

Weathering The Storm

:: key elements ::

Last time we were together we started a series discussing the Emerging or Emergent Church Movement.

Tonight we need to talk about the key elements of the Emerging Church. We only have a few minutes, so we can't possibly discuss everything involved in the movement. Instead we are going to focus on the most predominant and widespread issues.

Now, there are a couple of things we need to remember while we look at these teachings. First, it must be stated that the Emerging Church Movement is not organized like a denomination. It is a term used for a variety of churches, practices and writings. There is no definitive definition or group that we can box up and examine. What we are doing is simply looking at the over-arching character of the movement and we are focusing on the foundational teachings and beliefs that most if not all Emergents share.

Second, we must remember that our goal is not to bad-mouth these people. We don't mean to attack anyone's character or ministry. What we do want to do is educate ourselves about this fast-growing movement and be ready to give a defense where it is needed. The best way for us to do that is to quote these pastors and authors directly, no middle man, no name-calling, finger-pointing or propaganda, just the beliefs of these men from the men themselves. It is our belief that the Emerging Church Movement has some very serious, very dangerous errors and we do not ascribe to their teachings. However, we must not forget that the people involved in this movement are all loved by God and He desires to restore them into a healthy relationship with Him.

There are many key elements in the Emerging Church, as I said it would be impossible to discuss all of them in just a few minutes.

One key element is called "orthopraxy," which means, 'how a person lives' is much more important than 'what he or she believes.'¹ This is an important underlying attitude of the Movement.

Social justice is quite important in the Emerging Church and is often the focus **above** doctrine and theology. One current example, Rick Warren is working on what he calls the "P.E.A.C.E. Plan," which is an all-inclusive, social action cause which circumvents Biblical teaching or doctrine in favor of economic stability.²

It may seem strange, but *language, or, vocabulary* is keenly important to this movement.

Emergents talk about relating to God within our own cultural language constructs. In his book, *The Story We Find Ourselves In*, Emergent Leader Brian McLaren talks about being "stuck" within language.³

McLaren, Leonard Sweet and Jerry Haselmayer have written a book entitled: *A Is For Abductive: The Language Of The Emerging Church*. One of the authors writes within:

¹<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/february/11.35.html>

²Roger Oakland, *Faith Undone*, pg 145-149

³Brian, McLaren, *The Story We Find Ourselves In* pg 28

"People...were insisting on a beginner's guide to the pathway of postmodern ministry." Here it is. There is no right or wrong place to begin—just pick a letter and start reading. You'll acquire new words for a new world that will change how you think about church, about ministry, and about what it means to follow in Jesus' footsteps—entering today's culture in order to love it, serve it, and lead it home to God.⁴

Language and vocabulary are very important because to the Emerging Church faith is about "the conversation," more than belief, "discussion" more than doctrine. In fact, most Emergent writers and pastors refer to their movement and their belief system as "The Conversation."

What does that mean? It means that Emergent literature is filled with philosophical riddles and existential reasoning. Scot McKnight, a professor of religious studies at North Park Theological Seminary and self-proclaimed Emergent writer says that emergents, "embrace the idea that we cannot know absolute truth."⁵ Thus, a great amount of time is given to circular discussions about how we can never really know the truth, we can never really know God, we can never really know anything.

What does that lead to? Well, age, location and social standing determines individual truth in the Emerging Church. What is true for a Californian may be very different from what is true for the African, Indian or European, including how you get to heaven.⁶

Another key element in the Emergent Movement is ancient-future worship, meaning the blending of traditions and rituals from the dark ages with our own traditions and styles. We will talk about Emergent worship in a coming week.

Another important aspect of the Emerging Church that we will cover in a coming week is 'mysticism.'

Brian McLaren states, "we don't just offer 'answers;' we offer mysteries."⁷

Matthew Fox says, "I foresee a renaissance...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.'"⁸

Finally tonight, a key element in the Emergent Movement is what is called, "Kingdom Now theology." Emergent leader and author Doug Pagitt writes:

"The Kingdom of God is a central conversation in emerging communities...and let me tell you, 'Kingdom of God' language is really big in the emerging church."⁹

Emergents generally believe that the Kingdom of God can be attained through our actions, through social change, through governmental peace. They generally do not believe in Biblical prophecy as a literal telling of the future, but instead believe that we can usher in God's heavenly kingdom by right-living and spiritual unity.

⁴<http://www.brianmclaren.net/archives/books/brians-books/a-is-for-abduct.html>

⁵<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/february/11.35.html>

⁶<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/february/11.35.html>

⁷Brian McLaren, *Church On Other Side*, pg 78-85

⁸Roger Oakland, *Faith Undone*, pg. 33

⁹Roger Oakland, *Faith Undone*, pg. 142

This is just the surface of the Emergent Church. If you would like more information feel free to talk to me or email me, and please stop by the bookstore to pick up a copy of Faith Undone by Roger Oakland.

This movement is growing and is influencing the face of the American church. We need to educate ourselves about who these people are and what they believe.

Our foundation is in Jesus Christ and His Word. If we remain grounded on the Rock we will be able to weather any storm.