

“Truth without Love is too hard; Love without Truth is too soft”
Living Faith Church

Through

the

Maze

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Pathetic & Blasphemous....

The Emerging Church

*Confused by Postmodernism, Intimidated by Political Correctness, Greedy for “Church Growth,”
Bitter toward the Evangelical Church, and Hungry for Acceptance—
The Emerging Church is simply one more Cult.*

“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.”—Brian McLaren, A Generous Orthodoxy

Brian McLaren is the best known missionary for a movement known as the Emerging or Emergent Church. This movement was actually born within the Evangelical church. The Emerging Church is very likely incubating and growing within *your* church. If your church is larger than a hundred people, you can be certain that members, if not pastoral staff, have been infected to some degree or another with this disease. It is an epidemic.

The subtitle of McLaren’s book is, I suppose, an attempt at humor: *“Why I Am a Missional, Evangelical, Post/Protestant, Liberal/Conservative, Mystical/Poetic, Biblical, Charismatic/Contemplative, Fundamentalist/Calvinist, Anabaptist/Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, Green, Incarnational, Depressed-yet-Hopeful, Emergent, Unfinished Christian.”*

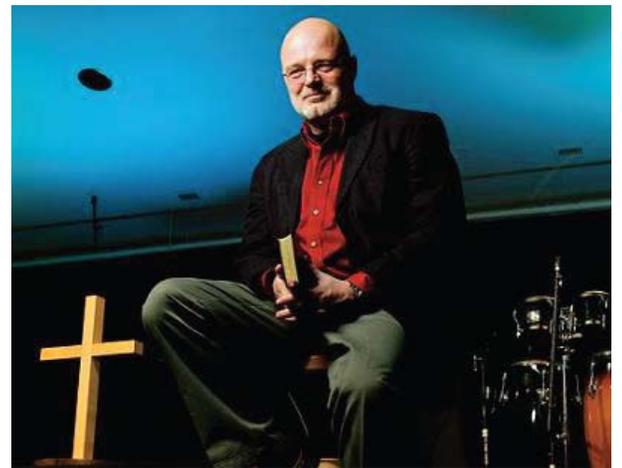
Quotes from within the book, however, demonstrate it isn’t funny at all. He says, for example:

The traditional understanding [of the Atonement of Christ would mean] that God asks of us something that God [Himself] is incapable of. God asks us to forgive people, but God is incapable of forgiving. God can’t forgive unless He punishes somebody in the place of the person he was going to forgive [by allowing His son to be crucified]...A common understanding of Atonement presents a God who is incapable of forgiving unless He kicks someone else. (A Generous Orthodoxy, p. 100)

Of the traditional doctrine of Original Sin, McLaren writes:

The church latched on to that old doctrine of original sin like a dog to a stick, and before you knew it, the whole gospel got twisted around it. Instead of being God’s big message of saving love for the whole world, the gospel became a little bit of secret information on how to solve the pesky legal problem of original sin. (The Last Word and the Word After That, p.134)

Another “light” in the Emerging Movement is Alan Jones. In his book, *Reimagining Christianity*, he states:



Brian McLaren, Emergent guru, acclaimed as **One of “The 25 most influential Evangelicals in America”** (*Time Magazine*, Feb 07, 2005)

The Church’s fixation on the death of Jesus as the universal saving act must end, and the place of the cross must be reimagined in Christian faith. Why? Because of the cult of suffering and the vindictive God behind it.” (p. 132)“The other thread of just criticism addresses the suggestion implicit in the cross that Jesus’ sacrifice was to appease an angry god. Penal substitution [the Cross] was the name of this vile doctrine. (p. 168)

I could cite quote after quote from these men and their friends (and they have a lot of them). Many of the most famous Evangelical pastors—if they are not actually joining the Emergent Movement—are studying the Emerging prophets, showing their videos, promoting their books, and even putting them in their pulpits. McLaren, for example did a multi-

day seminar here in Boise (actually at Northwest Nazarene College in Nampa, Idaho). My friends, Eric Barger and Chris Bayer attended the painful presentation. Eric said McLaren was received with adoration by the faculty and students. Eric wrote of the event:

The “service” ended with McLaren’s invitation for attendees to come to the front, and among other exercises, take some water from a vat and re-baptize themselves into the new enlightenment we’d received. He recommended that while we were there we also stick our hands into the tub of dirt that had been provided to fully sense “what needed to be saved!” [McLaren and his breed claim Jesus did not come—primarily—to save men from sins, but rather to save the earth from men.] —*For more info goto BeyondMormonism.com/0309*

The Emergent Movement is not a collection of uninformed novices (like, for example, Joseph Smith or David Koresh). No, in many cases the Emergents are seminary-trained pastors, and *not* from particularly liberal seminaries. Most of the Emergent leaders come from a background in solid Evangelical churches. But they all have one thing in common: they angrily resent their Evangelical past. They are convinced Evangelicalism is corrupt.

Dissatisfaction

As you read the Emergent leaders’ “stories” (a word of ultimate significance to Emergents) you will discover a seething rancor related to their experience in Evangelical churches. Authoritarian pronouncements of Christian doctrine particularly dismay them. Evangelicals, they feel, are arrogant to suggest that they have all truth (or at least that Christian truth is superior to other religious truth). They think we should be content to let our truth simply be *our truth*. To an Emergent, being certain about anything is the chief sin.

Postmodernism: The Roots of the Emergent Movement.

The world truly passed into a “New Age” beginning in the 1960’s. Officially, we moved from Modernism to Postmodernism. People who study such cultural phenomena agree that movement happened in the first decades after World War II.

Postmodernism is hard to define, but it addresses changes in art, architecture, music, film, literature, sociology, communications, fashion, and technology. This cultural reformation of the last half of the 20th Century was swift and radical.

Culture, of course, is always evolving. If you wanted to consider an overview of Western

Civilization, you would start about 500 BC with the Greek philosophers like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Five hundred years later Rome inherited Greek culture and adapted it. Another five hundred years saw the fall of Rome and the world found itself in the superstitious Dark or Middle Ages when a corrupt religious system held Western Civilization hostage. The Renaissance and the Reformation dragged us out of that Medieval time. The so-called Enlightenment paved the way for the Victorian Age which gave way to the Modern Age during the 19th and 20th Centuries.

Modernism—the age into which I was born—began with the Industrial Revolution in the late 19th Century and continued through the rise of the Technological world in the first half of the 20th Century. This was an era of optimism; mankind clung to the idea that it could save the world with science and social enlightenment. The League of Nations and the United Nations were formed with that hope.

The greatest blow to modernism came with the First World War. That war was so unbelievably ghastly that men like Nietzsche and Sartre—in despair—gave up on the idea that (as the Classic philosophers believed) “man could, by taking thought, find the good life.” (WWI and WWII can actually be thought of as one war that destroyed Europe, killed six million Jews, and ushered in the Cold War under a nuclear shroud.) Those wars left the world awaiting revolution.

Breaking with the Past

We all think of the 1960’s as the decade when the Old Way was ridden out of town on a rail. And so it was. All art, literature, social science, and modern philosophy seemed to be rejecting

Panel Discussion on The Emerging Church

Ligonier Ministries “Questions and Answers Video”

—*For more info goto BeyondMormonism.com/0309*

The Emergent Church: Commentary and Analysis by R. C. Sproul, Al Mohler, and Ravi Zacharias

Excerpts

Mohler:

Postmodernism rejects the idea that truth is universal, absolute, unchanging, and knowable and that language is capable of conveying truth.

The hard line Emergent form...is represented by such persons as Brian McLaren...[who embraces] a relativistic understanding of truth: you can be a Calvinist and an Armenian; a catholic and a protestant; a charismatic and a non charismatic...[One popular] Emergent website is [called appropriately] “the ooze.”

Today’s Liberals were Evangelicals yesterday... if you get the truth question wrong, you are going to be aberrant in every other area of life...and your personal understanding of Christianity...Call it what you will, Emergent is a new form of Liberalism.

[The] essence of postmodernism... is an abdication of Christian responsibility, and abdication of Christian conviction, and a cave-in of Christian courage.

Sproul:

Truth is that which describes real states of affairs...Postmodernism does not believe in real states of affairs.”

In postmodern terms right and wrong are not real categories...[some] people don’t like orthodox Christians because they want to reassert categories of right and wrong...[Emergents] don’t want any doctrinal assertions. The Emergent Church has a built in allergy to that.

Zacharias:

When you read Brian McLaren, every chapter dies the death of a thousand qualifications...until you wonder what he really believes: one thing on Monday [another] on Tuesday...He is an anti doctrinaire doctrinizer...always postulating doctrine while he is antidoctrinizing.

[Emergent thinking] appeals to people who do not want to have to deal with theological conflict...because it’s divisive, so [they want to] revitalize doctrine...[but] truth is too important to kill it in the streets for the sake of peace.

the way things had been. Everything was in turmoil: The civil rights movement, the anti-war movement, radical feminism, the sexual revolution (including the gay rights movement), environmentalism—everything.

On the religious front, mainline denominations—already sinking under a growing secularism in the pulpits—were shaken by the Jesus Movement (followed by the Charismatic Renewal). As Postmodernism replaced Modernism, American Christianity also was challenged from the outside. Religious ideas, including

Eastern Mysticism, Paganism, and New Age thinking—and eventually Islam—took up root in American cities.

Radical ideas ran amok on college campuses. As Bob Dylan had predicted: *The Times They [were] A-Changin'*. Pot smoking took over students, students took over administration buildings, race riots took over the streets, and drugs took over the inner cities.

Not only were college students radicalized, but academia itself revolted. Universities replaced The Great Books—the wisdom of “dead white males”—with modern multicultural writings.

Alienation and extremism were watchwords. Of this age, Camille Paglia writes:

[In] October 1967, Yippies performed a mock-exorcism to levitate the Pentagon and cast out its demons. Not since early nineteenth-century Romanticism had there been such a strange mix of revolutionary politics with ecstatic nature-worship and sex-charged self-transformation. —For more info goto BeyondMormonism.com/0309

At the Expense of Truth

Therefore is judgment far from us, neither does justice overtake us: we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness... We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes: we stumble at noon day as in the night; we are in desolate places as dead men... And judgment is turned away backward, and justice stands afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. (Isaiah. 59:9-10, 14)

If one were to search for a common phrase to illustrate this new philosophical era, it would have to be “Truth is Relative.” This generation is convinced that Truth—ultimate truth—cannot be discovered. No one can, in the end, know *anything* with certainty. Those who try to know are fools. The most absurd and infuriating thing you can say to a postmodern is that you are *certain*. The most hackle-raising statement you can make to one of the Emergent crew is that you are certain that Christianity is the only way for mankind to be reconciled with God. They dogmatically hate dogmatism. They value relativism.

One of the most insightful students of the fall of reason in American society was the late Allan Bloom. Bloom was a University of Chicago professor who had taught at Yale, The University of Paris, The University of Toronto, Tel Aviv University, and Cornell University. He was one of many American intellectuals who raised their voices against what they saw as the gravest threat to Western Civilization since the Middle Ages—our abandonment of the search for Truth and the abandonment of the written wisdom of Western Civilization.

The Closing of the American Mind

In his unparalleled book, *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987), Bloom claimed that the **greatest barrier to American social health is the modern American educational system**, a system which does not pursue truth, he said, but instead *obstructs* the pursuit of it. That system, he said, was teaching students to believe that **every idea is as good as every other idea**, every culture is as good as every other culture, and every way of thinking about God, man, and the universe is as good as any other. Worse than that, he said, students have been led to believe that the world has always been mad and that men have always thought they were right, when no absolutes exist. The only real danger, educators tell students, “Is to think you are right”. Bloom’s students asked him, he said, “What right do you have to suppose that one opinion or culture is better than the others?” Bloom said American universities teach students that “absolutism” only leads to wars, persecutions, slavery, racism, and fear of others.

If I pose the routine questions designed to . . . make them think, such as, ‘If you had been a British administrator in India, would you have let the natives under your governance burn the widow at the funeral of a man who had died?’ They either remain silent or reply that the British should never have been there in the first place . . . The purpose of their education is not to make them scholars, but to provide them with . . . openness. (The Closing of the American Mind) —For more info goto BeyondMormonism.com/0309



Dr. Allan Bloom

Symbolism over Substance

Simultaneous with the fall of reason, there arose in America a radical change identified by Marshall McLuhan, the Canadian educator, philosopher and scholar. He coined the phrase “the medium is the message.” He meant that the *way* in which a message is propagated (he especially referred to television) determines what is *able* to be said. (Evidence of that is found in watching television shows in which two opposing “authorities” shout at each other their views on a given topic. The audience is left, not with an understanding of the issues, but with a “feeling” of support for one side or the other. Contrast that with the historic Lincoln-Douglas debates which enthralled open-air listeners for six hours—with a break for supper.)

Neil Postman penned another interesting evaluation of current postmodern communication in his book *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985). In it he says:

The most significant American cultural fact of the second half of the twentieth century [is] the decline of the Age of Typography and the ascendancy of the Age of Television. This change-over has dramatically and irreversibly shifted the content and meaning of public discourse...—For more info goto BeyondMormonism.com/0309 [Note: I can’t help but wonder what Postman would say about the sudden death of print newspapers taken over by YouTube video bloggers.]

The fundamental difference between a *word* oriented society and an *image* oriented one is the difference between objectiveness vs subjectiveness—reason vs feelings. Words are the things of reason; pictures are the things of emotion. The language of God to man is His Word. Jesus, of course, is the Word of God—the *logos*. God is a God of order and law. Judaism stood out from all the world as a people of The Book. Pagan, esoteric, occult cultures

Willow Creek Community Church Promotes the Emergent Leaders

Pastor Bill Hybels, one of the most influential Evangelical leaders in the world, hosted the Emergent leaders at his South Barrington, Illinois church in April 2008. The Shift Conference invited youth leaders and pastors from all over the world for what they describe as a Student Ministers Conference.

Brian McLaren led off the conference speaking on the subject “Everything Must Change.” Shane Claiborne, who did a session called “Another Way of Doing Life (or Christian Troublemakers).”

Videos were provided by Rob Bell’s Nooma Ministries and music was provided by Switchfoot.

Mark Yaconelli, author of “Growing Souls: Experiments in Contemplative Youth Ministry,” was there, along with a host of other self-described Emergents.



Shane Claiborne



Rob Bell

surrounded the Jews.

One author contrasted the pagan Greek and Jewish cultures in this way:

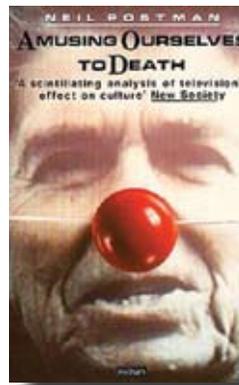
Judaism is contrasted to Greek culture as polytheistic, sedentary, and iconic—which means that the Greeks organized their lives around city-states and representational art. Judaism, on the other hand, was defined by “linguistic monotheism.” It was a religion of nomads, oriented toward the Word rather than the image.

The Emergent Movement squarely rejects reason and logic in favor of “experiencing and living the ‘life of Jesus.’” Of course, no one in the Emergent Movement can definitively say what the life of Jesus really is. To do so would be doctrinal and dogmatic—which Emergents disdain. To

“smells and bells.” (See sidebars: “An Emergent Worship Service” and “An Insiders View of the Emergent Movement”)

How are Christians to Deal with these Cultural Changes?

How should Christians react to the swelling sea of exasperating Relativism in which we find ourselves? We are tempted to remain silent. Who likes to argue? Not me. No one wants to be seen as critical and negative. But, as Ravi Zacharius says, “Truth is too important to kill it in the streets for the sake of peace.”



No matter how nice we are, the fallen world is not going to like us because, as Jesus said, “They hated me.” (John 15:18; Mat 10:22) In fact, the Bible tells us that we should worry *only when men speak well of us*. To be a *friend* of the world, the Bible tells us, is to be an *enemy* of God.

We can not tamper with the biblical message: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” (Jer. 17:9) Sinners need to be *saved*, not merely encouraged to find their own way. Please do not say to a sinful man, “listen to your heart.” His heart got him into trouble in the first place. Without a clear announcement of man’s guilt, there is

no hope that he can comprehend God’s offer of freedom. He must first understand his freedom will only come when he undertakes the desperate act of repentance. Telling people that Jesus loves them is true, but it is an incomplete message. Without a clear description of man’s sin and rebellion and the hope of repentance, the message of God’s love is simply nice to know, but it is not saving information.

Emergents have totally lost the message that

describes mankind’s reprobate nature. What a shame! I can remember what hope and joy I felt when I learned that my black heart had a cure. Many people never face that. “How can they hear,” the Bible asks, “unless there is a preacher?” (Rom. 10:14) Usually the lost need shock therapy to understand the message. They won’t get that understanding in an Emergent church.

The Emergents—like Liberal and Liberation theologians before them—are wrong in believing that the *first* message of the Gospel is about “social justice.” Emergents are twice wrong in forgetting that the Gospel is *primarily* about the saving of souls *from* hell and *to* heaven. As the Apostle Paul plainly taught:

This [is] a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. (I Tim. 1:15)

If a Christian Liberal loves the world, but hates the Church, he misses the boat.

The Liberal drift is not New

The Body of Christ, historically, slides down the philosophical slippery slope into the slough of despond (the world). The world—the *cosmos*—is fallen. It awaits redemption, not assimilation. When you dance with the devil, *you* change, not the devil. Evangelism is to stand in a godly ark and throw a secure lifeline to the lost. We are not to swim in the world’s pool, breathe the world’s air, and drink the world’s water, because that narcotic brew will cloud our minds. We will drift and we will forget:

Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let [them] slip. (Heb 2:1)

Churches and denominations are born in youthful fire, become reasonably adult, grow old, and—eventually—die. By the time they are dead, they are indistinguishable from the world which was dead to start with.

It is Easy to be Complex; it is Hard to be Simple

But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or [if] ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with [him]. (II Cor. 11:3-4)

Whenever we go to the world for understanding and wisdom, we become infected with the sophistication of the world. The things we learn sound good to itching ears, but they are useless to bring us to Christian maturity.

The Voices of the Emergent Church Speak

I believe the best way to get the feel of the Emergent Church is to read its literature. But, it is only necessary to read the *titles* of their literature to understand that they speak a very different language from that of Evangelical Christians. These authors are all self-proclaimed Emergents.

Rob Bell	<i>Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith</i> <i>Sex God: Exploring the Endless Connections between Sexuality and Spirituality</i> <i>The Gods Aren't Angry (DVD)</i> <i>Jesus Wants to Save Christians: A Manifesto for the Church in Exile</i>
Brian McLaren	<i>Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope</i> <i>The Secret Message of Jesus: Uncovering the Truth that Could Change Everything</i> <i>A Generous Orthodoxy</i> <i>The Story We Find Ourselves In</i>
Doug Pagitt	<i>A Christianity Worth Believing</i> <i>Body Prayer: The Posture of Intimacy with God</i>
Dan Kimball	<i>They Like Jesus, But Not The Church</i> <i>I Like Jesus, But Not The Church</i>
Tony Jones	<i>The New Christians: Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier</i> (Jones is/was National Coordinator of Emergent Village)
Ian Mobsby	<i>The Becoming of G-d,</i> <i>Emerging & Fresh Expressions of Church</i>
Don Miller	<i>Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality</i> <i>Searching For God Knows What</i>
Erwin McManus	<i>Seizing Your Divine Moment</i> <i>The Barbarian Way: Unleash the Untamed Faith Within</i>
Shane Claiborne	<i>The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical</i> <i>Becoming the Answer to Our Prayers: Prayer for Ordinary Radicals</i>

them, the definition of the Jesus Life is not to be found in declarations in the Bible. Emergents think everyone needs to find his own definition of the godly life. (God disagrees, criticizing the Israelites in the Book of Judges because “every man did [that which was right] in his own eyes.” Judges 17: 6 & 25)

Likewise, the emphasis in Emerging *worship* is “experiential not doctrinal.” Some who observe Emergent worship services talk about

Colossians, especially the end of chapter two.)

Where Did this Current Silliness Come From?

I mentioned that the Emergents are mad at the Evangelical church. I would be angry, too, if the straw man they have constructed accurately represented the Evangelical church, but it doesn't. I'm baffled, for example, as to how the Emergents have come to believe Evangelicals do not care about justice and mercy. They seem to think *they* discovered it. Where were they when they (supposedly) were Evangelicals? The respected scholar, Ravi Zacharius, pondered the rise of the Emergent leaders in this way:

It makes me wonder, were these guys bored with God? What brought this [movement] about? What brought this [Emergent] methodology into a theology? When you write a book like The Secret Message of Jesus [by Brian D. McLaren]—What! 2,000 years have gone by and now suddenly he's found the secret to it and we didn't know it? This is so bizarre!

The problem is we have noncritical people [people who are not critical thinkers] listening to this stuff—and they absorb it! —For more info goto BeyondMormonism.com/0309

I believe I know where this movement really started. I believe it started about 1980 as the hot breath of the Charismatic Renewal began to cool. I was one who was swept up by the Holy Spirit in that move of God (a reaction to the rising chaos of the 1960's). I watched churches become infused with life. And as they did, the pews filled and new churches and new denominations sprung up. Of course there were problems within the movement—where there is light there will be bugs.

Some people were intoxicated with the vibrancy and growth of that day. As the spiritual wind died down, we heard a new rallying cry: "Church Growth!" Now experts came forward to tell us how to replicate the sovereign filling of our churches. Its funny in a way: people who are blessed begin to think it is something they earned, discovered, or created.

Many Evangelicals made the mistake of equating numbers with godly success. They, of course, told themselves that they didn't really want *numbers*, they wanted *souls*! Don't get me wrong. I'm not so jaded as to think that

An Insiders View of the Emergent Movement

Scot McKnight is an Anabaptist theologian and is the Karl A. Olsson Professor in Religious Studies at North Park University. Prior to joining the Faculty at North Park University (1994), McKnight was a professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Scot McKnight has taken a great interest in the Emerging church movement, becoming a proponent of it himself. He posts daily on his blog, JesusCreed.org, especially on Emerging church issues.

In an article titled, "Five Streams of the Emerging Church" —For more info goto BeyondMormonism.com/0309

McKnight posits five major distinctives of the Emerging Church, saying the movement is :

1) Prophetic (Or at least Provocative)

The emerging movement is consciously and deliberately provocative. (To demonstrate that he quotes McLaren) "*Often I don't think Jesus would be caught dead as a Christian...*"

2) Postmodern

When the evangelical world prohibited postmodernity, as if it were fruit from the forbidden tree, [many of us] chose to eat it to see what it might taste like. We found that it tasted good, even if at times we found ourselves spitting out hard chunks of nonsense.

3) Praxis Oriented [How we live our faith]

I've heard folks describe the emerging movement as "funky worship" or "candles and incense" or "smells and bells." It's true; many in the emerging movement are creative, experiential, and sensory in their worship gatherings...

[Emergents] ask these sorts of questions: Is the sermon the most important thing on Sunday morning? If we sat in a circle would we foster a different theology and praxis? If we lit incense, would we practice our prayers differently? If we put the preacher on the same level as the congregation, would we create a clearer sense of the priesthood of all believers?

4) Post-evangelical

The emerging movement is a protest against much of evangelicalism as currently practiced.

5) Political

A final stream flowing into the emerging lake is politics. Tony Jones is regularly told that the emerging movement is a latte-drinking, backpack-lugging, Birkenstock-wearing group of 21st-century, left-wing, hippie wannabes. Put directly, they are Democrats. And that spells "post" for conservative-evangelical-politics-as-usual.

there was no sincerity in the Church Growth Movement. And, there may be some truth to the proposition: "If you are healthy you will grow." But the inverse certainly is *not* true: "If you grow, you are healthy." Mormonism, for example, grows, but it is not spiritually healthy.

Once certain Christian leaders decided numbers were proof of a fruitful ministry, the emphasis shifted from faithfulness to "numbers." Some then began to seek methodologies to produced numbers, and skimped on examining their motives.

How the Church Growth Mentality Created the Emergent Church

It is simple: the Gospel divides. Have we forgotten:

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide [is] the gate, and broad [is] the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:

Because strait [is] the gate, and narrow [is] the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. (Matt 7:13-14)

So, if you want to grow and you aren't, you ask "why?" You ask, "Why is our message falling on deaf ears?" But was the message wrong or were the ears wrong? The faithful ministers prior to this era of postmodern doubt *knew* the message was *right*, so they preached it faithfully even when

fruit was not readily apparent.

But today many have changed the message to fit the ears. Investigators *like* that and churches fill up. *Voila*, success. Of course, Seeker Sensitive Churches say they will "net them and then clean them." However, the guru of the Seeker Sensitive Movement, Bill Hybels of Willow Creek Community Church, admits his church-building theory, though it netted huge numbers of people, did not effectively make disciples.

When Willow Creek disclosed the results of a multi-year study, Pastor Hybels called the findings "earth shaking," "ground breaking," and "mind blowing." —For more info goto BeyondMormonism.com/0309

The Church Growth, Seeker Sensitive, Emergent, postmodern methodologies have continually claimed, "We have not changed the message, we just changed the medium." But do you remember what Marshall McLuhan said? It's worth repeating: When you change the medium, you change the message because, "The message *is* the medium!"

The final stage in the march from Evangelical to Emergent is the absurd conclusion that since the new methodologies produced results (growth) they were right; *and therefore* the old way (Evangelical doctrinal preaching) was *wrong*. This accusation then became the justification for Emergent disdain for the Old Way and fueled their bitterness toward the Evangeli

cal church.

Are Evangelicals “Insensitive?”

The base claim of the Emergents is that Evangelicals are doctrinaire, insensitive, and smugly superior, while they—the Emergents—are cool, hip, caring, and accepting. However, as I have moved among the Evangelical church for thirty years—ministering in a broad variety of denominations—I have found Evangelical pastors and parishioners to be humble, caring, dedicated, and *fun!* The Emergents, in their resentment of Evangelicals, seem a little teeth-gritting and humorless. Maybe that flows out of their conviction that Evangelicalism has failed, but, in any case, it sure is wearing.

Love Motivates Us

Most Evangelicals are not, as the Emergents seem to think, insensitive and shrewish. On the contrary, they are dedicated to fighting for justice and charity. True Christians fight evil out of a sense of sharing the liberty they, themselves, have experienced in Christ. We fight because love requires it:

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

We love him, because he first loved us.
(1 John 4:7-8, 19)

We also preach the Gospel because if we do not, we, ourselves, are in danger of forgetting its power. We then are in danger of being changed by the world into *its* likeness. I appreciate the sentiment of this tune recorded by Country and Western star Garth Brooks:

One hand reaches out,

And pulls a lost soul from harm.

While a thousand more go unspoken for.

They say, “What good have you done,

By saving just this one?”

It’s like whispering a prayer,

In the fury of a storm.

And I hear them sayin’,

You’ll never change things.

And no matter what you do,

It’s still the same thing.

But it’s not the world,

That I am changing.

I do this so this world will know,

That it will not change me.

(“The Change,” by Tony Arata & Wayne Tester)

In my opinion, the Emergents have let the world change them!

A sense of love and service has motivated Christian missionaries and martyrs for

two thousand years. To this day, American Evangelicals dominate the funding of worldwide Christian charitable efforts. Evangelicals understand Charity is the greatest attribute of Christian character. The biblical message which infuriates Emergents is the same message that sends Evangelicals into foreign mission fields where there are no “smells and bells,” ambient music, nor lattes. It is the doctrinal message of the amazing grace which saved hard-bitten sinners (of whom I am chief) that drives us to lives of service. Evangelicals remember (what social liberals often forget) that the real famine from which people suffer is a famine of “the Word of God.” (Amos 8:11-14)

The Emergents, in valuing social action at the expense of preaching and doctrine obviously have forgotten that “it is by the foolishness of preaching that some are saved.” (1 Cor. 1:21) That is why the Apostle Paul penned the statement that is most relevant to this discussion:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. (Rom 1:16)

Evangelicals know—and Social Gospel Liberals never know—there is no saving power in human love, but there *is* in the preached word. The “power unto salvation,” Paul said, is “the Gospel.” The power unto salvation is the *message*. McLuhan was right.

The Word of God truly is “quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword” and it changes both the heart and soul. (Heb 4:12) To abandon the preaching of the Word for “user friendly smells and bells” is not only silly in the extreme, it is pathetic and blasphemous spiritual gamesmanship.

The Bottom Line

Preaching the gospel is not complex. We do not need new, sophisticated methods to reach the minds of the unsaved postmodern, we need to use the old methods to reach their hearts!

The Gospel must reveal to sinners that they are rebellious and wild, unable to control their own passions and unable to escape from their guilt and shame without a radical conversion to the Lordship of Christ. If we don’t tell them that—if we simply tell them that God loves them—we are wasting both our time and theirs.

Sincere Christians need to speak the truth in love—both are required. Frankly, I would rather hear a boorish but biblically accurate preacher than a sophisticate peddling bunk and baloney. Our message to the unsaved is that they are *not* OK. Their foot is on a slippery place. They are bent towards hell.

Our message to the ministers of foolishness is a strong warning. The Apostle Paul warned the church to beware of false doctrines,

An Emergent Worship Service

What usually *doesn’t* happen:

- sermons or didactic teaching
- sitting in one place all the time
- worship bands, choirs or organs
- one person at the front directing everything
- powerpoint presentations

What *does* happen

- no pews or rows of seats
- no pulpit
- no stage
- non-directional space—no front to face, things happen all around
- soft seating, beanbags, sit or lie on floor
- cafe spaces—chairs and tables, sofas, food and drink
- intimate lighting—spotlights, candles, tvs, projections
- installations and artworks
- ambient music—as background to everything including speech and prayer
- ambient video—relevant to event content but not attention-grabbing

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false Christs, and false Apostles, but he warned the false *ministers* themselves that they were in grave jeopardy. Finally, Paul told *us*, who are stewards of the mystery of the Gospel, to rebuke those who preach aberrant doctrines. (1 Tim 1:3)

If we truly love the revealed truth of God, we should pray for the understanding Jeremiah had of the false prophets of his day:

Mine heart within me is broken because of the prophets; all my bones shake...For both prophet and priest are profane... Wherefore their way shall be unto them as slippery [ways] in the darkness: they shall be driven on, and fall therein: for I will bring evil upon them, [even] the year of their visitation, saith the LORD. (Jer. 23:9-12)

To the Law and to the Testimony!

Today’s postmodern culture stifles anyone who wants to stand boldly for the truth. We should not be surprised that when we challenge them we will draw fire. Therefore, we must pray for zeal as we contend for truth. We need to become passionate for true justice and mercy:

And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead?

To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, [it is] because [there is] no light in them. (Isaiah 8:19-20)