

What is the Emerging Church?



David Cloud

What Is the Emerging Church?
Copyright 2008 by David Cloud
This edition February 24, 2016
ISBN 978-1-58318-112-6



Published by Way of Life Literature
P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061
866-295-4143 (toll free) • fbns@wayoflife.org
<http://www.wayoflife.org>

Canada: Bethel Baptist Church,
4212 Campbell St. N., London, Ont. N6P 1A6
519-652-2619

Printed in Canada by
Bethel Baptist Print Ministry

Table of Contents

What Is the Emerging Church?.....	7
The Emerging Church's Influence.....	8
Everything Is Changing	10
How and When Did the Emerging Church Begin?	12
Two Streams of the Emerging Church.....	14
A Great Blending and Merging.....	17
The Liberal Emerging Church.....	25
Leading Voices.....	26
A Magnet for Rebels.....	38
Complicated	42
What You Won't Find in the Liberal Emerging Church	45
Hypocrisy	45
Straw Man Argumentation	45
A New Dictionary	48
Refusing to Acknowledge the Relativism of Its Stance	49
Misusing Scripture.....	50
Truth Mixed with the Error	52
Errors of the Liberal Emerging Church	54
Rejecting the Infallible Inspiration and Sole Authority of Scripture.....	54
No Clear Testimony of Salvation	67
A Non-Dogmatic Approach to Doctrine	79
Glorifying Doubt Over Faith.....	96
Contemplative Mysticism	103
A Social-Justice, Kingdom-Building Gospel.....	221
Theistic Evolution	252
Rejection of Dispensational Theology and the Imminency of Christ's Return.....	255
Low Key About Evangelism.....	266
Worldliness	271
Loving to Drink.....	296
Ecumenism.....	302
Tending Toward Universalism	312

Downplaying Hell	334
Weak on the Issue of Homosexuality.....	340
Weak on the Substitutionary Atonement.....	349
Female Church Leaders.....	357
The Conservative Emerging Church	361
Some Influential Voices	363
New Evangelicalism Set the Stage for the Emerging Church...364	
Errors of the Conservative Emerging Church	371
Worldliness	371
Contemplative Mysticism	381
The “Incarnational Doctrine”	381
A Positive, Non-Judgmental Approach	389
Ecumenicalism	394
Traditional Ways of Evangelism and Church Planting No Longer Work.....	396
Anti-Fundamentalist	400
A Social Justice, Kingdom-Building Emphasis	406
Rejecting “Agenda” of Winning the Lost to Christ.....	407
Only “Major” Doctrines Should Be Points of Division Among Christians.....	411
Music Is a Matter of Preference	416
Rejection of Dispensational Theology and the Imminency of Christ’s Return.....	422
Brian McLaren: The Emerging Church’s Biggest Mouth	426
A Review of “A New Kind of Christian”	426
Quotes from Other Books and Articles by McLaren	430
Conclusion	439
Cain: The First Emergent Worshiper	440
Charles Spurgeon Exposed the Emerging Church.....	442
Bibliography	445
INDEX.....	453

*What Is the
Emerging Church?*

SAMPLE

What Is the Emerging Church?

“We’re all trying to stumble along and take some steps in the right direction” --Brian McLaren

Nothing has made me more conscious of the vicious battle that is raging for the very life and soul of Bible-believing churches than my research into the emergent church. It is frightful, because so many are falling into the devil’s trap and so many more will doubtless fall in the coming days.

Emerging church leaders have the objective of proselytizing our children and grandchildren. In his 2008 book *Finding Our Way Again: The Return of the Ancient Practices*, Brian McLaren describes his plan to infiltrate churches and Christian institutions that are currently rejecting the emerging church. He says:

“But over time, what they reject will find or create safe space outside their borders and become a resource so that many if not most of the grandchildren of today’s fundamentalists will learn and grow and move on from the misguided battles of their forebears [Biblicist Christians]” (p. 133).

McLaren is saying that emerging church teachers will infiltrate Biblicist churches from without through “resources” such as books, videos, and web sites. That is exactly how New Evangelicalism has so deeply infiltrated fundamental Baptist churches over the past two decades and it is doubtless how the more radical emerging church doctrines will infiltrate over the coming decades. It is more imperative than ever that pastors train their people to discern the error of these heresies and that they exhort them to avoid the writings of false teachers. It is imperative that fundamentalist Bible Colleges and Institutes prepare their students to resist this tide of error. Too often it can be said of Bible-believing churches today what was said of Israel of old, “*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge*” (Hosea 4:6).

The average member of a fundamentalist Bible-believing church is not equipped to deal effectively with the spiritual dangers that lurk on the shelves of the typical Christian bookstore and on the airwaves of the typical Christian radio station. The average church

member receives little practical warning from his pastors and teachers and has no interest in building a library of material that can help protect him from spiritual dangers. If this situation is not rectified, the Brian McLaren of this world will doubtless devour many of our children and grandchildren.

At the same time, it is exciting to study the emerging church, because it reminds us that the hour is very, very late and we need to be busy in the Lord's service and always "looking up."

At the Soularize gathering in 2002 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Brian McLaren said, "This is a small part of something very big and in its very early stages."

We could not agree more, but when it reaches terminal velocity, the Antichrist himself will be at the helm!

I have made a great effort to understand the emerging church. In the past several months I have read more than 80 books and a great many articles by emerging church leaders and their teachers.

In a movement as complicated and diverse as this, there will be exceptions to the rules, but I am confident that the following review is an accurate representation of the emerging church movement as a whole.

The Emerging Church's Influence

The *emerging church* is the name that has been coined for a new approach to missions and church life among some "evangelicals" for these present times.

In reality, the emerging church is simply the latest heresy within the broad tent of evangelicalism. It is the twenty-first century face of New Evangelicalism. When the "neo-evangelicalism" swept onto the scene in the late 1940s with its bold repudiation of "separatism" and its emphasis on dialogue with heretics, the door was left open for every sort of heresy to infiltrate the "evangelical" fold, and that is precisely what has happened. The Bible does not warn in vain, "*Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners*" (1 Corinthians 15:33).

Emerging church teaching tends to be complicated, convoluted, contradictory, and confusing.

Coming to grips with it is like trying to pin a glass marble to a table with an ice pick. It is movable and if forced to stand still and be consistent, it shatters!

In addition, it is evolving as I write, and there is a “conservative” side to the emerging church issue that further complicates things.

Regardless, we must deal with the emerging church because its influence is growing.

Dwight Friesen of the Emergent Village says, “... we have a few thousand churches in the United States and more around the world” (“Emergent Village and Full Communion,” a paper presented to the National Council of Churches Faith & Order Commission, March 17, 2007, <http://dwightfriesen.blog.com/1616648/>).

Emerging church books are published by evangelical publishers such as Zondervan, InterVarsity, and Baker.

Brian McLaren, a prominent and very liberal emerging church voice, was included in *Time* magazine’s list of the 25 most influential evangelicals in America in 2005

The exceedingly influential Rick Warren has promoted McLaren on his *Ministry Toolbox* web site. Warren also recommends emergent Leonard Sweet’s book *Soul Tsunami* (his recommendation is printed on the cover), which says, “It is time for a Postmodern Reformation ... Reinvent yourself for the 21st century or die” (p. 75). Warren and Sweet collaborated on an audio set entitled *Tides of Change*, and Sweet was scheduled to speak at Saddleback Church in January 2008 for a small groups training conference.

In October 2001, Sweet spoke for the Southern Baptist Convention’s Lifeway Christian Resources in Nashville.

The emerging church is also supported by Bill Hybels and Willow Creek Community Church. Emergents Brian McLaren, Scot McKnight, and Shane Claiborne spoke at Willow Creek’s Shift conference in April 2008.

In the section on Blending and Merging we will give more documentation on the emerging church’s influence within evangelicalism.

Everything Is Changing

The emerging church emphasizes the fact that great changes are occurring throughout the world, and particularly in North American and British society. They use the terms “postmodern” or “post-Christian” to describe this, and they contend that since the world is changing, the churches must change.

In addition to “post-modern” they use terms such as “new paradigm” and “paradigm shift” (a change in one’s worldview), “tipping point,” “changing times,” and “transformation.”

Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger write, “The church must recognize that we are in the midst of a cultural revolution and that nineteenth-century (or older) forms of church do not communicate clearly to twenty-first-century cultures” (*Emerging Church*, p. 17).

Long-time Wheaton College professor Robert Webber wrote in 1999:

“Currently, Western society is in a transition from the modern world to a postmodern world. The new revolutions ... are shifting us toward the affirmation of new values. ... These shifts are resulting in a whole new culture and raise new questions about the way a biblical Christianity is to be understood and communicated” (*Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World*, p. 15).

Dan Kimball describes this change in his book *The Emerging Church*:

In the post-Christian era ... the values and beliefs of a person raised in America are shaped by a global, pluralistic atmosphere. This person has instant exposure to global news, global fashion, global music, and global religions. There are many gods, many faiths, many forms of spiritual expression from which to choose. In a postmodern atmosphere, a person grows up learning that all faiths are equal but that Christianity is primarily a negative religion, known for finger-pointing and condemning the behavior of others. In this atmosphere, the Ten Commandments aren’t taught and the Bible is simply one of many religious writings. Ethics and morals are based on personal choice, as families encourage their children to make their own decisions about religion and

to be tolerant of all beliefs. A major influence on a postmodern person's ethics and morals is what they learn from the media and what is accepted by their peers. ... relativism is more of a norm. ...

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. The basis of learning has shifted from logic and rational, systematic thought to the realm of experience. People increasingly long for the mystical and the spiritual rather than the evidential and facts-based faith of the modern soil [referring to the 20th century]. The way people respond and think is more fluid than systematic, more global than local, more communal than individualistic. And in postmodern soil a high value is placed on personal preference and choice, as opposed to predetermined truth. ...

At the University of California at Santa Cruz ... the non-Christian student religious groups on campus conspicuously outnumber the Christian groups. They have a Muslim group, a Buddhist group, a Baha'i group, even a Wiccan group. Religious diversity such as once was found only in metropolitan areas now flourishes in suburbs and rural areas. ... The times are definitely changing as we see all types of religious faiths in mainstream America. ... Diana Eck ... has written a book called *A New Religious America: How a 'Christian Country' Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation*. ...

In order to think like missionaries we need to recognize that America is a nation that offers an ever more accessible mix of spiritual choices, all perceived as equal. So we shouldn't be surprised to hear statements like the one Madonna said in a 1990 interview on *60 Minutes*: 'I go to synagogue, I study Hinduism ... all paths lead to God.' This is the religious anthem of those growing up in a post-Christian world. ... What is interesting is that most people in the emerging culture have no problem believing in a 'God.' But this 'God' is pieced together from a mix of world religions and various personal beliefs. Since having contradictory beliefs is not a problem in postmodern culture, this is acceptable. Though she embraced aspects of Hinduism and practices the Jewish mysticism of kabbalah, Madonna has no problem having her son baptized in an Anglican church. ...

12 *What Is the Emerging Church?*

Something we cannot underestimate is the way that communications media affect our worldview. Just as the printing press transformed Europe in past centuries, we are in the midst of another communications revolution with the internet, which almost every household in America has access to. Unlike any other time in history, emerging generations have instant access to world news. ... We have global access to endless volumes of information, including about religion and world faiths of all kinds. This information changes how we see the world. Because we are in a global community, even trends in fashion, entertainment, and music are no longer merely regional. ...

“A new group of prophets, philosophers, and theologians are teaching the emerging culture about spirituality and even Christian theology. ... Movie theaters all across America (and the world) show a steady stream of movies that deal with spiritual themes ... Spirituality is taught quite often in popular music. ... To add to the confusion, famous celebrities claim they are Christian and talk about God or Jesus yet promote a lifestyle contrary to Scripture (*The Emerging Church*, pp. 59, 60, 67, 70, 71, 73, 75, 85, 86).

We agree that the world is changing dramatically and we believe that there are adjustments that churches should make in regard to this. I am nearly 60 years old and have seen the great changes with my own eyes. And as a preacher with 35 years experience, including nearly two decades in cross-cultural church planting in one of the darkest parts of the world, I understand the need to try to understand the culture in which one ministers and to do everything possible within the biblical framework to preach the gospel in a meaningful way, but the emerging church is going far beyond biblical boundaries in its adaptation to culture.

How and When Did the Emerging Church Begin?

On his website, Brian McLaren says, “Emergent grew out of the Young Leader Networks, which was launched in the mid-90’s by Leadership Network, a Dallas-based foundation.”

The Leadership Network was formed in the mid-1980s to stimulate discussion of new ideas, to disseminate those ideas, and to network innovative leaders within evangelicalism. It was a

network of leaders led by megachurch pastors. Founded by Bob Buford, a business guru with the objective of building the kingdom of God in the world in this present time, the Leadership Network was designed from its inception as a radical change agent. Buford “introduced Leadership Network as a ‘resource broker’ to churches, hoping to help leaders of ‘innovative churches’ connect together” (Roger Oakland, *Faith Undone*, p. 23). (I am thankful for Roger Oakland’s ground breaking research into the history of the Leadership Network.) “Buford’s goal was to be a resource to the megachurch, because he saw it as a highly influential instrument for societal changes. ... Buford described Warren and Bill Hybels (Willow Creek) as ‘change makers’” (*Faith Undone*).

Buford, in turn, was mentored by Peter Drucker (1909-2005), a business management guru who was deeply influenced by Soren Kierkegaard’s mystical existentialism and Martin Buber’s pantheistic universalism. Drucker believed that we have moved into a new era in which we need to rethink everything. He said that we need a great imaginer “of a new synthesis, of a new philosophy” (*Landmarks of Tomorrow*, 1957, p. x). He used terms such as “age of transition,” “post-modern,” “shift to innovation,” “new frontiers,” “changing times.” Drucker wrote, “Mankind ... needs the deep experience that the Thou and the I are one, which all higher religions share” (*Landmarks of Tomorrow*, p. 265). Drucker promoted interfaith dialogue and established the Leader to Leader Institute, “an interspiritual thought forum, which to this day includes Buddhist sympathizers, globalists, evangelicals, and New Age sympathizers” (*Faith Undone*, p. 27). Drucker believed that doctrine is less important than “people’s needs.” Thus, some of the chief earmarks of the emerging church were evident in Drucker’s philosophy: believing that we need a new Christianity for a new times, promoting mysticism, downplaying doctrine, learning from heretics, interfaith dialogue, and kinship with New Agers. (Speaking at the Pew Forum on Religion in 2005 Rick Warren called Drucker “my mentor” and said he had “spent 20 years under his tutelage.”)

In the mid-1990s the Leadership Network formed the Young Leaders Network. It targeted innovative youth workers who represented the Leadership Network’s philosophy. The Young Leaders Network spread its influence through books, conferences,

and Internet blogs. Its chief personalities included Doug Pagitt, Brian McLaren, Chris Seay, Tony Jones, Dan Kimball, Andrew Jones, and Brad Smith. When he was brought into the Young Leaders Network, Pagitt was a youth pastor at Wooddale Church in Minneapolis. His pastor, Leith Anderson, in his 1992 book *A Church for the 21st Century*, had already called for a new roadmap for the future. He wrote, “[W]e need a paradigm shift for the future.” This refers to a dramatic change in one’s worldview.

The Young Leaders Network morphed into the Terra Nova (new earth) Project. It involved seminars and conferences to teach evangelicals how to be change agents in churches, denominations, and Christian organizations and kingdom builders in the world. For example, the one at University Baptist Church in Waco, Texas, February 22, 2001, was described as a “working lab.” It combined social-justice theology with the arts to prepare the participants to “act as a transforming presence.”

The Young Leaders Network eventually morphed into the Emergent Village.

Roger Oakland documents the close association between the Leadership Network and two large publishing houses, Zondervan and Jossey-Bass. Zondervan, which was purchased by Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation in 1988, is the publisher of Rick Warren’s mega bestseller *The Purpose Driven Life*. Warren has stated that he is Murdoch’s pastor (“Murdoch Pastor Gets Heat for Mogul’s Porn Channels,” *WorldNetDaily*, May 10, 2007). As for Jossey-Bass, Peter Drucker was one of the board members. “Through this strong-arm publishing alliance of Jossey-Bass and Leadership Network, the handful of carefully selected young men began writing books, and with the Drucker/Buford marketing energies, these young emerging leaders became known world-wide in just a few years, so much so, that in 2005, *Time* magazine named Brian McLaren one of the country’s top 25 ‘Most Influential Evangelicals’” (*Faith Undone*, p. 37).

Two Streams of the Emerging Church

The emerging church is not a unified system; it is multi-faceted, and for the purposes of this book we will describe two distinct streams that feed the broad river of the movement.

One is the more radical side that is represented by Brian McLaren and the Emergent Village. We will call it **THE LIBERAL EMERGING CHURCH**. *In doctrine*, it is flexible, tolerant, non-dogmatic, rethinking, evolving. It is dismissive of the Bible as verbal-plenarily inspired, infallible, and the sole authority for faith and practice. It is hesitant about holding a doctrinal statement of faith and if it does hold one it is usually very limited (such as the so-called Apostles' Creed). *In worship*, it is experimental and borrows heavily from "ancient spirituality," incorporating candles, incense, dim lighting, ambient music, labyrinths, icons, prayer stations, art, dance, meditation, silence. *In mission*, the emphasis is on kingdom building in the world today and developing relationships with the unsaved, with no strict line between the church and the world. It is heavily involved with a social-justice-environmentalist gospel and often accepts people as part of God's family even when they do not have personal faith in Jesus Christ.

The other stream is less radical. For lack of a better term we will call it **THE CONSERVATIVE EMERGING CHURCH**. It is represented by men such as Mark Driscoll of Seattle and the Acts 29 church planting network. They have a higher view of the Bible and want to maintain a solid doctrinal foundation (particularly Calvinistic Reformed theology), but they are open to worldly, "cultural affirming" techniques of church growth because "the old methods aren't working." One report says that they are "not necessarily trying to rewrite theology, but offer innovative methods of ministry" ("Conference examines the emerging church," Baptist Press, Sept. 25, 2007). Driscoll claims to be "theologically conservative and culturally liberal."

Many men have made an effort to distinguish between the various streams of the emergent church.

Mark Driscoll uses the terms "emergent liberals" and "emerging evangelicals," putting himself into the latter group (*Confessions of a Reformission Rev.*, pp. 21-23).

We believe, though, that an attempt to make a sharp distinction between the terms *emergent* and *emerging* is confusing to the average person and won't hold up in the long term. The two terms are often used as synonyms. Further, even those of the liberal stream of the emerging church fall within the broad category of "evangelicals," so the distinction between "emerging liberals" and

“emerging evangelicals” cannot be maintained. The emerging church in all of its facets fits under the broad umbrella of modern evangelicalism, so it is “evangelical” even when it is liberal. (If you find that confusing, I am not surprised, but it is only because of the confusion that reigns within contemporary evangelicalism.)

Ed Stetzer of the Southern Baptist Convention coined the term “relevant” to describe the more conservative stream, because they want to be “relevant” to modern culture. Yet the term “relevant” could as easily be applied to both streams of the emerging church, since the desire to be relevant to modern culture is a distinguishing feature of the entire field. They differ only in how far they will go in this venture.

Some use the term “missional” to describe the conservative side of the emerging church, but the liberal emerging churches also like that term, so it is of little help in distinguishing between various aspects of the movement.

I considered using the terms *doctrinal* and *non-doctrinal* to distinguish the two major streams of the emerging church, since one stream is much more oriented toward doctrinal truth and less relativistic than the other. But in the end I decided that those terms are too cumbersome.

We have decided to use the terms “liberal” and “conservative” to describe the two branches, though these are not ideal. While “liberal” is a perfectly good term for the most radical side of the emerging church, it is with great difficulty that we use the term “conservative” to describe the less liberal type of emerging churches. They are “conservative” only when compared to the liberal stream!

We will begin our study by examining the liberal stream and then we will look at the more conservative side.

A Great Blending and Merging

It is important to understand that it is difficult to draw a strict line between the two streams of the emerging church.

There is a blending and merging going on that will cause all lines to be blurred eventually. This is the devil's grand plan that is leading toward the formation of the end-time one-world church, and the New Evangelicals are unwittingly a part of that program.

Phyllis Tickle says the emerging church is blending the four major streams of American Christianity: Evangelicalism, Charismaticism, mainline liberal Protestantism, and liturgicalism (Catholicism, Orthodoxy). She says, "WHERE THE QUADRANTS MEET IN THE CENTER THERE'S A VORTEX LIKE A WHIRLPOOL AND THEY ARE BLENDING" ("The Future of the Emerging Church," March 19, 2007, *Leadership Magazine*).

Brian McLaren has said, "A lot of mixing is taking place--Lutherans using Catholic liturgy, Catholic churches using Pentecostal stuff, evangelicals borrowing the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer" ("Young Pastors Explore New Forms of Worship," *Christian Science Monitor*, Oct. 31, 2002).

Indeed, everywhere you look there is a whole lot of mixing going on!

TAKE ED STETZER, FOR INSTANCE. He is an influential Southern Baptist and rejects the more radical elements of the emerging church, but he does not believe in separating from the liberal emergents and often recommends their writings. After admitting that the liberals deny "the substitutionary atonement, the reality of Hell, the nature of gender, and the nature of the gospel itself," a very serious accusation, Stetzer makes the following amazing and very dangerous statement: "The revisionist emerging church leaders should be treated, appreciated, and read as we read mainline theologians" (*Breaking the Missional Code*, 2006, p. 190). This type of brash rejection of biblical separation (e.g., Romans 16:17; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; 2 Timothy 3:5; 2 John 7-11) on the part of the conservative emerging church leaders is why the blending and merging will continue.

At a Convergent Conference at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in September 2007, Stetzer gave another very weak and mixed signal about the liberal emerging church. He said that instead of being upset about emerging churches, Southern Baptists should affirm their faith statement and share their witness for Christ (“Conference examines the emerging church,” Baptist Press, Sept. 25, 2007). In fact, Bible-believing people should stand fast in sound doctrine, should be zealous in evangelism, AND should earnestly contend for the faith against every heresy such as the emerging church. God’s people should definitely be upset about false doctrine. The Psalmist testified, “I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right, and I HATE EVERY FALSE WAY” (Psalm 119:128). That is the proper biblical attitude.

Stetzer is a participant in Shapevine, the emerging church blog that features liberal emergents such as Brian McLaren, Tony Jones, Sally Morgenthaler, Alan Hirsch, and Leonard Sweet. Shapevine is called “a global community of COLLABORATORS,” and Southern Baptist “conservatives” are collaborating in this forum with the most radical of emergent heretics. Collaboration is the very opposite of separation.

Stetzer is on the board of the Acts 29 church planting network, and he is not the only member of Acts 29 that is participating on Shapevine. Darrin Patrick, pastor of The Journey in St. Louis, has participated non-critically in Shapevine. Instead of rebuking the emergents who congregate on this blog, the “evangelical relevant” Patrick is buddy-buddy with them, dialoguing with them instead of rebuking them plainly and separating from them as a plain witness against their heresies.

CONSIDER DAN KIMBALL. He says that he has “a fundamental belief in the inspired Scriptures being my guide and my authority” and that he “cannot read the New Testament and consider it all inspired and then downplay or ignore the repeated teaching about the blood of Jesus being shed on the cross for the payment of our sin” (*Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*, pp. 97, 100). That sounds good, but he undermines this by his principle of allowing people to question traditional doctrines and his idea that “we are supposed to approach theology more with a sense of wonder, awe, and mystery than like trying to solve a mathematical puzzle” (p. 91). This position reduces the plain

teaching of divine revelation to something mysterious and uncertain. Kimball recommends books by Emergent Village people such as Tony Jones. Kimball's book *The Emerging Church* was forwarded by Brian McLaren and Kimball quotes McLaren several times with no warning about his heresies. Kimball joined McLaren and other emerging church leaders as a contributor to *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope* and did not have one word of warning about their agenda to tear down the Bible and find saving faith in non-Christian religions. As a contributor to the book *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*, Kimball joined hands with liberals Doug Pagitt and Karen Ward, a female preacher, and said that he has tremendous respect for them (p. 86). Kimball praised Ward and her church and said her contribution to this book "was the one that moved me most emotionally" (pp. 190-191). He had little substantial criticism of her views, even though she plainly denied that the Bible is the sole authority for faith and practice, rejected the infallibility of Scripture, dismissed the doctrine of substitutionary atonement as a "theory," refused to reject the doctrine of universalism, claimed that the Bible's stories are not always literal, said that a church's theology should be like a "potluck" with everyone contributing his own ideas, and claimed that baptism is the beginning of the Christian life.

CONSIDER RICK MCKINLEY OF IMAGO DEI OF PORTLAND. The church has a doctrinal statement that, though brief, does cover some important things such as the infallible inspiration of Scripture (though how exactly they define this and to what extent they actually believe and defend it in practice, we do not know). Yet when McKinley published a blog entitled "My Thoughts on the Emerging Church" on October 18, 2007, and distanced himself a bit from it, he did not reprove its heresies but merely said he has some "concerns." He used the blog to take a cheap shot at the fundamentalist's "need to divide Christians into categories," because "it's just not that cut and dry." This is exactly the type of vagueness and non-dogmatism that we find in the liberal emerging church. McKinley says that it is wrong and dangerous to "simply want to know what category they fit in so we can pronounce our judgment if we disagree with them." He says we shouldn't force the emerging church leader to define himself, and if we do we are "putting a yoke upon him that will crush all the

life and creativity.” He says that the emerging church is a “young and fragile thing” and we must be careful that we don’t harm it. He says it is “a new thing that God is doing and we should respect it as such.” He says he feels responsible “to create space for what is coming up behind us,” that though he has built his faith “on the foundation of orthodoxy and the gospel of the reformers,” yet he says, “I think there is a lot of room for theological progress. Not denying the foundation but building on it.” He concludes, “I hope that those of us that have gone before them will not be so full of fear that we kill their vision and quench the Spirit, for I fear that we will have to answer for that one day.”

It is obvious that this type of approach is unscriptural and dangerous. Resisting heresy is not quenching the Spirit! We are exhorted in Scripture to prove all things (1 Thess. 5:21). The Bereans were commended because they “*searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so*” (Acts 17:11). We must understand that there are false christs, false gospels, false spirits and we are thus to be exceedingly careful in theological matters (2 Cor. 11:1-4). We are not instructed to give the heretic space to develop but “*after the first and second admonition reject*” (Titus 3:10). When some “false brethren” tried to teach a different gospel, Paul dealt with them quickly. He said, “*To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you*” (Galatians 2:5). The Bible warns that “*a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump*” (Gal. 5:9); thus, error must be dealt with quickly.

McKinley’s foundational error is his heresy pertaining to the kingdom of God and the church’s mission in this present world. He says, “I hope that we can leave the next generation great theology on the Kingdom of God that seems to have gotten confused in the enlightenment. I hope that we can expand our theology of the Trinity from a static doctrine to a dynamic and living theology of community and transformation.” He is exceedingly sympathetic with even the most radical elements of the emerging church because he holds the same heresy pertaining to the kingdom of God. This is true of all of the conservative emerging church leaders.

CONSIDER DONALD MILLER. His popular book *Blue Like Jazz* is a harsh rant against traditional evangelical Christianity and

he frequently takes shots at doctrinal dogmatism, speaking so much like a liberal emergent that it is difficult to know where to place the man. For example, in discussing his involvement in church in his youth he writes, "I wished I could have subscribed to aspects of Christianity but not the whole thing" (*Blue Like Jazz*, p. 30). He said, "In order to believe Christianity, you either had to reduce enormous theological absurdities [i.e., Garden of Eden, universal flood] into children's stories or ignore them" (p. 31). He wanted to believe the gospel "free from the clasp of fairy tale" (p. 35). Thus he wanted to pick and choose what parts of the Bible he would believe. At a book signing event, one enthusiastic reader of *Blue Like Jazz* said: "I love *Blue Like Jazz* because it's, like, a Christian book, but it doesn't make you feel bad about yourself" ("A Better Storyteller," *Christianity Today*, June 2007). Miller even claims that terms such as "inerrancy" are relatively new to church history and that "much of biblical truth must go out the window when you approach it through the scientific [literal] method" (*Searching for God Knows What*, p. 160).

Yet Miller is a member of Imago Dei, which has a doctrinal statement that includes an affirmation of the infallibility of Scripture and knows personally and speaks highly of Mark Driscoll, who returns the compliment in *Confessions of a Reformission*. Rev. Driscoll writes, "The church [Imago Dei] is doing great, and so is Donald" (p. 97).

CONSIDER DALLAS THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY. This institution is also looking at the emerging church far too sympathetically. In 2004 they invited Brian McLaren for a one-day conference. He was critiqued by the faculty, but the fact remains that he was there by invitation and he had an opportunity to spread his harmful influence among the students. Dallas Seminary sells Dan Kimball's CD set *The Emerging Church* at the Resources section of their web site, and there are no warnings. Emergent blogger Andrew Jones praised Dallas' three-set podcasts on the emerging church, concluding, "I wish all seminaries would take THIS LEARNING POSTURE towards the emerging church" (http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/2006/06/3_seminary_podc.html). He would not have said this if Dallas Seminary were treating the liberal emerging church as the gross heresy it is and separating from it as the Bible commands.

22 What Is the Emerging Church?

CONSIDER MARK DRISCOLL. Though he has distanced himself somewhat from some emerging church radicals and has warned of some of their errors, he has not separated from them after a biblical fashion. He calls them friends rather than the dangerous heretics that they are, continues to recommend some of their writings, and joins hands with them in contributing to the same books.

Two of the titles on Driscoll's "Short List of Books of Missional Church Planters" are by Lesslie Newbigin, an author greatly beloved by the liberal emergents (*The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* and *The Open Secret*) (<http://mrclm.blogspot.com/2007/10/mark-driscoll-short-list-of-books-for.html>). In *The Radical Reformation*, Driscoll gives "thanks to Lesslie Newbigin for his prophetic voice" (p. 9). Newbigin was a bishop in the very liberal Church of South India and was Associate General Secretary in the radically heretical World Council of Churches. In *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, Newbigin denied that the Bible is the verbally inspired Word of God and said the 18th century defenders of the faith were in error when they taught that the Bible is "a set of timeless truths." Newbigin falsely claimed that Jesus did not leave behind "a book, nor a creed, nor a system of thought, nor a rule of life" (*The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, p. 20). Though the Lord Jesus did not write anything with His own hand, He promised to send the Holy Spirit to guide the apostles into all truth and the New Testament Scripture is the product (John 16). Paul testified that he spoke in Christ (2 Cor. 2:17) and called the New Testament Scriptures "the word of Christ" (Col. 3:16). Further, Newbigin said, "All so-called facts are interpreted facts. ... What we see as facts depends on the theory we bring to the observation" (p. 21). This is a liberal emerging church principle, that all facts are merely human interpretations and all interpretations of the Bible are therefore imperfect. Newbigin called the split between liberals and fundamentalists "tragic" (p. 24) and taught that there is the possibility of salvation apart from personal faith in Christ.

These are all liberal emerging church heresies, and the man who held them is highly recommended by conservative emerging church pastors. You can see the confusion, the blurring of lines.

Driscoll also recommends five books by Dan Allender, the president of Mars Hill Graduate School, which has a very radical

liberal emerging church philosophy. Brian McLaren is an adjunct professor there, and the school sponsored McLaren's "Everything Must Change" tour.

On a visit to the Ballard campus of Driscoll's Mars Hill Church on January 27, 2008, I saw the following books by heretics for sale in the small bookstore in the main lobby: *The Essential Kierkegaard*, *The Cost of Discipleship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* by Lesslie Newbigin, and *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis.

CONSIDER BIOLA UNIVERSITY. In May 2005, they hosted an emerging church conference. Though some of the professors have rejected elements of the liberal emerging church, it is obvious that they are dialoguing with it and not separating from it in a biblical fashion. For example, J.P. Moreland, a Biola professor, critiques the emerging church in his book *Kingdom Triangle*. While he criticizes the emerging church for rejecting objective truth, he hastens to add: "I do not wish to be harsh or inappropriately critical of my brothers and sisters who are part of the emerging church. There is much good in the problems they are bringing to the surface and in some of the solutions they are offering. For now, I simply register my concern about what I believe is their unnecessary association with postmodern language."

This approach won't get the job done.

The liberal emerging church philosophy will continue to have an influence among evangelical "relevant" churches like Driscoll's and Kimball's and Warren's and Hybels' and schools like Biola and Multnomah and Dallas because their approach toward heresy is too soft and the line of demarcation is not clear enough and separation, in fact, is despised and because of their folly of recommending books by and quoting men that are unsound.

As we have seen, the Achilles heel of New Evangelicalism from its inception has been the renunciation of separatism. When Harold Ockenga coined the term "Neo-evangelical" in 1948 and proclaimed its standard in a speech that year, he twice stated, "We repudiate separatism" (Ockenga's foreword to Harold Lindsell's *The Battle for the Bible*).

New Evangelicals want to dialogue rather than separate. They want to take a more positive stance. They don't like naming the

names of false teachers and labeling them heretics. Compared to the biblical pattern, they are soft and tolerant toward error.

The fact is that New Evangelicals despise biblical separatists more than they hate theological modernism!

The New Evangelical philosophy, which has permeated the evangelical world over the past 50 years, set the stage for the emerging church heresy and facilitates its progress.

SAMPLE

The Liberal Emerging Church

The emerging church says that since the world is changing we need a new type of Christianity. Modern people don't respond to the old type; in fact, they are offended by it, so we need to devise a new one. We need to rethink everything. Leonard Sweet says:

"A sea change of transitions and transformations is birthing a whole new world and a whole new set of ways of making our way in the world.... It is time for a Postmodern Reformation ... Reinvent yourself for the 21st century or die" (*Soul Tsunami*, pp. 17, 75).

The liberal emerging church is infatuated with novelty and change. One of the articles in *An Emergent Manifesto* begins with this quote from the elf queen Galadriel in the mythical movie *The Fellowship of the Ring*: "The world is changed. I feel it in the water. I feel it in the earth. I smell it in the air" (*An Emergent Manifesto*, p. 226).

The same quote appears in the foreword to Brian McLaren's book *A Generous Orthodoxy*, and I have seen it referenced in at least two other emerging books.

Emergent Tim Keel says that since the world has changed, facts alone are not adequate; we must follow "the artists, poets, prophets, contemplatives, and mystics among us" because "they are leading us somewhere" (*An Emergent Manifesto*, pp. 228, 229).

The liberal emerging church is an open-ended pursuit of mysticism into an unknown future.

It reminds us of the Athenians who "*spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing*" (Acts 17:21). It is "*ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*" (2 Tim. 3:7).

It downplays the preaching of the gospel and the winning of souls while aiming to create "meaningful relationships" and transform the world by building the kingdom of God through socio-political-environmental-artsy endeavors (they call this "missional" work).

It calls for positive dialogue among professing Christians rather than doctrinal evaluation and separation.

It downplays the importance of doctrine and the infallibility and sole authority of Scripture (“we committed ourselves to lives of reconciliation and friendship, no matter our theological or historical differences,” Emergent Village).

It looks upon doctrine as something that is always evolving.

It says we should develop intimate relationships with the unsaved without an “agenda” of trying to win them to Christ.

It is intimately involved with Roman Catholic contemplative forms of “spirituality,” such as silent meditation, mantras, centering prayer, and monasticism.

It looks upon life as a party to be enjoyed and participates freely in the world’s music, art, fashion, movies, etc. It “communicates with” the world’s culture rather than condemning it.

A *Christianity Today* article about emerging church, which analyzes the liberal side, says that emergents “are looking for a faith that is colorful enough for their culturally savvy friends, deep enough for mystery, big enough for their own doubts,” and, “To get there, they are willing to abandon some long-defended battle lines” (Andy Crouch, “The Emergent Mystique,” *Christianity Today*, Nov. 2004).

Thus, emergents want a Christianity that is worldly enough to attract those who love the world and non-dogmatic enough to allow for doubts and heresies.

Leading Voices

The following are some of the leading voices for the liberal emerging church. We have included some individuals who, though deceased, have a major influence on the emerging church through their writings.

MARK BATTERSON is senior pastor of National Community Church in Washington D.C. (“one church in multiple locations”). Seventy percent of the church membership is composed of young people in their twenties. Batterson is author of *In a Pit with a Lion on a Snowy Day: How to Survive and Thrive When Opportunity Roars* (2006).

ROB BELL (b. 1970) is pastor of Mars Hill Bible Church in Grandville, Michigan, and author of *Velvet Elvis* (2005) and *Sex*

God: Exploring the Endless Connections between Sexuality and Spirituality (2007). In the January 2007 issue of *The Church Report*, Bell was named #10 in their list of “The 50 Most Influential Christians in America” as chosen by readers and online visitors. He also produces the popular series of short films called NOOMA.

RYAN BOLGER is Assistant Professor of Church in Contemporary Culture in the School of Intercultural Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary and coauthor with Eddie Gibbs of *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Baker, 2005).

SPENCER BURKE is the founder of an emergent church in Los Angeles and the host of SOULARIZE, an annual emergent conference; his web site, TheOOze.com, which is described as “a safe place to ask questions and work through issues,” is said to have 250,000 unique visitors every month. Burke is author of *Making Sense of Church* (2003), *Stories of Emergence* (2003), and co-author of *An Heretic’s Guide to Eternity* (2006). Matt Palmer, a member of Burke’s church, says, “Our goal is to be there for each other and try to find activities [through which] we can service our community” (“These Christians Radically Rethink What a Church Is,” http://www.fuller.edu/news/html/emerging_church.asp).

TONY CAMPOLO (b. 1935) is professor emeritus of sociology at Eastern University and an ordained minister in the American Baptist Church. He co-authored *Adventures in Missing the Point* with Brian McLaren, and McLaren endorsed Campolo’s book *Speaking My Mind: The Radical Evangelical Prophet Tackles the Tough Issues Christians Are Afraid to Face* (2004). Campolo is also the author of *How to Rescue the Earth without Worshiping Nature* (1992), *Red Letter Christians* (2008) and the co-author with Mary Darling of *The God of Intimacy and Action* (2007), which promotes Roman Catholic-style contemporary spirituality. Some of the testimonies in the book *Emerging Churches* by Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger mention Campolo as an influence.

G.K. CHESTERTON (1874-1936) was a Roman Catholic whose writings have a large influence within the emerging church. He is often quoted, and his book *Orthodoxy* is recommended by many emergents. He believed that the so-called Apostles’ Creed, which briefly states a few very basic doctrines, is a sufficient summary of

the Christian faith; he used humor to break down walls of differing doctrinal opinions; he was philosophical and complicated rather than straightforward and plainspoken; he accepted theistic evolution (*Orthodoxy*, p. 30); he loved to drink liquor. A 2001 edition of *Orthodoxy* has an introduction by Philip Yancy that explains Chesterton's attraction. Yancy says, "Chesterton seemed to sense instinctively that a stern prophet will rarely break through to a society full of religion's 'cultured despisers'; he preferred the role of jester. ... In a time when culture and faith have drifted even further apart, we could use his brilliance, his entertaining style, and above all his generous and joyful spirit. When society becomes polarized, as ours has, it is as if the two sides stand across a great divide and shout at each other. Chesterton had another approach: He walked to the center of a swinging bridge, roared a challenge to any single combat warrior, and then made both sides laugh aloud" (*Orthodoxy*, Image Books, 2001, p. xix). The fact that this is not the type of "prophet" that we see in Scripture doesn't bother the emerging church one iota.

CHRISTIANITY TODAY magazine is a strong promoter of the emerging church. A page of their web site, called "The Emergence of Emergent," is dedicated to it, and they have published many positive articles dealing with it, including several by Brian McLaren. Marshall Shelley, vice president of *Christianity Today*, said of Spencer Burke's *An Heretic's Guide to Eternity*, which is forwarded by Brian McLaren: "Spencer is a winsome walking companion for those who find traditional dogma too narrow. It's a thoughtful conversation" (<http://www.spencerburke.com/pdf/presskit.pdf>).

TIM CONDOR is a member of the coordinating team for Emergent Village, pastor of Emmaus Way, an emergent community in Durham, North Carolina, and a member of the board of directors of the Mars Hill Graduate School. He authored *The Church in Transition: The Journey of Existing Church into Emerging Culture* (2006).

EMERGENT VILLAGE, headquartered in Minneapolis, Minnesota, is not a village in a traditional sense, nor is it a church or denomination. It is described by Dwight Friesen as "a type of ecumenical movement of Christian churches from various ecclesial

non/traditions, parachurch organizations, and Christian social-advocates linked together in a generative conversational network around mission" ("Emergent Village and Full Communion," a paper presented to the National Council of Churches Faith & Order Commission, March 17, 2007, <http://dwightfriesen.blog.com/1616648/>). The Emergent Village claims "to have everything from a Texas Baptist pastor to a New England lesbian Episcopal priest" (Roger Moran, "The Emerging Church movement Calls for Biblical Scrutiny by Missourians," <http://www.mbcpathway.com/article97073c482768.htm>). Thus the Emergent Village is an ecumenical linking of professing Christians or various stripes who accept the basic premises of the liberal emerging church. Its objective is to facilitate "mission," which refers to social justice projects and artistic living geared toward the building of the alleged kingdom of God.

CHRIS ERDMAN is senior pastor of University Presbyterian Church, Fresno, California, professor at the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, and contributor to *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*.

DAVID FOSTER (b. c. 1969) is founding pastor of Bellevue Community Church, Nashville, and author of *A Renegade's Guide to God: Finding Life outside Conventional Christianity* (2006). This book is recommended by Brian McLaren, Tim Stevens, pastor of Granger Community Church, Bill Cornelius, pastor of Bay Area Fellowship in Corpus Christi, Texas, Ron Phillips, pastor of Abba's House, Jim Henderson of Off the Map, and Tony Morgan of WiredChurches.com.

DWIGHT J. FRIESEN is a teacher at Mars Hill Graduate School, founder of an emerging church in Seattle, and member of the Faith & Order Commission of the National Council of Churches.

FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY is a hotbed of emerging church theology and sympathies. Fuller professors Ryan Bolger and Barry Taylor contributed highly supportive articles to the book *An Emergent Manifesto*. In March 2007, Doug Pagitt joined Bolger in co-teaching a 40-hour Doctor of Ministry class. Spencer Burke has also lectured at Fuller.

STANLEY GRENZ (1950-2005) was a Baptist pastor and professor at several schools (including North American Baptist Seminary, Regent College, and Baylor University) and author of books that are promoted in the emerging church. These include *A Primer on Postmodernism* (1996) and *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (2000), which he coauthored with John Franke. Grenz was influential in the formation of the “theological roots” of Mars Hill Graduate School in Seattle.

ALAN HIRSH is founder of Forge, author of *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church*, and co-author of *The Shaping of Things to Come* (2006). The foreword to the latter was written by Leonard Sweet, who said: “Hirsch has discovered the formula that unlocks the secrets of the ecclesial universe like Einstein’s simple formula ($e=mc^2$) unlocked the secrets of the physical universe. There are some books good enough to read to the end. There are only a few books good enough to read to the end of time. *The Forgotten Ways* is one of them.” The book is also recommended by Tony Jones and Brian McLaren.

TONY JONES is National Coordinator of Emergent Village and ministers to youth and young adults at Colonial Church of Edina in Minnesota. He is the author of *Postmodern Youth Ministry: Exploring Cultural Shift, Creating Holistic Connections, Cultivating Authentic Community* (2001), *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life* (2005), *Soul Shaper: Exploring Spirituality and Contemplative Practices in Youth Ministry* (2003), and *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life* (2005).

TIM KEEL is the founder of Jacob’s Well Church in Kansas City, Missouri. He is a member of the board of directors for Emergent Village and his interests “include monastic life and culture, reading, writing, and all things Middle Earth” (*The Relevant Church*, p. 161).

LEADERSHIP NETWORK- We described the Leadership Network’s history and workings in the first chapter.

C.S. LEWIS (1898-1963) is very popular with both streams of the emerging church. This is not surprising, of course. A *Christianity Today* reader’s poll in 1998 rated Lewis the most influential evangelical writer. In an article commemorating the