

Manawatu Christian Apologetics Society

DEFENDING THE CHRISTIAN FAITH IN THE MANAWATU

The Emergent Church

the key to effective evangelism
or
tragic compromise?

- Chris Good



A Note of Caution

- The problem with critiquing new movements is that they often take time to cohere. Often the edges are blurred and different groups have different emphases.
- This puts those who seek to critique a new movement at a disadvantage as they can be accused of over generalising.

What is the Emergent Church?

- **a movement that has been developing for the last 10-15 years**
- **mainly in the US & Britain, but also increasingly elsewhere**
- **began at a scholarly level but has gone moved into mainstream churches**
- **seeks to reach a new generation**

Key Features

- Prefers to view itself as a ‘conversation’ rather than a ‘movement’
- Reacting against the Evangelical compromises (eg: consumer/market/vision/prosperity orientated seeker movement; mindless fundamentalism; etc)
- The sense of protest is strong that such ‘Evangelicalism’ needs to be rejected in favour of something more culturally engaged with the emerging post-modern

Key Terms

- **Modernism**
The dominant worldview of the 20th century. Argues that people can come to authoritative truth by reason alone
- **Postmodernism (or ultramodernism)**
Recognises all knowledge is biased by a person's perspective. The best we can know is our interpretation of Truth – but we cannot know for certain whether one interpretation is better than another. It rejects absolute truth claims as arrogance and leading to a lust for power
- **Emergent (or Missional) churches**
Christians who embrace an inclusive approach to the faith that acknowledges different perspectives in the hope of reaching a post-modern culture

Key Positives

- Good at reading the times and know that the presentation of the Gospel must change with the times
- Value authenticity & sincerity
- Recognise the social context of the church, and that we cannot be removed from it
- A high value on evangelism.
- Willing to question tradition and seek to build a faith that is rooted in the past while still being relevant to the present

Key Failings

- Highly critical of Modernism and 'Evangelicalism' – but minimally so of their own culture of Postmodernism. They exchange one cultural compromise for another
- Implicit or explicit denials of key doctrines as 'interpretations' (eg: view of atonement [substitution = 'cosmic child abuse'], Scriptural inspiration, hell, personal devil, etc). Emergent churches criticise those without for cultural failings while tolerating major doctrinal compromise within
- Failure to articulate clear Biblical stances on issues of the day (Eg: homosexuality, Scriptural infallibility)
- Some embrace a 'Hard' postmodernism that is sceptical of all truth claims. This is self refuting.

Key Biblical Critique

- The Bible is not sceptical about the existence of Truth
(eg: John 14:6)
- Our inability to see the Truth stems from the blindness of Sin
(eg: Romans 1:18,25)
- God Uses the Word & Spirit to change our hearts and perspectives to His
(eg: Ephesians 1:13)

Key Biblical Response

- The key to escape the subjective trap of postmodernism is to start with God rather than Man.
- He knows Truth and His view is the objective one
- This He has revealed adequately by His Word
- As the Author, He interprets His Word to us by His Spirit

Key Lessons for Us

- The movement emerged largely in reaction to the failure and compromise of Evangelicals with the modernist world and the failure to practice a rich church life
- We must hold to a strong Christ & Word centred approach. As the Reformers critiqued Medieval Catholicism in light of the Word – let us be willing to test Modernism, Postmodernism, the Emergent & ourselves by the same standard
- We must seek to present this objective Truth humbly and consistently in ways that speak to our pluralistic world

Any Key Questions?

