

# The Feel-Good Gospel of the Emerging Church

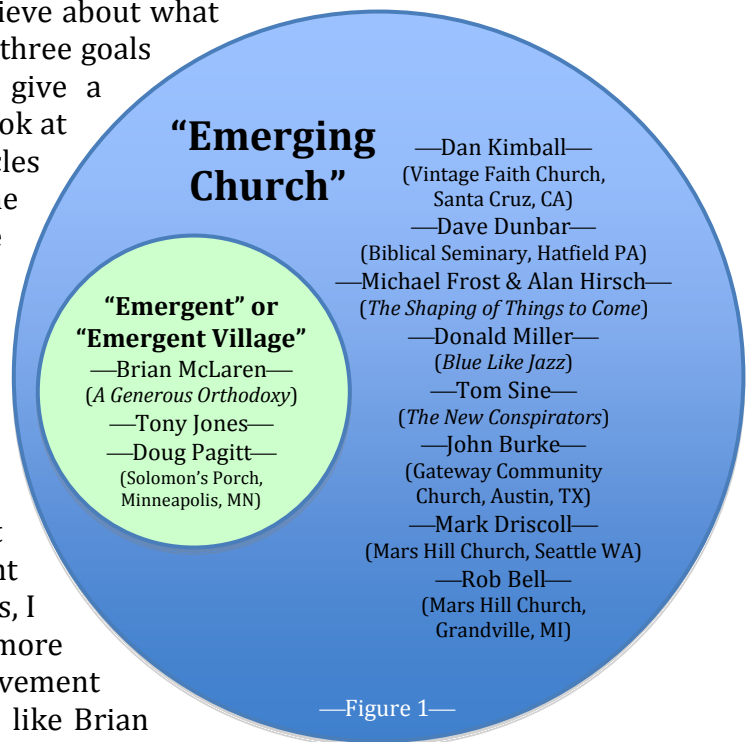
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Doing a paper on the gospel of the emerging church (designated as EC hereafter) is like trying to nail the proverbial Jell-O to the wall.<sup>1</sup> This is due to the fact that the EC movement is a somewhat recent phenomenon (most say it began in the 1990's) and is fairly diverse in most theological categories. In 2007, the Myers Professor of Ministry at Northern Seminary, Robert Webber, said that we must: "...keep in mind that the emerging church is too young to have produced a full-orbed theology."<sup>2</sup> While this may be true, there are enough books in print to at least get an idea of what EC writers believe about what a person must do to be born again. The three goals of this paper are as follows: (1) to give a definition of the EC movement; (2) to look at direct statements from books and articles written by EC pastors concerning the terms of eternal life; and (3) to make some brief concluding remarks in light of what has been said.

## The Emerging Church Defined

Before listing any specific definitions, it would be wise to say a few words about a subset of the EC that is called "emergent" or the "emergent village" (see Figure 1). Like many writers, I would contend that this is the much more theologically liberal group in the movement and would include pastors and authors like Brian McLaren, Tony Jones, and Doug Pagitt.<sup>3</sup> Those listed in the blue area of the diagram are theologically diverse, but would tend to sound a bit more evangelical when positing their beliefs.

A definition of the EC given by Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger based on research done in the US and UK, asserts: "Emerging churches are communities that practice



<sup>1</sup> Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We're Not Emergent* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2008), 17

<sup>2</sup> Robert Webber, *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 195

<sup>3</sup> "...the emergent church is part of the Emerging Church Movement but does not embrace the dominant ideology of the movement. Rather, the emergent church is the latest version of liberalism. The only difference is that the old liberalism accommodated modernity and the new liberalism accommodates post-modernity" (Mark Driscoll, *Confessions of a Reformation Rev.* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2006), 21

the way of Jesus within postmodern cultures. This definition encompasses nine practices. Emerging churches (1) identify with the life of Jesus, (2) transform the secular realm, and (3) live highly communal lives. Because of these three activities, they (4) welcome the stranger, (5) serve with generosity, (6) participate as producers, (7) create as created beings, (8) lead as a body, and (9) take part in spiritual activities.”<sup>4</sup> Ed Stetzer, research team director and missiologist at the North American Mission Board, recognizing the diversity of the movement, sees three distinct groups with the following characteristics:

- (1) **The Relevants**—those who take the gospel in its historic form and seek to make it understandable to the emerging culture
- (2) **The Reconstructionists**—those who take the same gospel but are questioning and setting out to reconstruct much of the form of the church
- (3) **The Revisionists**—those who are questioning and revising the both the gospel and the church<sup>5</sup>

Scot McKnight, professor of religious studies at North Park Theological Seminary in Chicago, IL, wrote an article for *Christianity Today* in 2007 and said that he sees five “streams” that flow through emerging churches:

- (1) **Provocative**—because emerging Christians believe the church needs to change, they will purposefully write and say things to shake people up. McKnight quotes McLaren: “Often I don’t think Jesus would be caught dead as a Christian, were he physically here today. ... Generally, I don’t think Christians would like Jesus if he showed up today as he did 2,000 years ago. In fact, I think we’d call him a heretic and plot to kill him, too.”
- (2) **Postmodern**—here McKnight quotes Doug Pagitt, pastor of an EC in Minneapolis, and says that some Christians will minister *to* postmoderns, some will minister *with* postmoderns, and others [Pagitt would include himself in this third group] will minister *as* postmoderns. They embrace the idea that you cannot know absolute truth, or, at least, you cannot know truth absolutely.<sup>6</sup>
- (3) **Praxis-oriented**—they are very concerned about how faith is lived out. At its core, the EC is setting out to fashion a new ecclesiology (or, doctrine of the church).

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<sup>4</sup> Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 44.

<sup>5</sup> Ed Stetzer, “First-Person: Understanding the Emerging Church,” January 6, 2006, Baptist Press News Website, found at <http://www.bpnews.net/> (click “search”; enter “Stetzer”; and set parameters to “2006” and from “January” to “January”)

<sup>6</sup> “Drop any affair you may have with certainty, proof, argument—and replace it with dialogue.” Brian McLaren, quoted by DeYoung, *Why We’re Not Emergent* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2008), 39

- (a) **Worship**—many in the emerging movement are creative, experiential, and sensory in their worship gatherings. Emerging Christians ask things like: “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? If we acted out what we believe, would we encounter more emphatically the Incarnation?”
- (b) **Orthopraxy**—The contention is that how a person lives is more important than what he or she believes. Emergents contend that every judgment scene in the bible is portrayed as a judgment based on works and that no judgment scene looks like a theological articulation test.
- (c) **Missional**—Jesus cared not just about lost souls, but also about whole persons and whole societies. So social concern is a big emphasis of emerging churches.
- (4) **Post-Evangelical**—the emerging movement is a protest against much of evangelicalism as it is currently practiced and believes that the church must always be reforming itself. EC’s are suspicious of systematic theology and shy away from statements of faith.<sup>7</sup> They like statements like: “This is what I believe, but I could be wrong. What do you think? Let’s talk.” Also, emergent Christians do not like the exclusivity of evangelicalism—the issue of who is saved and who is not saved pains the emerging generation. Some even accept Spenser Burke’s unbiblical contention in *A Heretic’s Guide to Eternity* (Jossey-Bass, 2006) that all are born “in” and only some opt “out.”
- (5) **Political**—Tony Jones is regularly told that the emerging movement is a latte-drinking, backpack-lugging, Birkenstock-wearing group of 21<sup>st</sup> century, left-wing, hippie wannabes. Put directly, they are Democrats. And that spells “post” for conservative-evangelical-politics-as-usual.<sup>8</sup>
- McKnight concludes his article on the five streams of the EC by saying: “I see the

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<sup>7</sup> “Statements of faith are about drawing borders, which means you have to load your weapons and place soldiers at the borders. You have to check people’s passports when they pass at those borders. It becomes an obsession—guarding the borders. That is simply not the ministry of Jesus. It wasn’t the ministry of Paul and Peter...I don’t want to spend [my time] guarding borders. I’d like to spend it inviting people into the kingdom. Statements of faith...[are] a modernistic endeavor that I’m not the least bit interested in” (from an interview with Tony Jones, *Relevant Magazine*, quoted by DeYoung, *Why We’re Not Emergent* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2008), 117

<sup>8</sup> “It is undeniable that left-wing politics is a common thread running throughout the emergent literature. From Donald Miller’s rants against Republicans to the McLaren/Campolo list of social concerns, the movement is clearly more comfortable left of center...God may not be a Republican or a Democrat, but from reading the emergent literature, it sure seems like He votes Democrat” (*Ibid*, 189).

emerging movement much like the Jesus and charismatic movements of the 1960s, which undoubtedly have found a place in the quilt called evangelicalism.”<sup>9</sup>

In probably the most intricately researched and yet user-friendly book written about the EC, entitled *Why We’re Not Emergent*,<sup>10</sup> Kevin DeYoung shares a list constructed by David Tomlinson on the shifts that have occurred between the modern and post-modern church:

- from propositional expressions of faith to relational stories about faith journeys;
- from the authority of Scripture alone to a harmony between the authority of Scripture and other personal ways God mysteriously and graciously speaks to Christians;
- from a theology that prepares people for death and the afterlife to a theology of life;
- from a personal, individualistic, private faith to harmony between personal and community faith;
- from the church being a place where people take up space to the church as a mission outpost that sends people out;
- from arguing faith to the “dance of faith”;
- from salvation by event to a journey of salvation;
- from motivating through fear to motivating through compassion, community, and hope; and
- from a search for dogmatic truth to a search for spiritual experience.<sup>11</sup>

As you can see, defining the EC is somewhat complicated, but not impossible. Being a relatively young movement, emergent can mean a lot of things to a lot of people. However, it is clear that there are enough books, sermons, and blogs in circulation to get a general idea of the characteristics of this movement—a movement that in many quarters steers clear of contending “earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). Quoting DeYoung: “It would be unfair to say that every emergent leader has thrown doctrine out the window. But I think it is fair to say that even for those who affirm core doctrinal beliefs, and that does not include everyone in the movement, orthodoxy as a set of immovable theological assertions is largely downplayed, if not completely rejected.”<sup>12</sup>

## **The Emerging Church and the Gospel**

The EC’s answer to the question “What must I do to be saved?” is difficult to answer in a few words because the movement is so diverse and their answers to that question run the gamut. But one thing is for sure, Jesus’ command that “You must be born again” (John 3:8) is practically non-existent in EC literature. Now I am not saying that every emerging pastor denies that a person must be born again, but it is unmistakable that a clear proclamation of the gospel and the assurance of salvation is not a priority for many in this movement.

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<sup>9</sup> Scot McKnight, “Five Streams of the Emerging Church,” February 2007, *Christianity Today*, found at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/february/11.35.html>

<sup>10</sup> Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We’re Not Emergent* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2008), 150

<sup>11</sup> David Tomlinson, *The Post-Evangelical* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 42-43

<sup>12</sup> Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We’re Not Emergent* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2008), 106

## God's grace not spoken of much in emergent literature

When you read EC literature, you will hear a lot about the call to live like Christ, but not much about the “wonderful grace of Jesus, greater than all our sin.” DeYoung says: “Now, I’m sure that many in the emergent church would also talk about grace, but I don’t read much about grace in their books...I despair when I hear Pagitt say, ‘The good news is not informational... Instead we have an invitation into a way of life—life we constantly realize is not ours alone.’ If the good news is an invitation to a Jesus way of life and not information about somebody who accomplished something on my behalf, I’m sunk. This is law and no gospel.”<sup>13</sup>

In a book we referenced earlier, *Burke’s Guide to Eternity*, mankind is already a recipient of God’s grace and faith in Christ is unimportant: “Faith is many things, but it is not a requirement. It is faithfulness, the giving of oneself, trust in God, and belief that something greater than the material world exists for all of us... In reality, nothing stands between us and God’s grace.”<sup>14</sup> DeYoung states: “This is maybe the biggest difference between emergent Christianity and historic evangelical Christianity. Being a Christian—for Burke, for McLaren, for Bell, for Jones, and for many others in the emerging conversation—is less about faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ and the only access to God the Father and the only atonement for sins before a wrathful God, and more about living the life that Jesus lived and walking in His way.”<sup>15</sup>

## Emphasis on salvation through works

According to Rob Bell, an extremely popular EC pastor and writer, the gospel is good news for the world because it means we start living like Jesus, which makes life better for every one.<sup>16</sup> Quoting DeYoung once again:

Although McLaren in a few places acknowledges that the old question about getting saved still matters, this clearly is not the most pertinent question for the emergent church. The question is not “How do I get to heaven after death” but “what kind of life does God want? What does life in the kingdom look like?” Salvation isn’t something we get but something we experience and spread as a part of God’s mission.

For emergent Christians the good news is that God is doing a new work right here, right now on planet earth:

“I am discovering (to my wonder, joy, and amazement) that I have mistakenly placed emphasis of the good news on the eternal. In the Gospels, Jesus wasn’t talking about something distant when he proclaimed the good news. It was something for NOW. People would become a part of the Kingdom of God... not a heavenly dwelling but the place where God is King. The place where God turns everything upside down. The place where the light shines and people can be known for who they are and loved.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 114

<sup>14</sup> Spencer Burke and Barry Taylor, *A Heretic’s Guide to Eternity* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 184-85

<sup>15</sup> Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We’re Not Emergent* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2008), 120

<sup>16</sup> Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 166

<sup>17</sup> Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We’re Not Emergent* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2008), 185

Notice how Bell interprets what Jesus meant in calling Himself “the way, the truth, and the life”:

“Jesus was not making claims about one religion being better than all the other religions. That completely misses the point, the depth, and the truth. Rather, he was telling those who were following him that his way is the way to the depth of reality. This kind of life Jesus was living, perfectly and completely in connection and cooperation with God, is the best possible way for a person to live. It is how things are... Perhaps a better question than who’s right, is who’s living rightly?”<sup>18</sup>

Notice once again, the EC emphasis on practice at the expense of biblical truth. Jesus is the way, according to Bell, not because He alone saves, but because He shows us the best possible way to live.

DeYoung, referencing Brian McLaren, says: “The stuff of our evangelistic tracts—‘God’s grace, God’s forgiveness... the free gift of salvation’—is, at best, only ‘a footnote to a gospel that is much richer, grander, and more alive, a gospel that calls you to become a disciple and to disciple others, in authentic community, for the good of the world.’”<sup>19</sup> Bell adds: “The meat of the gospel has to do with justice, compassion, and transformation.”<sup>20</sup>

### **Can you be sure that you are saved?**

Kevin DeYoung has a lot to say about the EC and the issue of certainty, not only in reference to eternal life, but to certainty about many other areas as well:

“Certainty, for the emergent church, is the same as pinning down Jesus and summing up God, while uncertainty is a breath of fresh air. ‘Drop any affair you may have with certainty, proof, argument—and replace it with dialogue, conversation, intrigue and search,’ argues McLaren.”<sup>21</sup>

“Emerging leaders equate uncertainty with humility.”<sup>22</sup>

“...Peter Rollins argues that instead of thinking in terms of destination (we became Christians, joined a church, are saved), we should think in terms of journey (we are becoming Christians, becoming church, becoming saved). Hence, we ‘need to be evangelized as much, if not more than those around us.’”<sup>23</sup>

“‘The reason traditional faiths are having a hard time of things,’ offers Taylor, ‘is that the present situation is one in which certainty is suspect and sanctity is being redefined.’ Taylors’ alternative is a commitment to ‘nondogmatic specificity.’”<sup>24</sup>

### **Doubt, not assurance, is of the essence of faith**

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<sup>18</sup>Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 21

<sup>19</sup>Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We’re Not Emergent* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2008), 186, from Brian McLaren in *The Church in the Emerging Culture*, Leonard Sweet, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 215

<sup>20</sup>Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 166

<sup>21</sup>Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We’re Not Emergent* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2008), 39

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 39

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 33

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 106

Several quotes from *Why We're Not Emergent* illustrate the proclivity of the movement to bask in the “joy” of post-modern uncertainty:

- “[Another] problem with the emergent view of journey is that it establishes doubt as the essence of faith.”<sup>25</sup>
- “For emergent leaders, faith is a personal trust commitment despite the uncertainty of our knowledge and the doubt we all experience. In other words, doubt is the good friend of faith.”<sup>26</sup>
- “The key to the emergent appreciation for doubt is the distinction made between trusting God versus trusting in doctrines about God. Doubt is good...”<sup>27</sup>

Now my question is this: if doubt is good, why did Jesus rebuke those who harbored doubts and possessed little faith? In Matthew 14:31, Jesus asked Peter, “Why did you doubt?” and was clearly unhappy with his lack of faith. Paul told the Ephesian church that being “carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Ephesians 4:14) was a bad thing, not a good thing. But in the EC, “one of the hallmarks of the movement is that being thought of as a Really Smart Guy... And one of the tenets of being a Really Smart Guy is questioning everything.”<sup>28</sup>

### **Disdain for propositional truth**

Not only does the EC dislike absolute truth claims, but it also has a disdain for propositional truth. “Christianity is a relationship with a person, not affirming a set of propositions’ is how the concern is usually voiced. Or, ‘we worship the Word made flesh, not the words on a page.’”<sup>29</sup>

Leonard Sweet put it this way:

Postmodern spirituality is different from modern spirituality. A continental drift of the soul has taken place whereby spirituality is less creedal, less propositional, more relational, and more sensory. Logic is no longer converting anyone—only the transforming experience of the living Christ.

Postmoderns are truth-seekers first, truth-makers second. Whereas modern seekers sought the knowledge of the truth, postmodern seekers want to know the truth in the biblical sense of that word “know”—that is, experience the truth.<sup>30</sup>

One of the problems with the EC according to D.A. Carson is a refusal to admit that anyone else is wrong. “Carson also reveals that reading the Bible ‘literally’ has become something of a dirty concept.”<sup>31</sup>

“All we need is Jesus,’ many emerging Christians cry, ‘not these fancy theologies and doctrinal formulations.’ Thus Erwin McManus writes, ‘The power of the gospel

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 49

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 49

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 49

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 57

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 73

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 149

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 95

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.”<sup>32</sup>

### **Direct quotations regarding the gospel by EC leaders**

In *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*, five EC leaders spanning the theological spectrum share their views on the Scripture, the atonement, and the Trinity. Here are some of their own words concerning the gospel beginning with the conservative side of the spectrum.

#### **Mark Driscoll**

(Mars Hill Church, Seattle, WA)

...the Bible is one story about the Trinitarian God who created us, mercifully endures our sin, and sent Jesus to live and die in our place, thereby saving us from eternal wrath if we repent of sin and trust in him alone. This is the true gospel revealed to us by God through Scripture.<sup>33</sup>

Salvation is made possible through Jesus Christ alone and there is no possibility of salvation apart from him.

From God’s perspective, salvation is accomplished by God choosing some people for salvation. From our perspective, salvation is accomplished by repenting of sin and turning to Jesus Christ in faith. Salvation is accomplished through God’s grace alone.<sup>34</sup>

Simply by dying for everyone, Jesus purchased everyone as his possession, and then he graciously forgives the elect who repent of sin and applies his wrath to the non-elect who are unrepentant of their sin. As a result, Jesus’ death was sufficient to save anyone and only efficient to save those who repent of their sin and trust in him. Therefore, Calvinists like me do not believe anything different than our Arminian brothers and sisters; we simply believe what they believe and more. I call this position unlimited limited atonement. And regarding this point, I do believe it is a secondary matter and don’t fuss with faithful Christians over it.<sup>35</sup>

As you can see, for Driscoll, faith alone in Christ for eternal life is not sufficient. He is one of the more theologically astute pastors in the EC movement and yet, contrary to the gospel of John—the gospel given with the express purpose of bringing unbelievers to faith in Christ (cf. John 20:30-31)—he sees repentance from sin as a condition of receiving eternal life.

#### **John Burke**

(Gateway Community Church, Austin TX)

Honestly, I’m not that interested in internal church debates about who has the right or wrong form of theology or Christian practice if the outcome doesn’t impact a hurting, broken world. Jesus came to seek and save what was lost, to restore all things. So I write mainly from a concern that his church be his body, on his mission, in his world.<sup>36</sup>

Theologically, the emerging church must wrestle with what the Scriptures say God has revealed about the uniqueness of Jesus in relation to the world’s religions. Why must we wrestle with this

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 108

<sup>33</sup> Robert Webber, *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 35

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 34

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 31

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 52

question? Because instead of helping people find their way home to Jesus as the only one who can save, we often put up barriers to belief by the way we communicate what Scripture reveals.<sup>37</sup>

Jesus' ministry felt messy, didn't it? Didn't Jesus' body live among the "sinners" of his day? Wasn't Mary Magdalene a demoniac? Weren't Matthew and Zacchaeus thieving tax collectors? Wasn't Judas a traitor who looked like a follower? Didn't Jesus treat Judas as an insider even though he never truly submitted his heart to God?<sup>38</sup>

Burke doesn't go into an extended discussion on the terms of eternal life, but it is telling that in reference to Judas Iscariot's unbelief, he states: "...he never truly submitted his heart to God." On its face, this sounds as if Burke believes that submission is necessary to receive eternal life.

### **Dan Kimball**

(Vintage Faith Church, Santa Cruz, CA)

I know myself, and I have no problem admitting I am a sinner as the Bible describes. As a sinner, I am so incredibly thankful that God provides a way to atone for our sinful nature. Although I don't understand the mystery, I rejoice that God chose to accomplish it through Christ's death and resurrection. I believe that we are saved through Jesus alone by substitutionary atonement. No human works or religious efforts bring salvation. Only Jesus.<sup>39</sup>

Unfortunately, we don't have a lot of data to work with here. It is good that Kimball stresses that human works and religious effort do not bring salvation. His view of the reception of eternal life could have been a lot clearer had he simply quoted the words of Jesus: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

### **Doug Pagitt**

(Solomon's Porch, Minneapolis, MN)

Because theology is connected to real life, answering particular questions, concerns, and opportunities of the day, it will be ever-changing.<sup>40</sup>

All theology has developed in a context, and those contexts are tenuous at best, so theology must always be developing.<sup>41</sup>

The gospel of Jesus is meant to be good news in its particulars.<sup>42</sup>

I do think that too often people understand the Christian profession of believing in the Word of God to mean belief in the Bible rather than Jesus, but that is another issue.<sup>43</sup>

My presupposition is that the gospel calls us to participate in the things of God wherever we find them. I find the Bible to be plumb full of stories of people finding the agenda of God beyond both their religion and their culture. This is why the sending of the Messiah/Christ/Savior to the world rings so richly the declaration of Jesus that "The time has come....The kingdom of God has come near. Repent

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 55

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 68

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 100

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 121

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 124

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 124

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 126

and believe the good news!" is a call that is radically Good News in our day. I believe the nearness Jesus speaks of is not only in time, but he is saying that it is close enough that people can step into it.

The call of Jesus is not simply to believe, but to join in and participate.<sup>44</sup>

What kind of Jesus-way would we have if we no longer saw Christendom, or perhaps the church, as being the sole proprietor of the hopes of God through Jesus?...The questions theology must deal with in our pluralistic world are of this nature.<sup>45</sup>

I certainly believe in sin and forgiveness, but they are not built around a Greek judicial model of separation, rather around a relational call to return to a life in full agreement and rhythm with God. So God does not move away in the midst of our sin, but he moves closer. Sin is atoned for and we are again integrated into the life of God.<sup>46</sup>

This is a *radical revision* of the good news and is heretical. Pagitt preaches salvation based on good works as people "participate in the things of God" and encourages sinners not simply to believe but to "join in and participate." He believes that the reception of eternal life is a "relational call to return to a life in full agreement and rhythm with God." Thus, according to Pagitt, if a person desires eternal life, they will need to start relating to God appropriately and get in full agreement with Him.

### **Karen Ward**

(Church of the Apostles, Seattle, WA)

I resonate with [a] firm holding to the atonement of Christ as Lord and Savior. I affirm no other Savior than Jesus Christ, yet at the same time, I feel no need to know with certainty the final destination of those of other faiths who have either no knowledge of Christ or who do not accept the Christian claims of atonement. My view of God is high enough to leave such matters to God, while at the same time never downplaying the twenty-four/seven calling of Christians to make bold our witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>47</sup>

...what being "emerging" is in my view. There is a movement to it, recognition that we hold a living faith, and that, as the United Church of Christ's brilliant motto puts it, "God is still speaking."

So theology is not a done deal and a sealed canon written for us by others, that we need to swallow whole and espouse, but instead it is a living "art form" to which we as Christian practitioners are all given a brush.<sup>48</sup>

...we are learning to embrace the fact that we are all heretics and idolaters—and bound to be so, because our conception of God inevitably differs from God's true nature. So we'll enter into the dialectic of Christian dogmatics, but with a grain of salt, knowing that if we get saved in virtue of our correct theology, we're all in trouble.<sup>49</sup>

Ward, a believer in community hermeneutics, quotes a blog:

Salvation, like everything else concerning God's address to humans, is a relational reality. To be saved or atoned for is to have and experience a love relationship with God that is evidenced by living in a loving manner here upon the earth, as "God is love."

The blog continues a little later:

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 133

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 133

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 134

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 46

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 156-57

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 164

It says in 1 John 4:7 that “Love comes from God,” and “Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God,” so anyone who loves God knows God already, even if they know God without a name.<sup>50</sup>

...“evangelism” is not something we do to attract seekers, instead we simply invite others to join us and be part of what God is doing in the world around us, and to help us put God’s eschatology into practice in doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God.<sup>51</sup>

...instead of giving folk tracts with “spiritual laws” and invitations to pray the “sinner’s prayer” off of cards, we try to come alongside seekers and be a community of sound spiritual guidance and good spiritual company as newcomers embark on a life-altering journey into “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>52</sup>

We do not possess truth or seek to correct the truths of others, but we seek to live faithfully in light of the truth of God in Jesus Christ.<sup>53</sup>

Once again, we see that salvation is a “relational reality”—inviting people “to be part of what God is doing in the world.” “Anyone who loves God knows God already, even if they know God without a name.” Of course, this is simply unbiblical drivel. In regards to eternal life and Jesus’ name, the apostle Peter boldly declared: “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is **no other name** under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12—emphasis mine).

## Conclusion

As a local church pastor, what I admire about the EC is its desire to motivate people to follow the example of Jesus in being a “friend of tax collectors and sinners” (Matthew 11:19). The evangelical church as a whole has been in a relational cocoon in regards to unsaved people for so long that meaningful friendships with neighbors, co-workers, and relatives have become extremely low on the spiritual totem pole. In most cases they are non-existent. Emergents have reacted to this style of Christianity with a desire to befriend unsaved postmoderns and bring them to Christ. This is a good thing *but only if the gospel they share is the gospel of grace*—eternal life through faith alone in Christ alone. If the EC shares a gospel of works (as it does in many sectors of the movement), they are not walking in the footsteps of Christ, but in the footsteps of the Pharisees, producing converts who are undeniably religious but eternally lost.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 165

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 171

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 172

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 179

<sup>54</sup> Jesus said: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, **you make him twice as much a son of hell** as yourselves” The New King James Version (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Matthew 23:15, emphasis mine.