

Part 1:

Introduction

by Brian Jones

I. Our goals and plan for studying the “emerging church.”

A. Our Goals:

1. To inform our church about a significant and growing trend in American religion.

1 Chronicles 12:32: “men of Issachar, who understood the times and knew what Israel should do....”

2. To learn what may be helpful from this growing trend.

1 Thessalonians 5:21-22: “Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil.”

3. To warn against the dangers present in this growing trend.

1 John 4:1: “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

B. Our Plan:

The ideas covered in this topic are big and diverse. Although there are some things that most who call themselves “emerging” or “emergent” hold in common, there are many things that are true of some in the emerging camp but not others.

Therefore, although we will speak about some things that are generally true of the emerging church, most of our approach will look at specific people who are leaders in the emerging/emergent culture. Here is a general outline of this series of lessons.

1. Introduction
2. Major Common Characteristics
3. Personalities: Names and Faces
4. Theology of emerging churches
5. Critiques & criticisms of the emerging church

6. What can we learn from the emerging church?

II. Definition: What is the emerging church?

A. The problem of “definition.”

1. There are arguments about whether to use the term “emerging” or “emergent.”

a. Some authors make little to no distinction between the terms “emerging” and “emergent.”

D. A. Carson: “But during the last dozen years, ‘emerging’ and ‘emergent’ have become strongly associated with an important movement that is sweeping across America, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere. Many in the movement use **‘emerging’ or ‘emergent’ (I will use the two words as equivalents)** as the defining adjective for the movement.”¹

b. Some authors do distinguish between those who are “emerging” and those who are “emergent.”

i. Mark Driscoll sees himself and his church as “emerging” but not “emergent.”

a) To Driscoll, “emerging” churches hold steadfastly to Biblical orthodoxy while adapting their methods to reach those with a postmodern mindset.

b) To Driscoll, “emergent” churches adapt BOTH their theology AND their methods in order to reach postmoderns.

Driscoll writes: “During dinner one evening with a friend, Dan Kimball, who wrote *The Emerging Church*, I was struck by his distinction between the emergent church and the emerging church. There has been much confusion on this matter, partly due to the similarity in names. The emerging church is a growing, loosely connected movement of primarily young pastors who are glad to see the end of modernity and are seeking to function as missionaries who bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to emerging and postmodern cultures.... Since the movement, if it can be called that, is young and is still defining its theological center, I do not want to portray the movement as ideologically unified because I myself swim in the theologically conservative stream of the emerging church.”²

Driscoll goes on after this paragraph to describe some of the ways in which certain people in the emerging church have departed from orthodox Christian theology. Driscoll implies that these should use the label emergent.

¹D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), p. 12, emphasis added.

²Mark Driscoll, *Confessions of a Reformation Rev.* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), p. 22.

“Therefore, it is very important that any church seeking to be emerging define whether it is **an emerging evangelical church or an emergent liberal church**. Our church is emerging and missional in its practice and evangelical and biblical in its theology.”³

- ii. Dan Kimball, whom Driscoll credits with the distinction between “emerging” and “emergent,” does distinguish the terms but not in the same way that Driscoll does. On his blog, Kimball has posted two articles recounting the history the terms “emerging” and “emergent” as he remembers them.⁴
 - a) In the first article, Kimball states that “emerging” was used first in 1997 to describe Christians who were trying to reach “Generation X” or “postmoderns.”
 - b) In the second article, Kimball describes how three men (Tony Jones, Brian McLaren, and Doug Pagitt) in the “emerging” crowd formed a distinct group dedicated to theological study. This group called itself “emergent,” and they started a website—still in existence—called “Emergent Village.”⁵ Kimball writes, “Tony told me that when he, Brian and Doug were thinking of new names for the theology group that was formerly the Leadership Network one — they were not trying to play off the ‘emerging church’ term. Tony said, that naming it ‘emergent’ was because the word is defined as the ‘coming to the surface’ of new organic life beginning and reproducing and that was why they chose the word. So ‘emergent’ was not named because it was similar to ‘emerging church’ — that was coincidence and Tony told me if there was any connection, it was subconscious, not intentional.”⁶
- c. So although some authors use the term “emerging” and “emergent” as synonyms, it seems best to treat them as distinct. The “emergent” group is a subset of the “emerging church.” Emergents are associated with the Emergent Village led by Tony Jones, Brian McLaren, and Doug Pagitt. Because these three men have openly questioned some major scriptural doctrines, Mark Driscoll’s distinction between “emerging” (which could be anyone reaching out to postmoderns) and “emergents” (who tend toward theological liberalism) does seem to have some validity.
- d. For the sake of clarity, then, it seems best to use the term “emerging” to describe everyone we will look at in this study, knowing that some of them might prefer

³Ibid., p. 23. emphasis added.

⁴Those articles are: http://www.dankimball.com/vintage_faith/2006/04/origin_of_the_t.html and http://www.dankimball.com/vintage_faith/2006/04/origins_of_the_.html.

⁵<http://emergentvillage.com>

⁶http://www.dankimball.com/vintage_faith/2006/04/origins_of_the_.html

the term emergent. A helpful article by Scot McKnight makes this clear: “To prevent confusion, a distinction needs to be made between ‘emerging’ and ‘Emergent.’ Emerging is the wider, informal, global, ecclesial (church-centered) focus of the movement, while Emergent is an official organization in the U.S. and the U.K. Emergent Village, the organization, is directed by Tony Jones, a Ph.D. student at Princeton Theological Seminary and a world traveler on behalf of all things both Emergent and emerging.... While Emergent is the intellectual and philosophical network of the emerging movement, it is a mistake to narrow all of emerging to the Emergent Village.”⁷

2. There are arguments about whether or not to use the term “church” with this group.
 - a. Many of the leaders of this group are pastors who are intentionally focused on doing ministry in a church context. Instead of starting a parachurch organization (like AWANA, or Campus Crusade), these people have started churches. For this reason, the term “church” has often been associated with the word “emerging.” For instance, Dan Kimball (mentioned above) wrote and published a book called *The Emerging Church* in 2003.⁸
 - b. Some have objected to the term “church” and instead prefer the word “conversation.”

Scot McKnight: “There is no such thing as the emerging ‘church.’ It is a movement or a conversation — which is Brian McLaren’s and Tony Jones’s favored term, and they after all are the leaders. To call it a ‘church’ on the title of his [D. A. Carson’s] book is to pretend that it is something like a denomination, which it isn’t.”⁹

- B. The definition I will use for this study is as follows: “The emerging church is a religious response to postmodernism most often manifested in local churches who associate with Christianity.”

III. History: How did the “Emerging Church” emerge?

- A. It began with postmodernism.

1. Postmodernism is a cultural phenomenon that is changing western society.

⁷Scot McKnight, “Five Streams of the Emerging Church,” *Christianity Today*, February 2007. http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/article_print.html?id=40534

⁸Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).

⁹Scot McKnight, “What is the Emerging Church?” (paper presented at the Fall Contemporary Issues Conference at Westminster Theological Seminary, 26-27 November 2006), p. 3.

“Postmodernism” is a word used to describe the worldview of (mostly young) adults today in contrast with the worldview held by previous generations of adults.

“The term postmodernism has been in widespread use for three decades, but the story of its spread through culture is fairly complex. Apart from a number of isolated early sightings of the term... postmodernism started life mainly as an academic category concerned with certain developments in the arts, but soon became a descriptive term for all sorts of proposed shifts and changes in contemporary society and culture.”¹⁰

a. Postmodernism is a reaction to modernism.

“Some of our postmodern forerunners spoke about society entering a new phase. They claimed that we were in a historical period with novel features that distinguished it from any other time in history. In particular, it was to be distinguished from the preceding Modern Age. The exact character of this age, as well as the precise dates of its beginning and end, has been described in different ways by historians, but it is often associated with faith in:

- progress
- optimism
- rationality
- the search for *absolute knowledge* in science, technology, society, and politics
- the idea that gaining knowledge of the *true self* was the only foundation for all other knowledge.”¹¹

“In direct contrast to the above features of the Modern Age, postmodern society is often negatively associated with:

- exhaustion
- pessimism
- irrationality
- disillusionment with the idea of absolute knowledge.”¹²

b. Postmodernism is suspicious of any truth claims because it distrusts the foundations of those truth claims, such as science and logic.

“The... fundamental issue in the move from modernism to postmodernism is *epistemology*—i.e., how we know things, or think we know things. Modernism is often pictured as pursuing truth, absolutism, linear thinking, rationalism, certainty, the cerebral as opposed to the affective—which in turn breeds arrogance, inflexibility, a lust to be right, the desire to control. Postmodernism,

¹⁰Glen Ward, *Teach Yourself Postmodernism* (Chicago, IL: McGraw-Hill, 2003), p. 4.

¹¹Ibid., p. 9.

¹²Ibid., p. 10.

by contrast, recognizes how much of what we ‘know’ is shaped by the culture in which we live, is controlled by emotions and aesthetics and heritage, and in fact can only be intelligently held as part of a common tradition, without overt claims to being true or right.”¹³

Although postmodernism has many attributes about it that make it different from modernism, one of the most important differences is postmodernism’s views about truth and knowledge.

- Modernism viewed truth as objective. “Objective truths are true for all people, whether or not anyone accepts them as true or talks about them as such. Their status as being true (that is, corresponding with how things are in reality) is independent of our knowing them to be true. For example, $2+2=4$ is objectively true in that its truth value is independent of anyone’s believing it or not. Similarly, murder is wrong even if someone happens to say otherwise.”¹⁴
- Postmodernists do not have one unified view of truth, but they do tend to agree that objective truth is unknowable, if it exists at all. “Postmodernism may seem similar to, yet it is different from, ethical relativism. Ethical relativists think that there are no objective moral truths, things that are in fact true for all people across all cultures. Some postmodernists might hold that view, but most hold to something similar yet different: *even if* objective truths exist, say the postmodernists, we cannot *know* them as such.”¹⁵

B. The emerging church is a response to the challenge of postmodernism in our society.

Mark Driscoll: “In the mid-1990s I was a young church planter trying to establish a church in the city of Seattle when I got a call to speak at my first conference. It was hosted by Leadership Network and focused on the subject of Generation X. **I spoke on the transition from the modern to the postmodern world and some of the implications this cultural shift was having on the Church.** Other participants spoke on the various ways that emerging generations were changing and how the Church might faithfully respond. That conference shifted in focus from reaching a generation to larger issues related to being the Church in an emerging postmodern culture.... **Out of that conference a small team was formed to continue conversing about postmodernism and the overarching concern of what mission work would look like in the United States, including the implications for how theology and church are done.**”¹⁶

¹³Carson, *Conversant*, p. 27.

¹⁴R. Scott Smith, *Truth and the New Kind of Christian* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), p. 13.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁶Mark Driscoll. “A Pastoral Perspective on the Emergent Church.” *CTR* n.s. 3/2 (Spring 2006): 87-93, emphasis added.

1. Some see the emerging church as a way to communicate the unchanging truth of Christianity to a changing society—one that is changing from a modern worldview to a postmodern worldview. People in this category try to retain an evangelical worldview and theology but communicate those things in ways that are meaningful to postmoderns.
2. Others see “evangelical Christianity” as hopelessly modern in its worldview. They see our method of Bible interpretation and our theology as symptoms of our modernistic worldview. These would argue that our theology and our methods of interpreting the Bible need to be rethought and possibly rewritten based on a postmodern worldview.

C. Its early manifestation was in the young adult ministries of larger evangelical churches.

1. Most large churches have some kind of young adult ministry. Some of the current leaders of the emerging church started out leading services for young adults.

a. Spencer Burke:

“I used to be a pastor. More than that, I was a pastor at Mariners Church in Irvine, California—a bona fide megachurch with a 25-acre property and a \$7.8 million budget.... During my time at Mariners I eventually grew tired of keeping up appearances.... Sensing my anguish, the senior pastor presented me with the opportunity to start a Saturday night service—try new ideas and put a postmodern spin on the message. After deliberating long and hard, I decided to accept his offer. The new service did well. I was glad to see students from my years as a youth pastor coming out on Saturday nights, now toting kids of their own. Even more gratifying, a whole new crop of people started attending—people who’d heard about the service from others in the community and had decided to come see for themselves.”¹⁷

b. Dan Kimball’s “Graceland”

Kimball began his journey into the emerging church at Santa Cruz Bible Church in Santa Cruz, California. The bio page of his current church’s website reads: “After serving in high school ministry for 8 years as high school pastor, Dan (and Josh) felt the need for a worship gathering and ministry that reflected more of the values of the emerging culture and heart of emerging generations. So, they started the Sunday night ‘Graceland’ worship services and ministry at Santa Cruz Bible Church. Graceland initially started as a college ministry, but because it connected with a broader age range became a ‘young adult’ ministry and then eventually became alternative worship gatherings for all ages.”¹⁸

¹⁷Spencer Burke, “From the Third Floor to the Garage” in *Stories of Emergence* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), pp. 28-29.

¹⁸<http://vintagechurch.org/about/leadership/dank>

2. This approach to building “a church within a church” usually fails.
- a. Spencer Burke, who started the Saturday night service at Mariners Church, resigned due to dissatisfaction. He writes:

“Though I couldn’t put my finger on it at the time, I knew something was wrong, as if the service were cross-wired. Some elements, like the music, were thoroughly modern; others, like my message, were quite different. Even more problematic, the more I identified with the new mindset of the congregation, the less connected I felt to the rest of the church’s program. Eventually, I knew something had to give. When the pain of staying at Mariners began to seem worse than the pain of leaving, I submitted my resignation. I packed up my desk, loaded up my car, and drove home to my 700-square-foot beach shack. Five years later, here I sit.”¹⁹

- b. Dan Kimball’s “Graceland” service at Santa Cruz Bible Church was spun off into a separate church, Vintage Faith Church. Although not writing about Graceland specifically, Kimball has written the following, which we can reasonably assume reflects his experience at Santa Cruz Bible Church:

“With Axis, Willow Creek was one of the first churches to experiment with launching an alternative worship gathering within an existing church. Over ten years ago, Willow was noticing that value differences and cultural differences between generations were emerging. Despite the great success Willow was having with older generations, they realized they needed new expressions of evangelism, worship, teaching, learning, and spiritual formation for those younger people they were not seeing in the church. Needing new expressions of ministry for different cultural populations should be a natural thing. To my understanding this was the reason behind the birthing of Willow Creek itself back in the seventies. However, when launching a new worship gathering within an existing church, the questions to ask should be: Are the changes occurring mainly generational (music style, appearance, language), or are the changes bigger? Is a shift in worldview(s) occurring? If it is just a generational change, then you might as well just change the music, add some candles, create hip environment, and play a video of the senior pastor. That’s changing the style, and I think that if we really peeled back the layers of the majority of these alternative services within existing churches, that is what we would find.... However, if the changes in culture are bigger than merely generational styles, it is absurd to think that creating a different aesthetic environment and changing the music is really being missional.... This means that the whole culture of a church will change, not just what happens in a worship gathering. That is why only changing the worship gathering is not the answer. This is why so many worship gatherings launched within a church last only 3-5 years. Very few last any longer than that. They end up imploding because if the new worship

¹⁹Burke, “From the Third Floor,” p. 29.

gathering is truly rethinking everything as a missionary would to a different culture, then the new ministry with different values struggles to squeeze into the existing church structure's cultural form of ministry. Because the power lies with the senior leadership, the decisions are made from top to bottom, and the alternative worship gatherings are not at the top. Ironically, the very thing (the need for something different) that the senior leadership was excited about in birthing the new worship gathering, ends up causing all the tension. This usually happens after lots of conflict and difficulty.”²⁰

- c. Willow Creek Community Church (which many evangelicals and pastors regard as a leader in church innovation) attempted a separate service for young adults called Axis. They recruited a successful pastor from California, Dieter Zander, to lead this service.

“He founded an evangelical church geared to young adults in 1986, and then he later joined the staff of Willow Creek Community Church, a nationally recognized megachurch in suburban Chicago. At Willow Creek, Zander pioneered the ‘church within a church’ model, which gave Generation Xers their own contemporary worship service.”²¹

Zander left Willow Creek in 2001. “His departure was sparked by differences over how the baby buster congregation fit into the larger church body, he says. ‘We all said we wanted to do something to reach the next generation ... but we weren’t really saying the same thing.’ Pastor Bill Hybels expected the new congregation eventually to ‘fold into the main ministry of the church,’ Zander explains.”²²

After ten years of Axis, Willow Creek finally did fold it into the larger congregation in a decision announced in July of 2006.²³

3. The reason that emerging (or postmodern) ministry cannot seem to exist in a modern evangelical church is the difference in worldview between the emerging (postmodern) leaders and the existing (modern) evangelical church leaders. It is not primarily a conflict of youth/age or two differing worship styles.

D. It rejected the “modern” church in favor of its own community and identity.

²⁰http://blog.christianitytoday.com/outofur/archives/2006/07/axis_denied_wha.html

²¹Colleen Carroll, *The New Faithful* (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2002), p. 85. This page of the book is available online at http://books.google.com/books?id=JHkVarVXKXYC&pg=PA85&lpg=PA85&dq=dieter+zander+willow+creek&source=web&ots=vEpNckEHNG&sig=yVR9zwPmz0GZQWrKKq_8upUv2Uk&hl=en&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=9&ct=result.

²²<http://www.theooze.com/articles/article.cfm?id=135>

²³http://blog.christianitytoday.com/outofur/archives/2006/07/axis_denied_wha.html

Although most emerging churches did not start within an evangelical church, there is a common thread of dissatisfaction with “modern” evangelical churches that caused the emerging leaders to found their own ministries. The emerging church is a church planting movement because it is fundamentally dissatisfied with the modern church.

1. Brian McLaren

In the closing chapter of a book of stories by some of the emerging leaders, McLaren writes, “...these stories reflect a shared discontentment with modern evangelicalism. However you want to define the postmodern condition... it’s clear that to be postmodern means to feel that modern culture is (to some degree) on the wrong track, including modern Christianity.”²⁴

McLaren went so far as to dissolve the evangelical (modernistic) church he had founded in 1982 and restart a new emerging church in 1987.²⁵

2. Mark Driscoll

“It was the first half of 1996 and I was twenty-five years of age chronologically, six years of age spiritually, and trying to gather enough people to launch Mars Hill Church in the city of Seattle.... I had spent the previous two years as the college ministry intern plankton at the bottom of the food chain at a multiracial megachurch and had used the youth room to run a college group in Seattle. College ministry soon started to feel like hanging out with an ex-girlfriend, so I hit the eject button because life-stage ministry was a vocational dead end.... So I decided to start a church, for three reasons. **First, I hated going to church and wanted one I liked, so I thought I would just start my own.** Second, God had spoken to me in one of those weird charismatic moments and told me to start a church. Third, I am scared of God and try to do what he says.”²⁶

So, this is how we got to where we are. Over time (many would say since World War II), people began to change the way that they look at the world. Instead of feeling confident about truth and optimistic about progress, they began to wonder about the existence and knowability of truth. This led them to question whether or not the progress of science was really good for society. Therefore, they became distrustful of authority and of dogmatic claims to truth. Some Christians felt this way too, or at least noticed the changes in others and they spoke up in response to them. When their modern evangelical churches did not accept them, they went out and started their own churches. Some of these churches have gathered a large number of young people, which gave their leaders visibility and the ability to openly present their ideas to other Christians and Christian leaders. That is why we’re talking about this subject today.

²⁴Brian D. McLaren, “We’re Not Finished” in *Stories of Emergence* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), p. 223.

²⁵Brian D. McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), pp. 25-26.

²⁶Mark Driscoll, *Confessions*, pp. 38-39, emphasis added.

Part 2:

Characteristics and Leaders

by Brian Jones

I. Characteristics: What are some of the common elements of emerging churches and leaders?

A. Youth

1. Emerging leaders—especially those who are pastors/church planters—tend to be younger adults (under 40).
2. Emerging’s proponents feel that they represent a generation of younger adults who do not connect with the “modern” church. It is generally agreed that this group—and those who come after them—hold a “postmodern” worldview.
3. The age difference between emerging believers and evangelicals is not due to different stages of life; rather, it is due to postmodernism.
 - a. Older people were educated and acculturated when modernism was the dominant worldview.
 - b. Postmodernism was developed by progressive thinkers during modern times and taught in colleges and universities first, where it has eventually filtered down to all of society and culture.
 - c. Because younger adults were educated and acculturated during the rise of postmodernism, they are more natively comfortable with the postmodern world.
 - d. The result is that the emerging church does not necessarily target younger adults only; rather, **it attracts more younger adults** than older ones because younger adults more natively think like postmoderns than older adults do.

The late Robert Webber, a former theology professor who sympathized with the emerging church, writes: “First, *younger evangelicals* refers to those who are *young in age*. My interest is in capturing the thinking of the college and seminary student in particular, the ‘twenty-something.’ Such students are thinking about what it means to be an evangelical in the twenty-first century.... Second, there are older leaders from the previous generation who are already addressing the matter of the evangelical faith and practice in the twenty-first century. They are *young in spirit*.... Here, then, is how I am using the phrase *younger evangelical*. The younger evangelical is anyone, older or younger, who deals thoughtfully with the shift from twentieth- to twenty-first-

century culture.... The younger evangelical wants to release the historic substance of faith from its twentieth-century enculturation in the Enlightenment and recontextualize it with the new cultural condition of the twenty-first century.”²⁷

B. Dissatisfaction with the “modern” church which ultimately led to rejecting it.

A Note about “Modernism” and “Modernity”

Depending on what your background in Christianity is, you might have been surprised to hear me refer to our church as “modernistic.” Many fundamental and conservative evangelical churches have warned against the evils of “modernism.” Let me say three things to clarify the meaning here:

- When I refer to us as a “modern” or “modernistic” church, I am using the term as the emerging church-types use it. In other words *they* call churches like ours “modernistic.” I am doing this to let you know that they are talking about us, not some other kind of church.
- When those in the emerging church movement call us “modernistic,” they are referring to our culture and worldview, not our theology. They are saying that we see the world through modern assumptions—truth is real (objective), truth is knowable, we come to know truth through the five senses (empiricism) and rationality (logic), etc. To them, our presentation of Christianity is “modernistic” because our evangelism, our preaching and teaching, and our apologetics are based on logic and science. We base our presentation on these things, they say, because we have a modernistic worldview.
- “Modernism” when used to speak of theology, is different than modernism as a cultural worldview. They are different, but they are related. Since the Enlightenment, people have relied more and more on science and logic because we are “modern.” This is modernism in a worldview or cultural sense; some have suggested using the word “modernity” instead of “modernism” to refer to this. Unbelievers attempted to use science and logic as ways to undermine Christianity and their success resulted in Western culture becoming increasingly secular. In the early 1900’s, some attempted to recast Christianity in ways that were more palatable to “modern (that is, secular) man.” Bible believing Christians called this “modernism” and it led to what has been called the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy. **This is “modernism” in the religious sense and it is what pastors and Christian leaders are talking about when they use the word modernism. In this sense, Calvary Bible Church is not modernistic.** For a brief, but helpful discussion of this, see Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), pp. 434-35.

1. Many in the emerging church complain about the highly organized, well-planned structure of the modern church.

²⁷Robert E. Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals* (Baker, 2002), pp. 16-17.

Spencer Burke: “Mariners is a great American success story. Founded in 1963 by a few families in a Newport Beach living room, the church has become one of the fastest growing congregations in the country. Each weekend, some 4,500 adults pass through its doors, with nearly 10,000 people attending its services and midweek activities. The church has everything a modern evangelical pastor could want. Great people, great programs, and great pay. The only problem is that I’m not a modern evangelical pastor. Try as I might, I’m troubled by things like parking lot ministry. Helping well-dressed families in SUVs find the next available parking space isn’t my spiritual gift.”²⁸

Remember that the emerging church is a response to postmodernism which is a change in worldview from modernism. One fixture of modernism is the corporation which is highly planned and structured. A common complaint from emerging church advocates is that modern evangelical churches are too structured; too much like corporations. James Engel writes, “I have often felt like an unappreciated cog in the Great Commission machinery designed to fit people into its mold with only scant attention paid to productivity, fulfillment, and well being. **This mentality still prevails in many churches and organizations. Sadly, it carries over from the factory era in modernism and is characterized by top-down command and conformity.** It can have devastating effects on lives — even bringing people, myself included, to the point of doubting whether ministry is worth the price.... What we have done is enthrone and even publicly honor **evangelical workaholism, a common feature within modernism** that has torn many lives and families asunder behind the scenes.”²⁹

Dan Kimball writes, “One of the most often repeated criticisms of the church today is that it is an ‘organized religion,’ a ‘big business,’ a ‘modern man-made religion.’ So what are we communicating when we use terms such as executive pastor and management team to describe our church’s ‘corporate structure?’ Are we reinforcing negative stereotypes? Don’t underestimate the power of words. I was serving on a ‘management team’ at church and mentioned to someone, who was not a believer, that I was at our management team meeting earlier in the day. I remember the puzzled look I got. ‘Management team? I thought you worked at a church.’ I found it very awkward to explain that a church was using the terminology of the corporate world.”³⁰

2. Many in the emerging church criticize the message of the modern church.
 - a. Even a theologically conservative emerging pastor like Mark Driscoll finds fault with the message of modern churches.

²⁸Burke, “From the Third Floor,” p. 28.

²⁹James F. Engel, “A Search for Christian Authenticity,” in *Stories of Emergence*, ed. Mike Yaconelli (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), p. 125.

³⁰Kimball, *Emerging Church*, p. 231.

Driscoll makes a distinction between traditional, contemporary, and emerging churches. He writes, “Traditional, contemporary, and emerging churches also differ in how they present the gospel. The traditional church generally proclaims a gospel of forgiveness.... The contemporary church generally proclaims a gospel of fulfillment.... In this framework, I do not exist for God but rather God exists for me.... What hinders the fulfillment of our full potential is not that we are sinners but rather that we don’t love ourselves enough and don’t have enough self-esteem and positive thinking.... The emerging church proclaims a gospel of freedom. According to the gospel of freedom, we were made to live in community with God and with each other without the pains of sin and death. But because of our sin, we have wrecked God’s good creation and brought death and havoc into all of life. And though we are self-destructive, God in his loving-kindness has chosen to save us from ourselves. Our God, Jesus, came to live without sin as our example, die for our sin as our substitute, and rise from death as our Lord who liberates us from Satan, sin, and death.”³¹

- b. Others, such as Brian McLaren want to hold on to certain terms used in modern churches, but redefine them in ways that change the meaning and message of those terms.

Consider this passage from one of McLaren’s books: “...the word *Evangelical* can have some pretty negative connotations. But it’s a word I would rather not abandon, if I can help it. In fact, I am happy and honored to consider myself an evangelical. First, though, I should explain why I was careful not to capitalize the term in the previous sentence.... ‘Big E’ Evangelical, as some use the term (especially in the U.S.), increasingly refers to ‘the Religious Right.’ That group would probably not want me in their company.... In contrast, evangelicals include both political conservatives and liberals, and those who, like me, don’t fit in either category. As used by others, *Evangelical* sometimes means ‘Fundamentalists of a slightly less narrow-minded and arrogant attitude,’ which, I suppose, a small step in the right direction.... Suffice it to say that I would heartily like to be included among any group making even small steps in the right direction, especially fundamentalists, **as long as that label means ‘adhering to fundamentals,’ and as long as *fundamentals* itself means ‘loving God and loving neighbors’ above all. (If *fundamentalist* means other things—such as belief in a foundationalist epistemology, assenting to something like a dictation theory of biblical inspiration, upholding a sectarian and elitist approach to non-Fundamentalist Christians, and identifying judgmentalism and anger as fruits of the Holy Spirit, then there’s little chance I’d be welcome in their company, which is probably for the best.... When I say I cherish**

³¹Driscoll, *Confessions*, pp. 23-25.

an evangelical identity, I mean something beyond a belief system or doctrinal array or even a practice. I mean an attitude—an attitude toward God and our neighbor and our mission that is *passionate*.³²

In the quotation above, McLaren directly talks about “foundationalist epistemology” (implying clearly that he’s against it), and deconstructs both the modern church’s evangelicalism/fundamentalism by casting them in negative caricatures and attempting to re-define both terms. Anti-foundationalism and deconstruction are both major pillars of postmodernism.

- C. They see themselves on a mission to reach postmoderns and, therefore, they make ministry choices in keeping with that mission. (The emerging group’s term for this is “**missional**.”)
1. Christianity has historically been part of America’s culture.
 - a. Historically, freedom of worship was part of the reason for the founding of America therefore most Americans were familiar with the Bible and some form of Christian denomination.
 - b. For many Christians who grew up in church, the traditions and practices of the church became intertwined with Christianity itself. Put another way, being a good Christian meant more than just believing the gospel and obeying the Bible. It also included living according to a Christian subculture, one whose standards and practices were defined by your church, your pastor, your denomination, and the other Christians in your community.
 - c. Modernism (in the form of secular humanism) and now postmodernism has largely removed Christianity from the mixture of elements that make up American culture.
 - d. Therefore, Christianity—both its message and its culture—are now foreign to many Americans.
 2. Many Christians leaders—including, but not exclusively, emerging church leaders—now stress that evangelism in America is now similar to foreign (that is cross-cultural) missions.
 - a. Because Christian culture and the Christian message are both foreign to many Americans, we have to separate what is cultural from what is Christian.
 - b. To reach our culture for Christ, we need to communicate the truth of Christianity into the culture of non-Christians. Our ministry then must be cross cultural.

³² Brian D. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Youth Specialties, 2004), pp. 116-17, emphasis in *italics* is McLaren’s; emphasis in **bold** is mine. This passage comes in a chapter titled “Why I Am evangelical.”

This is what Paul meant when he wrote, “To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. **I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings**” (1 Corinthians 9:20-23).

Speaking for the emerging church, then, Mark Driscoll writes, “Since the mid-1190s, the conversation among young pastors has evolved from reaching Generation X, to ministering in a postmodern culture, to a more mature and profitable investigation of what a movement of missionaries would look like, missionaries sent not from America to another nation but from America to *America*. This ‘reformission’ is a radical call to reform the church’s traditionally flawed view of missions as something carried out in foreign lands and to focus instead on the urgent need in our own neighborhoods, which are filled with diverse cultures of Americans who desperately need the gospel of Jesus and life in his church. Most significant, they need a gospel and a church that are faithful both to the scriptural texts and to the cultural contexts of America.... What I am advocating is not an abandonment of missions across the globe but rather an emphasis on missions that begin across the street, like Jesus commanded (Acts 1:8). Meanwhile, the churches in our neighborhoods may be more akin to museums memorializing a yesterday when God showed up in glory to transform people, than to the pivot points of a movement to reform the culture of the present day. Reformission requires that we all learn the principles handed down to us from mentors who are seasoned cross-cultural missionary pioneers.... These missionaries are most adept at helping us to cross from our church subcultures into the dominant cultures that surround us. Subsequently, at the heart of reformission are clear distinctions between the gospel, the culture, and the church.”³³

D. They deliberately choose language that is consistent with postmodernism.

1. They prefer metaphors and similes to propositions.

Spencer Burke founder of <http://theooze.com>: “People ask me about the name, TheOoze, what it means and how I chose it? **It’s actually a metaphor.** The idea behind the name is that the various parts of the faith community are like mercury. At times we’ll roll together; at times we’ll roll apart. Try to touch the liquid or constrain it, and the substance will resist. Rather than force people to fall into line,

³³ Driscoll, *Radical Reformission*, pp. 18-19.

an oozy community tolerates differences and treats people who hold opposing views with great dignity. To me, that’s the essence of the emerging church.”³⁴

This way of speaking corresponds to the visual nature of younger, postmodern generations. Since postmoderns were raised on mass media such as movies, television, video games, and the Internet, many argue that they learn visually rather than by listening/reading. Speaking in images—metaphors and similes—is a way to speak to and teach postmoderns while still communicating in a visual way.

2. They prefer “story” to explanation and argumentation.

Speaking of his own church, Mike Yaconelli wrote, “We don’t talk in propositions. We tell stories.... For whatever reason, there seems to be a growing awareness that our stories are the workshop of our faith. Stories describe our interaction with God, the tale of God’s presence or lack of it in our lives.”³⁵

“Story” is a strong communication vehicle in postmodern thought. While postmoderns may doubt the notions of truth and knowledge, they affirm that each of us has a story. Christian communicators see parallels to the Bible here, since most of the Bible contains stories. Instead of trying to use rational arguments to prove the truthfulness of Scripture (as a “modern” preacher would do), postmodern (i.e. “emerging”) preachers communicate in stories. The hope is that the postmoderns will resonate with the stories of the preacher and the Bible. As a postmodern person hears echoes of his or her own stories in the preacher’s story, they may then come to believe in Jesus.

Dan Kimball writes, “I get my hair cut twice a month, mainly because of how much I learn about preaching and communicating each time I go. At my local salon almost all the stylists are young and represent today’s culture. To my knowledge none of them attends church or has anything to do with it. But over the past two years, I have developed a friendship with the girl who cuts my hair—a twenty-five-year-old who’s into the psychobilly music scene. Each visit, I have the privilege of sitting and talking with her for nearly an hour. Often our conversation turns to whatever I’m preaching about in church for the following few weeks. She loves giving her viewpoint and has no trouble at all talking about spiritual things.”³⁶

A few pages later, Kimball returns to this girl. “Because I have a relationship with her, speaking about spiritual things has become normal. I was able to speak of God’s design for men and women and what it means to be one flesh. She suddenly

³⁴Burke, “From the Third Floor,” pp. 36-37, emphasis added.

³⁵Mike Yaconelli, “The Illegitimate Church” in *Stories of Emergence*, ed. Mike Yaconelli (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), pp. 18-19.

³⁶Kimball, *Emerging Church*, p. 174.

stopped cutting my hair, spun the chair around, and jerked it to a stop. She looked me in the eye, with the razor still buzzing in her hand, and said, ‘Say that again. I want to hear more about that.’ Because she trusted me, I was able to say some very strong words about God’s design for sex and relationships. As I spoke, she was about as wide-eyed and open to questions as one could ever hope for. Her eyes even welled up with tears as she expressed how she could relate to some of what I said. You see, hearing about God’s guidelines for sex and relationships was not a negative thing at all to her. It truly was good news because for the very first time, she was **hearing the story of God and his love and how our sexuality was designed by him**. I didn’t just talk about sin, but **I told the story and how relationships and sexuality fit in that story.**³⁷

Toward the end of this chapter in his book, Kimball returns again to the story of his hairstylist and how her experience demonstrates the power of story. “Preaching is a beautiful way of showing people in emerging generations not only that there is truth in a world of relativism but also that there is a Truth who personally loves them (John 14:6). This is what the girl who cuts my hair needs the most. Not just teaching that she shouldn’t have sex before marriage because it is sin but also teaching on the grand story of the Bible so she sees herself as God does **and sees how her sexuality fits within that story.**”³⁸

Notice how Kimball not only talked about the importance of story, but actually told a story to us to demonstrate its power.

E. They emphasize “authenticity” over “authority.”

1. Because postmodernism is suspicious about objective truth and modern methods for acquiring knowledge, it is therefore distrustful of authority.
2. Instead of looking at someone’s authority (their title or educational degrees) as a reason to trust what they are saying, postmoderns look to see if that person is living authentically within what they are saying.

F. They speak of evangelism as a “process” more than a decision made at a point in time.

Mark Driscoll articulates this view while still holding to the theology that a person is saved at a moment in time. “At some point, God may grant saving faith to their lost friends and enable them to pass from death to life, but their salvation is ultimately between them and God, as he alone gives salvation. The precise moment of their conversion is known by God but it is often unknown to them, because authentic conversion is commonly experienced **more as a process than as a single moment**.

³⁷Ibid., p. 177, emphasis added.

³⁸Ibid., p. 180, emphasis added.

Ultimately what matters most is not when they meet Jesus but that at some point they begin loving him with new hearts and will continue to do so forever.”³⁹

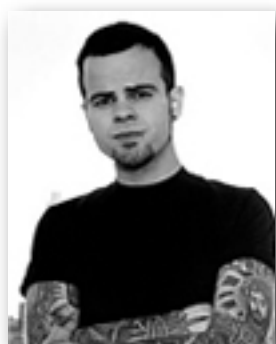
- G. They talk about the power of the church as “community,” including as an aspect of evangelism.

Mark Driscoll writes, “Reformation evangelism understands that the transformed lives of people in the church are both the greatest argument for, and the greatest explanation of, the gospel. Therefore, it welcomes non-Christians into the church, not so much through evangelistic programs as through informal relationships like Jesus developed with his first disciples.... Reformation Christians are not ashamed of the gospel, and they speak about Jesus and pray to him in front of their lost friends as they would around their Christian friends; and their lost friends appreciate their authenticity.”⁴⁰

- H. Church Planting

I mentioned this last week when I talked about the three phases of the emerging church. After (1) recognizing the cultural shift to postmodernism and (2) being unable to deal with it in the context of the “modern” [mega] church, most of the energy of emerging church adherents went into (3) planting new churches.

II. People: Who are some emerging church leaders?



Jay Bakker

Revolution Church

New York, NY

Pastor & Founder

<http://www.RevolutionNYC.com/>

Author:

- *Son of a Preacher Man* (2001)

Son of Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker

³⁹Driscoll, *Radical Reformation*, pp. 69-70.

⁴⁰Ibid., 68-69.



Rob Bell

Mars Hill Bible Church
Grandville, MI
Teaching Pastor & Founder
<http://www.marshall.org/>

Nooma
<http://nooma.com>

Author:

- *Velvet Elvis* (2006)
- *Sex God* (2007)
- *Jesus Wants to Save Christians* (2008)



Shane Claiborne

The Simple Way
Philadelphia, PA
Co-founder

Author:

- *The Irresistible Revolution* (2006)
- *Jesus for President* (2008)
- *The New Conspirators* (2008)
- *Simple Spirituality* (2008)



Mark Driscoll

Mars Hill Bible Church
Seattle, WA
Pastor & Founder

Author:

- *Radical Reformation* (2004)
- *Confessions of a Reformation Rev.* (2006)
- *Vintage Jesus* (2008)



Tony Jones

Emergent Village

Edina, MN

National Coordinator

<http://emergentvillage.org/>

<http://tonyj.net/>

Author of many books, including:

- *The Sacred Way* (2005)
- *The New Christians* (2008)



Frederica Mathewes-Green

Holy Cross Orthodox Church

Baltimore, MD

Her husband is the pastor, she calls herself “Khouria” (mother) and co-founder of the church.

<http://www.holycrossonline.org/>

<http://www.frederica.com/>

Author of 8 books including:

- *Facing East: A Pilgrim’s Journey into the Mysteries of Orthodoxy* (1997)
- *The Illumined Heart: The Ancient Christian Path of Transformation* (2001)



Brian McLaren

Cedar Ridge Community Church

Spencerville, MD

Pastor & Founder

<http://www.crc.org/>

<http://www.brianmclaren.net/>

Author of many books including:

- *A New Kind of Christian* (2001)
- *A Generous Orthodoxy* (2004)



Erwin McManus

Mosaic

Los Angeles, CA

Calls himself “the primary communicator and cultural architect” of Mosaic.

<http://mosaic.org>

<http://erwinmcmanus.com/>

Author of many books, including:

- *An Unstoppable Force* (2001)
- *Seizing Your Divine Moment* (2002)



Donald Miller

New York Times bestselling author

Author of:

- *Through Painted Deserts* (2005)
- ***Blue Like Jazz* (2003)**
- *Searching for God Knows What* (2004)
- *To Own a Dragon* (2006)

<http://www.donaldmillerwords.com/>



Doug Pagitt

Solomon’s Porch

Minneapolis, MN

Pastor & Founder

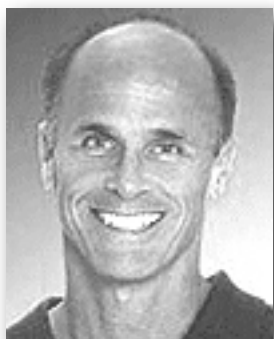
Co-Founder of Emergent Village

<http://www.solomonsporch.com/>

<http://dougpagitt.com/>

Author of numerous books, including:

- *Church Re-Imagined* (2004)
- *Preaching Re-Imagined* (2005)
- *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope* (2007)



Chuck Smith, Jr.
Capo Beach Calvary
Capistrano, CA
Pastor & Founder

<http://www.capocalvary.com/>

Author of:

- *The End of the World...As We Know it* (2001)
- *There Is a Season* (2005)

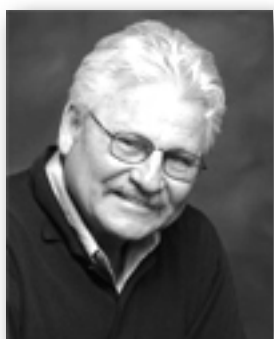
Son of Chuck Smith who founded
Calvary Chapel



Leonard Sweet
Drew University
Madison, NJ
Professor

Author of many books, including:

- *Quantum Spirituality* (1991)
- *Aqua Church* (1999)
- *Soul Tsunami* (2001)



Robert Webber
(deceased)
Wheaton College
Wheaton, IL
Former Professor

Institute for Worship Studies
Jacksonville, FL
Founder
<http://www.iwsfla.org/>

Author of over 40 books, including:

- *Ancient-Future Faith* (1999)
- *The Younger Evangelicals* (2002)

Part 3:

Personalities: Names and Faces

I. Mark Driscoll



Mark Driscoll
Mars Hill Church
Seattle, WA
Pastor & Founder

Author:

- *Radical Reformation* (2004)
- *Confessions of a Reformation Rev.* (2006)
- *Vintage Jesus* (2008)

A. Personal information

1. Childhood

Mark Driscoll was born 1970⁴¹ in Grand Forks, ND.⁴² His family moved to Washington early in Mark's life—first to Spokane, then to Seattle.⁴³ His father did construction work while his mother stayed home to raise their five children.⁴⁴ Of his childhood he writes, “Culturally, I am Irish, which means I have two emotions: angry and asleep. I was raised as the oldest of five kids in a hardworking, blue-collar Catholic family near the airport in Seattle, Washington. It was a Norman Rockwell—

⁴¹Driscoll, *Radical Reformation*, p. 4 (copyright page). Wikipedia lists his birthdate as October 11, 1970 (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mark_Driscoll)

⁴²<http://voxpopnetwork.com/vision/2008/01/04/welcome-to-the-pastors-new-blog/>

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid.

Precious Moments kind of neighborhood just up the hill from the strip clubs and the hunting grounds of the Green River Killer and Ted Bundy.”⁴⁵

Driscoll was apparently a good student, ambitious, and showed leadership qualities in high school. “So I worked hard through high school and graduated Most Likely to Succeed and student body president. I was very proud to have never drunk alcohol, smoked a cigarette, tried a drug, or voted Republican.”⁴⁶

After high school, Driscoll did not stay in Seattle and work construction as his father did.⁴⁷ “Upon graduation, I was awarded a few scholarships that enabled be to be the first person in my family to go to college. So, wanting to get out of the city and try something new, I moved about three hundred miles away to Washington State University, which is tucked away in the wheatfields [sic] of eastern Washington.”⁴⁸

Driscoll became a Christian in college, married his high school sweetheart, graduated⁴⁹ and moved back to Seattle.

2. Conversion to Christianity

As previously noted, Mark Driscoll was raised in a Catholic family, though his own testimony indicates that he learned little Catholic theology. “Growing up, I thought that as long as I believed in a nebulous Sky Fairy named God and was a decent, moral person outperforming those below me on the ethical food chain, I would end my life hearing the old theme song from *The Jeffersons* television show and be ‘movin’ on u’ to heaven with all the other good guys.”⁵⁰

In high school, he had dated a pastor’s daughter named Grace, but Driscoll did not become a believer in Christ until he was in college. “Without a car and majoring in boredom, I began reading a nice Bible my high school girlfriend had given me as a graduation present. She was a pastor’s daughter who, in retrospect, should not have been dating me.... After a bad few weeks of frat experience that landed me in the freshman equivalent of purgatory—a dorm—I sat down to read the Gospels. Frankly, they seemed boring because they kept saying the same thing. I wondered if the Bible wasn’t written by an old man with dementia, or by a young man who had gone to my ‘publick skewl. As I continued to read, Jesus seemed okay, but the guys I really liked—because of their self-control and strength—were the denominational leaders of that

⁴⁵Driscoll, *Radical Reformation*, p. 11.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 12.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 11.

⁴⁹Ibid., 13; Driscoll, *Confessions*, p. 97; Wikipedia states, without citation, that Driscoll earned a bachelor’s degree in communication with a minor in philosophy (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mark_Driscoll)

⁵⁰Driscoll, *Radical Reformation*, p. 11.

day: the Pharisees. They were about the only guys in the cast of characters with any guts. I identified with them and was convinced they were the good guys in the story... until they killed Jesus. I wasn't much of a theologian at the time, but murdering Jesus did seem like a bad move."⁵¹

Driscoll continued reading the Bible that Grace had given him, but its meaning was unclear to him until he studied Augustine in a college philosophy class. Reading Augustine revealed to Driscoll that sin is not just bad things people do, but rather that people do sinful activities because of the natural depravity of our hearts. He continues, "I then read the entire New Testament over the course of the next few weeks. God opened my eyes to the fact that I was a Pharisee and that the worst sinners are often the most moral and spiritual people who, like I was doing, pursue righteousness apart from Jesus. As I was sitting on my dorm bed, the words of Romans 1:6 'And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,' sounded in my head like an alarm. I realized that God had been pursuing me and was, in that moment, screaming into the three pounds of meat between my ears that I belong to Jesus."⁵²

Immediately after becoming a Christian, Driscoll began teaching a Bible study using the fact that he had a TV to gather a group. He told guys they could watch *The Simpsons* in his dorm room if they listened to him teach the Bible first. "To my surprise, about ten guys showed up. It then dawned on me that I had been a Christian for only a few days, had never been in a Bible study, and did not really know anything in the Bible.... So I told the guys they could ask me any question about the Bible and I would take the following week to research the answer, since I didn't have any answers yet. This was my first ministry, and it inspired me to begin buying commentaries, reference materials, theology texts, apologetics books, and the like, which were more interesting by far than most of my classes."⁵³

Driscoll also began attending a church and learning God's word there in addition to his own personal study. "Shortly thereafter, I found a good church that met my criteria. First, the pastor was a man who had been in the military and knew how to kill people in self-defense. Second, he taught through the Bible verse by verse, so that I could learn to trust the Scriptures and to love Jesus without feeling like we had a thinly veiled homosexual relationship."⁵⁴

He attended a men's retreat with some men from this church and had an experience that moved him toward Christian ministry. "Late one night during the retreat, I went down to the river and was compelled by God to kneel for some time in prayer. Then it

⁵¹Ibid., p.12.

⁵²Ibid., p. 13.

⁵³Ibid., p. 14.

⁵⁴Ibid.

happened! He spoke to me and told me what to do with the days between my birth and the judgment—in other words, my life. He told me to lead men, preach Scripture, plant churches, marry Grace, and trust him. So I married Grace, began studying Scripture with the enthusiasm of a glutton at a buffet, and started preparing myself to become a pastor....”⁵⁵

3. Preparation for Ministry

Driscoll had no academic theological training when he started Mars Hill. When he graduated from college, he and Grace moved back to Seattle, and became involved in a church in the suburbs. The Driscolls volunteered in the church’s college ministry and Mark began co-hosting a weekly Christian talk show where he began “learning a great deal about the views and struggles of young non-Christians and new Christians.”⁵⁶

Recently, Driscoll entered seminary to obtain a master’s degree. He did this years after Mars Hill began and grew to be a large ministry. Although he does not claim that his approach was intentional, Driscoll prefers the “serve first, seminary later” approach that he followed. “I once read a pithy quote from Chuck Smith, who founded the Calvary Chapel movement. He said that most churches called the trained, but their churches trained the called. This simple distinction is profoundly important. The traditional model of ministry is that a person goes to seminary and is trained for ministry. Once they have completed their training and have passed their ordination exams, they are called into ministry by a church or denomination. As Smith said, it is much wiser for someone to be overseen by leaders in a church who confirm that God has called them into ministry. Then, once their call has been confirmed, they should be trained by doing ministry in their church. This point was reinforced by Dr. John Piper. He encouraged me to make time for theological education and writing because every generation needs to define and defend Christian orthodoxy for themselves. His encouragement was wise and has helped me to validate in my own mind the need to make time for further education, study, and writing. So, though our church leaders nearly all began as new converts who were self-taught, our elders are now pursuing further education while working at Mars Hill, and I am finishing a degree at Western Seminary.”⁵⁷

Although I have not been able to confirm this from any other source, the entry about Driscoll in Wikipedia states that he has finished the program he referenced above at Western Seminary. It states that he has “a Master of Arts degree in exegetical theology.”⁵⁸

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 15.

⁵⁷Driscoll, *Confessions*, p. 178.

⁵⁸http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mark_Driscoll

4. Family.

A previous quote mentions that Mark married his high school sweetheart Grace. At the time of this writing, they have five children (three boys, two girls).⁵⁹

B. Mars Hill Church

1. Origin

After spending two years as a volunteer college ministry intern at a suburban Seattle megachurch, Driscoll started Mars Hill Church in his living room in 1996. “We named the church after the place where Paul preached to the great pagan city of Athens with cultural relevance by quoting their poets and artists. In retrospect, the name of our church is kind of dumb and sounds more like a cult than a church, which, sad to say, actually benefits us in a city where words like *Jesus* and *Christian* are far more offensive than four-letter cuss words.”⁶⁰

The first meeting place outside the Driscolls’ home was “the upstairs room at the fundamentalist church.”⁶¹ “It was the first half of 1996 and I was twenty-five years of age chronologically, six years of age spiritually, and trying to gather enough people to launch Mars Hill Church in the city of Seattle. About ten to twenty people a week were showing up for our Sunday service, which had outgrown the living room of my rental home and was now being held in one of those epically awful youth rooms, complete with golden shag carpet on the floor and Christian rock posters on the wall.... Our weekly service would start sometime around 6:00 p.m., whenever the college students and indie rockers would show up, because it was apparently very difficult to get up by the crack of dinner. Fortunately, the room was free, which was nearly more than we could afford.”⁶²

Driscoll describes the early services of Mars Hill in negative terms. “In retrospect, our church services were, quite frankly, painful. My preaching was like a combination of boring systematic theology and uninspiring motivational talk from a cranky junior high gym teacher. Our rotating cast of worship leader tryouts ranged from screaming punk rockers—to this day, I have no idea why they were so dramatically depressed—to ...happy-clappy Christian praise musicians....”⁶³

⁵⁹Driscoll, *Confessions*, p. 165. There is a brief, recent video of the Driscoll family at the airport, on their way to Australia, that you can see here: <http://voxpoppnetwork.com/vision/2008/08/05/hello-from-the-airport/>.

⁶⁰Driscoll, *Confessions*, p. 9.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 38.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ibid., p. 40.

Despite the humble beginnings, Driscoll had a much bigger vision for Mars Hill. “In my imagination, however, I saw an entirely different church, one that did not have a beat-up old couch or a foosball table in the sanctuary. I envisioned a large church that hosted concerts for non-Christian bands and fans on a phat sound system, embraced the arts, trained young men to be godly husbands and fathers, planted other churches, and led people to work with Jesus Christ as missionaries to our city. Sadly, that church existed only in my mind, and the hard part was figuring out how to get my vision into the minds of other people so that together we could build the church God had put in my imagination. I started to wrestle with some very basic questions that, although I had read widely, I had apparently not connected in a practical way for ministry. These questions continue to drive our ministry so that it remains missional, and I believe they are vitally important for every Christian and Christian leader to continually ask because they keep the person and mission of Jesus as the most important factor in the church and Christian life.”⁶⁴

Though the church did not formally launch until October of 1996,⁶⁵ the pre-launch services of the church took place weekly and were growing. It had grown to the point that the free teen room (at the “fundamentalist church”) was no longer adequate and it became necessary to start renting the auditorium of that church. “Renting the sanctuary cost \$1,000 a month, which was a great deal of money at the time because we were struggling just to get up to broke. I occasionally bought lottery tickets and promised God I would tithe if he’d let me win, but to no avail. We decided to go ahead and rent the sanctuary anyway because we wanted more seats so that we could reach more people and had faith that God would bring in the money because we were on his mission.”⁶⁶ In the spring and summer of 1996, Mars Hill began preparing for a more formal ministry launch. “Anyway, our church started as a Bible study with a handful of people, and over the course of about six months, it grew to be a good weekly service of about seventy people, with a great band, child care, and hope.... As the summer was winding down, we were preparing for a big fall launch of our little church plant on the first Sunday in October 1996.”⁶⁷

2. Growth

Although things were rough in the pre-launch phases of Mars Hill, the church grew quickly when it officially began. There was no money available for a large advertising campaign, so the formal launch of Mars Hill depended on personal invitations and prayer. “My wife, Grace, and I fasted and prayed for the week leading up to our first public church service. The only advertising we could afford was invitations we had printed up for our people to give to friends and family, but we were hoping for a big

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 71

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 58.

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 70-71.

turnout.”⁶⁸The big turnout came. “Between 160 and 200 people had shown up for our big kickoff service.... The following week we leveled off at around 80 to 100 people as the friends, family, and well-wishers who came for the launch went back to their churches.”⁶⁹

Within a year, Mars Hill had moved to its own rental building, a vacant Presbyterian church that had closed.⁷⁰ “By the end of the summer of 1997, we were running anywhere between 120 and 150 people on Sundays, and the sanctuary was looking fairly full.”⁷¹

The growth of Mars Hill continued and has accelerated over the past eleven years. In 1998, “our attendance began bouncing somewhere in the 220 to 250 range on Sundays.”⁷² Although the church’s attendance dropped below 200 when Mars Hill lost its meeting place unexpectedly in 1999⁷³, by 2001 the church had grown to over 800 people⁷⁴ meeting in three locations at multiple times.⁷⁵

An article published in *Pacific Northwest* (the magazine of the *The Seattle Times* newspaper) in 2003 states, “Since Driscoll founded Mars Hill in 1996, the church has grown about 60 percent each year — solely by word of mouth. Weekly attendance now averages around 1,600.”⁷⁶ Around this time in 2003, Driscoll set his sites on growing Mars Hill to an attendance over 3,000. “I began writing out how I envisioned our church at 3,000-plus people. I chose this number because roughly half of all megachurches have between 2,000 and 3,000 people, and the other half have over 3,000 people.... This means that the 3,000 barrier is the most difficult of any church size to overcome. Therefore, it seemed prudent to push for that goal with plans to reorganize if and when we got over the 3,000 mark.”⁷⁷ Preparing for this kind of growth required quite a bit of pruning. Mars Hill spun off one of its three locations

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 75.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 76.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 83

⁷¹Ibid., p. 93.

⁷²Ibid., p. 100.

⁷³Ibid., p. 119.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 132.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 134.

⁷⁶Janet I. Tu, “Pastor Mark packs ‘em in” in *Pacific Northwest*, 30 November 2003. Available online at <http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/pacificnw/2003/1130/cover.html>.

⁷⁷Driscoll, *Confessions*, p. 147.

into a separate church plant.⁷⁸ Its leaders closed down several high profile ministries⁷⁹ and consolidated Mars Hill into a 40,000 square foot industrial building that had previously been a hardware store.⁸⁰ By 2006, when *Confessions of a Reformation Rev.* was published, Mars Hill had broken the 3,000 barrier and was regularly hosting 4,000 people in its Sunday worship services.⁸¹

According to their 2008 annual report, **Mars Hill now has an average weekly attendance of 5,771 people with 2,707 either in membership already or in the process of becoming members.** The church meets in seven separate locations scattered throughout the Seattle-Tacoma area.⁸²

Mars Hill meets at multiple locations and times. The good news is that the church remains the same. More than just a building, the church is God's people. Each Sunday we gather to listen to spiritual teaching, worship through song and to remember Christ's sacrifice through communion. Regardless of which roof we're under, our purpose remains to love and honor Jesus.

For detailed information about service times, locations, getting involved, and more, please select a location from the following list:

Select campus. . .

Current Service Times:

Ballard	9am, 11am, 5:00pm, 7:00pm*
Bellevue	9am, 11:15am, 5pm**
Downtown Seattle	10am & 6pm
Lake City	10:30am, 5pm
Olympia	10am
Shoreline	9am, 11:15am, 5pm
West Seattle	9am, 11:15am

* no childcare | ** only nursery and toddler rooms offered

This is a picture from Mars Hill's website showing the locations and service times for the church's seven locations: [http://www.marshillchurch.org/locations and services](http://www.marshillchurch.org/locations_and_services)

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 148.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 149.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 152.

⁸¹Ibid., pp. 9, 155.

⁸² "Mars Hill Church Annual Report, 2007-2008" available online at http://www.marshillchurch.org/media/2008/08/01/20080801_mars-hill-quarterly-summer-2008_document.pdf. This document details the giving and attendance trends of Mars Hill from 2001 until the present.

C. Key Features of Driscoll's Theology & Ministry

1. Driscoll's theology.

a. Driscoll is Reformed in his theology.

Wikipedia's article on Driscoll states that he is a "four and a half point Calvinist"⁸³ which means that he believes all the doctrines of Calvinism, including Limited Atonement, but sees the potential of the atonement as sufficient to save all, not just those chose by God (i.e. the elect). The source for this is the audio of a message by Driscoll called "Unlimited-Limited Atonement."⁸⁴

In an interview with *Christianity Today*, Driscoll stated, "I came to Reformed theology by preaching through books of the Bible such as Exodus, Romans, John, and Revelation, along with continually repenting of my sin."⁸⁵

b. Driscoll practices classic Bible interpretation.

Driscoll describes himself as "an intense biblical literalist."⁸⁶ In a book on the beliefs of some in the emerging church, Driscoll contributed a chapter where he wrote, "As a devoted biblicist I am seeking to be as faithful to Scripture as possible, which explains the many Scripture references in this chapter."⁸⁷ Later in that chapter he explains "...God has revealed what he has determined we need to know in the divinely inspired text of Scripture..."⁸⁸ "... as we pick up the Bible, we must interpret the words in the text so we know their meaning. The best way to interpret Scripture is Scripture, since Scripture alone is perfect and the locus of final authority over us."⁸⁹

Driscoll contrasts his method for interpreting the Bible (the normal, evangelical method) with postmodern efforts at interpretation. "But postmodern uses of the Bible are prone to impose on the text cultural meanings and desires that ignore or alter the meaning of the Scripture altogether. In doing so, the interpreter is elevated in authority over the text of Scripture, no longer humbly coming under

⁸³http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mark_Driscoll

⁸⁴http://www.marshallchurch.org/Audio/Atonement8_Driscoll_112005.mp3

⁸⁵Jason Bailey, "Men Are from Mars Hill," in *Christianity Today* 4 July 2006 available online only at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/julyweb-only/127-52.0.html>.

⁸⁶Driscoll, *Confessions*, p. 66.

⁸⁷Mark Driscoll, "The Emerging Church and Biblicist Theology," in *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*, ed. Robert Webber (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), p. 21.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

Scripture, but instead rising up arrogantly over it, much like the serpent tempted our first parents with the hermeneutical question, ‘Did God really says...?’ For example, perhaps the most blatant postmodern use of Scripture is the growing ‘Christian’ defense of homosexuality.”⁹⁰

c. Driscoll promotes biblical manhood and womanhood.

Masculinity is one of the things that makes Mark Driscoll stand apart from other Christian leaders. Because he speaks of it often, it is clear that masculinity is a core value for Driscoll. Consider this paragraph that describes why he chose a man named Tim to lead worship at Mars Hill: “But I really liked Tim because he is one of the few manly men whom I have ever seen leading worship. I am not supposed to say this, but most of the worship dudes I have heard are not overly dudely. They seem to be very in touch with their feelings and exceedingly chickified from playing too much acoustic guitar and singing prom songs to Jesus while channeling Michael Bolton and flipping their hair. Tim was a guy who brewed his own beer, smoked a pipe, rock climbed, mountain biked, river rafted, carried a knife on his belt, and talked about what he thought more than how he felt. We clicked because I drive a 1978 Chevy truck that gets single digits to the gallon and has a bacon air freshener and no functioning speedometer and because I fashion myself as the self-appointed leader of a heterosexual male backlash in our overly chickified city filled with guys drinking herbal tea and rocking out to Mariah Carey in their lemon yellow Volkswagen Cabriolets while wearing fuchsia sweater vests that perfectly match their open toed shoes.”⁹¹

The reason for this focus on masculinity comes not only from Driscoll’s personality, but from the Bible. He writes, “...I am an intense biblical literalist who believes that the man is the head of the home, that the man should provide for his family, that children are a blessing, and that we would not have so many deceived feminists around if men were better husbands and fathers because the natural reaction of godly women to godly men is trust and respect.”⁹²

Furthermore, he sees the city of Seattle as a place filled with feminists, feminized men, and others who are confused about their own sexuality. He also feels that the church is suffering from excessive feminization.

d. Driscoll believes in direct, extra-scriptural revelation.

A short time after his salvation, Driscoll claims that God spoke to him and revealed a plan for his life while he was on a men’s retreat with his church. “Late one night during the retreat, I went down to the river and was compelled by God

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 26.

⁹¹Driscoll, *Confessions*, p. 146-47.

⁹²Ibid., pp. 66-67.

to kneel for some time in prayer. Then it happened! He spoke to me and told me what to do with the days between my birth and the judgment—in other words, my life. He told me to lead men, preach Scripture, plant churches, marry Grace, and trust him.”⁹³

Just before launching Mars Hill publicly, “an older man who had become like a theological mentor”⁹⁴ to Driscoll began to cause problems within the group. Mark and Grace Driscoll began praying “that God would reveal to us what we should do about this man who wanted to be a pastor in the church and oversee our discipleship process.”⁹⁵

The answer, according to Driscoll, was a “prophetic dream” that helped him resolve the situation. “I actually was not sure that such miraculous things still happened and was skeptical of prophetic dreams altogether. But while I was sleeping one night, the Holy Spirit gave me a dream in which I was standing in the foyer of our rented church on the opening night of our church plant. As I turned around in my dream, the older man walked in by himself, carrying a Bible in a brown leather case and wearing a blue shirt, green shorts, sandals, and a homemade cross around his neck. He informed me that he wanted to pastor the church and that I should step aside and let him. God then spoke Acts 20:28-31 to me, saying, ‘Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.... I then woke up to tell my wife that God had revealed to me that the older man was a wolf sent by Satan and that Jesus wanted me to protect and lead the small flock he had given me.... **Since that time, I have had many other similar dreams and words from God and always know that they are from God because they come true and are confirmed by God with Scripture....** On the opening night of our church plant in October of 1996, the service was just getting started when my wife realized that she had forgotten her Bible in the foyer. I jumped up to get it, and as I turned around I found myself standing alone in the foyer, just as I had been in my dream. The older man then walked in the door wearing the same outfit he had worn in the dream and came toward me speaking every word he had in my dream. I was so stunned that I was momentarily speechless. When I collected my thoughts, I told him to leave our church and never come back. A few months later, another older pastor contacted me and said that the man God warned me of had been kicked out of his denomination on suspicion of undermining younger pastors and taking money from young churches.”⁹⁶

⁹³Driscoll, *Radical Reformission*, p. 14.

⁹⁴Driscoll, *Confessions*, p. 74

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶Ibid., pp. 74-76.

2. Driscoll's approach to ministry.

a. Driscoll describes Mars Hill as “theologically conservative; culturally liberal.”

Driscoll has coined the term “reformission” to describe this aspect of his ministry philosophy. The “reform” part of “reformission” describes his theology; the “mission” part describes his desire to reach pagans. “Reformission is a gathering of the best aspects of each of these types of Christianity: living in the tension of being Christians and churches **who are culturally liberal yet theologically conservative** and who are driven by the gospel of grace to love their Lord, brothers, and neighbors.”⁹⁷

Being “culturally liberal” means that Driscoll encourages Christians to be active consumers of popular culture that many theologically conservative Christians would view as sinful, or worldly, or—at best—unwise because they lead into temptation toward worldly/sinful behavior. Driscoll writes, “As a college freshman and a new Christian in the early 1990s, I had a Christian buddy tell me to throw all of my ‘secular’ music out and get new ‘Christian’ music. He reasoned that if I listened to non-Christian music, it would shape my mind and cause me to end up living like a non-Christian. While I doubted that listening to the Cure would compel me to wear eye shadow, I acquiesced and threw out all my CDs...”⁹⁸ In the pages that follow this section, Driscoll explains a number of reasons why he returned to listening to secular music and why it is missional, not sinful or worldly, for Christians to consume popular culture. He believes that this “‘garbage in, garbage out’ theology assumes that if Christians see and hear sin up close, they will want to participate in it. But the fact is that sin looks good only from a distance; the closer you get to it, the more clearly you see it, the more sickening it becomes.... Reformission requires discernment by God’s people to filter all of the cultures they encounter, Christian and non-Christian, through a biblical and theological grid in order to cling to that which is good and reject that which is evil.”⁹⁹

“... some people at our church dress in gothic fashion, complete with faces painted white, hair dyed black, and dark clothing. I was speaking with a visiting pastor once before a church service when a woman dressed in this style walked by, and the pastor commented that it was good for the woman to be in church because she obviously needed to meet Jesus and overcome her depression. But the woman he spoke of was a leader in our church and a godly woman who dressed that way because of her sense of personal style. She was in no way depressed. To be faithful in reformission, we must embed ourselves in a culture and develop friendships with lost people so that we can be informed and avoid making

⁹⁷Driscoll, *Radical Reformission*, p. 22.

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 125.

⁹⁹Ibid., pp. 126-27.

erroneous judgements. Non Christian friends actually help to disciple us in culture as we evangelize them in Christ.”¹⁰⁰

b. Mars Hill is young.

The original idea behind Mars Hill was “to be nothing but a church for college students and singles.”¹⁰¹ “A buzz was growing about ministry to Generation X.... I declared that we would be a Generation X church because it seemed cool. To this day I cannot fathom why I was so stupid, because I obviously was not going to card people at the door like a bar to make sure they were born between certain years to attend our church and hear the gospel.”¹⁰²

When young families with children showed up to Mars Hill, Driscoll was forced to reconsider this plan. “I had foolishly told our church that we would not do anything for kids, but it became obvious that eventually almost everyone in the church would get married and have kids, and some would also have kids before they were married because they were sinfully fornicating. Either way, we needed to have a plan for kids.”¹⁰³

Therefore a day came when Mars Hill officially abandoned its original generational limit. “That Sunday, I repented before our church for my dumb idea of having a Generation X church....”¹⁰⁴

Although Driscoll abandoned the idea of having a church for young people only early in the life of Mars Hill, he writes “the average age at Mars Hill remains in the midtwenties [sic].”¹⁰⁵

c. Mars Hill is a church planting ministry.

Driscoll writes, “We give away one-tenth of our annual budget in order to help start churches wherever in the world God raises up a qualified leader to do reformation.”¹⁰⁶ To this end, Driscoll founded the Acts 29 network which “exists to start churches that plant churches. God is significantly using our network to influence and shape the church planting culture through both rock-solid theology

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 97.

¹⁰¹Driscoll, *Confessions*, p. 63.

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 64.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 63.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 66.

¹⁰⁵Driscoll, *Confessions*, p. 10.

¹⁰⁶Driscoll, *Radical Reformation*, p. 188.

and contextualizing the gospel. We will not waver on either of these commitments. We won't water down our theology to reach more people and we won't attack the culture in the name of Christianity. We are planting churches that are missionaries in their respective communities sent by Christ with the gospel (John 20:21). It is our desire to plant 1,000 new churches in the next 20 years.”¹⁰⁷

3. Driscoll's relationship to the emerging church.

a. Driscoll's initial vision for Mars Hill was to reach “Generation X.”

As quoted earlier, Driscoll has written, “I declared that we would be a Generation X church because it seemed cool. To this day I cannot fathom why I was so stupid, because I obviously was not going to card people at the door like a bar to make sure they were born between certain years to attend our church and hear the gospel.”¹⁰⁸ Despite later repenting of this decision, Mars Hill was effective at reaching younger adults.

b. Driscoll was an early contributor to conferences where the “emerging conversation” began.

Because Mars Hill was growing by reaching younger adults for Christ, Driscoll received an invitation “to speak at my first pastors' conference, hosted by Leadership Network, at the Mount Hermon Conference Center in northern California.”¹⁰⁹ A number of other young men who are now prominent in the emerging church movement were also in attendance. This seems to be where the emerging church started as a movement. Here is Driscoll's account of this conference. “In college I had studied philosophy under a Christian professor who did his thesis on Descartes and modern understandings of truth and knowledge. He got me reading philosophy, which led to a lengthy multiyear study of the transition from the modern to the postmodern world. Because I was familiar with the growing curiosity about postmodernism, I spoke on these subjects. I titled my session ‘The Flight from God,’ which I stole from existential philosopher Max Picard's book by the same name. That message reportedly outsold any conference tape at Mount Hermon that year. And it shifted the conversation from reaching Generation X to the emerging mission of reaching postmodern culture. I was not prepared for the media onslaught that came shortly thereafter. Before I knew it, National Public Radio was interviewing me, *Mother Jones* magazine did a feature on our church, Pat Robertson's 700 Club gave me a plaque for being America's ‘Church of the Week’ and did a television story on us.... Pretty soon Leadership Network hired a young pastor named Doug Pagitt, who later went on to help

¹⁰⁷<http://www.acts29network.org/about/welcome/>

¹⁰⁸Driscoll, *Confessions*, p. 64.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 97.

found the Emergent Network, to organize what they were calling the Young Leaders Network.”

In fact, an early project by Brian McLaren, Doug Pagitt, Tony Jones, and Andrew Jones called Terra Nova credited Driscoll as a co-founder of the emerging church. “On the front page of their first Terra Nova website, they thanked Chris Seay and me for founding the movement, which made me uneasy because I did not want to be associated with the theological direction the movement was taking, though they were personally nice guys. Though it was hard to part company with these men, I believe that conviction must override community, and we were not theologically like-minded. The Terra Nova project disbanded before long, and the Emergent Village replaced it.”¹¹⁰

- c. Driscoll still describes Mars Hill as “emerging” but has attempted to distinguish it from the “emergent” church, which he criticizes.

He writes, “The emerging church is a growing, loosely connected movement of primarily young pastors who are glad to see the end of modernity and are seeking to function as missionaries who bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to emerging and postmodern cultures. The emerging church welcomes the tension of holding in one closed hand the unchanging truth of evangelical Christian theology (Jude 3) and holding in one open hand the many cultural ways of showing and speaking Christian truth as a missionary to America (1 Cor. 9:19-23). Since the movement, if it can be called that, is young and is still defining its theological center, I do not want to portray the movement as ideologically unified because I myself swim in the theologically conservative stream of the emerging church. I am particularly concerned, however, with some growing trends among some people: the rejection of Jesus’ death on the cross as a penal substitute for our sins; resistance to openly denouncing homosexual acts as sinful; the questioning of a literal eternal torment in hell, which is a denial that holds up only until, in an ironic bummer, you die and find yourself in hell; the rejection of God’s sovereignty over and knowledge of the future, as if God were a junior-college professor who knows only bits and pieces of trivia; the rejection of biblically defined gender roles, thereby contributing to the ‘mantropy’ epidemic among young guys.... Therefore, it is very important that any church seeking to be emerging define whether it is an emerging evangelical church or an emergent liberal church. Our church is emerging and missional in its practice and evangelical and biblical in its theology.”¹¹¹

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 99.

¹¹¹Ibid., pp. 22-23.

II. Dan Kimball



Dan Kimball

Vintage Faith Church
Santa Cruz, CA
Pastor & Founder

Author:

- *The Emerging Church*
- *The Emerging Worship*
- *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*

A. Personal Information

1. Childhood

Kimball was born and raised“ in the New York City suburb of Paramus, New Jersey”¹¹² and grew up in a non-religious family. “I grew up outside of church with a vague concept of ‘God,’ knowing Jesus was somehow related to God as ‘his Son’ but having no idea what that meant. It always confused me to think God had a son. My parents would occasionally drop my brother and me off at a church, but I found it horribly dull and boring, and I can’t remember much from my time there.”¹¹³

2. Conversion to Christianity

Although he did have a few memories of going to church as a child, his conversion to Christ did not happen in church. In fact, the actual point of his conversion is murky. “I did have someone witness to me in a shopping mall when I was a freshman in high school. Out of fear, I prayed with him to trust in Jesus so I wouldn’t go to hell (he really played up the going to hell part, which as I look at it now, was kind of weird for a grown man to do to a ninth-grader). I do wonder if that actually was the point of conversion for me, but I don’t know. After that time, I didn’t really do anything since I didn’t know any Christians and had no idea what it meant to follow Jesus.”¹¹⁴

After finishing high school, Kimball attended Colorado State University. While spending the weekend at his girlfriend’s family home, he found a book about end time

¹¹²Dan Kimball, *Emerging Worship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), p. ix. <http://www.vintagechurch.org/about/leadership/dank>

¹¹³Dan Kimball, “The Emerging Church and Missional Theology,” in *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*, ed. Robert Webber (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), p. 87.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

events by Tim LaHaye in the guest room. “So while lying in bed reading this book in the wee hours of the night, by the fifth chart, I became an instant premillennial, pretribulational dispensationalist.”¹¹⁵

3. Preparation for Ministry

After finishing college,¹¹⁶ Kimball eventually “found a wonderful Bible-teaching church—an evangelical, dispensational, conservative church.”¹¹⁷ Though unnamed in this quote, the church was Santa Cruz Bible Church, the church where Kimball would later launch the Graceland service.¹¹⁸ After attending Santa Cruz Bible Church for a time, Kimball moved to Portland, Oregon and obtained a Graduate Certificate in Bible. He also earned some kind of master’s degree at Western Seminary (also in Portland), before returning to Santa Cruz to become the youth pastor at Santa Cruz Bible Church.¹¹⁹ He is pursuing a Doctor of Ministry degree from George Fox Evangelical Seminary.¹²⁰

4. Family and Interests

Kimball married a woman named Becky in 1990. The Kimballs “have two daughters, Katie and Claire and one day hope to have a poodle. Dan loves rockabilly and punk music, comic art and drives a 1966 Mustang that is slowly rusting.”¹²¹

B. Vintage Faith Church

1. Origin

After serving for eight years as the youth pastor at Santa Cruz Bible Church, Dan Kimball and his teen worship leader Josh Fox “felt the need for a worship gathering and ministry that reflected more of the values of the emerging culture and heart of emerging generations. So, they started the Sunday night ‘Graceland’ worship services and ministry at Santa Cruz Bible Church. Graceland initially started as a college

¹¹⁵Ibid., p. 88. This was before LaHaye’s book *Left Behind*, and the series that followed were published.

¹¹⁶Kimball earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Landscape Architecture from Colorado State according to his biography page at Vintage Faith Church’s website: <http://www.vintagechurch.org/about/leadership/dank>.

¹¹⁷Kimball, “The Emerging Church and Missional Theology,” p. 88.

¹¹⁸<http://www.vintagechurch.org/about/leadership/dank>.

¹¹⁹Kimball, “The Emerging Church and Missional Theology,” p. 88.

¹²⁰<http://www.vintagechurch.org/about/leadership/dank>

¹²¹Ibid.

ministry, but because it connected with a broader age range became a ‘young adult’ ministry and then eventually became alternative worship gatherings for all ages.”¹²²

Graceland grew to the point that it was offering two Sunday night services, but then the ministry was shut down. The final Graceland services were held on November 16, 2003 and the staff of Santa Cruz Bible Church began “morphing them into the life of SCBC.”¹²³ Apparently this means that the Senior Pastor and other leaders in the church wanted to integrate elements of Graceland into the pre-existing Sunday morning services at Santa Cruz Bible Church.¹²⁴ But this became a source of frustration of Kimball and Graceland’s leaders. “The more we aligned the values and infrastructure and style of leadership of Graceland and Santa Cruz Bible Church, however, the more we distanced ourselves from the very things that made Graceland unique. Instead of our discussions being exciting ones about mission and innovation, they turned into discussions about squeezing Graceland into how the rest of the church functioned. Graceland suddenly felt wrong.... In many ways it wasn’t Graceland anymore. We slowly but surely became a miniature version of what already was happening in the other worship services and the rest of the church.”¹²⁵

Ultimately, Santa Cruz Bible Church decided to form a new church led by Kimball and based on the ideas behind Graceland. “Recognizing where we had gone astray, we decided to go back to our original vision—but began talking about birthing a new church instead of simply trying to ‘fix’ what we broke.”¹²⁶ “Part of the vision and dream of Santa Cruz Bible Church has been to start new churches. Dan Kimball and Josh Fox, the co-founding pastors of Graceland, will be leading this first new sister church out of SCBC. Vintage Faith Church (VFC) will initially be comprised of 200+ people from SCBC. We have started developing the core leadership team and we will launch our first weekly worship gatherings here on site, in the early part of 2004. VFC will be very innovative, though rethinking how the church reaches the emerging post-Christian culture of Santa Cruz. VFC will have a strong focus on the arts, discipleship-evangelism and reaching UCSC by offering a “vintage Christianity” approach. VFC will also continue the strong focus on the family and children’s ministry which SCBC is dedicated to.”¹²⁷

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³<http://www.santacruzibible.org/graceland/>

¹²⁴Kimball, *Emerging Worship*, pp. 172-73.

¹²⁵Ibid.

¹²⁶Ibid.

¹²⁷<http://www.santacruzibible.org/graceland/>

Vintage Faith Church began in February of 2004, just three months after Graceland was shuttered.¹²⁸ Vintage Faith started with a core team of “around 175.”¹²⁹ Like Graceland, it met on Sunday evening in the building of Santa Cruz Bible Church and continued meeting there “for the first year and a half.”¹³⁰ On Easter Sunday of 2006, Vintage Faith moved into First Presbyterian Church in downtown Santa Cruz, a traditional-looking red brick church built in 1939. Earlier this year, the two churches merged completely. “After nearly two years serving together, the two churches joined together as one under the name ‘Vintage Faith Church’ on January 1st, 2008.”¹³¹

2. Growth

Although attendance figures are not available, Vintage Faith continues to meet and offers two Sunday worship “gatherings,” one at 11 a.m. and the other at 7 p.m.¹³² It also operates a “coffee, art, and music lounge” called “The Abbey.”¹³³

C. Key Features of Theology and Ministry

1. Theology

a. Kimball’s theology is evangelical but open to dialog.

“I would say I still am a conservative evangelical. But when I say those words ‘conservative evangelical,’ all these bad images come into my mind. Christian leaders on television saying that SpongeBob is gay. Christian leaders on the Larry King show awkwardly squeezing John 3:16 into every other sentence. Radio preachers slamming homosexuals as being the source of all evil in the world today and saying they are out to get your kids. Christians wearing ‘Jesus would vote Republican’ buttons around election time. Overly opinionated Christian leaders who talk as if they have access to God’s truth and know all answers, and believe everyone else is wrong but them. Judgmental finger-pointing Christians focusing on negatives in the world. I also think of conservative evangelicals as Christians who are generally afraid of discussing any new expression of theology and and who are immediately closed to new ideas. This always puzzled me, why many conservative evangelicals go into such a ‘defend and protect’ mode when it comes to hearing and discussing other theological views and thoughts. I don’t know why anyone should be afraid of discussing other theological views; we

¹²⁸<http://www.vintagechurch.org/about/history>

¹²⁹Ibid.

¹³⁰Ibid.

¹³¹Ibid.

¹³²<http://www.vintagechurch.org/about/gatherings>

¹³³<http://www.vintagechurch.org/news/theabbey>

should always be open to questioning in healthy ways what one believes. If not, it seems like we are not confident in what we believe and are afraid of what we might discover. So, am I one of these conservative evangelicals? Oh, no. Please, no.”¹³⁴

Vintage Faith’s website describes this in terms of having a “humble theology.” “Holding a “humble theology” means we approach the Scriptures recognizing our inadequacies as human beings to determine with 100% certainty every single thing in the Bible. Even though we live with a ‘humble theology,’ it doesn’t mean that we cannot make certain theological conclusions. There are many Scriptural truths and doctrines that have been held throughout the 2,000 year history of the church which we as Vintage Faith Church believe are central to the Christian faith.”¹³⁵ This statement reflects a tension that seems to recur in Kimball’s writings about theology. He believes in truth and that there are truths that are central to Christianity, but he also wants to leave room for people to explore Christianity by asking unorthodox questions—questions that show a doubt in the questioner about the truthfulness of these doctrines.

Some of this openness rises from Kimball’s own experience reaching out to unbelievers in our pluralistic world. Kimball finds that a less strident, less authoritarian, less dogmatic tone is useful in evangelism. He writes, “I am finding that emerging generations really aren’t opposed to truth and biblical morals. When people sense that you aren’t just dogmatically opinionated due to blind faith and that you aren’t just attacking other people’s beliefs out of fear, they are remarkably open to intelligent and loving discussion about choice and truth.”¹³⁶

b. Kimball’s theology is based on the Nicene Creed.

According to the Vintage Faith Church’s website, “The Nicene Creed is a beautiful creed written during the 4th century AD, expressing the heart of the several doctrines which are critical in the understanding of who Jesus is and His relationship to the Father and the Spirit.”¹³⁷ The site then quotes the Nicene Creed as follows:

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

¹³⁴Kimball, “The Emerging Church and Missional Theology,” p. 85.

¹³⁵<http://www.vintagechurch.org/about/theology/humble-theology>

¹³⁶ Kimball, *Emerging Church*, p. 76.

¹³⁷<http://www.vintagechurch.org/about/theology/truths-in-the-nicene-creed>

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
 the only son of God,
 eternally begotten of the Father,
 God from God, Light from Light,
 true God from true God,
 begotten, not made,
 of one being with the Father.
 Through Him all things were made.
 For us and for our salvation
 He came down from heaven:
 by the power of the Holy Spirit
 He became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
 and was made man.
 For our sake He was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
 He suffered death and was buried.
 On the third day He rose again
 in accordance with the Scriptures;
 He ascended into heaven
 and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
 He will come again in glory
 to judge the living and the dead,
 and His kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit,
 the Lord, the giver of life,
 who proceeds from the Father [and the Son].
 With the Father and the Son
 He is worshipped and glorified.
 He has spoken through the Prophets.
 We believe
 in one holy catholic
 and apostolic Church.
 We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
 We look for the resurrection of the dead,
 and the life of the world to come.
 Amen.¹³⁸

The Nicene Creed is not all that Kimball and Vintage Faith believe, nor is it the statement of faith that they use. The Vintage Faith Church website has a page with another statement of faith, complete with Bible verses, as most evangelical churches currently have.¹³⁹

¹³⁸Ibid.

¹³⁹<http://www.vintagechurch.org/about/theology/core-beliefs/beliefs>

- c. Kimball shows a tolerance in theology for disagreement among Christians on theological matters.

Kimball holds tenaciously to what is clearly revealed in scripture, but he shows latitude in how he defines what is “clear” and what, in scripture, is hazy. Regarding the unclear things, Kimball’s attitude seems to be that God left them unclear so that we would approach them with reverence. “Perhaps we are supposed to approach theology more with a sense of wonder, awe, and mystery than like trying to solve a mathematical puzzle. Perhaps we need to admit that our own personal biases and backgrounds do taint how we view theology. Therefore, we better not be too prideful in how dogmatic we get with some of our conclusions as they very well may be our own tainted ones. My assumption is that we all have pure motives when we think about theology, and of course we have the Spirit to guide us. Even so, we are inherently sinful (Romans 6:6; 7:17-18) and our hearts can be deceitful (Jeremiah 17:9). Knowing this, why do we then so confidently think our particular theological conclusions from our denominational brand are always *the* true and perfect ones? I am not talking about core theological beliefs such as those in the Apostles’ Creed or the Nicene Creed.... At the same time, when we move beyond what the Nicene Creed discusses, I feel that it is not as easy to be saying so confidently that we have things all figured out.”¹⁴⁰

Later he adds, “Please understand, that as I say I left more to mystery, it doesn’t mean I don’t believe you can’t come to solid conclusions about many things in addition to the Nicene Creed. There are many things not mentioned in the Nicene Creed that I believe are clear, such as Jesus’ teaching about marriage, the authority of the Bible itself, the role of the Spirit in personal sanctification, etc. But at the same time, I have grown comfortable and securing in saying, ‘I don’t know’ about some things (many things, in fact).”¹⁴¹

2. Approach to Ministry

- a. Kimball stresses the need for ministry to be “missional.”

Like most emerging church leaders, Kimball sees the secularization of America and the postmodern outlook of younger Americans as a call not just to be more evangelistic but to re-invent evangelism. Instead of assuming that the church and Christianity are integral parts of American culture, Kimball and others urge us to embrace the fact that our culture is now post-Christian. Therefore, it is necessary for us to shape our church ministry to American culture in the same way that missionaries shape their ministry in the foreign culture of the people they want to reach. “As we approach ministry to the emerging culture—a post-Christian mission field—we need to use the same approach we would employ entering a

¹⁴⁰Kimball, “The Emerging Church and Missional Theology,” pp. 91-92.

¹⁴¹Ibid., p. 94.

foreign culture. We cannot go on seeing ourselves simply as pastors and teachers; we need to see ourselves as a new kind of missionary.”¹⁴²

- b. Kimball attempts to be “vintage” in his practice of Christianity.

The name “Vintage Faith Church” suggests that the church looks backward to ancient forms of worship expression. “We chose the name ‘Vintage Faith Church’ as we wanted to reflect the ‘vintage’ values of the early church and teachings of Jesus. We know that our culture today is far different from the culture of the New Testament, but instead of being shaped by contemporary organized religion, we desired to focus on the original understanding of what the “vintage” early church was about.”¹⁴³

The desire to be “vintage” is expressed in the worship forms and styles used at Vintage Faith Church. After describing how the room used for an emerging worship gathering is set up to be “a sacred space,”¹⁴⁴ Kimball writes, “The room invokes a sense that this is a spiritual gathering happening here, and that Christianity is not just a modern religion, but an ancient one.”¹⁴⁵

- c. Vintage Faith Church offers multi-sensory worship gatherings.

When Graceland began as part of Santa Cruz Bible Church, it used the auditorium of that church—an auditorium that was very modern. Still, the leaders of Graceland attempted to create a more spiritual atmosphere in the room. “Although the worship gatherings I lead currently meet in a modern contemporary building, we wanted it to have a vintage-faith feel.... We began by purchasing eight-foot-high black curtains like those used in trade shows. Each week we place them in an arch around the outer rim of chairs. On the curtains we display the artwork of people from the church community.”¹⁴⁶ The artwork is intended to draw people into worship visually because “emerging generations are very visual.”¹⁴⁷

In addition to the custom artwork they use, Vintage Faith Church projects older works of art, including images of stained-glass windows on the screens.¹⁴⁸ They also keep the room darker and use candles. “In most emerging worship

¹⁴² Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, p. 69.

¹⁴³ <http://www.vintagechurch.org/about/history>

¹⁴⁴ Kimball, *Emerging Worship*, p. 78.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

¹⁴⁶ Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, p. 135.

¹⁴⁷ Kimball, *Emerging Worship*, p. 78.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

gatherings, the lighting is dark (not pitch black). The darkness and candles make a beautiful atmosphere where the heart can settle in and focus on worshipping God.”¹⁴⁹ These are efforts to engage the worshippers eyes in worship.

Vintage Faith also attempts to use smell as part of the worship experience. “We also use incense when discussing how financial giving is an offering that goes up before the throne. Candles may also have a worshipful aroma associated with them. One worship gathering baked bread inside the room before the gathering began. This was meant to evoke a sense of hunger when people walked into the room. The theme of that particular meeting was hungering for God and Jesus as the bread of life.”¹⁵⁰

Kimball advocates a greater variation in musical style used for worship. “Musical worship styles are usually a reflection of a specific community. Most emerging worship gatherings are moving beyond Christian-pop and moving into a post-Matt Redman form of musical worship combining the ancient with pop rhythms, global music, and other forms of eclectic and ambient music. An emerging worship gathering in the city of Chicago fuses hip-hop with the ancient and with pop. An emerging worship gathering in Minnesota focuses primarily on songs the community writes and is more folk-sounding. In Vintage Faith Church, we use an eclectic blend of the ancient with contemporary pop. We have even formed a choir.... I imagine choirs becoming a big part of emerging worship. I’m not talking about the rather corny 1970s and ’80s style of Christian choir music. Instead I see choirs that go back and study ancient choral music and also sing gospel spirituals and other choir music that invokes both reverence and joy. If there is a choir, they will not sing from a stage wearing all the same color sweaters, all smiling with lots of make-up.... Music is not categorized in emerging church worship since it is a reflection of the church community and not simply repeating whatever top ten worship songs are playing on Christian radio stations. DJs with turntables are sometimes used in the band adding layers of sound and rhythm to the worship music.... There is some global music influence and definitely an eclectic feel to the worship music during a gathering.”¹⁵¹

Vintage Faith Church also seeks to be participatory in its worship, with stations in the worship space where a person can act in response to the worship. “People may move about the room to stations for prayer, painting, or journaling. Above all, the gathering is participatory.”¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹Ibid., p. 80.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., p. 86.

¹⁵¹Ibid., pp. 83-84.

¹⁵²Ibid., p. 77.

3. Relationship to the Emerging Church

- a. Kimball was one of the first to use the title “emerging church” to describe this movement.

He titled his book, published in 2003, *The Emerging Church*. About this Kimball writes, “I used the term because I first saw the organization, Leadership network (www.leadnet.org), using it. They used it to describe themselves as ‘advance scouts for the emerging church.’ I liked the use of the word ‘emerging,’ because it felt like an adventurous exploration of new horizons, which the Spirit of God was leading amongst churches in our emerging culture. The dictionary defines ‘emerging’ as ‘what is coming to the surface.’ So I began using the words ‘emerging church’ to describe churches that are exploring what it means to be the church as we enter emerging cultures.”¹⁵³

- b. His presentation of the scriptures is more consistent with postmodern attitudes about truth.

After adequately defending his belief in the inspiration and authority of Scripture, Kimball explains that the way he uses the Bible is different than the way most evangelicals use the Bible. “We approach the Scriptures more as a narrative than as a science textbook.... Far too often, it seems that we take verses so far removed from their context and historical setting and use them in understanding how we’re supposed to live today. I’ve sat through many sermons that feel more like a ‘Tony Robbins seminar with a few Bible verses thrown in’ (as one twentysomething girl told me she experienced at a certain church) rather than a sermon that moves us into the beautiful and sometimes mysterious narrative of the Bible, helping us become better disciples of Jesus.”¹⁵⁴ Later he concludes: “we can have bold confidence about essential core doctrines. In fact, I believe emerging generations are looking for something to believe in. I believe they are looking for ‘truth,’ and when we do have something we know is true, we should clearly and boldly say it. But I think the church sometimes says lots of things are ‘true’ when we really aren’t certain. Emerging generations respect us when we aren’t afraid to say ‘I don’t know’ about something.”¹⁵⁵ “No matter what size group, in emerging worship the sermon is more of an invitation into Kingdom living rather than focused on the five steps for this or that wrapped up in clean application points.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³Kimball, “The Emerging Church and Missional Theology,” pp. 83-4.

¹⁵⁴Ibid., p. 98.

¹⁵⁵Ibid., p. 99.

¹⁵⁶ Kimball, *Emerging Worship*, p. 88.

III. Erwin McManus



Erwin McManus

Mosaic
 Los Angeles, CA
 Lead Pastor and “the primary
 communicator and cultural architect”
 of Mosaic.
<http://mosaic.org>
<http://erwinmcmanus.com/>

Author of many books, including:

- *An Unstoppable Force* (2001)
- *Seizing Your Divine Moment* (2002)
- *Uprising* (2003)
- *The Barbarian Way* (2005)
- *Chasing Daylight* (2006)
- *Soul Cravings* (2006)
- *Stand Against the Wind* (2006)

A. Personal Information

1. Childhood

Erwin McManus was born in El Salvador¹⁵⁷ in 1958, though his birth name was “Raphael Sandoval Meza Cardona.”¹⁵⁸ In an interview, McManus explained his name change this way: “Erwin McManus is not an adopted name, it’s just an alias and I made it legal when I was in my thirties because I married as a McManus, my kids were a McManus, so I thought I should probably become McManus. My mom married someone who lived under an alias who was involved in 'creative underground economies' and so evidently he needed a new identity so that’s how we ended up being called McManus.”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷<http://www.assistnews.net/stories/2008/s08010207.htm>; <http://www.hispanicprwire.com/news.php?l=in&id=7646&cha=7>. Wikipedia lists August 28, 1958 as his official birthdate (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erwin_mcmanus).

¹⁵⁸http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erwin_mcmanus

¹⁵⁹<http://www.assistNews.net/stories/2008/s08010207.htm>

His family emigrated to the United States when he was young and McManus “grew up on the east coast from Miami to New York.”¹⁶⁰

2. Conversion to Christianity

McManus was apparently raised Catholic,¹⁶¹ and came to Christ as a young adult.¹⁶² About his conversion to Christ, McManus writes, “On August 20, 1978, I walked to the altar at the first [sic] Baptist Church in Orlando, Florida and gave my life to Jesus Christ as my Lord. I remember standing there, looking up at Jim Henry, the pastor of the congregation, as he held his Bible and asked the question, ‘Do you confess Jesus as Lord, and will you obey his Word?’”¹⁶³

3. Preparation for Ministry.

McManus has a bachelor’s degree from the University of North Carolina and a Master of Divinity degree from the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.¹⁶⁴ He describes his first steps toward ministry as follows: “I had been a believer only a year when I was at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and a college friend invited me to visit a small church in the country.... I was so surprised two months later to receive a letter from the pastor inviting me to preach on a Sunday morning when I returned to school. In our brief conversations, I had shared my sense of calling to preach the gospel, but never expected that he would entrust me with that kind of responsibility. He didn’t know me from Adam. I had never spoken in any formal or public setting... I was so afraid that my message would not be biblical that I used more than 150 verses in that one talk. More than giving me an opportunity to speak, Pastor Bob taught me about servant leadership.”¹⁶⁵

Before coming to Los Angeles, McManus did ministry among the poor in the inner city of Dallas, reportedly starting two churches there.¹⁶⁶ “For nearly ten years the focus of my life was working with urban poor people.”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁰Ibid.

¹⁶¹Erwin Raphael McManus, *Seizing Your Diving Moment* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2002), pp. 205-206. I conclude he was raised Catholic based on the story he tells in these pages about his first confession.

¹⁶²Ibid., p. 232. Although no details about his conversion are given, McManus writes, “I had been a believer only a year when I was at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill....”

¹⁶³ Erwin Raphael McManus, *An Unstoppable Force* (Loveland, CO; Group, 2001), p. 200.

¹⁶⁴http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erwin_mcmanus

¹⁶⁵McManus, *Divine Moment*, p. 233.

¹⁶⁶Ibid.

¹⁶⁷McManus, *Diving Moment*, pp. 67-68.

4. Family

McManus is married to Kim and has a son, Aaron, and a daughter, Mariah,¹⁶⁸ as well as a foster daughter named Paty.¹⁶⁹

B. Mosaic

1. Origin

According to Wikipedia, Mosaic Church was once named Bethel Baptist Church. Bethel was founded on January 3, 1943, in a rented store front.¹⁷⁰ Those who attended the church had to bring their own chairs.¹⁷¹ The church grew and at some point was renamed to the First Southern Baptist Church of East Los Angeles.¹⁷² In 1969, twenty-four year old Thom Wolf was called to be the senior pastor. People began calling the church, “The Church on Brady” because it was located on Brady Ave. in LA. Though the name was never officially changed, apparently the nickname became the primary way of referring to the church.¹⁷³

Thom Wolf served as the senior pastor of the Church on Brady from 1969 until 1994 when McManus was called to succeed him.¹⁷⁴ McManus writes, “Mosaic was once The Church on Brady. I followed a pastor who poured his life into his congregation. It was his combination of intellect and passion that compelled me to come with my family to this community of faith.”¹⁷⁵

2. Growth

Although I cannot find published attendance and growth figures for Mosaic, a press release from December of 2006 calls Mosaic “one of the country’s fastest growing churches.”¹⁷⁶ In an interview dated January 2008, McManus says “Mosaic has a few

¹⁶⁸McManus, *Unstoppable Force*, p. 4.

¹⁶⁹<http://erwinmcmanus.com/bio/>. The story of Paty’s entrance into the McManuses’ life is told in *Seizing Your Divine Moment*, p. 231.

¹⁷⁰http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mosaic_Church

¹⁷¹Ibid.

¹⁷²Ibid.

¹⁷³Ibid.

¹⁷⁴Ibid. Wolf continued in the role of Teaching Pastor after McManus became the Senior Pastor.

¹⁷⁵McManus, *Unstoppable Force*, p. 5.

¹⁷⁶<http://www.hispanicprwire.com/news.php?l=in&id=7646&cha=7>

thousand people.”¹⁷⁷ The church has a long history of growth and multiplication through church planting, going back to its days as “The Church on Brady.” According to Wikipedia’s entry for Mosaic, “In the early 1990’s the ‘The Church on Brady’ was responsible for more missionaries than any other church in the International Mission Board, regardless of size.... The Church on Brady started many new churches both locally in or near Los Angeles and internationally.... Even though many were sent out, Brady faced a constant issue of overcrowding due to perennial growth.”¹⁷⁸

Having outgrown their building on Brady Street, by 1999 Mosaic was looking for a new place for its worship services. McManus writes, “...Greg SooHoo, one of our elders, called me to meet him at a nightclub downtown. It was for sale, and he was proposing that our congregation consider the location for our future worship center.... I was more than five years into my pastorate in Los Angeles when we were desperately searching for a more strategic location to meet. Mosaic was a community defined in many ways by its creativity, artistry, and love for beauty. Any facility would need to express a commitment to reach the cultural edge through innovation and uniqueness. The nightclub sitting in the heart of Los Angeles would also communicate our love for the city and our commitment to touch the world by reaching its people. There was just one problem: the property was a few million dollars out of our range.... Maybe a year later a Chinese couple, George and Susan Luk, got the property and reopened a nightclub there. They renamed the nightclub the Downtown Soho. The Soho had as apart of its artistic heritage that it was once known as the Glam-Slam owned by Prince. When the Luks purchased the property, Greg SooHoo called me again and suggested we meet them.... When Greg and I sat down with George, it just sort of came out: ‘We’d like to invoke the presence of the living God to meet people here in this nightclub and become a voice of hope to the city.’ I have to admit, he looked pretty shocked. There wasn’t a lot of subtlety to my approach. He was gracious and asked if he could talk to his wife before giving us an answer. It wasn’t even a week before he responded with a yes. Our cost would be around one thousand dollars a month. That amount would cover the janitorial costs, and he added that if we couldn’t afford that, just to let him know.”¹⁷⁹

In 2003 Mosaic sold the building on Brady street¹⁸⁰ and now meets in five different venues—all rented. From Mosaic’s website: “Mosaic meets on Sundays in 7 gatherings at 5 different locations in the Los Angeles and San Francisco area (Inland, Pasadena, West Los Angeles, Downtown Los Angeles, and Berkeley).... Erwin McManus typically speaks at the following celebrations.

Pasadena @ 9:30am

Westside @ 11:15am

¹⁷⁷<http://www.assistNews.net/stories/2008/s08010207.htm>

¹⁷⁸http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Church_on_Brady

¹⁷⁹McManus, *Divine Moment*, p. 48.

¹⁸⁰http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mosaic_Church

Mayan @ 6:00pm
 Mayan @ 8:00pm¹⁸¹

C. Key Features of McManus's Theology and Ministry

1. Theology

Mosaic has long been part of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), going back probably to its foundation but certainly to the point where it was named First Southern Baptist Church of East Los Angeles. Because it is part of the SBC, it claims to hold to the doctrinal standards of that denomination, which are encoded in a document titled the Baptist Faith and Message. The SBC is an evangelical denomination; therefore, the theology of McManus (and Mosaic) is also evangelical. The following passage from his book *Seizing Your Divine Moment* is an accurate presentation of the gospel. "There is no greater moment filled with eternal ramifications than the moment we turn from our sin and turn to Christ. In that moment, when we are invited to receive the infinite grace of God, we are required to give up everything we have. To have the life that Jesus Christ offers us, we must in that moment commit ourselves to die. If we are unwilling to die to ourselves, we are unable to receive the life that only God can give."¹⁸²

A later passage in the same book describes how McManus had the opportunity to speak to a group of Muslims in the Middle East on the subject of Western Christianity. "Nearly eighty Muslims overwhelmed the handful of Christians who had organized the meeting. I was reminded before I spoke that these were first-time hearers of the gospel and that any declaration of Jesus being God would be considered nothing less than blasphemy."¹⁸³ Reflecting on his experience giving the gospel that night, McManus writes, "There have been a thousand times in my life, perhaps tens or hundreds of thousands, when I have declared that Jesus Christ is Lord without a second thought. I have expressed that God Himself came into human history, took on flesh and blood, was crucified on our behalf, and was raised from the dead. I must tell you, this time was different. The same declaration had a greater weight to it than ever before. I thought deeply before I made my confession. I understood the implications and the potential consequence."¹⁸⁴

Mosaic's official FAQ page regarding doctrine reads as follows:

Overview:

Mosaic is a community of followers of Jesus Christ, committed to live by faith, to be known by love, and to be a voice of hope. The name of our community comes both from

¹⁸¹<http://mosaic.org/faq/#faq2>

¹⁸²McManus, *Divine Moment*, p. 133.

¹⁸³Ibid., p. 134.

¹⁸⁴Ibid., p. 135.

the diversity of our members, and from the symbolism of a broken and fragmented humanity which can become a work of beauty under the artful hands of God. We welcome people from all walks of life, regardless of where they are in their spiritual journey.

Mission :

To live by Faith, to be known by Love, and to be a voice of Hope
(1 Thess 1:3)

Vision:

To be a spiritual reference point throughout Los Angeles , and a sending base to the ends of the Earth.

Core Values/Metaphors/Environments:

Wind (Commission) Mission is why the Church exists.

The Church is a movement, not an institution.

Every follower of Jesus is commissioned by God.

See:

John 3:1-8

Acts 1:8; 8:1-14

Acts 2

Acts 8:26-40

Luke 4:14-21

Genesis 2:4-7

Ezekiel 37:1-10

Mark 4:41

Water (Community) Love is the context for all mission.

The Church is relational, not programmatic.

Every follower of Jesus is part of a larger community.

See:

John 4

John 13:34-35

1 John 4:7-21

Psalms 42:1

Psalms 1:1-3

Isaiah 32:1-3

Isaiah 58

John 7:25-44

Wood (Connection) Structure must always submit to Spirit.

The Church is empowering, not controlling.

Every follower of Jesus is called and connected uniquely to serve.

See:

1 Corinthians 12

John 15:1-17

Romans 11

Matthew 9:14-17

Romans 12:3-8

John 15:2

Jeremiah 31:31

2 Corinthians 3

Fire (Communion) Relevance to culture is not optional.
The Church is incarnational, not esoteric.
Every follower of Jesus celebrates communion with God.

See:

John 1:14
Philippians 2:5-9
Acts 17:16-34
Romans 12:1-2
Genesis 22
Exodus 3
1 Kings 18:16-39
Psalm 51
1 Corinthians 9:19-23
Hebrews 12:29
1 Corinthians 14

Earth (Character) Creativity is the natural result of spirituality.
The Church is transforming, not conforming.
Every follower of Jesus grows in Christ-like character.

See:

Matthew 25:14-30
Luke 8:4-15
2 Corinthians 5:17-21
Ephesians 4:17-5:2
Genesis 2:7
Isaiah 64:8
2 Corinthians 4:7-11

Core Convictions:

The Bible is God's authoritative word to us.
Jesus is the only hope for a lost and broken world.
The local church is God's agent for redemptive change.
Every Christian is called and gifted by God to serve the Body and seek the Lost.
The Church is called to whole earth evangelism.

↑ What is your Doctrine?

The absolute best way to understand and learn about any community is to experience it on the relational level. Statements of faith can tell you what a community of faith's beliefs are, but they can't tell you who they are. If you'd like to discover who we are at Mosaic, please come to one of our Gatherings on Sundays by going to our home page at www.mosaic.org.

If unable to make it to Los Angeles and you want a more in-depth and relevant look at Mosaic (e.g. our core values and philosophy of ministry), please pick up a copy of the book *An Unstoppable Force*, by Erwin Raphael McManus. You can get it on sale at Amazon or probably find it at any major bookstore.

If the actual "statements of faith" are what you are still interested in, please reference the Baptist Faith and Message by going to this website: <http://www.sbc.net/bfm/bfm2000.asp>.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵<http://mosaic.org/faq/#faq3> and <http://mosaic.org/faq/#faq4>

2. Approach to Ministry

a. Creativity

McManus and Mosaic place an emphasis on creativity in their style of ministry. The bio on his personal website describes McManus this way: “Erwin Raphael McManus is an author, speaker, activist, filmmaker and innovator who specializes in the field of developing and unleashing personal and organizational **creativity**, uniqueness, innovation and diversity. In other words, he gets bored really easily. He is committed to creating environments that expand imagination, unleash **creativity**, and maximize the creative potential in every individual and organization. Erwin is also the catalyst behind Awaken. Convinced that the world is changed by dreamers and visionaries, Awaken serves the purpose of history by maximizing the divine potential in every human being. Engaging such issues as culture, **creativity**, change, and leadership, Erwin is widely known as a thought-provoking communicator. His travels have taken him to over 30 countries and he has spoken to over a million people from a wide variety of audiences, including the NFL, Lionsgate, New Line Cinema, and ILOG. His work is featured in numerous films, articles, and magazines across the US and internationally. Erwin also serves as the primary communicator and cultural architect of Mosaic in Los Angeles....”¹⁸⁶

b. Urban

I have already noted that Mosaic ministers to Los Angeles and the McManus has a history of ministry in urban churches. This focus on urban ministry is intentional as McManus sees the world becoming increasingly urban. “This phenomenon creates great friction for the contemporary church. The church has been informed and formed by rural ethos. Even the suburban church is in many ways the natural development of the county-seat church, maintaining its focus on family, community, and rural values. Again, there is nothing inherently wrong with these focuses and expressions of the Christian faith, but they certainly find themselves in crisis when surrounded by the urban world.... The urban world encompasses the most dramatic expressions of what many call postmodernism. Urbanities tend to be more liberal and culturally progressive.... When masses of people are pressed together, the society begins to reflect—on a societal level—the realities that are true within each human being’s heart.... However, urbanization creates traction when we see that God is scooping up the masses and placing them carefully together, making it easier for the gospel to get to them.”¹⁸⁷

c. Multiethnic/Multicultural

In *An Unstoppable Force*, McManus writes, “...every week I reflect on the incredible privilege I have of not only leading this congregation but also living in

¹⁸⁶<http://erwinmcmanus.com/bio/>, emphasis added.

¹⁸⁷ McManus, *Unstoppable Force*, pp. 45-47.

the middle of a miracle. To step into a community each week in which at least a third of the congregation is of Asian descent; a third is of Latino descent; and the other third is a mix of Caucasian, African American, Middle Eastern, Indian, and other ethnicities is indescribable if you have not experienced it. Mosaic represents the nations. At times I've tried to count how many countries are represented in our midst. I know there are at least fifty, perhaps more."¹⁸⁸

4. Relationship to the Emerging Church

- a. Like all emerging churches, Mosaic emphasizes being missional.

Being missional explains part of the decision to relocate one of the services to a nightclub. McManus writes, "There is a line of demarcation that those who are religious seem to establish: there are just some places they won't go and some things they won't do. Some people in our congregation were troubled when we relocated from our church sanctuary to a college auditorium. They felt we were moving from the sacred to the secular. You can only imagine the response we had when they discovered we were moving to a nightclub. If the first move us from the sacred to the secular, this would be from the secular to the sacrilegious. When we began our services in the nightclub, we would on occasion hand out three-by-five cards and allow those attending to write down any questions they would like addressed that evening. The first time I did this I was more than surprised by the opening question on the first card. 'What is a church doing in a nightclub? I couldn't resist responding, 'What are you doing in a nightclub?' and then went on to explain that Jesus had a terrible reputation for being the friend of sinners. There is no more appropriate place for the church to be than where people need God the most."¹⁸⁹

Apparently this focus on being missional is not only about seeing cultural adaptation within Los Angeles itself. McManus writes, "One of the most asked questions about our congregation is, How are we able to mobilize so many people to overseas missions? It's really pretty easy to explain. If your church is full of missionaries, the rest is just about geography. Most churches don't send missionaries because they don't have any. We have for several years averaged nearly one adult a month moving as a career missionary into what is known as the ten-forty window where the most unreached people in the world live. These people were not suddenly called to missions; these were people who were already on missions, and then God chose a change of address."¹⁹⁰

- b. McManus's doctrine of scripture reflects emerging church ideas about revelation, which are themselves reactions to postmodern views of truth.

¹⁸⁸Ibid., 55.

¹⁸⁹McManus, *Divine Moment*, p. 218-19.

¹⁹⁰Ibid., pp. 166-67.

Although McManus appears to be orthodox in his profession of faith and his presentation of the gospel, his views of scripture appear to depart from standard evangelical views. After quoting Hebrews 1:1-3a, McManus writes, “His point is simple: God has spoken through many people, in a variety of ways, and in many different times, all for the purpose of preparing us to hear the voice of the Son of God. Again, this is the chief end of all that God speaks, that we would know the one who has spoken. It is not enough for us to know or even believe that all that is true. It is essential that we know the one who is true. In this sense, the nature of truth is critical. Contemporary philosophy would propose that all truth is subjective. This position embraces relativism and makes the individual the center of reality. Science and modern Christianity would advocate that truth is objective, standing outside of the individual and empirically or rationally provable. The Scriptures give us a different position. Truth is neither relative nor objective. The biblical view is that truth is personal, relational, and subjective. The critical difference, of course, is that we are not the subject. God is.”¹⁹¹

c. McManus’s preaching tends toward story and imagery.

One aspect of postmodernism is an antipathy for abstract propositions (because of their low view of truth) and preference for story and imagery. In the doctrinal section above, I quoted the imagery Mosaic uses to teach the five purposes of the church (wind, water, wood, fire, earth). These are images and, it is argued, they communicate more powerfully with the postmodern mind. Likewise, story is preferred over truth claims. Although McManus believes in truth, he uses story in his preaching for this reason. “One of the arts that leaders much craft is the selection of great stories. Preaching must be more than moving toward doctrinal soundness, more than simply calling people toward life application. Preaching must elevate the stories of God that draw a picture of what life can be like for everyone.”¹⁹²

d. McManus places less stress on propositional truth and more on personal encounter with Jesus.

Part of the postmodern mindset is a suspicion about truth in general, which causes the postmodernist to devalue the idea of argument through proposition and logic. Emerging church leaders, like McManus, put more stress on using the Bible as the means to introduce Jesus than on teaching/defending the Bible as truth for its own sake. “For too long we have hidden behind the rightness of propositional truth and have ignored the question of whether or not it works. Does the faith you advocate get you to God? If people are observing your Christianity... is there enough evidence in your life to cause a person to see Jesus as sufficient? What an incredible opportunity we have in a world of uncertainty! We know that God is

¹⁹¹Erwin Raphael McManus, “The Global Intersection,” in *The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives*, ed. Leonard Sweet (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), pp. 255-56.

¹⁹²McManus, *Unstoppable Force*, p. 119.

and that Jesus is his name. There are many things that we don't know, but what we know is enough."¹⁹³

In another place, McManus has written, "Whatever the range of views may be, if we are defined by the person of Jesus Christ, then our mission must be to bring to humanity life that is borne out of an intimate relationship to God through Jesus Christ. The knowing that Jesus speaks of is best described as intimacy. The power of this relationship changes our relationship to everything else. The power of the gospel is the result of a person—Jesus Christ—not a message. The gospel is an event to be proclaimed, not a doctrine to be preserved."¹⁹⁴

IV. Rob Bell



Rob Bell

Mars Hill Bible Church
Grandville, MI
Teaching Pastor & Founder
<http://www.marshill.org/>
Nooma: <http://nooma.com>

Author:

- *Velvet Elvis* (2006)
- *Sex God* (2007)
- *Jesus Wants to Save Christians* (2008)

A. Personal Information

1. Childhood

According to Wikipedia, Bell was born on August 23, 1970, and is the son of a federal judge named Robert Holmes Bell.¹⁹⁵

2. Conversion to Christianity

I was unable to find any direct testimony about Bell's conversion to Christ. Wikipedia states that he "grew up in a traditional Christian environment."¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³Ibid., p. 58.

¹⁹⁴ McManus, "Global Intersection," p. 248.

¹⁹⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rob_bell

¹⁹⁶Ibid.

3. Preparation for Ministry

Bell graduated from Wheaton College with a bachelor's degree in 1992.¹⁹⁷ Shortly after graduating, he preached his first sermon and experienced a call to the gospel ministry. "I was teacking waterskiing the summer after I graduated from college at a camp in northern Wisconsin called Honey Rock.... Every Sunday morning the camp had a chapel service in the middle of pine trees beside the lake. One week I was with the people who were planning the service, and for some reason, when they started discussing who would give the message, I told them I would do it. I had never preached or taught or tired to explain the Bible to a group of people — I had absolutely no idea what I was doing. And they said, 'You're on this Sunday.' I walked around the woods a lot that week, asking God to give me something to say. And if God could give it to me before Sunday, that would be great. Sunday eventually came. I remember standing up to talk in front of those hundred or so people gathered among those pine trees and being aware of the presence of God in a terrifying way. Seriously, it was terrifying. But in a good way. The word that comes to mind is *holy*.... I took off my sandals because I knew the ground I was standing on was holy and that my life was never, ever going to be the same again. It was in that moment that I heard a voice. Not an audible, loud, human kind of voice, but inner words spoken somewhere in my soul that were very clear and very concise. What I heard was, 'Teach this book, and I will take care of everything else.' In that moment, my entire life changed forever. It was like a rebirth. I had been so restless and rebellious and unsettled and unfocused, and I had all this energy and passion but nowhere to channel it. Now I had something I could do with my life. In that moment by the side of the lake, barefoot, with my tongue tied and my heart on fire, I found something I could give my life to.... So for a little over ten years, I have oriented my life around studying, reading, teaching, and trying to understand the Bible."¹⁹⁸

After this, Bell acquired a Master of Divinity from Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California.¹⁹⁹

4. Family

He met his wife Kristen at Wheaton College.²⁰⁰ They have two sons.²⁰¹

B. Mars Hill Bible Church

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), pp. 40-41.

¹⁹⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rob_bell

²⁰⁰ Andy Crouch, "The Emergent Mystique" in *Christianity Today*, 1 July 2008. Available online at: http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/article_print.html?id=11430

²⁰¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rob_bell

1. Origin

According to the Mars Hill Bible Church website, “Rob Bell was an assistant pastor at Calvary Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, longing to start a new church. He and his wife, Kristen, and some friends decided to do it, Calvary gave their blessing and the first Mars Hill gatherings took place on February 7, 1999.”²⁰²

Bell began the church by preaching through the book of Leviticus.²⁰³ “In February 1999 we planted a church to reach the unchurched and disillusioned people of Grand Rapids, Michigan. For the first year, I preached through Leviticus—verse by verse.

- Menstrual blood.
- Hold the pork.
- Avoid road kill.

Why start a church with Leviticus? Why not a series on relationships or finding peace? That would be the safer approach. Leviticus cannot be tamed. Its imagery is too wild. We ventured into its lair and let it devour us, trusting that God would deliver us with a truer picture of his Son. Why Leviticus? Two reasons. First, I didn't want the church to succeed because we put together the right resources. I wanted the church to flourish on the power of the Spirit alone. I knew opening with Leviticus—foreign words to today's culture—was risky. But the bigger the risk, the more need for the Spirit and the more glory for God to get. Second, unchurched people often perceive the Bible as obsolete. If that crowd could discover God speaking to them through Old Testament law, it would radically change their perception that Christianity is archaic. I wanted people to know that the whole biblical story—even Leviticus—is alive. The Scriptures are a true story, rooted in historical events and actual people. But many people don't see the connection between the Moses part and the Jesus part. But Moses' Leviticus is all about Jesus.”²⁰⁴

Bell's approach to starting Mars Hill was informed by his experiences playing in an alternative rock band. It was not that he wanted that to be the music of Mars Hill; instead, it was the “raw,” “bare bones” nature of that music that influenced what he wanted Mars Hill to be like. He writes, “This ethos heavily shaped my understandings of what a church should be like: strip everything away and get down to the most basic elements. A group of people desperate to experience God.”²⁰⁵ This caused him to de-emphasize the launch of the church. “I remember being told that a sign had been rented with the church name on it to go in front of the building where we were meeting. I was mortified and had them get rid of it. You can't put a sign out front, I argued; people have to *want* to find us. . . . People would come in, there would be some

²⁰²<http://marshill.org/about/history/>

²⁰³http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/article_print.html?id=11430

²⁰⁴<http://www.ctlibrary.com/le/2002/winter/4.45.html>

²⁰⁵Bell, *Velvet Elvis*, p. 99.

singing, I would talk about God and Jesus and the Bible and life for about an hour, and then it would be over. And the strangest thing happened: People came on the first Sunday.”²⁰⁶

In fact, on the first Sunday, a lot of people showed up. “A few people came to get me five minutes before the first service and said I had to look out the front windows. I was not prepared for what I saw. Cars and people everywhere. They proceeded to tell me there were traffic jams in every direction; they had run out of chairs; and people were giving up trying to get through the traffic and just pulling over on the side of the road, parking, and walking the rest of the way.... There were well over 1,000 people there the first Sunday. People in the aisles. People on the floor. Packed. No more room, not enough chairs.”²⁰⁷

2. Growth

Mars Hill started big and simply grew bigger. It launched in February of 1999 but “by September of that first year, we had to hold three services, pushing things over 4,000 people in the first six months.”²⁰⁸ At this point in the church’s life, “An extremely generous family from the community let their building be used for free for the first year and a half.”²⁰⁹ But that building was inadequate. Bell writes, “several months into it, the fire marhsall showed up.... He said we were over code and illegal, and we would have to start turning people away at the doors. We literally had to post people at the doors, and when the room was full, they had to stand there and tell people they weren’t legally allowed to go into the service. I have a friend who couldn’t get in the first three times he came.”²¹⁰

At that point “another extremely generous family offered to give Mars Hill their mall. What do you do when someone offers to give you their mall? You take it.”²¹¹ The young church had to buy the parking lots surrounding the mall, but the complex of buildings itself was free. “We blew out the walls of the anchor store to make a room big enough to meet in and then turned the other stores into classrooms for kids. A guy came to one of the first services in the mall-turned-church, sat down in a chair, and said, ‘Hey, I used to shoplift in this exact spot.’”²¹²

²⁰⁶Ibid.

²⁰⁷Ibid., p. 100.

²⁰⁸Ibid., p. 101.

²⁰⁹<http://marshill.org/about/history/>

²¹⁰Bell, *Velvet Elvis*, p. 102.

²¹¹<http://marshill.org/about/history/>

²¹²Bell, *Velvet Elvis*, p. 102.

The outcome of all this growth was that, “Two years into it, there were around 10,000 people coming to the three gatherings on Sundays.”²¹³The church continues to be large, though no I could not find more current attendance figures.

C. Key Features of Theology and Ministry

1. Theology

a. Bell claims to hold to historic Christian doctrine.

In his book *Velvet Elvis*, Bell writes, “I affirm the historic Christian faith, which includes the virgin birth and the Trinity and the inspiration of the Bible and much more. I’m a part of it, and I want to pass it on to the next generation. I believe that God created everything and that Jesus is Lord and that God has plans to restore everything.”²¹⁴

Bell’s description of salvation is orthodox. He writes, “salvation is a legal transaction. Humans are guilty because of our sin, and God is the judge who has to deal with our sin because he is holy and any act of sin goes against his core nature. He has to deal with it. Enter Jesus, who dies on the cross in our place. Jesus gets what we deserve; we get what Jesus deserved.”²¹⁵

However, Bell’s understanding of the extent of Jesus’ atonement causes him to misunderstand the nature of salvation. In *Velvet Elvis* he writes, “Jesus died. And when Jesus died on the cross, he died for everybody. Everybody. Everywhere.... So this reality, this forgiveness, this reconciliation, is true for everybody. Paul insisted that when Jesus died on the cross, he was reconciling ‘all things, in heaven and on earth, to God’. All things, everywhere. This reality then isn’t something we make true about ourselves by doing something. It is already true. Our choice is to live in this new reality or cling to a reality of our own making.... Heaven is full of forgiven people. Hell is full of forgiven people. Heaven is full of people God loves, whom Jesus died for. Hell is full of people God loves, whom Jesus died for. The difference is how we choose to live, which story we choose to live in, which version of reality we trust.”²¹⁶This is a distortion of the gospel. Hell is not full of forgiven people; God does not punish sin twice. While many Christians hold that Jesus’ death on the cross is *sufficient* for everyone, the Bible teaches, and orthodox Christians hold, that only those who trust in Jesus receive the forgiveness of God that Jesus acquired. See Acts 2:38, 1 John 1:9. Also see Luke 12:10 for an example of something Jesus said would not be forgiven.

²¹³ Bell, *Velvet Elvis*, p. 103.

²¹⁴Ibid., p. 27.

²¹⁵Ibid., p. 107.

²¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 145-46.

- b. Bell's approach to Christianity is open to questions about evangelical theology in the areas of truth and interpretation.

- (1) For Bell, the truthfulness of the Bible (and Christianity) is not dependent on the facts in the Bible being true.

Bell compares his faith to jumping on a trampoline, and the doctrines of Christianity are, to him, like “springs on the trampoline.... The springs help us make sense of these deeper realities that drive how we live each day. The springs aren't God. The springs aren't Jesus. The springs are statements and beliefs *about* our faith that help give words to the depth that we are experiencing in our jumping.”²¹⁷

He contrasts his view of Christian truth to other views of Christian doctrine, which he compares to bricks in a wall. Bell describes one man's teaching this way: “It hit me while I was watching that for him faith isn't a trampoline; it's a wall of bricks. Each of the core doctrines for him is like an individual brick that stacks on top of the others. If you pull one out, the whole wall starts to crumble. It appears quite strong and rigid, but if you begin to rethink or discuss even one brick, the whole thing is in danger.”²¹⁸ In this section, he uses the specific example of the virgin birth and asks, “What if tomorrow someone digs up definitive proof that Jesus had a real, earthly, biological father named Larry.... Could you still be a Christian?”²¹⁹ On the next page, he affirms his belief in the virgin birth, but the fact that he questions its necessity to Christian doctrine is a departure from evangelicalism.

- (2) For Bell, interpreting the NT is heavily dependent on understanding the Jewish religion—especially the ways of rabbis.

In an interview, Bell describes how a deeper understanding of Judaism and rabbis has helped him to interpret the New Testament. “I have a couple of Jewish friends who became Christians. They kept saying about things in the Bible, ‘You know what that's about?’ ‘No.’ ‘Seder.’ ‘What?’ ‘Four promises in Exodus 6, the four cups. When Jesus says, ‘This is my cup,’ there are four of them. He's picking the fourth one. Do you know why?’ ‘No.’ I didn't know the Jewish background of Scripture. We need to reclaim the prophetic poetic preaching voice—that moment when a person speaks, and it's the words of God, and everybody knows it. Jesus is Jewish. I thought he was Christian. So then I started reading. Jesus taught about himself with Moses—the Torah—and the Prophets. It drove me crazy. I thought, There must be a whole world

²¹⁷Ibid., p. 22.

²¹⁸Ibid., p. 26.

²¹⁹Ibid.

of stuff in there that I'm missing. And there was. There are thousands and thousands of pages of ancient writings that Christians are oblivious to. The rabbis have an ancient ceremony called the Akedat—the binding of Isaac where they celebrate Isaac's action. Christians celebrate Abraham's faith; Jews the action. Isaac went. So this whole Akedat is a ceremony of the binding of Isaac. Baptism, the mikvah, all throughout Leviticus, all that stuff. It didn't come out of nowhere. Everything Jesus said—the Good Samaritan is commentary on Leviticus 15—those things are discussions about Torah. He's not randomly pulling things out of the sky. When Jesus becomes kind of an esoteric spiritual figure and not a real dude in a real place at a real time, the really subversive economic and political things he's saying get lost in an effort to proclaim him as Son of God, which we do. But he's also a Jewish rabbi who lived in a Jewish way in a Jewish time, and we have lot of information about what that world was like.”²²⁰

2. Approach to Ministry

Unlike some other emerging churches, which emphasize the arts, Mars Hill Bible Church has a simple format. Bell's desire was to start a church where people “would come in, there would be some singing, I would talk about God and Jesus and the Bible and life for about an hour, and then it would be over.”²²¹ He also writes, “Somebody asked me the other day why our church doesn't support the arts because we don't have dramas and short-act plays in the services.”²²²

One blogger recently (in July of 2008) visited Mars Hill and writes about his experience there. His two blog posts on this subject are worth reading, but for now pay attention to his description of the service at Mars Hill. “Mars Hill holds its Sunday “gatherings” in a renovated shopping center. The facilities are nice, but certainly not extravagant. They have three identical gatherings on Sundays and we chose the early one at 9am. When we pulled into the parking lot, there was no huge sign telling us we had arrived at God's special place for us; an army of greeters didn't welcome us and tell us where the coffee bar would be found, just a small imprint on the glass door that read ‘Mars Hill Bible Church: A Jesus Community.’ We came into the side of the auditorium and were greeted with the sound of the new Coldplay album coming through the speakers. The stage was in the middle of the room with no pulpit and chairs surrounding it on all four sides. We grabbed seats in the fourth row on what we assumed would be the front of the stage, hoping to get the full experience. Come to think of it ... it's funny that we thought there would be a ‘front of the stage’ in a church focused on postmodern ministry. Who would be arrogant enough to say that they really know which side of the stage is the front? When we reached our seats we found three pieces of paper waiting for us, one red, one orange, and one blue. I

²²⁰<http://www.ctlibrary.com/le/2004/spring/1.24.html>

²²¹Bell, *Velvet Elvis*, p. 99.

²²²Ibid., p. 85.

wondered if these pieces of paper were going to be used for something or if this was just part of the whole postmodern experience. As it turns out, we actually ended up using them during the message, which I'll talk about later. We had arrived about ten minutes before starting time, so we took a few minutes to take in our surroundings. Above the stage were four screens forming a box so that no matter where you sat you were facing one of the screens. On the screen were rotating a number of announcements and quotations. One of the announcements let everyone know that Shane Claiborne would be at Mars Hill the next night to speak on politics. Apparently Claiborne is in the middle of a nationwide tour promoting his book, *Jesus for President*. Amid the announcements were a series of quotes dealing with creativity from a variety of sources including Dorothy Sayers, Kent Ruth, and Pablo Picasso. The service ... I mean gathering, began with about thirty minutes of music. We sang a variety of songs including one song by The David Crowder Band and a couple of hymns. The last song we sang was a Woody Guthrie song entitled "Jesus Christ". The song paints a picture of a hardworking Jesus who went throughout the land and told the rich people to give their money to the poor. Jesus is portrayed, essentially, as an ancient version of Robin Hood who became a migrant worker. One verse proclaims that the bankers and the preachers put Jesus in the grave. After we sang, someone got up and made a few announcements and introduced the teachers (the "s" is not an accident) for the morning..."²²³

In addition to Mars Hill, Bell has produced a series of DVDs of his teaching called Nooma. Their website describes Nooma as follows: "We can get anything we want, from anywhere in the world, whenever we want it. That's how it is and that's how we want it to be. Still, our lives aren't any different than other generations before us. Our time is. We want spiritual direction, but it has to be real for us and available when we need it. We want a new format for getting Christian perspectives. NOOMA is the new format. It's short films with communicators that really speak to us. Compact, portable, and concise. Each NOOMA touches on issues that we care about, that we want to talk about, and it comes in a way that fits our world. It's a format that's there for us when we need it, as we need it, how we need it."²²⁴

In addition to authoring several books, Bell has toured the country on three occasions speaking to sold out crowds in secular venues. For one man's description of one of these events, and his excellent critique of Bell's message, visit http://www.buzzardblog.com/buzzard_blog/2007/11/rob-bell-the-go.html.

3. Relationship to the Emerging Church
 - a. Bell became part of the emerging church through the influence of Brian McLaren's book *A New Kind of Christian*.²²⁵

²²³<http://www.sfepulpit.com/2008/07/10/back-from-mars-part-1/>

²²⁴<http://www.nooma.com/Info/About.aspx>

²²⁵http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/article_print.html?id=11430

Rob and Kristen Bell became dissatisfied with evangelicalism. “In fact, as the Bells describe it, after launching Mars Hill in 1999, they found themselves increasingly uncomfortable with church. ‘Life in the church had become so small,’ Kristen says. ‘It had worked for me for a long time. Then it stopped working....’ The Bells, who flourished at evangelical institutions from Wheaton to Fuller Theological Seminary to Grand Rapids’s [sic] Calvary Church before starting Mars Hill, were by their own account happy and successful young evangelicals. Yet that very world, as the Bells tell it, became constricting—in Kristen’s phrase, ‘black and white....’ and how did the Bells find their way out of the black-and-white world where they had been so successful and so dissatisfied? ‘Our lifeboat,’ Kristen says, ‘was *A New Kind of Christian*.’”²²⁶

- b. Bell’s approach to interpreting the Bible rests on postmodern ideas about truth and objectivity.

Postmodernists believe that, if truth even exists, it is ultimately unknowable to us because we can never observe it or experience it objectively. Bell makes the same point about studying the Bible. “Everybody’s interpretation is essentially his or her own opinion. Nobody is objective.... The assumption is that there is a way to read the Bible that is agenda- and perspective-free. As if all these other people have their opinion and biases, but some are able to just read it for what it says.”²²⁷

A purely postmodern theory of truth is that truth is not objective but created by a community. A community—a group of people—unite together and establish the rules and language for their group. The terminology, language, and rules made up by that group are its truth. A person is judged not by his or her life or morals or ethics independently, but rather whether or not he or she lives “authentically” that is, in conformity to the “truth” established by his or her community. This is why you hear people saying phrases like “your truth” and “my truth.” For them, truth is subjective and created by whatever group you choose. While I don’t believe that Bell holds to truth in a purely subjective way, he borrows from this postmodern model in the way he talks about interpretation. He writes, “Community, community, community. Together, with others, wrestling and searching and engaging the Bible as a group of people hungry to know God in order to follow God. Perhaps this is why the Bible can be confusing for some the first time they read it. I don’t think any of the writers of the Bible ever intended people to read their letters alone. I think they assumed that people who were hearing these words for the first time would be sitting next to someone who was further along in her spiritual journey, someone who was more in tune with what the writer was saying. If it didn’t make sense, you could stop the person who was reading and say, ‘Help me understand this.’ When we’re serious about dealing with the Bible as the communal book that it is, then we have to be honest about

²²⁶http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/article_print.html?id=11430

²²⁷Bell, *Velvet Elvis*, p. 54.

our interpretations. Everybody’s interpretation is essentially his or her own opinion. Nobody is objective.”²²⁸

I agree that we all have opinions and perspectives that shape, and often distort, our understanding of the Bible’s meaning. But I also believe that God gave us the Holy Spirit, history, language, logic, argument, and rationality all of which can be used by him to expose our false perspectives and opinions. In other words, although we have our opinions, God has given us the means to learn when we are wrong. Therefore, it is possible to come to an understanding, and even agreement, about what the Bible means—a meaning that is independent of me.

V. Brian McLaren



Brian McLaren

Cedar Ridge Community Church
Spencerville, MD
Pastor & Founder
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<http://www.brianmclaren.net/>

Author of many books including:

- *A New Kind of Christian* (2001)
- *A Generous Orthodoxy* (2004)

A. Personal Information

1. Childhood

McLaren was born in 1956.²²⁹ McLaren was raised in a Christian family. He describes himself as “a lifelong participant in the Christian religion.”²³⁰

2. Conversion to Christianity

About his early exposure to Christianity, McLaren has written, “As a little boy I was sometimes unfathomably bored and uncomfortable in church. Bored because I didn’t understand what the grown-ups were saying; and uncomfortable because I had to wear a white shirt, clip-on tie, jacket, slippery socks, and stiff, tight shoes with slippery soles. (Most churches don’t torture children that way anymore.) As a teenager I was indignant about the hypocrisy I saw in others, though sadly, not yet in

²²⁸Bell, *Velvet Elvis*, p. 53.

²²⁹ <http://www.brianmclaren.net/archives/about-brian/biography/>

²³⁰ McLaren, *Generous Orthodoxy*, p. 20.

myself. Perhaps I just hadn't lived long enough to develop my own personal style of hypocrisy. I have lived long enough now. Then I had a series of experiences with Jesus Christ that ruined my life—ruined it for good—in a good way, I mean.”²³¹ McLaren has written numerous books and I did not have time to review them all before preparing this material. This was the closest to his salvation testimony I could find, though he mentions in a footnote, “I share some of my own spiritual journey in a book called *Finding Faith* (Zondervan, 2000).”²³²

3. Preparation for Ministry

McLaren is highly educated, but has no formal theological training. His website states that he has bachelor of arts and master of arts degrees in English from the University of Maryland.²³³ Although he was awarded a Doctor of Divinity degree from Carey Theological Seminary in Vancouver, BC, the Doctor of Divinity is an honorary degree which involves no classwork, no exams, no demonstration of theological competence.

On his own qualifications, McLaren states, “I myself will be considered by many to be completely unqualified to write such a book of theology, being neither a trained theologian nor even a legitimate pastor if legitimacy is defined by ordination qualifications in a bona fide denomination. Rather I am only a lowly English major who snuck into pastoral ministry by accident through the back doors of the English department and church planting, and whose graduate education consisted of learning how to read—a skill most people feel they have mastered by about the third grade. In other words, I am a confessed amateur. You may define amateur as ‘one who works for love, not money,’ as I might prefer, or you may define it as ‘unskilled, a rude beginner, unprofessional’ if you wish. Either way, I can’t blame you for deciding to read a book by a certified professional instead of this one.”²³⁴

4. Family

McLaren’s wife is named Grace and they four grown children.²³⁵

B. Cedar Ridge Community Church

1. Origin

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid., note 8.

²³³ <http://www.brianmclaren.net/archives/about-brian/biography/>

²³⁴ McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, p. 34.

²³⁵ Ibid.

McLaren founded a church in 1982 called “Community Church” and served as the pastor while also teaching college English.²³⁶ By 1986, the church had grown to about 85 people and called McLaren to be the pastor.²³⁷ After two years of struggle, the leadership of Community Church decided to close and re-launch as Cedar Ridge.²³⁸ The new church launched with 130 adults and 50 children. It appears that the new church (Cedar Ridge) was typically modern and evangelical in style, parroting the megachurch strategies of Willow Creek Community Church and Saddleback Community Church. The Cedar Ridge website describes the church’s services at that time this way: “Messages, music, drama, and the general atmosphere showed an increased sensitivity to “seekers” — unchurched, non-Christians who needed a personal relationship with God.”²³⁹

2. Growth

After a successful relaunch, Cedar Ridge began to grow. Again, according to the church’s history webpage, “Over the next three years, the church doubled in size, and, in answer to the church’s prayers, increasing numbers of the people coming in the doors were previously unchurched people.... Cedar Ridge was becoming a place where more and more seekers could find God! The growth process was not problem-free, however. Many of the long-term members felt much less comfortable in the ‘new’ church. It used to be so ‘cozy,’ and everyone knew one another. With all the new Christians and spiritual seekers around, some longstanding members felt their needs weren’t being met as well as before, and many long-time friends decided to move on. This new way of ‘doing church’ was exciting, but it was turning out to be harder than anyone had expected.”²⁴⁰

In January of 1999 Cedar Ridge moved into its first building. In 2006, McLaren stepped down as pastor in order to devote time to speaking and writing, though he apparently remains active at Cedar Ridge.²⁴¹ Matthew Dyer was called to replace McLaren as Senior Pastor.²⁴²

C. Key Features of Theology and Ministry

1. Theology

²³⁶ <http://crcc.org/section.php?SectionID=29>

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid. McLaren, *Church on the Other Side*, pp. 25-26.

²³⁹ <http://crcc.org/section.php?SectionID=29>

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ <http://crcc.org/section.php?SectionID=29>

²⁴² Ibid.

- a. McLaren claims that his theology is in line with the Apostles' and Nicene Creed.

While discussing the word “orthodoxy” in his book titled *A Generous Orthodoxy*, McLaren writes, “Many hold a minimalist concept of orthodoxy, seeking ‘the least common denominator,’ which limits the list of requirements for orthodoxy to a few core essentials. The generous orthodoxy consistently, unequivocally, and unapologetically upholds and affirms the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds.”²⁴³

He also affirms that doctrine is important. “This isn't to say that doctrine doesn't matter—not at all! Let me go on the record as saying that I believe sound doctrine, is very, very, *very* important (Titus 2:1-3:11), and that bad doctrine, while not the root of all evil, is a despicable accomplice to a good bit of the evil in the world. In fact, this book is an attempt to correct what I perceive to be some bad doctrine, including bad doctrine *about* doctrine.”²⁴⁴

- b. McLaren seeks to include a broad range of Christian ideas/denominations into his Christianity.

McLaren spends several pages detailing the encounters he has had in life with Christians of various denominations and beliefs. After describing them all, he summarizes them in a chart that is reproduced here:

Type of Christian	Focus/Problem	Good News
Conservative Protestant	The human race is guilty of sin and wrongdoing.	Jesus' death pays the full penalty for human sin.
Pentecostal	The human race is held down by disease and poverty.	Jesus teaches us how to receive miracles and healings from God through faith in God's promises.
Roman Catholic	The human race is enslaved by the fear of death.	Jesus' resurrection defeats death and liberates humanity.

²⁴³ McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, p. 28.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

Eastern Orthodox	The human race is spiritually sick and needs healing; it has dropped out of the “dance” of creation.	Jesus’ entry (or incarnation) into humanity and history brings God’s healing to the human race and all of creation.
Liberal Protestant	The human race suffers from ignorance of the teachings and ways of Christ.	Jesus’ example and teachings inspire us to work compassionately for social justice.
Anabaptist	The human race is divided and violent and needs to learn the ways of Christ in community.	Jesus convenes a learning community of disciples who seek to model lives of love and peace.
Liberation Theology (nonviolent)	Humanity is oppressed by corrupt powers, systems, and regimes.	Jesus commissions and leads bands of activists to confront unjust regimes and make room for the shalom of God.

At the end of this description, McLaren writes, “I am a Christian because I believe the real Jesus is all that these sketches reveal and more. Saying that, a question comes to mind.... *Why not celebrate them all...?* Up until recent decades, each tribe felt it had to uphold one image of Jesus and undermine some or all of the others. What if, instead, we saw these various emphases as partial projections that together can create a hologram: a richer, multidimensional vision of Jesus?”²⁴⁵

- c. McLaren identifies with the passion of evangelicals, but not so much with our doctrine.

In his book *A Generous Orthodoxy*, McLaren includes a chapter titled, “Why I Am Evangelical.” His reason for calling himself evangelical has to do with our passion for God. “When I say I cherish an evangelical identity, I mean something beyond a belief system or doctrinal array or even a practice. I mean an attitude—an attitude toward God and our neighbor and our mission that is passionate. When

²⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 66.

evangelicals (at their best) sin, they *sing*. When evangelicals pray, they *pray*. When evangelicals preach, they *preach*. When evangelicals decide something is worth doing, they *do it*.... They *just do it*—and with passion.”²⁴⁶

- d. All of this is evidence that McLaren believes that theology must change due to postmodernism.

He has openly stated that theology must change because of postmodernism. “Postmodernism is the intellectual boundary between the old world and other side. Why is it so important? Because when our view of truth is changed, when your confidence in the human ability to know truth in any objective way is revolutionized, then everything changes. That includes theology—and not only the content of your theology, nor only its categories. More far reaching, the mind of the person doing and learning theology is also changed.”²⁴⁷

In what way does theology change? For one thing, McLaren evidences a much more cautious approach to Christianity and theology. He writes, “We have to distinguish between genuine Christianity and our (individual and various culture-encoded) versions of it. As I have already stated in these pages, I believe our modern version of Christianity won’t work on the other side.... Now, some of you are wondering whether I actually mean what I am saying. In good postmodern fashion I will answer that I mean what I am saying, but maybe not what you think I’m saying.... I believe Christianity is true, but I do not believe that my version (or yours, for that matter) of the Faith is completely true. (In other words, I believe that all versions are incomplete in some ways, weighed down with extra baggage, and married by impurities, biases, misconceptions, and gaps.)”²⁴⁸

- e. Part of this change in our theology relates to our handling of the Bible itself.

In his chapter titled, “Why I am Biblical,” in *A Generous Orthodoxy*, McLaren begins by affirming his belief in the Bible. “I believe it is a gift from God, inspired by God, to benefit us in the most important way possible: equipping us so that we can benefit others, so that we can play our part in the ongoing mission of God. *My regard for the Bible is higher than ever.*”²⁴⁹

Nevertheless, his understanding of what the Bible is and is not has changed over time. He writes, “We wanted a simple, clear, efficient, and convenient plan for getting to heaven after death. Between now and then, we wanted clear assurance that God didn’t like the people we didn’t like, and for the same reasons we didn’t

²⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 117-18.

²⁴⁷ McLaren, *Church on the Other Side*, p. 70.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 172.

²⁴⁹ McLaren, *Generous Orthodoxy*, p. 159.

like them. Finally, we wanted a rule book that made it objectively clear, with no subjective ambiguity, what behaviors were right and wrong for all time, in all places, and among all cultures, especially if those rules confirmed our views and not those of people we considered ‘liberal.’ Although I was taught that the Bible fulfilled these modern-Western-moderately-educated desires, I no longer see the Bible this way. But that doesn’t mean I have a lower regard for the Bible. Although I value it differently than I used to..., I still... value the Bible more than I can adequately explain.”²⁵⁰

McLaren protests that the Bible causes him problems. “I need to be forthcoming, though, and admit that the Bible has not only been an inestimable blessing to me: it has also been a problem. The more I learn from Jesus, the more I cringe when I read passages in Exodus or Joshua where the God of love and universal compassion to whom Jesus has introduced me allegedly commands what today we would call brutality, chauvinism, ethnic cleansing, or holocaust. I ache when biblical passages are used to reinforce an escapist, deterministic, or fatalistic view of the future, to assert the subjugation of women by men, or to justify a careless attitude toward our beautiful God-given planet.”²⁵¹ The key to understanding the passages McLaren dislikes “isn’t the Bible, but our modern assumptions about the Bible and our modern interpretive approaches to it. I try to explain that there is a better way to understand and apply the Bible a largely new and unexplored way that can be summarized like this: *We need to reclaim the Bible as narrative*. The Bible is a story, and just because it recounts (by standards of accuracy acceptable to its original audience) what happened, that doesn’t mean it tells what should always happen or even what should have happened.”²⁵² Thus, to McLaren, the killing and plundering seen in the Old Testament happened at God’s command, but God’s commands to do these things were due to the context in which the Jews lived. Because they lived in the ancient Middle East, it was impossible to survive in that violent world without also resorting to violence.²⁵³ This ignores two key facts: (1) God told Abraham hundreds of years before that the Jews would be slaves and then be liberated to return to the promised land. The devastation the Jews would bring on Canaan when they returned was an act of judgment on the people of Canaan for their sin (Genesis 15:12-16). (2) God was able to protect the Jews from the violence of their neighbors and, in fact, he did so repeatedly (see Exodus 14:10-31; Joshua 5:10-6:5).

After sketching out his plan for reading and interpreting the Bible, McLaren recommends some historical examples of men “whose reading and application of

²⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 160.

²⁵¹ Ibid., p. 166.

²⁵² Ibid., p. 167.

²⁵³ Ibid.

the Bible advanced the narrative trajectory.”²⁵⁴ One of the positive examples he cites is Mohandas Gandhi “who sought to follow the way of Christ without identifying himself as a Christian.”²⁵⁵

- f. Another set of changes which McLaren makes are to the words “fundamentalist” and “Calvinist.”

While separating himself from the combativeness of fundamentalism, McLaren wants to self-identify as a fundamentalist—but this requires redefining the fundamentals. “For me the ‘fundamentals of the faith’ boil down to those given by Jesus: *to love God and to love our neighbors*. These two fundamentals will not satisfy many fundamentalists.”²⁵⁶ The doctrinal issues that fundamentalists discuss and separate over are useless to McLaren. To him, “that line of approach (definitions and schools of theology, arguments and delineations and lines of reasoning won’t bring us good answers.”²⁵⁷ Later in the chapter he chides fundamentalists for choosing their five fundamentals “because they represented battle lines with theological liberals” rather than being truly “fundamental or essential for the practice of vibrant Christian faith.”²⁵⁸

Likewise, McLaren professes a “great respect and love for the Reformed churches, which trace their lineage back to Calvin.”²⁵⁹ But he has no belief at all in the typical “five points of Calvinism” because he doesn’t believe in concepts such as unconditional election or irresistible grace.²⁶⁰ To him, these smack of “Determinism, which says that ultimately our freedom is an illusion, and that we’re just puppets of one sort or another. . . . I have little time for determinism.”²⁶¹ He blames Calvin’s “determinism” on historical and cultural factors rather than Calvin’s study of the Bible. The Calvinism McLaren wants to identify with is the intellectual rigor that Calvinist leaders evidence in their ministries and writings. “When I was growing up, there was anti-intellectualism rampant in Evangelical Christianity. At that time it was mostly in the Reformed churches (Presbyterian, Christian Reformed, etc.) that one found much intellectual vigor and life of the mind. Reformed writers and speakers like Francis Schaeffer, R. C. Sproul, Ravi

²⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 170.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 184.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 197.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 187.

²⁶⁰ In fact, he seeks to redefine each of the five points of Calvinism in the TULIP acrostic used by Calvinists as shorthand for the Reformed faith. See *A Generous Orthodoxy*, pp. 195-96.

²⁶¹ McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, p. 186.

Zacharias, Os Guinness, J. I. Packer, and others gave me a challenge and permission to think, and, forever, grateful, I made use of that permission.”²⁶²

Ironically, modern day Reformed leaders are modernistic in their assumptions about truth and rationality. This is not lost on McLaren who writes, “In terms of intellectual vigor, I believe that Reformed Christianity is the highest expression of modern Christianity, which is a sincere compliment—and a gentle warning, too. If we are moving beyond modernity in general, then the forms of Christianity that have most successfully adapted themselves to the assumptions and thought patterns of modernity are in the most trouble.”²⁶³

McLaren denies the sovereign control of God in ways that seem like an embrace of open theism. “I do not believe in this modern mechanistic God or this closed, mechanistic universe. I do not believe that this universe is a movie that’s already ‘in the can,’ having been ‘produced and shot’ already in God’s mind, leaving us with the illusion that it’s all real and actually happening. I find it hard to imagine worshipping or loving a deterministic, machine-operator God.”²⁶⁴

- g. McLaren seems to suggest that there are true believers in other world religions.

In a chapter where he recommends being “incarnational,” McLaren writes, “I also propose (with Jesus’ parable from Matthew 13:24-30 in mind) that we don’t seek to root up all the bad weeds in the world’s religions (including our own), but rather seek to encourage the growth of good wheat in all religions, including our own, leaving it for God to sort it all out as only God can do. *Wheat* in other religions, you ask? Yes.”²⁶⁵

At first, this “wheat” is explained as simply finding the good in other world religions. These things, to McLaren, are practices such as the “mindfulness and meditative practices, about which Zen Buddhism has said much. To talk about different things is not to contradict one another; it is, rather, to have much to offer one another, on occasion at least. If, as a Christian, I am to love my neighbor as myself and to treat my neighbor as I would be treated, then without question one of my duties in regard to my neighbor of another religion is to value everything that is good that he offers me in neighborliness—including the opportunity to learn all I can from his religion. Another duty is to offer everything I have that could be of value to him—including the opportunity to learn from my religion if he can. This is not a compromise of my faith or his; this is a required practice of

²⁶² Ibid., pp. 187-88.

²⁶³ Ibid., p. 188.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 187.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

it.”²⁶⁶ Because McLaren is anti-foundational, there is no necessary foundation of belief in the Bible, or the biblical God, or Jesus to experience good in Christianity.

But McLaren’s pluralistic beliefs go further than this. To him, one can become a Christian and yet remain in his own religion. He writes, “I don’t believe making disciples must equal making adherents to the Christian religion. It may be advisable in many (not all!) circumstances to help people become followers of Jesus *and* remain within their Buddhist, Hindu, or Jewish contexts. This will be hard, you say, and I agree. But frankly, it’s not at all easy to be a follower of Jesus in many ‘Christian’ religious contexts either.”²⁶⁷

And then he goes even further. He asks, “But what happens in our missional dialogue when we meet others whose piety and goodness and spirituality dwarfs our own? What happens when we share the gospel and others are informed and enriched, maybe even gratefully so, but not convinced?” He answers this question by quoting from late missionary and missiologist David Bosch who writes, “We cannot point to any other way of salvation than Jesus Christ; at the same time, we cannot set limits to the saving power of God.... We appreciate this tension, and do not attempt to resolve it.”²⁶⁸ This kind of thinking directly contradicts the exclusivism that the Bible places in the gospel. Romans 10:12-15 says, “For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’”

McLaren then commends a model of how he thinks this kind of pluralistic Christianity should be displayed. He writes, “My friend Diana Butler Bass embodies this ethos in a story from *Broken We Kneel* (Jossey-Bass, 2004).”²⁶⁹ McLaren quotes a story from the book where Diana Butler Bass and her daughter see a Muslim woman in Washington, D. C. where they live. Bass’s daughter sees the headdress of the Muslim woman and asks her mother about it. Bass replies that the woman “dresses like that because she loves God. That is how her people

²⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 255.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 260.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 262. McLaren quotes Bosch, but does not give proper attribution to his quote. Therefore, I do not know which of Bosch’s books or what page this quote comes from. Earlier in *A Generous Orthodoxy*, McLaren two books by Bosch: *Transforming Mission* and *Believing in the Future*. Perhaps the quote is from one of these.

²⁶⁹ McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, p 265.

show they love God.”²⁷⁰ Later in the same story, the little girl sees a Pakistani woman wearing her headdress. The girl points to the woman and says, “Look, mommy, she loves God!” The writer (Diana Butler Bass) continues, “My neighbor was surprised. I told her what I had taught Emma about Muslim ladies loving God. While she held back tears, this near stranger hugged me, saying, ‘I wish that all Americans would teach their children so. The world would be better. The world would be better.’”²⁷¹

So, in one chapter of his book, McLaren has moved from saying that Christians should affirm the good in other religions, to saying that Christians should not convert people to Christianity, but instead encourage them to follow Jesus as Muslims, Hindus, etc., to saying that Muslims who don’t affirm the Jesus of the Bible at all love God. The Bible pronounces a curse on anyone who tampers with the gospel in this way: “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Galatians 1:6-10).

h. Atonement

I was not able to read all of McLaren’s books before writing this material. In the books and essays I read, McLaren did not address the death of Jesus and its significance and meaning in any depth. However, others who have studied his writings have expressed concerns about McLaren’s understanding of the meaning and importance of Jesus’ death. D. A. Carson, a solid evangelical scholar and critic of the emerging church, notes that, when writing about the atonement of Christ, McLaren will give a survey of different opinions churchmen have had historically. Then McLaren finds fault with most of them. But, Carson states that he does not deal with the Bible’s own interpretation of the atonement. Carson writes, “...nowhere in his writings (fiction or nonfiction) does he [McLaren] attempt to ground his treatment of the theories of the atonement in the Bible, and, second, that he invariably takes the time to take cheap shots at substitution and other elements taught in Scripture.... My point here is that McLaren’s claim to be

²⁷⁰ Quoted in *A Generous Orthodoxy*, p. 265, but again without the appropriate page number from *Broken We Kneel*.

²⁷¹ McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, p. 266.

‘biblical’ rings a trifle hollow when crucial elements of what Christ accomplished on the cross, as taught by Scripture, are handled so cavalierly.”²⁷²

i. Homosexuality

McLaren has publicly written that he does not know what he believes about homosexuality. Here is an extended quotation from an essay he wrote on this subject. “Most of the emerging leaders I know share my agony over this question. We fear that the whole issue has been manipulated far more than we realize by political parties seeking to shave percentage points off their opponent's constituency.... Frankly, many of us don't know what we should think about homosexuality. We've heard all sides but no position has yet won our confidence so that we can say ‘it seems good to the Holy Spirit and us.’ That alienates us from both the liberals and conservatives who seem to know exactly what we should think. Even if we are convinced that all homosexual behavior is always sinful, we still want to treat gay and lesbian people with more dignity, gentleness, and respect than our colleagues do. If we think that there may actually be a legitimate context for some homosexual relationships, we know that the biblical arguments are nuanced and multilayered, and the pastoral ramifications are staggeringly complex. We aren't sure if or where lines are to be drawn, nor do we know how to enforce with fairness whatever lines are drawn.”²⁷³

He has proposed a “five-year moratorium” on making statements about the issue during which “we’ll practice prayerful Christian dialogue, listening respectfully, disagreeing agreeably. When decisions need to be made, they’ll be admittedly provisional. We’ll keep our ears attuned to scholars in biblical studies, theology, ethics, psychology, genetics, sociology, and related fields. Then in five years, if we have clarity, we’ll speak; if not, we’ll set another five years for ongoing reflection. After all, many important issues in church history took centuries to figure out.”²⁷⁴

2. Approach to Ministry

Compared to the other men we’ve studied, I did find very detailed descriptions of how McLaren actually practices ministry. The books of his that I read seem to focus more on theology and ideas than on concrete ways in which a postmodern church would do ministry on Sunday and throughout the week.

One specific thing about McLaren’s ministry that is clear—and consistent with most other post-modern styles of ministry—is focus on story. One of his books, *A New Kind of Christian*, is written entirely as a story about two friends—both Christians—

²⁷² Carson, *Conversant*, p. 168.

²⁷³ http://blog.christianitytoday.com/outofur/archives/2006/01/brian_mclaren_o.html

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

named Pastor Dan and Neo.²⁷⁵ The subtitle of this book describes it as “A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey.” This is deliberate because according to McLaren, “Our rhetoric will depend more on the power of story.”²⁷⁶

And again, “We need to tell our own stories: unedited, unsanitized, rough and lumpy, not squeezed into a formula. Should we be cross with postmoderns for feeling that stories are the best conveyers of truth? Looking at the Bible, it appears that God might be postmodern in this respect too! In part, this means being more honest—with ourselves and with postmoderns. Our doubts, failures, fears, problems, embarrassments, and confessions have tremendous apologetic and pastoral value in a postmodern world. They illustrate ‘truth’ in its postmodern form of honesty, authenticity, transparency.”²⁷⁷

Liturgy is a public worship custom or form that is written down and intended to be followed and read in the public worship service. Churches like ours are generally “non-liturgical” in the sense that we don’t read our prayers, publicly affirm a creed, or follow a lectionary in choosing what to preach. McLaren, by contrast, seems to be more liturgical in the way he practices Christianity. He writes, “Many years ago our church (nonliturgical in its origins) began using the Nicene Creed in our public worship.”²⁷⁸ Later he recommends the use of liturgy beyond the Nicene creed. “To have some gifted people (like the Anglicans’ Thomas Cranmer or the many gifted Catholic liturgists) save us from our habitual ‘justs’ and ‘spontaneous’ clichés with well-chosen words, well-crafted sentences, and well-thought-out paragraphs is a great gift of liturgy. True, liturgy led by an anemic leader with a monotone voice and a corresponding heart is a sad thing, probably no better (perhaps worse) than ‘justified’ impromptu prayers. But have you experienced well-written, prayerfully planned liturgy led by gifted, enthusiastic, passionate leaders? You’ll find yourself saying, ‘Thanks be to God!’”²⁷⁹

3. Relationship to the Emerging Church

a. McLaren is “missional.”

Like all the emerging church leaders we’ve studied so far, being missional is important to McLaren—so important that he dedicated an entire chapter to it in his book *A Generous Orthodoxy*. While McLaren believes that salvation is personal, he insists that it goes far beyond “a personal relationship with Jesus.”

²⁷⁵ <http://www.brianmclaren.net/archives/books/brians-books/a-new-kind-of-c.html>

²⁷⁶ McLaren, *Church on the Other Side*, p. 90.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

²⁷⁸ McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, p. 222.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

Part of his objection to an emphasis on personal salvation is that it distorts the nature of the church and its reason for existing. “Is it any surprise that with this understanding of salvation, churches tend to become gatherings of self-interested people who gather for mutual self-interest—constantly treating the church as a purveyor of religious goods and services, constantly shopping and ‘trading up’ for churches that can ‘meet my needs’ better? Is it any surprise that it’s stinking hard to convince churches that they have a mission to the world when most Christians equate ‘personal salvation’ of individual ‘souls’ with the ultimate aim of Jesus? Is it any wonder that people feel like victims of a bait and switch when they’re lured with personal salvation and then hooked with church commitment and world mission?”²⁸⁰

- b. McLaren has been associated with the emerging church from the beginning and has served as a key leader in the Emergent Village.

Recall from our studies of Mark Driscoll and Dan Kimball that the emerging church formed as a movement at a pastor’s conference at Mount Herman Christian Conference Center in California.²⁸¹ McLaren was part of this group from the earliest days. He writes, “In the late 1990s, I was invited to become part of Leadership Network’s Young Leader Networks (YLN), also briefly known as the Terranova Project. I was grandfathered in as the network’s ‘old guy,’ having moved beyond 39 in 1996. In 2001, I met with Doug Pagitt to discuss our future plans, YLN having just been launched by Leadership Network to continue on its own as an independent entity.... One of us—I can’t remember which (a sign of good collaboration or an aging memory, or both)—came up with a new name for the group: *emergent* (www.emergentvillage.com). We had no idea how fitting the name was and how helpful it would be in our ongoing work.”²⁸²

Today, McLaren has left the pastoral office of the church he founded in order to devote himself full time to speaking and writing as ways to advance his ideas about the emerging church.

- c. McLaren has been a leader in the emerging church because of his background in English.

Recall that when I described his preparation for ministry, I noted that McLaren has no formal theological training. Rather, he has both a bachelor’s and a master’s degree in English. While many would argue that a lack of theological training makes McLaren unqualified to be a pastor or Christian leader, McLaren would tout his training in English as an important factor in his ability to reach postmoderns. This is true because postmodernism started, you will recall from the

²⁸⁰ McLaren, *Generous Orthodoxy*, p. 107.

²⁸¹ Driscoll, *Confessions*, p. 97.

²⁸² McLaren, *Generous Orthodoxy*, p. 275.

first two weeks of this class, as a literary idea that spread broadly into academia, and then, through college graduates, eventually permeated society. McLaren writes, “I was studying literature in graduate school just as postmodernism was making its debut. Beginning in literary criticism, it spread out to affect almost every other discipline. The same forces that spawned postmodernism in the academy were already at work on the street...”²⁸³ Many pages later, McLaren returns to this idea. “Postmodernism was spawned in the field of literary criticism, the field in which I did my graduate study. It was just hitting the scholarly world as I entered graduate school, but it was known then as *deconstructionism* (a term as hard to explain as *postmodernism*). If you are upset with me because of this chapter, you might be tempted to say to me, ‘See, you were influenced by your worldly environment...’ Another way to see it would be to say that perhaps God ‘led me’ (a young man with strong evangelical Christian heritage and a deeply personal Christian commitment) into graduate school in that field at that time for this very purpose: to sensitize me to issues on the other side of this huge transition we have been born into, and to equip me to somehow be of some small help.”²⁸⁴

²⁸³ McLaren, *Church on the Other Side*, p. 69.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

Part 4:

Evaluation

In the preceding sections, I attempted to define the emerging church as well as trace its development. We looked first at postmodernism as a societal phenomenon, then at the rise of the emerging church as a Christian response to postmodernism. I gave you some general features that emerging churches tend to hold in common, then we looked at some emerging church leaders and their churches in a fair amount of depth.

I attempted to present the viewpoint of these men in as unbiased a way as possible, letting their own words speak for them. Having listened carefully to what they are saying about us as evangelicals, about the world in its postmodern outlook, and about their own theology and approach to ministry, the time has come for me to state clearly what I believe about the emerging church.

I have already stated that I believe we can learn something from everyone, even if that person serves only as a bad example. My guiding principle in this, and all areas of life is 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22: “Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil.” With that in mind, here is my position about the emerging church movement.

I. What We Can Learn from the Emerging Church.

A. Society has changed.

It is not uncommon in our culture to hear people say things like: “your truth,” “my truth,” “be authentic,” etc. These statements reflect a postmodern mentality.

Furthermore, more and more people today grew up or are growing up with no meaningful experience with a church—any church. In addition to becoming postmodern, American society is increasingly post-Christian (which is to say, “secular”). It is clear to me that our society has changed and the leaders of the emerging church have not only studied these changes philosophically, but they have extensive experience talking to people who are postmodern and secular in their viewpoint.

B. Our task as Christians is to fulfill the mission Jesus gave us to make disciples of all the nations (Matt 28:19).

1. Our presentation of the gospel must be meaningful to those we are attempting to reach.

The one word that has permeated all of our studies of the emerging church is the word “missional.” It is a word that emphasizes that we are not here merely to worship the Lord until our time runs out, but that we are here to create more worshippers of Jesus on earth.

Christ’s final instructions to his disciples were missional instructions. Matthew 28:19-20 says, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

When the gospel left the Jewish culture and crossed over into Gentile culture, it was necessary for Paul to adapt himself—without sinning—to the Gentiles he was attempting to reach. 1 Corinthians 9:19-20 says, “Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law.”

Because we live in a post-Christian culture, we must assume that the people we speak to about Christ do not understand the basic message of the gospel. This means that we must be careful that what we communicate to them about Jesus is only the gospel and not the gospel plus our Christian culture.

2. Our mission requires us to go to where the lost are, not expect them to come to us.

Another key buzzword of the emerging church (and others) is the word “incarnational.” The concept wrapped up in this word has to do with the fact that in Jesus, God became incarnate—he became human flesh. Those who say that our evangelism must also be “incarnational” are saying that we need to become like those we seek to reach. One verse that is used to support this idea is John 20:21: “Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’” Some have interpreted the “as” in this verse to be a statement about the method we follow in our mission. That is, they say that just as Jesus took on human flesh, we take on the appearance of the people we want to reach. Furthermore, just as Jesus healed the sick, fed the hungry, and was concerned about the poor, an incarnational ministry will care for these people as part of the mission, not merely as a way to speak to them about Jesus. This is what is known as the social gospel.

The proper reading of John 20:21 emphasizes the “sending.” That is the word that is repeated in the verse and therefore it receives the stress in interpretation. The Father *sent* Jesus to accomplish something—to pay the penalty for sin. Likewise, Jesus sent us too—to declare the forgiveness of sins in Jesus (v. 23).

Because we are “sent,” then we must go out looking for the people that God wants to reach. We don’t expect them to come to us; we reach out to them. Part of this means that we need to be in places where the lost are. Mark Driscoll makes much of the fact that he is reaching men and women in Seattle—one of the most secular cities in

America. He started his church there because that is where the need was. This follows the pattern of Jesus who spent his time with “publicans and sinners.” His goal was not to be accepted by them as a friend but to be where they were so that he could speak to them about the forgiveness he offered them for their sins. Luke 5:29-30 says, “Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, ‘Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and “sinners”?’ Jesus answered them, ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.’”

3. We must rediscover the power of story.

The emerging church appeals to scripture as story largely because they have rejected evangelical methods for interpreting scripture. This is a profound error and I will discuss it in detail shortly. However, anyone who has read the Bible knows that most of the Bible is given to us in stories. Adam and Eve, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, the Judges, Ruth, Job, Samuel, David, Solomon, the kings, etc. This does not even mention the four gospels which are mostly stories about Jesus’ life and the book of Acts which are stories about how the church spread. There are many reasons why God gave us the Bible in stories but one of them is that stories are incredibly powerful vehicles of communication. We can and should use the power of story in a biblical way without detaching ourselves from basic evangelical convictions about scripture.

II. What Is Wrong with the Emerging Church.

A. Many in the emerging church have detached themselves from the Word of God.

The major problem with the emerging church is that its leaders no longer submit to the authority of God’s word. This is ultimately what happens to every Christian and Christian church that departs from the biblical definition of what “Christian” is.

Remember that “modernism” seeks truth through science and logic. Because the laws of Bible interpretation are logical, many postmoderns—including many emerging church leaders—have concluded that evangelical convictions about the inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible come from a modernistic mind rather than being central to Christianity itself. Thus, Brian McLaren writes that, “For modern Western Christians, words like *authority*, *inerrancy*, *infallibility*, *revelation*, *objective*, *absolute*, and *literal* are crucial. Many churches or denominations won’t allow people to become members unless they use these words in their description of Scripture. Hardly anyone realizes why these words are important. Hardly anyone knows about the stories of Sir Isaac Newton, Rene Descartes, the Enlightenment, David Hume, and Foundationalism—which provide the context in which these words are so important.”²⁸⁵

²⁸⁵ McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, p. 164.

Even men like Erwin McManus and Dan Kimball, who appear to have evangelical doctrine have made disturbingly postmodern statements about the Bible. Kimball has written, “We approach the Scriptures more as a narrative than as a science textbook.... Far too often, it seems that we take verses so far removed from their context and historical setting and use them in understanding how we’re supposed to live today. I’ve sat through many sermons that feel more like a ‘Tony Robbins seminar with a few Bible verses thrown in’ (as one twentysomething girl told me she experienced at a certain church) rather than a sermon that moves us into the beautiful and sometimes mysterious narrative of the Bible, helping us become better disciples of Jesus.”²⁸⁶ Later he concludes: “we can have bold confidence about essential core doctrines. In fact, I believe emerging generations are looking for something to believe in. I believe they are looking for ‘truth,’ and when we do have something we know is true, we should clearly and boldly say it. But I think the church sometimes says lots of things are ‘true’ when we really aren’t certain. Emerging generations respect us when we aren’t afraid to say ‘I don’t know’ about something.”²⁸⁷

McManus wrote that “... the nature of truth is critical. Contemporary philosophy would propose that all truth is subjective. This position embraces relativism and makes the individual the center of reality. Science and modern Christianity would advocate that truth is objective, standing outside of the individual and empirically or rationally provable. The Scriptures give us a different position. Truth is neither relative nor objective. The biblical view is that truth is personal, relational, and subjective. The critical difference, of course, is that we are not the subject. God is.”²⁸⁸

While modernism did attempt to restrict the apprehension of truth to science and logic, Christianity has always held that the major source of truth is revelation. God revealed truth to men of the Bible (like Moses, Paul, and many others) supernaturally. Jesus was the ultimate expression of truth (see John 14:6, John 1:1, Hebrews 1:1). Human authors were selected by God who breathed out God’s word through them into the Bible. Revelation is the ultimate source of truth and it is the reason why science and logic make sense and are also possible sources of truth. In fact, the reason postmodernism exists is that unregenerate men (“modernists”) decoupled science and logic from revelation. In doing this, they destroyed the very foundation on which these concepts rest. Over time, as people sought truth through science and logic but without the guidance of revelation, their confidence in them broke down because they lacked the proper interpretive foundation in God’s revelation.

The emerging church leaders are correct that evangelicals placed too much faith in science and logic. To the extent that we did this—without showing their basis in revelation—we allowed modernism to corrupt Christianity. The solution is not to

²⁸⁶ Kimball, “The Emerging Church and Missional Theology,” p. 98.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

²⁸⁸ Erwin Raphael McManus, “The Global Intersection,” in *The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives*, ed. Leonard Sweet (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), pp. 256.

abandon logic in our understanding of scripture. Instead, the solution is to ground our faith and worldview in revelation first and foremost.

- B. The emerging church has allowed postmodernism to dictate its theology, not just how its theology is communicated.

I have already affirmed the idea that the message of Christianity does not change but our methods and modes of communication will change over time. This is what I understand Paul to be doing when he states that “to the Jew I became like a Jew to win the Jews. To those without the law, I became like one without the law....”

Brian McLaren (and others) disagree with this premise. McLaren writes, “Postmodernism is the intellectual boundary between the old world and other side. Why is it so important? Because when our view of truth is changed, when your confidence in the human ability to know truth in any objective way is revolutionized, then everything changes. That includes theology—and not only the content of your theology, nor only its categories. More far reaching, the mind of the person doing and learning theology is also changed.”²⁸⁹

- C. The emerging church has stressed outreach so much that holiness is in danger of being compromised.

First Peter 3:15-16 regulates the way that we relate to lost people around us. It says, “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, **keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ** may be ashamed of their slander” (emphasis added). Jude 22-23 says, “Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.” These passages, and others like them, urge us to be careful not to expose ourselves to temptation when we live missionally in this world. Unfortunately, the writings of many in the emerging church do not show this kind of caution. Even a man with strong doctrine like Mark Driscoll seems to argue that Christians can consume popular culture without endangering their personal holiness.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁹ McLaren, *Church on the Other Side*, p. 70.

²⁹⁰ Driscoll, *Radical Reformation*, pp. 126-27.