to be. Where things aren't according to God's will. Where people aren't treated as fully human. It's called hell.⁴⁷

When Jesus uses the word 'gehenna'...[He] is talking about a present reality.⁴⁸

Brian McLaren implicitly denies the existence of hell.⁴⁹

Ok. So it seems like they just choose to not believe in things that make them uncomfortable. This is because they are essentially existentialists who reference the words of Jesus and try to Christianize their language enough to sound like they are in the same faith as other Christians.

⁴² <http://apprising.org/2007/04/evangelicals-attacking-the-atonement/>

⁴³ D.A Carson *Becoming Conversant With The Emerging Church* pg. 185

⁴⁴ Donald Miller *Blue Like Jazz* pg. 17

⁴⁵ Rob Bell *Velvet Elvis* pg. 139

⁴⁶ <http://apprising.org/2008/09/emerging-church-pastor-doug-pagitt/>

⁴⁷ Rob Bell *Sex God* pg. 21

⁴⁸ Rob Bell *Velvet Elvis* pg. 57

⁴⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brian_McLaren

But what do they believe in?

They believe that social justice is the key to God's plan for the earth. Theirs is a social Gospel, a message that is centered around raising the quality of life for the poor and little more. Part of their social justice is erasing distinctions between religions and denominations, into an all-encompassing, worldwide ecumenical group.

CONCERNING SOCIAL JUSTICE

Rob Bell

In the Scriptures, anything that's anti-human is anti-God.⁵⁰

The healing of the nations is the dream of the Jewish prophets, the dream of God - for everybody to finally get along.⁵¹

Emergent Manifesto (Tony Jones & Doug Pagitt)

This new collective spirituality leads people into a [socialistic community](#) where rituals, practices, and social justice become a means of salvation, but not the salvation you think of in a personal sense of being born-again through Jesus Christ. This is a collective salvation that includes whole cultures and communities who follow the way of someone referred to as Jesus.⁵²

One of the primary demonstrations of this value is Pastor Rick Warren's P.E.A.C.E. plan, which is a huge movement to join denominations, religions and governments together to throw out creeds and dogmas in favor of social-justice programs to feed and clothe those in need and protect the environment.

Rick Warren

I'm not talking about a religion this morning. You may be Catholic or Protestant or Buddhist or Baptist or Muslim or Mormon or Jewish or you may have no religion at all. I'm not interested in your religious background. Because God did not create the universe for us to have religion.⁵³

The Church, in all its expressions - Catholic, Evangelical, Pentecostal, Protestant and many others - has 2.3 billion followers...Let's use the grassroots network that is already on the ground. It's time to lay aside our prejudices and work together.⁵⁴

Dwight Longenecker

As we enter the third millennium, Catholicism, Evangelicalism and Orthodoxy will continue to converge...old cultural, national and doctrinal controversies will become increasingly irrelevant.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Rob Bell *Sex God* pg. 19

⁵¹ *ibid.* pg. 166

⁵² <http://www.crossroad.to/News/Church/emergent.html>

⁵³ Roger Oakland *Faith Undone* pg. 174

⁵⁴ *ibid.* pg. 224

⁵⁵ Roger Oakland *Faith Undone* pg. 129

This social-justice value that they have is centered around the idea that Jesus really only talked about helping the poor and almost nothing else.

Obviously, these views on ignoring differences in order to better socio-economic problems leads to a very unbiblical view of evangelism.

CONCERNING EVANGELISM

Brian McLaren

*We place less emphasis on whose lineage, rites, doctrines, structures and terminology are right and more emphasis on whose actions, service, outreach, kindness and effectiveness are good.*⁵⁶

Rob Bell

*Missions then is less about the transportation of God from one place to another and more about the identification of a God who is already there.*⁵⁷

*It's not that passion and love and exhilaration are in one place and Jesus is somewhere else. Wherever you find those, you are finding God.*⁵⁸

Stanley Grenz

*[we must not ask the question] Which religion is true? [rather, we must ask] What end is most ultimate, even if many are real?*⁵⁹

Dan Kimball

*In a post-Christian world, pluralism is the norm. Buddhism, Wicca, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, or an eclectic blend - it's all part of the soil.*⁶⁰

Rick Warren

*I happen to know people who are followers of Christ in other religions.*⁶¹

Thomas Merton

*I see no contradiction between Buddhism and Christianity.*⁶²

Leonard Sweet

One can be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ without denying the flickers of the sacred in followers of Yahweh, Kali or Krishna.

Brian McLaren

⁵⁶ <http://www.svchapel.org/resources/articles/21-church-trends/506-the-emerging-church-part-3>

⁵⁷ Rob Bell *Velvet Elvis* pg. 87

⁵⁸ *ibid.* pg. 92

⁵⁹ D.A. Carson *Becoming Conversant With The Emerging Church* pg. 132

⁶⁰ Roger Oakland *Faith Undone* pg. 14

⁶¹ Roger Oakland *Faith Undone* pg. 179

⁶² *ibid.*

*I don't believe making disciples must equal making adherents to the Christian religion.*⁶³

On every level you see emergent leaders fighting against doctrinalism. There is, in fact, a strong belief that having doctrines has led to great abuses in the Church.

Bottom line, the movement is a decide-what-you-want-about-life philosophy, as long as you are tolerant of everyone except conservative Christianity, for which emerging authors admit they have no patience or affection.

Within this philosophy everything is up for grabs; whether Jesus really died on the cross, whether He was truly virgin born, whether heaven and hell exist or if the Devil is just a metaphor (as Brian McLaren believes⁶⁴). None of it really matters all that much because it is your experience that is the most significant part of spirituality and social justice is the real directive God has given mankind, that we might create His kingdom here on the earth before His return.

What matters is that you accept everyone (except conservative Christianity) and live in a way that is enjoyable to yourself and supportive of social justice.

We don't have time to talk about their methodology. Our previous studies on the Emergent Church are archived online with references and go deeper into some of their practices. For more detail check those, but for now let me just quickly list a few and then we can discuss them afterward if you'd like.

These are the prominent features that you will encounter not just in the literature, but even here in town.

There's the adoption of the eastern practices of meditation and mantra. Contemplative prayer, which specifically utilizes Buddhist and Hindu methods, along with prayer mazes to draw you deeper into a new level of prayer. There is the practice of what they call ancient-future worship that combines ritual, art and experimentation in a multi-sensory service. There's the fascination and adoption of the Roman Catholic sacrament of the Eucharist, along with the use of the Rosary and prescribed Judaic prayers.

So where does this leave us?

The Emerging Church is full of sincere people who feel that a change is necessary. Though they have abandoned the Bible and orthodox Christian teachings, there are a number of attributes they have that are admirable.

To name a few:

Their desire to live what we would call *missional* lives. It's the idea that we are to live out our faith every day, everywhere we go. This is an admirable characteristic, one that we should share.

Their willingness to love others, despite differences, is an admirable characteristic, one that we should share.

⁶³ *ibid.* pg. 173

⁶⁴ D.A Carson *Becoming Conversant With The Emerging Church* pg. 182

Their rejection of carnal materialism, though not always as genuine as they might have you believe, is an admirable characteristic.

Their focus on helping others. Their willingness to challenge human traditions and to try new methods are admirable qualities.

Their love of community and unity is admirable.

These are things that they herald, sometimes for the wrong reasons, and quite often with the wrong goal in mind, but these are things that remind us of the actual truth of Jesus, as revealed to us in the Bible, which values these attitudes as well, though centers and focuses them differently.

We do need to be less materialistic. We do need to be more accepting of unbelievers, not their beliefs, but they themselves should feel welcome and loved in our presence. We do need to understand that as a congregation we are a community of people that should be living out what we believe every day in every way. We should be helping those less fortunate than us. We should be genuine with people we encounter.

So we're left with one final and fundamental question that we should ask ourselves:

Is the Emerging Church a group of prophets sent by God with a message of repentance and reformation?

If a fellow believer is calling for repentance or reform, it is important that we not simply ignore them, but instead we must evaluate that message.

When we look at the Emerging Church, when we look at their teachings and their influences, when we look at their goals, their treatment of the Scriptures and their attitude toward truth and belief, I think it is clear that our Emergent brothers and sisters are in terrible error in key parts of their thinking.

You need to be ready to spot the signs of this movement in the books or videos or sermons that family members or friends send your way.

More importantly, we need to have an answer for any questions that they might have or accusation they may make about our faith in Christ.

First, addressing their anger or disenchantment with traditional evangelicalism, we would say that the problems they find in one church do not transfer to all other churches.

Has there been problems in American Churches with materialism and greed? Yes. We think of televangelists, as the emergents do, and are saddened by the health-and-wealth, prosperity doctrines. But just because one church or one group participates in *those* errors does not make every orthodox church guilty of it.

Are some Christians and churches intolerant of sinners, even hateful toward them? Yes. Does that mean we too are guilty of that sin? No.

Second, concerning the issue of truth and the Bible, if truth cannot be known then we might as well close down the church and live independently. If God has not objectively revealed Himself, then what chance do we have that we are approaching Him correctly?

In his book *Blue Like Jazz*, Donald Miller says:

At the end of the day, when I am lying in bed and I know the chances of any of our theology being exactly right are a million to one, I need to know that God has things figured out, that if my math is wrong we're still going to be okay.⁶⁵

But that is illogical. If truth is subjective, then nothing matters. If we are the authority on what is right and what is wrong, then the whole perspective that we should help our fellow man breaks down. Everything breaks down. Because, if God is not the authority, if the Bible is not the authority, then *I* am the authority, and thus whatever I want to do is 'right' for me. We know that this cannot be, because we know that there is indeed absolute truth that transcends time and culture and that God has revealed it to us that we might have the life and lifestyle that He desires for us.

Finally, we must appeal to the Scriptures with our Emergent friends, and show them that despite their belief that it doesn't matter what you believe, the Bible is clear that unless a man is born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God, and that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.

The Bible must be our authority, not ourselves. And Jesus and authors of the Bible were very clear that what you believe is very, very important.

John 3.18 - Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

What we believe *and* how we live are important. We must have a compass, we must have a confidence, we must be centered on Jesus Christ, who came in the volume of the Book that we might live in a way that glorifies Him and draws other to Him, that they too might hear the Good News and be saved.

⁶⁵ Donald Miller *Blue Like Jazz* pg. 206