
Title: The Emerging Church: What They are Saying II

Text: Acts 17:16-34

Speaker: Chad Richard Bresson

Introduction Tonight we are continuing to look at what the emerging church is actually saying.

A word of caution... our words must be seasoned with grace. We need to be careful about how we say what we say. Much of this seems like a no-brainer to us. However, in saying these things to others it's not as much of a no-brainer. I said last week that many of our friends who are a) flirting with the emerging church, b) failing to see the danger, c) claiming there is a middle way to be found between what they think is fringe and conservative elements of postmodern Christianity, and d) claiming to be fringe in the emerging church what simply is not, are both grave (and quite frankly, unbelievable) naivety and a serious lack of discernment. But we must remember that what we see in the clarity of the gospel may not be so clear to those around us. These things must be said with grace, with humility, and in love.

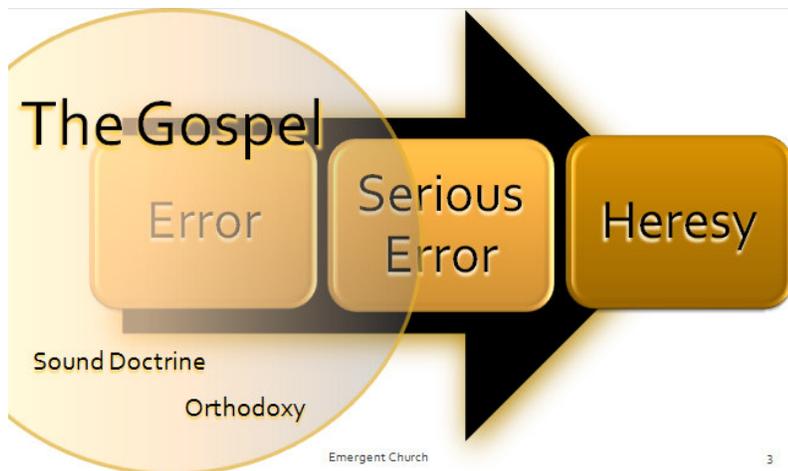
To repeat:

- If it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, and talks like a duck, it's not a hippopotamus.
- 100% of the names we critique tonight are going to say that I took them out of context.
- There is a kind of continuum between sound doctrine, orthodoxy, error and heresy.

There have been quite a few questions since then. We will have a Q & A coming up in the month of May. However, I want to briefly point out the most common questions, some of which will be answered this evening, and some of which may be answered in the rest of the series.

A gospel-heresy continuum

Before I get to those questions, I want to offer a graphic about this continuum between sound doctrine, orthodoxy, error, and heresy. Please keep in mind that this is intended as a help in understanding how the scripture thinks about the relationships between the gospel, error, and heresy and the movement away from the gospel inherent to error and heresy. But there are no chapters and verses specifically stating that the gospel is a circle and serious error is half in and half out of the gospel. This is a graphic to help us understand biblical truth, but is not biblical truth itself.



The first thing we notice is the gospel. This is the gospel broadly speaking... we tend to talk of that which conforms to the gospel as orthodoxy. The scriptures use the words “sound doctrine” and “proclamation”. Generally speaking, this is everything that constitutes “truth” from Genesis to Revelation... it is the proclamation of Jesus Christ throughout redemptive history. And we have almost 2000 years of Christian history that helps us understand that circle better... we have drafted confessions and creeds (and here at Clearcreek Chapel we have “Truths we Treasure” and “Truths we Teach”) helping us identify what is inside and what is outside of that circle.

One of the questions that was asked in the moments following last week’s presentation on the emerging church is this: is it really *that* bad? Another is this: where are you claiming the emerging church to be? or... Are you claiming everyone in the emerging church is a heretic? This graphic helps to answer these kinds of questions. The first thing we need to say in response to these questions is that we ourselves are fallible. There are things in our own grids that are in error. And I fully expect the other side of the veil to remedy those things in my own theological grid that are in error. The second thing we need to say is that one can be within the gospel circle, one can still be orthodox and be in error. For those of us who are Reformed, Arminianism is certainly an error that is still within the bounds of orthodoxy. Generally speaking, we can affirm that many of our Arminian brethren are indeed brethren and still preach some semblance of the gospel. They are in error, but they are not heretics. But again, notice, that these kinds of errors still have this movement away from and toward the outside of the gospel (symbolized by the arrow that begins in the middle of the circle and moves away from it). Other errors might include what someone believes to be true about the end times.

Serious errors are those things which can be on either side of the gospel, depending on what is being affirmed or denied, what other things are being affirmed or denied, and how strongly or tightly one holds to the error. And it may be a moment to moment thing depending on the individual. For instance, paedobaptism can be a serious error that leads one to affirm some things that take the person outside of the gospel, especially when it is tied to regeneration.

Then there is what we call “heresy”. There are those fundamentals of the faith, where, if you deny any one of those fundamentals, you have placed yourself outside of sound doctrine, outside of orthodoxy, and outside of the gospel. Such fundamentals include the virgin birth, the Trinity, the resurrection, and as we will point out in what follows, the exclusiveness of the Scriptures, Jesus Christ, and the gospel.

Are we saying that everyone who considers themselves to be part of the emerging or emergent church are to be understood as being outside of the gospel and in the big “h” word? No, this is not what we are saying, which is why I’ve already emphasized our need to be careful in these matters. However, it becomes quite apparent reading the large volume of published material from the emerging and emergent themselves that most of what has been published is in the serious error category, some of it does belong under the big “h” word, and generally speaking the movement itself is moving away from the gospel. We are not just talking about a difference of opinion about “church carpet”. We are not just talking about a difference of opinion over how to do church. This discussion doesn’t belong in the Romans 14 rubric. We are talking about beliefs and worldviews that impinge on the gospel itself and are leading people away from the gospel into serious error and some into heresy. And while many in the emerging church may not have reached the point of being outside of the gospel, many of them are unwilling to distance themselves from those who are. Many are unwilling to call the duck a duck. And this kind of naivety and serious lack of discernment causes great harm to the gospel.

The Questions

- Do we have any around here?
- How do we know it is emerging?
- What is the emerging church saying or doing differently than the church growth movement?
- What’s the difference between Rick Warren & Bill Hybels AND McLaren, Jones, Bell, Pagitt, Claiborne, etc.?
- What is so bad about it?

What is the emerging church?

Here is the quote we looked at last week. It is considered by many to be one of the more comprehensive definitions of the emerging church that has been given by the emerging church movement:

“Emerging churches are always in the process of becoming...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.” – Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger, “Emerging Churches”, p. 45

Some of you have asked what an emerging church looks like. Here are the characteristics of the emerging church as it is understood by Gibbs and Bolger. But if it sounds too cryptic, here are a couple of examples. When they say “identify with the life of Jesus”, more often than not they are often emphasizing the life of Jesus over against life and ethical principles that can be found in the rest of the New Testament. And more often than not, it has the look and the feel of being the 19th and 20th centuries’ social gospel (which ultimately was not the gospel at all). When they speak of “transforming the secular realm”, they believe it is the church’s responsibility and mandate to transform culture. This is an inherent part of their social gospel. The emerging church tends to idealize the premise of Charles Sheldon’s less-than-biblical book “In His Steps”.

The Christian life is one big morality play. And when they speak of “highly communal lives”, think “house churches”. The emphasis on house churches is the result of the “back to Acts” paradigm of the emerging church. While there is what has been called the “house church movement”, it is separate from what we’re discussing here. The emerging church is not *that* necessarily... although some in the “house church movement” consider themselves emerging.

Last week we also took a look at Scot McKnight’s identification of the emerging church:

- Prophetic rhetoric
- Postmodernism
- Praxis
- Post-evangelical
- Politics

So... we have asked the question, “Is it really all that bad?” I had toyed with the idea of just picking up where we left off last week, but having heard this question in the past week and some of you wanting examples of the egregious nature of what is being said, I’ve decided to bring these things from the end of the presentation to the front. And we’ll begin with the Virgin Birth of Christ.

What does the emerging church say about the virgin birth?

Here’s a quote from Rob Bell in “Velvet Elvis”...

“What if tomorrow someone digs up definitive proof that Jesus had a real, earthly, biological father named Larry, and archeologists find Larry’s tomb and do DNA samples and prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that **the virgin birth was just a bit of mythologizing the Gospel writers threw in to appeal to the followers of the Mithra and Dionysian religious cults** that were hugely popular at the time of Jesus, whose gods had virgin births?

O-K... let’s stop right there.... Mithra? Dionysian religious cults? This smacks of TMI. It is too specific. Is he asking a genuine question or is he stating what he believes to probably be true? I would suggest, based on what follows, that it is the latter. One can raise the Virgin Birth question, even raise skepticism about it, without getting into the specific details of some of the more unique skeptics. The other thing going on here is a hint of what many in the emerging church believe to be true about the scriptures: they are the product of the cultures in which they were written, such as the cultures of the third and fourth centuries. But I digress...

“But what if as you study the origin of the word virgin, you discover that **the word virgin in the gospel of Matthew actually comes from the book of Isaiah**, and then you find out that in the Hebrew language at that time, **the word virgin could mean several things**. And what if you discover that in the first century being “born of a virgin” also referred to a child whose mother became pregnant the first time she had intercourse?” – Rob Bell, “Velvet Elvis”, p. 26-27

So what does Rob Bell really believe to be true about the Virgin Birth? These kinds of statements are why many of us are saying that the foundations of the emerging church are not unlike what were the foundations of 20th century liberalism. But, as if on cue, Bell throws a curve ball

meant to dissuade those who would accuse him of having abandoned the faith once for all delivered to the saints. On the very same page, 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.” – Rob Bell, “Velvet Elvis”, p. 27

Oh really? By the time we get to this point on the page, this throwaway line added by Bell is hardly to be taken serious. He already has spilled much ink calling into question the virgin birth of Christ, but to keep his critics at bay, throws in a line about “historic Christian faith”. Yet, this is true to form for many in the emerging church: toss in some doubt, affirm the historic, and wash your hands of being out of bounds.

What does the emerging church say about Jesus?

“I am a Christian because I have confidence in Jesus Christ – in all his dimensions (those I know, and those I don’t). I trust Jesus. I think Jesus is right because **I believe God was in Jesus in an unprecedented way.** Through Jesus I have entered into a real, experiential relationship with God as Father, and I have received God’s Spirit into my life... I love Jesus. I believe Jesus embraces me, and you, and the whole world in the love of God.” – Brian McLaren, “Generous Orthodoxy”, p. 69

“I believe God was in Jesus in an unprecedented way” is classic liberalism from the 20th century a liberalism that denied Jesus is God. This is not an affirmation of Christ as deity, the second person of the Godhead preexistent from all eternity come in human form.

“To say Jesus is the Son of God is to say a lot, although many Christians use the phrase all their lives without ever really thinking about it... In the Gospels...we find that peaceful people are called “sons of peace,” two rambunctious brothers are called “sons of thunder,” dishonest, evil-hearted people are labeled “sons of the devil,” and perhaps most importantly, Jesus is also referred to as “son of man” or “son of humanity.”

What is McLaren doing here? He is attempting to flatline all of these terms as if they carry equal literary weight, so that there is no substantial or qualitative difference between them. The end result is that “of God” then becomes nothing more than a characteristic or quality rather than a reality.

“Clearly the meaning of this construction suggests **“carrying the essence of” or “embodying the heart of.”** Some people carry the essence of peace or have the essential quality of thunder (loud? bombastic?) or embody evil. In this sense “son of man” - another of Jesus’ favorite terms for himself - would mean “the essential human, the ultimate embodiment of humanity.” And in this sense “Son of God” would mean “embodying God” or “carrying the essence of God,”...

Is that what we mean when we say that Jesus is the “Son of God”? Is that what historic Christianity has meant in speaking of Jesus as the “Son of God”? Absolutely not. This amounts to a denial of Jesus Christ’s deity, a denial that Jesus Christ spoke this world into existence a few thousand years ago and now rules and reigns as God of the universe.

...just as in English a son who is the “spittin’ image” of his father carries his father’s genetic code or family likeness, or is a “chip off the old block,” or is “his father’s son.” This likeness is what the earliest followers of Jesus were so struck with. When **they were around Jesus, they felt—no, more than that, they somehow knew—they were expe-**

riencing God... This full, radiant, glorious experience of God in Jesus Christ eventually revolutionized the whole concept of God, so that the word “God” itself was reimagined through the experience of encountering Jesus, seeing him act, hearing him speak, watching him relate, and reflecting on his whole character.” – Brian McLaren, “Generous Orthodoxy”, p. 71-73

“On a cross, Jesus of Nazareth hung naked and beaten for love. Talk about rejection. It would be easy to conclude that God made a fool of himself. What was he thinking to die for love? **He gambled everything on the power of love.** That love was more powerful than hate. That love was more powerful than death. What was he thinking to die for us, to give himself for you and for me, knowing we might just kiss him in the face and then walk away. Love’s crazy like that.” – Erwin McManus, “Soul Cravings”

Notice how Steve Chalke, an emergent leader in the U.K., “backdoors” his way into calling the historic understanding of Christ’s substitutionary, penal substitution on the cross “child abuse”. He didn’t have the guts to say it outright... so he introduces the thought in a negative statement (though since then has in fact stated this in the positive) and allows the reader to draw his/her own conclusion:

“The fact is that the cross isn't a form of cosmic child abuse -- a vengeful father, punishing his son for an offence he has not even committed. Understandably, both people inside and outside of the church have found this **twisted version of events morally dubious** and a huge barrier to faith. Deeper than that, however, is that such a construct stands in total contradiction to the statement "God is love." **If the cross is a personal act of violence perpetrated by God towards humankind but borne by his son, then it makes a mockery of Jesus' own teaching to love your enemies and refuse to repay evil with evil.** The truth is the cross is a symbol of love. It is a demonstration of just how far God as Father and Jesus as his son are prepared to go to prove that love. The cross is a vivid statement of the powerlessness of love.” – Steve Chalke, “The Lost Message of Jesus”, p. 185

In positing God as a child abuser, Chalke calls into question the reality that Jesus was punished for our sins on our behalf. He then further elucidates his original comment in a later interview:

"In my view, **the real problem with penal substitution** (a theory rooted in violence and retributive notions of justice)....

The reality is that the cross **was** indeed violent. It was retributive justice. What should have been ours became his. Is that all there is to the atonement? Of course not. But if God’s justice is not satisfied at the cross, there is no gospel. Period. Denying penal substitution in the atonement is a heresy. This is the kind of thing that belongs in the big “h” column we showed earlier. Rather than bowing the knee and opening the heart because of the mercy and grace shown us in such an act, Chalke claims the penal substitution view is tantamount to cosmic child abuse. And in making that claim, Chalke has placed himself outside of the gospel.

“... is its incompatibility, at least as currently taught and understood, with any authentically Christian understanding of the character of God or genuinely Christocentric worldview – given, for instance, **Jesus own non-violent, ‘do not return evil for evil’, approach to life.**

Is that Christ's approach to life? Does this tell the whole story of how Christ understood the world and his mission? Many times error is in the form of what is left out. What is left out here is Christ's view that at some point in his future he would be the judge of all, and the fate of all men would hang in His balance. Cleansing the temple (and its future implications of judging evildoers) was certainly a violent act.

"Hence my comment, in *The Lost Message of Jesus*, **about the tragedy of reducing God to a 'cosmic child abuser'**. Though the sheer bluntness of my imagery might shock some, in truth, it is only because it is a stark 'unmasking' of the violent, pre-Christian thinking behind such a theology." – Steve Chalke, interview with Ekklesia news, 4/23/04

Here Chalke states his original claim in the positive. And he does so by invoking yet another fallacy used by emergents and liberals alike: the notion that Christian theology is based on ancient near east paganism. Here he's making the claim that we find our idea of penal substitution in pagan ideas of satisfying, placating, and appeasing the gods and their anger through sacrifice.

What does the emerging church say about the resurrection of Christ?

"We live in metaphors....."

Right off the bat, what has Bell done to the reality of the resurrection? He has reduced it to the category of "metaphor".

"...The tomb is empty because we have met the risen Christ - **we have experienced Jesus** in a way that transcends space and time. And this gives us hope." – Rob Bell, "Velvet Elvis", p. 61

How is the tomb empty? "We have met the risen Christ". And how have we "met" him? "We have experienced Jesus in a way that transcends space and time." Does that kind of resurrection "experience" really give hope? No, it does not. Is that how we are supposed to understand the resurrection? Or do we see and understand the resurrection as an objective reality outside of ourselves that imposes its will on us? "Velvet Elvis" isn't the only place where Bell monkeys with the historic and objective reality of the resurrection. He did it just recently at an interfaith event at which he appeared (along with Brian McLaren and Doug Pagitt) along side of the Dalai Lama and some Muslim leaders. Here is how he described the "resurrection":

"...**when somebody wrongs you**; when they commit an injustice, when they do evil—whether it's something petty or whether it's the oppression of millions—it's as if they have handed you this injustice, or evil. And so you can hand it back, that's called revenge, that's when you take the wrong, the evil, the injustice, the hurt, the betrayal, and you simply respond in kind. There is, next to revenge, another option, which is not to hand back the pain, which means that you're going to have to bear that pain. And when you choose not to respond with revenge or retaliation, but you choose to respond with forgiveness—and you choose to take it and bear that pain—it is going to be heavy, but it is going to lead to your freedom. It is going to **feel like a death, but it is going to lead to a resurrection. It's gonna feel like a Friday, but a Sunday is going to come.** And I think what we see with Archbishop Tutu, and his Holiness (Dalai Lama), is when people choose not to hand it back, but to bear it, it will always lead to suffering and it will—you will unavoidably become a better person on the other side. And I think that's what we re-

spond to; is that is what changes the world; when somebody chooses not to hand it back.”
– Rob Bell, comment from “Seed of Compassion” interfaith event

What is the resurrection to Rob Bell? It is only a metaphor. It is merely a personal experience. It is a way of helping us understand the good and the bad that happens to us in life. It is not an objective reality outside of himself. Is that the resurrection of Jesus as it is objectively explained to us in the authoritative Word? No, it is not. The resurrection of Jesus is not a metaphor; it is an historical fact, one of the “brute facts” of history (as Van Til liked to say).

What is the emerging church saying about the gospel?

“The goal is for us to put away labels that exclude, to become more like Jesus and less evangelical, or become more like Jesus and less Protestant.” Andrew Jones, (Boaz, U.K.) quoted by Gibbs and Bolger, “Emerging Churches”, pp. 37-38

This explains why Bell, McLaren, and Pagitt would feel comfortable being on the same platform as Buddhists, Muslims, and New Age mystics.

“For me **the declaration of the gospel is a call to a heroic life**. It’s not inviting people to receive the lowest level of their longings but to aspire to something beyond their greatest imagination.” – Erwin McManus, interview with Crosswalk.com

“Jesus at one point claimed to be ‘the way, the truth, and the life’. **Jesus was not making claims about one religion being better than all other religions**. That completely misses the point, the depth, and the truth.” – Rob Bell, “Velvet Elvis”, p.21

Oh really? The problem here is that Bell didn’t finish the sentence. No human being that has ever walked the face of this earth has access to the Father outside of Christ being the Way that he is portrayed in our Bibles.

“I don’t follow Christianity because I think Christianity is the best religion. I follow Jesus because he leads me into ultimate reality. He teaches me to live in tune with how reality is. **When Jesus said, “No one comes to the Father except through me”, he was saying that his way, his words, his life is our connection to how things truly are** at the deepest levels of existence.” – Rob Bell, “Velvet Elvis”, p. 83

“The presentation often begins with sin and the condition of human beings, separated from God and without hope in the world. God then came up with a way to fix the problem by sending Jesus, who came to the world to give us a way out of the mess we find ourselves in. So if we were to draw a continuum of the story of the Bible, **Jesus essentially shows up late in the game.**” – Rob Bell, “Velvet Elvis”, p. 82

“If by evangelical we mean one who spreads the good news that there is another kingdom or superpower, an economy and a peace other than that of the nations, a savior other than Caesar, then yes, I am an evangelical... many of us are refusing to allow distorted images of our faith to define us... there are those of who...want to spread another kind of Christianity, a faith that has as much to say about this world as it does about the next.” – Shane Claiborne, “The Irresistible Revolution”, p. 24

First of all, that’s not the gospel. The gospel is not primarily about the spread of a kingdom via economic and social change, but the exclusiveness of the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus Christ, a truth claim that imposes itself on the rest of the world. Claiborne views the gos-

pel through the socio-political lens. Second, Claiborne is rewriting the definition of “evangelical” to fit his view of the gospel, rather than allowing Christian history to define it for him: those who affirm salvation through faith alone in Christ alone by grace alone as it is taught in Scripture alone for the glory of God alone. Third, there resides at the end of Claiborne’s comment the common theme of the emerging church being preoccupied with the present, that what happens in this life is as important or more so than the life hereafter... when in fact, the Bible consistently says the opposite (esp. in Paul... but then again, Paul isn’t all that popular with the emerging church). The Bible squarely fixes our eyes upward and outward... on the heavens and to the future. That is where our hope lies. The Bible does not give us false expectations of transforming this present age, in fact, this present age is going to burn (an idea that is mocked by many emergents). Does this mean we have no consideration for what happens in the present? Of course not. There is some truth to Jacob Marley’s warning: mankind is our business. But even as we give cups of cold water, where is our orientation? It is upward and forward. The emerging church is squarely against this... this kind of thinking is throughout “Irresistible Revolution” and McLaren has dedicated at least two books to an earthward orientation of our perspective. Contra Colossians’ exhortation to cast our eyes to the heavens, Claiborne, McLaren and others would have us “walk by sight”... they want our gaze to be on the earthly, the here and now.

“One of the barriers seems to be the assumption that we have the truth and folks who experience things differently will all go to Hell. How do we unashamedly maintain a healthy desire for others to experience the love of God as we have experienced it without condemning others who experience God differently...” – Shane Claiborne, online interview with Tony Campolo, “On Evangelicals and Interfaith Cooperation”; the context is evangelizing Muslims and Jews.

Is it possible to experience God legitimately and genuinely outside of the gospel and its exclusive truth claims as presented in the authoritative Word? Absolutely not. Is it possible to experience God legitimately and genuinely outside of the historic Christianity’s understanding of the gospel as it has been affirmed by the creeds’ and confessions’ interpretation of that authoritative Word? Can we understand Jesus Christ or God legitimately outside of what Jesus Christ claims to be true about himself in the authoritative Word? Absolutely not. This kind of worldview is at odds with Christ and His gospel. Yet this kind of ecumenical universalism is common to many in the emerging church. They will claim that salvation does come through Christ, but how salvation is arrived at takes different forms. That claim is quite simply a false gospel.

We are now going to spend some time going through a long quote that I believe captures the heart and the essence of the emerging church. The things that Tony Jones, McLaren, Claiborne, Padgitt, and Bell are saying, especially about the “inclusiveness” of God’s kingdom, can be summarized in this quote.

This quote come from the Emergent Manifesto, a book of essays from those who consider themselves to be part of the Emergent Village, where the emerging and emergent ideas pretty much got their start in the mid to late 90’s. The author is Samir Selmanovic, founder of Faith House, Manhattan. The Faith House, Manhattan website describes its purpose this way:

“At the start of this journey, we all have more questions than answers. That’s why God gave us the ability to dream. Imagine: **Jews, Christians, Muslims, humanists, and atheists all wrestling with God and life together.** Imagine: one humanity, one pulpit, and a rich diversity of voices all learning from one another and cherishing the traditions of one

another. Imagine: **a synagogue, a church, and a mosque sharing lives in one community...Faith House will seek to bring progressive Jews, Christians, Muslims, and spiritual seekers of no faith to become an interfaith community** for the good of the world. We have one world and one God. Nothing is impossible. Who can stop God from teaching us how to live together in community?"

Faith House, Manhattan's self-stated mission, also at the website, is as follows:

"We want to start a new kind of community in which we can discover **The Other** (individuals or groups other than those we belong to), deepen our personal and corporate journeys, and together participate in repairing the world. In this endeavor we will honor and learn from teachings, practices, and suffering of people from religions, philosophies, and worldviews, different from our own. Instead of isolating ourselves into like-minded groups or melting together into a single-minded organization, we will learn to live together with our differences and in a way that contributes to the wellbeing, peace, joy, and justice in the world. In this endeavor we will always be a courageous, hospitable and learning community."

Anyone notice the capitalization of "The Other"? The logo for Faith House includes a cross, a crescent, a star of David, and then a blank space to indicate atheism. The home page says this:

"...From the initial expansive vision of a God who rules and sustains all of reality, we shrink into the **survival interests** of our chosen religions, theologies, denominations, churches, mosques, or synagogues. The blessings our religions offer give way to the fears our religions harbor. We turn our hearts inwards and over time we find ourselves isolated from the world that needs us, and **thus isolated from the God who is in the world...**As a result of this separation from reality, no matter how difficult it is to admit it, our religions (including atheism) inflict wounds on the world. The world is convulsing in religious strife and **the solutions must come from all people of faith.** The Faith House project is a journey from maps back to the landscape of life. That's where our religions are supposed to function; in the world, in the presence of "the other," **whoever that may be.** This is a journey we can only take with one another. If we follow this path together, we will need to trust not only in God, but also on God's people, whoever they are and wherever we find them, inside or outside the boundaries of our religions. We will need to re-learn what it means to trust in God and humanity. God has given us humans the ability to envision a better world and re-imagine our religions."

This universalist ecumenism inherent to Faith House Manhattan is the backdrop for the following quote in the "Emergent Manifesto of Hope":

"Christianity's idea that other religions cannot be God's carriers of grace and truth casts a large shadow over our Christian experience. Does grace, the central teaching of Christianity, permeate all of reality,

First, is grace "THE central teaching of Christianity"?

"...or is it something that is alive only for those who possess the New Testament and the Christian tradition?"

Yes, it is.

“Is the revelation that we have received through Jesus Christ an expression of what is everywhere at all times, or has the Christ Event emptied most of the world and time of saving grace and deposited it in one religion, namely ours?”

Yes, we wholeheartedly affirm that saving grace can be found in only one place, a Person, and knowledge of that Person comes through only one source, The Word, working in the only body upon which God has poured out his blessing, the church (Eph. 3:10). Again, the presupposition at work here in this comment is that knowledge and experience of Jesus can be outside of the one true religion in Christ via Buddhism, Islam, Confucianism, Hinduism, etc. etc.

“And more practically, how can we have a genuine two-way conversation with non-Christians about our experience of God if we believe that God withholds his revelation from everyone but Christians? Because we believe that there are no shadows in Christ, we want nothing less than to reinterpret the Bible, reconstruct the theology, and **reimagine the church** to match the character of God that we as followers of Christ have come to know... **One does not need to believe in God before living in God’s presence. God is present whether we believe in him or not.**

God might be present, but he is not present outside of Christ as the Bible presents him in a “salvific” way. When it comes to what it is that makes us right with God and glorifies him, the other religions of the world have nothing, absolutely nothing, to offer.

“And people do respond to him. Mark, a non-Christian friend of mine from New York, says that for him “to become a part of Christianity would be a moral step backwards.” Yet, he would say things like this to me: “To live is to be given a gift. I believe that there is a transcendent sweep over our existence and it seems to me that humanity has been squandering this gift. One just needs to look at what we are doing to each other. But in the midst of the mess, I see grace of a new beginning all around me. And within me. I often fail to respond to it. I participate in the madness instead. Whenever in my inner life I do turn to this grace to look for a second chance, I am always granted one. I think I want to spend the rest of my life being a channel of that same goodness to others.” This view embodies the doctrine of creation, sin, salvation, and new life.

Here once again we see the resurrection (new life) being redefined in terms of experience, and the experience of an unbeliever, no less.

“That’s Christ, embedded in the life of Mark, present in substance rather than in name...

This is not “Christ”. If one does not have the “name”, one does not have the “substance”. In fact, it was precisely that point that was the scandal for the first century Jews, especially the Judaizers who caused problems for Paul and the apostles.

“Christ never proclaimed, “Christianity is here. Join it.” But Christ did insist, “The kingdom of God is here. Enter it.”

And once again, we find the emerging church pitting the kingdom of God over against the exclusivity of Christ, Christianity, and the church. Such a dichotomy is a false one... the redemptive-historical trajectory of the kingdom in the New Testament tells us that one does not have the kingdom without the church, and vice versa. The church is THE vehicle, the only God-ordained vehicle for kingdom expansion in the New Covenant. One of the fundamental presuppositions of the emerging church is a denial of that New Covenant reality.

“The emerging church movement has come to believe that the ultimate context of the spiritual aspirations of a follower of Jesus Christ is not Christianity but rather the kingdom of God. This realization has many implications, and the one standing above all is the fact that, like every other religion, Christianity is a non-god, and every non-god can be an idol... **Has the supremacy of Christianity become our non-negotiable value?** Sin is a result of some faith commitment to things, people, or forces other than God, which are ultimately commitments to self. Religion, any religion, is not exempt from these dynamics of human experience. Scripture frequently describes other religions as idolatrous. Christians can conceive of things like money, sex, power being idols. But the Christian religion itself being an idol? Certainly, if we proclaim that Christianity is immune from idolatry, then we have come to believe that, finally, God has become “contained” by Christianity.

Do we hear what Selmanovic is attempting to claim here? If we insist that Christianity is an exclusive religion, that there are no other legitimate religions (or even that any other religion is inherently anti-God), and that everything else outside of Christ and His gospel as it is presented in the Scriptures is false, then we are guilty of creating an idol? Christianity as exclusive is idolatry? If, for some unknown or unthinkable reason, the emerging church and postmodernity take over the world and (contra their own plural “truth” claims) force everyone to bow to them, please, string me up as an idolater. Because the only place one can find this “new life”, the only place one can find this “salvation”, the only place one can find a true account of “creation”, the only place one can find forgiveness of “sin”, and certainly the only place one will find “salvation” is in Christ as the Scriptures present him and “Christianity”. Does this mean that Christianity has been perfect over the last 2000 years? No. It only means that Christianity has an exclusivity that no other religion can legitimately claim.

“We do believe that God is best defined by the historical revelation in Jesus Christ, but **to believe that God is limited to it would be an attempt to manage God. If one holds that Christ is confined to Christianity, one has chosen a god that is not sovereign.** Soren Kierkegaard argued that the moment one decides to become a Christian, one is liable to idolatry... **Is our religion the only one that understands the true meaning of life?** Or does God place his truth in others too?

Once again, here is an indication that the emerging church’s view of “common grace” is too big. The Scriptures tell us that anyone who is outside of Christ as the Scriptures present Him has a veil over their eyes and cannot understand the true meaning of life.

“Well, God decides, and not Us.

While this is a true statement, the point being made is certainly not true. God does decide, and he has told us **how** he has decided in a Word that is objectively outside of ourselves imposing itself upon us. In that objective Word, God declares to us that Christ **is** “confined” to Christianity and that He has limited the definition of Who He is to Jesus Christ. But then again, the emerging church isn’t all that hip on the Sola Scriptura reality, falsely claiming it is a modern construct.

“The gospel is not our gospel, but the gospel of the kingdom of God, and what belongs to the kingdom of God cannot be hijacked by Christianity.

Again, beating the drum again... here Christianity (and the church) is falsely pitted against “the kingdom of God.”

“God is sovereign, like the wind. He blows wherever he chooses. Christianity cannot regain credibility or recaptivate human imagination until it learns to exist for the sake of something greater than itself. People are rightfully afraid of any religion that will not accept its place at the feet of the Holy Mystery. **If the Christian God is not larger than Christianity, then Christianity is simply not to be trusted.** In the eyes of an increasing number of people seeking God, Christian or not, Christianity has developed an inordinate sense of self-importance.

“In the eyes of”? Whose opinion really matters to Selmanovic? Here is another characteristic of the emerging church... it is a movement that is too worried about what the culture thinks about it. If we look at what the emerging church is saying about the culture and the inclusiveness of Christ and the non-exclusivity of the gospel, you will find emergents who are madly interested in making sure that the other person likes them. It wants the culture to like it, despite the fact that Christ said that culture would hate his followers because it hated Him first.

What can be better than Christianity? The kingdom of God, of course. This kingdom supersedes Christianity in scope, depth, and expression. This is true regardless of whether we talk about “Christless” or “Christfull” Christianity. Even in its best form, Christian religion is still an entity in the human realm. When we say that only Christ saves, Christ represents something larger than the person we Christians have come to know. He is all and in all.

Now there’s a verse that has been taken out of context (Col. 3:11). While we wholeheartedly affirm this truth, given this universalist ecumenism context, it takes on the dimensions of pagan mysticism.

And Christ being “the only way” is not a statement of exclusion but inclusion, an expression of what is universal.

That’s certainly one way of spinning the word “only”. However, this reinterpretation of the word “only” isn’t unique to *only* Selmanovic... you’ll find this kind of spin on John 14:6 given by others in the emerging church.

“If a relationship with a specific person, namely Christ, is the whole substance of a relationship with the God of the Bible, then the vast majority of people in world history are excluded from the possibility of a relationship with the God of the Bible...

And we say “yes, absolutely”. And we say “absolutely” because that “relationship with a specific person, namely Christ” is grounded not just in the love of God, but God’s justice. Here begins an emotional appeal by Selmanovic. We should be burdened by the prospect that most people in world history have died outside of Christ and without hope of salvation from God’s wrath. But we also must remember (something conveniently either forgotten or denied by more than a few in the emergent movement) that humans have chosen this lot in Adam. And in the face of an emotional appeal, which again is not unique to Selmanovic, we must run back to Romans 9... are we going to claim that there is “injustice” on God’s part? Does the clay have any right to talk back to the Potter’s choice of “confining” himself and “limiting” himself to His Word, His sovereign decrees, and His design? Are we going to say to the Potter: this is not fair?

“...along with the Hebrews of the Old Testament who were without a knowledge of Jesus Christ – the person.

Side note: this is a fundamental misunderstanding or mischaracterization of redemptive history, especially in regards to what the Hebrews in the Old Testament knew or didn't know about a coming savior/messiah (Moses chose the reproach of “Christ” over the treasures of Egypt, Heb. 11:26). Christ was hidden in their shadows so that for them, embracing the shadows *was* embracing Christ. But I digress...

“The question begs to be asked: **would God who gives enough revelation for people to be judged but not enough revelation to be saved be a God worth worshiping?** Never!...

There you have it. Selmanovich goes where we shouldn't. He is claiming, if God's redemption of sinners operates in redemptive history the way the Scriptures say it does, then we have every right to call God's character, integrity, and morality into question. Selmanovich impugns God with his own sense of fairness. His sense of right and wrong is imposed onto God and the Bible. His sense of right and wrong have become the standard by which an exclusive Christ as the Scriptures present Him is measured. If God doesn't make salvation non-exclusive, Selmanovich is going to cry “unfair” and call his morality into question. Who is shaping God after his own likeness? Who is putting God into a box now? In fact, given he's called God's morality into question, we are right in asking, “whose box is it?” Is it the box of historical and confessional Christianity that has been his target or is it Selmanovich's?

For many in the emerging church, the idea that Christ is exclusive and that people die and go to hell outside of Christ is not a cosmic problem that motivates us to mission. They solve the problem by denying the exclusivity.... which “turns” the problem into a cause for celebration. If Christ is not exclusive, he is to be found everywhere and in every religion. The reality is that they are then masking over the problem... the problem hasn't gone away. It is merely being ignored. And many emergents are now saying that not only does Christ have something to add to the other religions, there is reciprocity... those religions have something to contribute to my “Christianity”. Friends, this is nothing less than universalism in different clothing. 7:32

To put it in different terms, **there is no salvation outside of Christ, but there is salvation outside of Christianity...**An emerging generation of Christians is simply saying, “No more special treatment...God's table is welcoming to all who seek...For most critics of such open Christianity, the problem with inclusiveness is that it allows for truth to be found in other religions. To emerging Christians, that problem is sweet... In fact, instead of being a problem it is a reason to celebrate...Moreover, if non-Christians can know our God, then we want to benefit from their contribution to our faith.” – Samir Selmanovic, “An Emergent Manifesto of Hope”, pp. 191-195

“I heard one well-known Christian leader, who—I won't mention his name, just to protect his reputation. Cause some people would use this against him. But I heard him say it like this: The traditional understanding says that God asks of us something that God is incapable of Himself. God asks us to forgive people. But God is incapable of forgiving. God can't forgive unless He punishes somebody in place of the person He was going to forgive. God doesn't say things to you—Forgive your wife, and then go kick the dog to vent your anger. God asks you to actually forgive. And there's a certain sense that, a

common understanding of the atonement presents a God who is incapable of forgiving. Unless He kicks somebody else.” – Brian McLaren, interview

“In college, one of my professors said, ‘Don’t let the world steal your soul. **Being a Christian is about choosing Jesus and deciding to do something incredibly daring with your life.**’ I decided to take him up on that challenge.” – Shane Claiborne, “The Irresistible Revolution”, p. 18

“We must be open to the perpetual possibility that our received understandings of the gospel may be faulty, imbalanced, poorly nuanced, or downright warped and twisted . . . Christians must continually expect to rediscover the gospel...one of the great benefits of missional interreligious dialogue for the Christian community (is that) it puts us in situations where we may discover misconceptions and distortions we never would have seen if we were only talking to ourselves in self-affirming, self-congratulating conversation.” – Brian McLaren, *Generous Orthodoxy*, p. 261

“This God-given thirst for emergence brings us beyond where we have been. It caused ancient Christians to emerge from first-century Judaism. It caused their descendants to emerge from apostolic Christianity to the era of the martyrs and apologists showing both courage and intelligence in dealing with their evolving situation. It caused the Celtic Christians to emerge from the parochial Constantinian Roman Christianity that threatened to stifle and stagnate ongoing Christian emergence.’ It caused late-medieval Christianity to emerge from the chaos and struggle of the early Middle Ages. It caused modern Christianity (in its Protestant and Catholic forms) to emerge from its late-medieval stage. And it is causing **new forms of Christian spirituality, community, and mission to emerge from modern Western Christianity.** No emergence is perfect. Old things, previous gains that should be retained and integrated are forgotten or rejected. Scars that should be embraced and thus healed are rejected, and infection results (think of a lightning scar on a tree and of forgiveness and repentance as ways of embracing and healing such a scar). New things that should be added are similarly feared and shunned. True prophets (those who bring **a new word from God** to assist in the current process of emergence) are crucified; false prophets (those who promise shortcuts that will cause regression or stagnation) are made rich and famous. The process is messy. So will our current emergence yield a superior and ultimate form of Christianity? Will this emerging form finally get it right? Of course not. No more than a teenager is superior to a child or than a senior citizen finally gets it right in comparison to a middle-aged mother. No more than a dying person is the ultimate and final form of a human being. Thus a generous orthodoxy is an emerging orthodoxy, never complete until we arrive at our final home in God.” – Brian McLaren, “A Generous Orthodoxy”, pp. 284-285

“If, for you, orthodox means finally "getting it right" or "getting it straight," mine is a pretty disappointing, curvy orthodoxy. But if, for you, orthodoxy isn't a list of correct doctrines, but rather **the doxa in orthodoxy means "thinking" or "opinion,"** then the lifelong pursuit of expanding thinking and deepening, broadening opinions about God sounds like a delight, a joy...**The achievement of 'right thinking' therefore recedes, happily, farther beyond our grasp the more we pursue it.** As it eludes us, we are strangely rewarded: we feel gratitude and love, humility and wonder, reverence and awe, adventure and homecoming.” – Brian McLaren, *Generous Orthodoxy*, pp. 293-294, 296

The reality is that the Bible never presents its “orthodoxy” as “thinking” or “opinion” and therefore our proclamation of what it is saying is neither “thinking” or “opinion”. The Bible exists over, above, and outside of us proclaiming to us what to think and what to believe. The Bible presents itself as something that can be known, and in fact, presents facts that can be known with the same certainty as God knows (the resurrection being chief among those *facts*). Not only does the Bible hold out to us the possibility of right thinking, it imposes “right thinking” onto us. And despite what is being claimed by the emerging church, such an understanding of knowledge, certainty, and objective truth is not a modern construct but is inherent to a Jewish text that in some instances is almost 4-thousand years old. The moment that God spoke something into existence from nothing was the moment absolute truth became inherent to time and space. That “something” is always over against and absolutely antithetical to that “nothing”. It’s a pretty stark contrast, something vs. nothing. The divine fiat making something from nothing renders “curvy orthodoxy” an oxymoron. Christ’s resurrection, in an absolute change from *dead* to *undead* or alive, debunks the notion of an “elusive” “right thinking”. The original fiat and the resurrection not only mean that “right thinking” is to be grasped, “right thinking” is demanded (by those events).

“...you start to think there must be more to Christianity, more than just laying your life and sins at the foot of the cross... I came to realize that preachers were telling me to lay my life at the foot of the cross and weren’t giving me anything to pick up... **where were the do’s?**” – Shane Claiborne, “The Irresistible Revolution”, p. 38

What does the emerging church say about evangelism?

“I’m not at all against the idea of a personal relationship with God. I think that’s **where it all begins**. I think this is part of the beauty of the message of Jesus. Every individual is invited into a personal relationship with God. But personal is not private, so personal doesn’t just mean it’s me and God, or me and Jesus, but personal means that my connection to God also connects me to other people and connects me to what God is doing, the mission of God in our world. When we end up in some ways commodifying and privatizing faith, it in many ways marginalizes faith and makes faith be either like a consumer product or like a personal preference. Or it makes us just be a demographic group that gets marketed to or manipulated by political parties or whatever else. But if people believe, as I do, that **our Christian identity actually thrusts us into the world** with a sense of mission, and it gives us a concern for the poor, it gives us concern for justice, all these very, very important things in our world today, the reconciliation with our neighbors and our enemies -- if we believe we’re thrust into the world in this way, then our faith doesn’t just stay personal and private. It then engages us in the world.” – Brian McLaren, [interview with Religion and Ethics Newsweekly](#)

“**Evangelism in the bounded set is focused heavily on getting people into the religious zone...**this is represented by the unyielding allegiance to the work of getting people to come to church. We stress again that we don’t object to inviting people to worship meetings. Even in the missional (centered-set) church, there should be the opportunity to invite not-yet-Christians to experience Christian community and worship. But in the incarnational mode the emphasis is well and truly on a cross-cultural Go-To-Them mentality. **It assumes that in every human being there is a longing to know the reason for**

their existence, the purpose of their lives.” – Michael Frost & Alan Hirsch, “The Shaping of Things to Come”, p. 49

“**Church is a minority pursuit**, and churches that make a fuss about what they’re doing are suspected, quite rightly, of trying to make converts, and **nobody wants to be converted**. Our non-Christian friends, who know what we’re up to, are interested, but they won’t come. It feels a little too risky, like we might trap them in some way.” Steve Collins (Grace, London), in Gibbs & Bolger, “Emerging Churches”, p. 129

“Axxess is missional but **not in the sense that we are trying to save all the individuals we are engaged with in the culture so that the kingdom will advance and Christ can work**. Instead, we are trying to make our community a place where you can feel **the kingdom of God**, and **we don’t think we need to save everyone for this to happen.**” Brad Cecil (Axxess, Arlington, TX), in Gibbs & Bolger, “Emerging Churches”, p. 129

“God encourages us never to separate the wheat from the tares. But we do. Every time we do that we hurt the work of God. We need to soften the ground, plant seeds. **Let’s quit making it tough to get to the inner circle**. Maybe some have wandered away because of our attitude.” Spencer Burke in Gibbs & Bolger, “Emerging Churches”, p. 129

“If the Christian church is to be incarnational and missional, as we believe the New Testament anticipates, and if it’s to **abandon an us-and-them mentality**, it will need to re-discover **the biblical mode of impacting the world around it**. Built into the very fabric of New Testament teaching on the extension of the kingdom is the assumption that when the Christian community embraces a godly, holy lifestyle, **it will so tantalize the wider community that they will seek after God**...The missional-incarnational church **will make Christian teaching attractive** by living it under the very noses of those who have not yet embraced it. What impact can a church that has withdrawn from society have on that society? The traditional-attractional church often quotes, “**Come ye out and be ye separate**”, a reversal of Jesus’ command to be salt and light in the world...**To impact a post-Christendom culture, the church must jettison its wealth, side with the poor, speak up for the wronged, and live as a kind, loving community.**” – Michael Frost & Alan Hirsch, “The Shaping of Things to Come”, pp. 53-54

What does the emerging church say about the exclusivity of Christ?

“My friends are resonating with Jesus whether they acknowledge it or not (Bell performed a wedding ceremony for two friends that **wanted no mention of Jesus in the ceremony**). And when they look into each other’s eyes and there is love there - real, passionate love, the kind that would lay down its life for another - I believe that love is made possible by God in Jesus. Their laying down their lives is a picture of God doing the same for every single human being in Jesus, whether we affirm it or not... In affirming and celebrating all that they did that day on the cliff (they got married), **my friends are closer to Jesus than they would ever imagine.**” – Rob Bell, “Velvet Elvis”, p. 92

“...when Jesus died on the cross, he died for everybody. Everybody. Everywhere. **Every tribe, every nation, every tongue, every people group**. Jesus said that when he was lifted up, he would draw all people to himself. All people. Everywhere. Everybody’s sins on the cross with Jesus. So this reality, **this forgiveness, this reconciliation, is true for everybody**. Paul insisted that when Jesus died on the cross, he was reconcil-

ing ‘all things, in heaven and on earth, to God’. All things, everywhere” – Rob Bell, “Velvet Elvis”, pp. 145-146

“The problem comes when salvation becomes all about me. Me being saved. Me having my sins forgiven. Me being reconciled to God. The Bible paints a much larger picture of salvation. It describes **all of creation being restored**. The author of Ephesians writes that all things will be brought together under Jesus. **Salvation is the entire universe being brought back into harmony with its maker.**” – Rob Bell, “Velvet Elvis”, p. 109

“There is a discomfort when I hear **Gandhi's whisper that the religions are one tree with many branches**, and I can appreciate the fact that our faiths trace their roots back to the same dysfunctional family of Abraham and Sarah. But in many interreligious gatherings I have experienced the feeling that we are forced to walk on eggshells in a shallow murky spirituality that does not honor the distinctiveness of each tradition. This universalism, in its attempt to honor every tradition I often merely creates a culture where **their beauty and distinctiveness are lost.**” – Shane Claiborne, online interview with Tony Campolo, “On Evangelicals and Interfaith Cooperation”

First, let’s say what Shane Claiborne is unwilling to say: Gandhi was wrong. There is only one true religion, and all others are perversions of the one true religion. While Abraham and Sarah may have been “dysfunctional”, both the Old and New Testaments are emphatic that the **only** legitimate religion to come out of that relationship was the divinely ordained pre-messianic religion of those who “believed God and it was accounted to them as righteousness”, a religion that had its one and only legitimate fulfillment in a Person, the second person of the Godhead incarnate, Jesus Christ. Second, while Claiborne rues the vanilla blandness of modern ecumenism, he is also positing that to be exclusive with our understanding of Christ and the Christian religion is to somehow dishonor those distinctive traditions and lose the opportunity to learn from them. While it is true that we must respect other traditions in a general sense, the exclusiveness of Christ as the Bible presents Him automatically “illegitimizes” every other religion. And in fact, if we are not “for” the exclusiveness of Christ (which is what it means to be “with Christ” in Luke 11:23), we, like the other religions, are against Him. This kind of inclusivity amounts to a denial of the gospel.

“...the work of conversion is not up to us but to the Spirit, and not contingent on our own persistence, technological ingenuity, or church growth tactics. It really is liberating to leave that in the hands of the Spirit, and continue to live in a way that magnetizes people to God. **Rabbi Michael Lerner says** that we not only need to decode **some of the violent threads of Christian thought**, but we also must re-credit the ancient Jewishness of Jesus. He points to the **many places that our faith traditions intersect**, namely in calling us to work for justice and peace and reconciliation. Lerner says, “People of all faiths need to shape a political and social movement that reaffirms the most generous, peace-oriented, social justice-committed, and loving truths of the spiritual heritage of the human race. It is only this **resurrection of hope** that can save us from a new wave of global hatred.” – Shane Claiborne, online interview with Tony Campolo, “On Evangelicals and Interfaith Cooperation”

The following is the last quote we will look at this evening. The rest of the quotes you can read for yourself online when the sermon manuscript is posted.

“For too many people, the name “Jesus” has become a symbol of exclusion, as if Jesus’ statement “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me” actually means, “I am in the way of people seeking truth and life. I won’t let anyone get to God unless he comes through me...”

It should be obvious to us by now that Brian McLaren and others in the emerging church are bent on denying the explicit and absolute truth claims made in John 14:6. They are reduced to arguing that it doesn’t mean what it actually says. Further, McLaren isn’t content just to state his objection in a positive way. In his objection, McLaren recasts the scripture, actually Christ’s verbal words here, in a negative light in order to make his point... it is shrill hyperbole. To those who have asked the question “what is the difference between Hybels and Warren, the church growth movement, and McLaren and the emerging church?”, here is a prime example. As we said when we started this series, we would have problems with much of what the emerging church and the church growth movements believe and do simply because we have a Reformed understanding of the Scriptures. And we haven’t been shy about disagreeing with Hybels and Warren, especially in how they frame the gospel. However, one would be hard pressed to find them using this kind of hyperbole from the scriptures. One of the key differences between the church growth movement and the emergents is that the emergents have a subversive attitude (of which they tend to be proud) that expresses itself through a lot of their writing. Many of these quotes come off, even in the context of the books, essays, blogs, or “dialogues” from whence they come, as “spitting bullets”. And the irony is that even as McLaren in this statement casts our understanding of Christ as “arrogant”, make no mistake, there is no humility in the use of such sarcastic hyperbole.

“The name of Jesus, whose life and message resonated with acceptance, welcome, and inclusion, has too often become a symbol of elitism, exclusion, and aggression.” – Brian McLaren, “Generous Orthodoxy”, p. 70

A Jesus whose salvation is not exclusionary is not the Jesus of the Bible. For those who tout such inclusivism, their idea of the gospel is not the gospel at all. They want a gospel that includes everybody, not just in its offer (which we would affirm), but in its effect. The moment we are inclusive with the effect of the gospel in salvation (in a right standing with God), is the moment we have compromised the gospel and we belong in the big “h” category we pointed out at the beginning of this evening. Does this mean everyone who talks this way is a heretic going to hell? I hope not. But what it does mean is that if one begins “believing” and “trusting” the idea of an inclusive Christ, one is no longer “believing” and “trusting” the Jesus of the Bible and is in danger of losing one’s soul. This is the true kind of idolatry to fear and be warned about. Salvation is only found in Jesus as the Bible presents him: the only King, resurrected by God and exalted to his throne, to whom we and all of our man-made “religions” must and will bow. The gospel includes Christ’s exclusive truth claims about himself, which is why he was a scandal to the Jews even in his day. It was a scandal throughout the book of Acts. Anything else is not the gospel.

“(Missional faith i.e. “expressing saving love for the world”) gets us beyond the **us-them thinking** and **in-grouping and out-grouping that lead to prejudice, exclusion, and ultimately to religious wars**. It opens up a third alternative beyond exclusive and universalist religion. Exclusive religion says, “**We’re in, and you’re out.**” **Good news for us, bad news for you.** Understandably, universalist religion reacts and says, “Everybody’s in!” That’s good news for everyone at first blush until you ask, “Why is there so much in-

justice then? Why are so many sad, cruel, harassed, and helpless? If everybody's in—is this as good as it gets?” Saying that “everybody's in” can too easily lead to complacency about injustice here and now and can create a kind of nice, relaxed, magnanimous apathy. This **magnanimous apathy maybe better than the narrow antipathy** often associated with exclusive religion, but I think we need a better alternative. Missional Christian faith asserts that **Jesus did not come to make some people saved and others condemned. Jesus did not come to help some people be right while leaving everyone else to be wrong. Jesus did not come to create another exclusive religion**— Judaism having been exclusive based on genetics and Christianity being exclusive based on belief (which can be a tougher requirement than genetics!). Missional faith asserts that Jesus came to preach the good news of the kingdom of God to everyone, especially the poor. He came to seek and save the lost. He came on behalf of the sick. **He came to save the world.** His gospel, and therefore the Christian message, is Good News for the whole world. The idea that the Christian message is **universally** good news for Christians and non-Christians alike is, to some, unheard of, strange, and perhaps heretical.” – Brian McLaren, “a Generous Orthodoxy”, pp. 109-110

“Is the story of God a story of my own soul, a story of my religion, a story of humanity or a story of all that is? To accept all these stories as the stories of God is to imply that my religion then becomes only a part of the ultimate story of the world, not the ultimate story itself. Orthodox rabbi David Hartman, concerned with the perennial conflict in Jerusalem, insists that different melodies of one God must be cherished: “Each group feels that its way is the only way: there is one God, therefore there has to be one truth. Christians build their story on the Jewish story and therefore feel they are inheritors of Judaism. **Muslims built their story on the Bible**, and therefore they feel that they are the perfect expression of monotheism. Now, we've got to get out of each other's story. **We can't feel that in order for me to tell my story, your story has to end.** . . . In other words, affirmation [of my story] does not require that I demonise those who are different from me. I don't have to build conviction out of hate and fear.” If my identity depends on annihilation of other stories, I cannot really sing all four songs of God.” – Samir Selmanovic, [“Four Stories of God”](#)

“Islam is much more gracious towards evangelical Christians who are faithful to the New Testament, than Christians are towards Islamic people who are faithful to the Koran. The Islamic faith will ask, “Are you faithful to the book that you have?” **Mohammad was very understanding that there was great truth in Christianity.** He differed with us in that he felt he had a more complete truth, and Islam would hold to that, but Mohammad contended that we would ultimately be judged in terms of the truth that we had at our disposal. I think **there are Muslim brothers and sisters** who are willing to say, “You live up to the truth as you understand it. **I will live up to the truth as I understand it,** and we will leave it up to God on judgment day.” – Shaine Claiborne, online interview with Tony Campolo, “On Evangelicals and Interfaith Cooperation”

“...I find it hard to “give a testimony” today without offending people of my own religion whose identity depends on a divided and conflicted world. As a follower of Christ, **I have grown to believe in a world that is larger than Christianity.** Jesus called this larger world the kingdom of God. It is the symphony made of all stories, individual and communal, our magnanimous God is involved with in this world. Only God is God. And

Christianity is not. Nor Judaism. Nor Islam. Paradoxically, **this realization about the greatness of God is a deeply Christian, Jewish and Muslim teaching.**” – Samir Selmanovic, [“Four Stories of God”](#)

What does the emerging church say about God?

“(In the Emerging Church) the idea that **there is a necessary distinction of...creation from creator is being reconsidered.**” – Doug Pagitt, “Listening to the Emerging Churches”, p. 142

“If there is a divine being who made everything, including us, what would our experiences with this being look like? **The moment God is figured out with nice neat lines and definitions, we are no longer dealing with God.** We are dealing with somebody we made up. And if we made him up, then we are in control. And so **in passage after passage, we find God reminding people that he is beyond and bigger and more.**” – Rob Bell, “Velvet Elvis”, p. 25

“Take, for example, the doctrine - the spring (Bell uses an analogy for various doctrines or propositional truths as springs in a mattress; crb) - called the Trinity. This doctrine is central to historic, orthodox Christian faith. Where there is only one God, God is somehow present everywhere. **People began to call this presence, this power of God, his ‘Spirit’...**” – Rob Bell, “Velvet Elvis”, p. 22

“[Jesus] said at one point that if you had seen him, you had ‘seen the Father’. He claimed to be showing us what God is like. **In his compassion, peace, truth telling, and generosity, he was showing us God.**” – Rob Bell, “Velvet Elvis”, p. 21

“**This three-in-oneness understanding of God emerged in the several hundred years after Jesus’ resurrection...**But over time this belief (in the Trinity), this understanding, this doctrine, has become central to how followers of Jesus have understood who God is. It is a spring, and people jumped for thousands of years without it. It was added later. We can take it out and examine it. Discuss it, probe it, question it. It flexes, and it stretches.” – Rob Bell, “Velvet Elvis”, p. 22

“As [Jesus’] movement gathered steam, **this Jewish man came to be talked about more and more as God**, fully divine as well as fully human. As his followers talked about him and did what he said and told and retold his stories, the significance of his life began to take on all sorts of cosmic dimensions” – Rob Bell, “Velvet Elvis”, p. 124

“The Christian faith is mysterious to the core. It is about things and beings that ultimately can’t be put into words. Language fails. And **if we do definitively put God into words, we have at that very moment made God something God is not.**” – Rob Bell, “Velvet Elvis”, p. 32

What does the emerging church say about anthropology?

“The healing of our world not only **begins within us** but does not end with us.” – Shane Claiborne, “The Irresistible Revolution”, p. 18

"I am absolutely convinced of one thing: **God has placed cravings within your soul that will drive you insane or drive you to him.** Your soul longs for God; you just may not know it yet" -- Erwin McManus, Soul Cravings

“Jesus said that **the kingdom of God is within us**....It seems what he is implying is that **we have a better chance of finding God in the universe within us** than in the one that surrounds us. And it is on this path that I invited you to walk with me. I invite you to engage in an exploration of the human spirit, to journey deep inside yourself and search out the mystery of the universe that exists with you.” – Erwin McManus, *Soul Cravings*

"We run from God because we long to be loved and we have convinced ourselves that the One who is most loving could not and would not embrace us. **We run from the One our souls crave.**" – Erwin McManus, *Soul Cravings*

"**When we stop believing the world can become a better place**, when we stop caring about the lives and conditions of others, we lose a part of ourselves." – Erwin McManus, *Soul Cravings*

"For the past two thousand years, **Christianity, along with pretty much every other world religion, has made the primary focus the sinful nature of us all. In some ways I think this has led to a not-so-subtle self-hatred.**" – Erwin McManus, *Soul Cravings*

“Jesus wants to heal our souls, wants to give us the shalom of God. And so we have to stop. We have to slow down. We have to sit still and stare out the window and let the engine come to an idle. **We have to listen to what our inner voice is saying.**” – Rob Bell, “Velvet Elvis”, p. 118

“Over time when you purposefully try to live the way of Jesus, you start noticing something deeper going on. You begin realizing the reason this is the best way to live is that it is rooted in profound truths about how the world is. You find yourself living more and more in tune with ultimate reality. **You are more and more in sync with how the universe is at its deepest levels.**” – Rob Bell, “Velvet Elvis”, p. 21

“At one point, Jesus’ disciples are riding in a boat and Jesus comes walking by on the water. And one of the disciples says, ‘If it’s you, let me come to you on the water.’ It’s a weird story, isn’t it? And it gets even weirder when the disciple Peter jumps out of the boat because he wants to walk on water like Jesus... So this disciple gets out on the water and he starts to sink, so he yells, ‘Jesus save me!’ And Jesus says, ‘You of little faith, why did you doubt?’ Who does Peter lose faith in? Not Jesus; Jesus is doing fine. **Peter loses faith in himself.** Peter loses faith that he can do what his rabbi is doing. If the rabbi calls you to be his disciple, then he believes you can actually be like him. **As we read the stories of Jesus’ life with his talmidim, his disciples, what do we find frustrates him to no end? When his disciples lose faith in themselves.**” – Rob Bell, “Velvet Elvis”, pp. 133-134

“**I can’t find one place in the teachings of Jesus, or the Bible for that matter, where we are to identity ourselves first and foremost as sinners.**” – Rob Bell, “Velvet Elvis”, p. 139

What does the emerging church say about the culture?

“The Emergent imagination is at its most basic level **a call to friendship** – friendship with God, with one another, and **with the world.**” – Doug Pagitt, “An Emergent Manifesto of Hope”, ed. Pagitt and Jones, p. 19

“...missional church thinking values the development of **shared or joint projects between the Christian community and its host community**. Proximity spaces are excellent for casual interaction. Shared projects allow the **Christians to partner with unbelievers** in useful, intrinsically valuable activities within the community...The important thing is to find joint projects that put Christians and not-yet-Christians shoulder-to-shoulder in a **lengthy partnership**...By standing with not-yet-Christians...conversation, **shared values**, and mutual trust naturally develop.” – Michael Frost & Alan Hirsch, “The Shaping of Things to Come”, p. 25

“This thing Jesus called the kingdom of God is emerging across the globe in the most unexpected places, a gentle whisper amid the chaos. **Little people with big dreams are reimagining the world**. Little movements of communities of ordinary radicals are committed to doing small things with great love.” – Shane Claiborne, “The Irresistible Revolution”, p. 25

“(Christ) took on our culture and our practices; he became one of us. He participated in the local life of the Jews in all their cultural variety. He made himself accessible... as Jesus did, **we must immerse ourselves in the local cultures of our time**. As Jesus did, we must provide critique, but that evaluation must come from within rather than be imposed from outside the cultural context”. – Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger, “Emerging Churches”, p. 16

“...incarnational mission will mean that in reaching a people group we will need to identify with them in all ways possible without compromising the truth of the gospel itself...incarnational mission means that **people will get to experience Jesus on the inside of their culture (meaning systems)**...**If Jesus has become so unfamiliar to most people, perhaps it is because he is perceived by many as a tame ‘churchgoer’** and a teacher of moralistic platitudes. Most attitudinal research on the subject indicates that in terms of the public perception of outsiders (the “unchurched”), to become a Christian is synonymous with becoming a somewhat happy but bland, usually white, almost always middle-class, middle-of-the-road kind of person...**Jesus himself would likely have been deeply alienated from the church** as it generally expresses itself in the U.S., the U.K., and Australia. This puts a new spin on that text “Behold, I stand at the door and knock.” – Michael Frost & Alan Hirsch, “The Shaping of Things to Come”, p. 40

“It is absolutely vital for the gospel to be incarnated into the thousands of sub-cultures that now exist in our complex, postmodern, tribalized, Western contexts. It is vital that these multiform people and subcultures encounter Jesus **from within their own cultures** and from within their own communities, for only there can they truly comprehend him. **It is now critical for the sake of the gospel itself that these people experience salvation in a way that does not dislocate them from their organic groups but rather allows them to encounter Jesus in a way that is seamlessly connected with life as they have come to understand it through their own histories and experiences.**” – Michael Frost & Alan Hirsch, “The Shaping of Things to Come”, p. 40

“...(if) the vast majority of nor-yet-Christians have no access to, or no desire to attend, then the gospel is effectively hobbled. God becomes mute to the vast majority of people in the Western world, **people who cannot interpret the church culture that has effectively imprisoned the good news within its cultural system**. The only means to evan-

gelize people becomes organizing little “patrols” to go into the world in order to rescue them and bring them back to the safety of “church.” Many westerners in our post-Christendom era report that they’ve tried church and found it wanting. If they don’t want to go back, what then?...**the incarnational church...enhances and “flavors” the host community’s living social fabric rather than disaffirming it.** – Michael Frost & Alan Hirsch, “The Shaping of Things to Come”, p. 42

“Emerging churches do not occupy a reactive and defensive stance in regard to the wider culture but rather seek to engage it **as insiders.**” – Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger, “Emerging Churches”, p. 75

“**These kids want to stop being cultural outsiders.** They look to bring their two worlds together. They seek authenticity, and in so doing, they need to end the dissonance.” – Andy Thornton, (Late Late Service, Glasgow) quoted by Gibbs and Bolger, “Emerging Churches”, p. 75

“...we must, at long last, give up trying to rejig the paradigm to suit the massively changed missional contexts of the Western church. It simply has not worked. In fact it has created more problems. The church is in decline in almost every context in the First World. The church is worse off precisely because of Christendom’s failure to evangelize its own context and **establish gospel communities that transform the culture.** The missional church, with all its fluidity and lack of buildings, its failure to institutionalize, has been far more successful **from the margins...**We must admit that Christendom, particularly its ecclesiological and its missiological manifestations, amounts to something of a failed experiment. To reiterate, by the term Christendom, we are referring to a period in history when the church assumed influence by its connection to temporal, secular power...**Christendom is not the biblical mode of the church.** It was/is merely one way in which the church has conceived of itself. In enshrining it as the sole form of the church, we have made it into an idol that has captivated our imaginations and enslaved us to a historical-cultural expression of the church...**When there are megashifts in a culture, there tends to be a reconceptualization of the church. The more profound the cultural shift, the more thorough is the shift in the church’s notion of itself...**The Renaissance, particularly with its new hermeneutic, set in motion cultural forces that led inexorably to Luther’s revolution, which in turn unleashed a massive recalibration in both church theology and praxis. **The church is inseparably related to its cultural milieu...**we suggest that if the church in the West does not embrace such a radical recalibration, it will find itself increasingly imperiled. The standard Christendom model will simply not engage the Burning Man generation. To reach them and all other postmodern subcultures, the church should abandon its role as **a static institution** and embrace its initial calling to be a missionary movement...The church by its very nature has **an indissoluble relationship to the surrounding cultural context.** This relationship **defines** the practical nature of its mission.” – Michael Frost & Alan Hirsch, “The Shaping of Things to Come”, pp. 14-16

“The church continues to communicate a verbal, linear, and abstract message to a culture whose primary language consists of sound, visual images, and experience, in addition to words. Meaningful activity assumes the convergence of sound, sight, and touch through activities, rituals, and stories. Current patterns and styles of preaching communicate with

diminishing impact. Pastors must understand the comprehensive nature of language **to be heard by the culture.**” – Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger, “Emerging Churches”, p. 20

“...unless the church recovers its role as a subversive, missionary movement, **no one who has been to Burning Man will be the least bit interested** in it...Burning Man (the event) (and) Fight Club (the movie)...are prime examples of the desperate yearning that has been unleashed in the Western world over the past ten or so years. During that time, the advent of postmodernism has raised within the West many expectations for an experiential, activist form of religious, mystical experience. **The Christian church has not met these expectations**, though it could be argued that for a brief time some forms of Pentecostalism came closer than the rest of the church. The contemporary traditional church is increasingly seen as the least likely option for those seeking an artistic, politically subversive, activist community of **mystical faith**. The church can no longer write the emerging Burning Man generation off as a small subculture. While the activities at Burning Man might not be everybody’s cup of tea, the yearnings it seeks to meet are much more common than **the church gives credence to.** – Michael Frost & Alan Hirsch, “The Shaping of Things to Come”, pp. 5-6

“What the church needs is a revolutionary new approach...The Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN) says, ‘The missional church represents God in the encounter between God and human culture. It exists not because of human goals or desires, but as a result of God’s creating and saving work in the world. It is a visible manifestation of how the Good News of Jesus Christ is present in human life and **transforms human culture** to reflect more faithfully God’s intentions for creation. It is a community that visibly and effectively participates in God’s activity, just as Jesus indicated when he referred to it in metaphorical language as salt, yeast, and light in the world’...such a church makes its mission its priority and perpetually asks itself, “What has God called us to be and do in **our current cultural context?**” The issue of cultural context is essential because **the missional church shapes itself to fit that context in order to transform it for the sake of the kingdom of God...**In many places it is so radical it barely resembles church as we know it. In other cases it might appear conventional but is in fact **incarnating itself into its community** in surprising and exciting ways.” Michael Frost & Alan Hirsch, “The Shaping of Things to Come”, pp. 6-7

“What do we do when the foolishness of the cross actually makes more sense than the wisdom of the sword? **What if a fragile world is more attracted to God’s vision of interdependence and sacrificial sharing** than to the mirage of independence and materialism?...after speaking so long to a world I thought would never really listen, it is a beautifully bewildering thing to feel so **many of us dreaming something better for a world together.**” – Shane Claiborne, “The Irresistible Revolution”, p. 21

“This **credibility gap between the church world and the real world** is, as Helmut Thielecke calls it, a modern form of Docetism...it is so **endemic** in the contemporary church that it has worked its way into the very fabric of all aspects of church life. Remove this Docetism, or **dualism**, from church and a great deal of what the church has built and developed over 1,700 years will fall away. Because the missional church, by its very nature, exists organically within its host community, it has had to abandon Western Christianity’s dualistic worldview in favor of a whole-of-life spirituality.” – Michael Frost & Alan Hirsch, “The Shaping of Things to Come”, pp. 20-21

“Sociologists and philosophers believe that Western societies are undergoing a major cultural shift, away from what they call modernity to postmodernity...during most of the twentieth century, evangelicals experienced and express their faith, and contended for the integrity and credibility of their faith, in the cultural environment of modernity. Post-evangelicals, on the other hand, live in an increasingly postmodern cultural environment. Consequently postmodernity influences the way they think about and experience their faith. **Postmodernity has become the new context in which the integrity and credibility of their faith must be tested.**” – Dave Tomlinson, “The Post Evangelical”, p. 28

What does the emerging church say about the church?

“We need **new forms of church that relate** to the emerging culture.” – Jonny Baker, (Grace, London), quoted by Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger, “Emerging Churches”, p. 41

“...The attractional church is a bounded set. That is, it is **a set of people clearly marked off** from those who do not belong to it. Churches thus mark themselves in a variety of ways. Having a church membership roll is an obvious one. This mechanism determines **who’s in and who’s out**. The missional-incarnational church, though, is a centered set. This means that **rather than drawing a border to determine who belongs and who doesn’t**, a centered set is defined by its core values, and **people are not seen as in or out**, but as closer or further away from the center. In that sense, **everyone is in and no one is out...Rather than seeing people as Christian or non-Christian, as in or out, we would see people by their degree of distance from the center, Christ**. In this way, the missional-incarnational church sees people as Christian and not-yet-Christian. **It acknowledges the contribution of not-yet-Christians to Christian community** and values the contribution of all people. Jesus’ faith community was clearly a centered set, with him at the center...core members of the church will exhibit the features of Christ’s radical lifestyle (love, generosity, healing, hospitality, forgiveness, mercy, peace, and more), and **those who have just begun the journey toward Christ (and whose lives may not exhibit such traits) are still seen as “belonging.” No one is considered unworthy of belonging because they happen to be addicted to tobacco, or because they’re not married to their live-in partner**. Belonging is a key value. The growth toward the center of the set is the same as the process of discipleship.” – Michael Frost & Alan Hirsch, “The Shaping of Things to Come”, pp. 47-49

“**The kingdom of God cannot be equated with the church**; it is instead the rule of Christ that includes the church but is larger than the church. The kingdom of God is the invisible sphere of Christ’s power and reign into which we enter through the Holy Spirit and faith. In this way Paul viewed the kingdom of God as not primarily concerned with material things and political realms but rather as a personal and social reality—righteousness and peace and joy—the fruits of the indwelling Spirit. Kingdom living in the present time, according to Paul, begins with our reception of the Holy Spirit as the “down payment” (arrabon) of our inheritance (Ephesians 1:14). The word signifies the promise of what lies in the future, not merely a promise but the present reality of living in that promise. Life in the Spirit is both a historical reality and a future realization, it is both experience and hope; the kingdom of God is both present and future; the blessings of the age to come have reached from the future into the present and have become immediate realities for us in Christ For those in Christ, says Paul, the “end of the ages” have overlapped,

the first part of the age to come reaches back into the last part of this present age so that the time between the resurrection of Christ and his coming again (parousia) is a time “between the times” (1 Corinthians 10:11). The church does not drive the kingdom into the world through its own institutional and pragmatic strategies. Rather, it is drawn into the world as it follows the mission of the Spirit. The church is constantly being re-created through the mission of the Spirit. At the same time it has historical and ecclesial continuity and universality through its participation in the person and mission of Christ Jesus through the Spirit.” – Ray Anderson, “An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches”, pp. 109-110

“**The church exists to be a catalyst of the kingdom.** In other words, it doesn’t just exist for its own aggrandizement. It exists for the benefit of the kingdom of God, something bigger than itself. Of course, the church must grow, numerically and spiritually, but that growth matters so the church can become more and more catalytic for the kingdom of God, for the good of the world. This means that the world doesn’t exist for the benefit of the church, as if the world were a mountain that we strip-mine to get ore to process in our spiritual factory, for the church’s enhancement. No, the church exists for the world—to be God’s catalyst so that the world can receive and enter God’s kingdom more and more.” – Brian McLaren, “A New Kind of Christian”, p. 84

“Christendom is the name given to the sacral culture that has dominated European society from around the eleventh century until the end of the twentieth...In virtually an instant, Christianity moved from being a marginalized, subversive, and persecuted movement secretly gathering in houses and catacombs to being the favored religion in the empire...Overall, Christianity moved from being a dynamic, revolutionary, social, and spiritual movement to being a religious institution with its attendant structures, priesthood, and sacraments...the apostolic and post-apostolic mode (of church and its mission, AD 32-313)...**didn’t have dedicated sacral buildings**...was **grassroots** and a decentralized movement...communion was celebrated as a sacralized community meal...in the advance and triumph of Christendom mode (AD 313-current)...leadership is by an institutionally **ordained clergy primarily in a pastor-teacher mode**... in the (emerging) missional mode (the past 10 years)... the church redeems, re-sacralizes, and ritualizes **new symbols** and events, including the meal... In Christendom thinking, (the church) assumes that the church belongs prominently on the main street, and it claims that the church has the right to take over a public space and clean out the local people while creating a so-called sanctified religious zone... **what is needed is the abandonment of the strict lines of demarcation between the sacred and profane spaces in our world** and the recognition that people today are searching for relational communities that offer belonging, empowerment, and redemption.” - Michael Frost & Alan Hirsch, “The Shaping of Things to Come”, pp. 8-10

“1. The missional church is Incarnational, not attractional, in its ecclesiology. By incarnational we mean it **does not create sanctified spaces** into which unbelievers must come to encounter the gospel. Rather, the missional church disassembles itself and seeps into the cracks and crevices of a society in order to be Christ to those who don’t yet know him. 2. The missional church is messianic, **not dualistic**, in its spirituality. That is, it adopts the worldview of Jesus the Messiah, rather than that of the Greco-Roman empire. **Instead of seeing the world as divided between the sacred (religious) and profane (nonreli-**

gious), like Christ it sees the world and God's place in it as more holistic and integrated. 3. The missional church adopts an apostolic, rather than a **hierarchical**, mode of leadership. By apostolic we mean a mode of leadership that recognizes the fivefold model detailed by Paul in Ephesians 6. It **abandons the triangular hierarchies** of the traditional church and embraces a **biblical, flat-leadership community** that unleashes the gifts of evangelism, apostleship, and prophecy, as well as the currently popular pastoral and teaching gifts. We believe the missional genius of the church can only be unleashed when there are foundational changes made to the church's very DNA, and this means addressing core issues like ecclesiology, spirituality, and leadership. It means a complete shift away from Christendom thinking, which is attractional, dualistic, and hierarchical. Many Christians seem to have great difficulty giving up on the old Christendom-based assumptions. They fear that to finally abandon Christendom means we cast the church into oblivion or chaos. They would ask, How could a bunch of Christians running a pub in Bradford be a church? Well, we think they can be. Many of the ways the missional church is emerging around the world look messy, chaotic, and dynamic. They don't always meet in the same room on a Sunday for church services, but they are worshipping God, building Christian community, and serving their world. **They meet the biblical criteria for a church**, but they don't often look like church as we are used to thinking of it." –Michael Frost & Alan Hirsch, "The Shaping of Things to Come", pp. 12-13

"The New Testament church did not have a clergy. The Catholic priest and the Protestant pastor were completely unknown. **The church had traveling apostolic workers who planted and nurtured churches. But these workers were not viewed as being part of a special clergy caste.** They were part of the body of Christ, and they served the churches (not the other way around). Every Christian possessed different gifts and different functions, but only Jesus Christ had the exclusive right to exercise authority over His people. No man had that right. **Eldering and shepherding were just two of those gifts. Elders and shepherds were ordinary Christians with certain gifts. They were not special offices.** And they did not monopolize the ministry of the church meetings. They were simply seasoned Christians who naturally cared for the members of the church during times of crisis and provided oversight for the whole assembly." – Frank Viola & George Barna, "Pagan Christianity?", p. 248

"Decision making in the New Testament church fell upon the shoulders of **the whole assembly.** Traveling church planters would sometimes give input and direction. But ultimately, **the whole church made local decisions** under the lordship of Jesus Christ. It was the church's responsibility to find the Lord's mind together and act accordingly...The New Testament church was organic, not organizational. It was not welded together by putting people into offices, creating programs, constructing rituals, and developing a top-down hierarchy or chain-of-command structure." - Frank Viola & George Barna, "Pagan Christianity?", p. 248

"Some people are upset with me because **it sounds like I'm anti-Christian. I think they might be right.**" -- Erwin McManus, "The Barbarian Way"

"Two thousand years ago, **God started a revolt against the religion He started.** So don't ever put it past God to cause a groundswell movement against churches and Christian institutions that bear His name." -- Erwin McManus, "The Barbarian Way"

“...the traditional church (Christendom) is hierarchical, deeply indebted to what we see as an overly religious, bureaucratic, top-down model of leadership, as opposed to one that is more structured around grassroots agendas...For **how much longer can the church ignore Paul’s radical dissolution of the traditional distinctions between priests and laity between officials and ordinary members**, between holy men and common people?” – Michael Frost & Alan Hirsch, “The Shaping of Things to Come”, p.21

"The greatest enemy to the movement of Jesus Christ is Christianity." -- Erwin McManus, "The Barbarian Way"

“What they don’t realize is the first century church they didn’t have any nice comfy well-designed church building to meet in and we’re in the middle of all the pagan gods declaring Jesus as Lord. And **somehow we’ve come to believe the suburban expression of Christianity is actually the biblical expression.**” – Erwin McManus, interview with Crosswalk.com

“...the Christendom-mode church is dualistic. It separates **the sacred from the profane**, the holy from the unholy, **the in from the out**. What we have said so far about the sickness of attractionalism finds its roots in the church’s dualistic spirituality...the church has so fully embraced its attractional stance because of its dualistic spirituality. We talk routinely about the “world out there.” What else can that mean other than that **we, the church people, are “in here”!** This dualism has over 1,700 years created Christians that cannot relate their interior faith to their exterior practice, and this affects their ethics, their lifestyles, and their capacity to share their faith meaningfully with others.” – Michael Frost & Alan Hirsch, “The Shaping of Things to Come”, p. 19

“The unscriptural clergy/laity distinction has done untold harm to the body of Christ. It has divided the believing community into first-and second-class Christians. The clergy/laity dichotomy perpetuates an awful falsehood—namely, that some Christians are more privileged than others to serve the Lord. The one-man ministry is entirely foreign to the New Testament, yet we embrace it while it suffocates our functioning. We are living stones, not dead ones. However, **the pastoral office has transformed us into stones that do not breathe...We believe the pastoral office has stolen your right to function as a full member of Christ’s body.** It has distorted the reality of the body, making the pastor a giant mouth and transforming you into a tiny ear. **It has rendered you a mute spectator** who is proficient at taking sermon notes and passing an offering plate...The modern-day pastoral office has overthrown the main thrust of the letter to the Hebrews—the ending of the old priesthood...All of this does violence to the fact that every believer is a priest. Not only before God, but to one another.” – Frank Viola & George Barna, “Pagan Christianity?”, pp. 136-137

“The contemporary pastor not only does damage to God’s people, he does damage to himself. The many who come within its parameters. Depression, burnout, stress, and emotional breakdown occur at abnormally high rates among pastors...Unfortunately, few pastors have connected the dots to discover that **it is their office that causes this underlying turbulence.** Simply put: Jesus Christ never intended any person to sport all the hats a present-day pastor is expected to wear...The pastoral profession dictates standards of conduct like any other profession, whether it be teacher, doctor, or lawyer. The profession dictates how pastors are to dress, speak, and act. This is one of the major reasons

why many pastors live very artificial lives. In this regard, **the pastoral role fosters dishonesty.** Congregants expect their pastor to always be cheerful, completely spiritual, and available at a moment's call. They also expect that he will have a perfectly disciplined family. Furthermore, he should never appear resentful or bitter. Many pastors take to this role like actors in a Greek drama. Based on the scores of personal testimonies we have heard from erstwhile pastors, **many—if not most—pastors cannot stay in their office without being corrupted on some level.** The power-politics endemic to the office is a huge problem that isolates many of them and poisons their relationship with others...**All of these pathologies find their root in the history of the pastorate.** It is “lonely at the top” because God never intended for anyone to be at the top—except His Son!...**not a strand of Scripture supports the existence of this office...**To boil it down to one sentence: The Protestant pastor is nothing more than a slightly reformed Catholic priest.” – Frank Viola & George Barna, “Pagan Christianity?”, pp. 137-141

What does the emerging church say about worship?

“Worship makes two moves: **It brings the real world into the church,** and it enables God to be encountered back in the real world.” – Jonny Baker, (Grace, London) quoted by Gibbs and Bolger, “Emerging Churches”, p. 75

“The communal life of many congregations doesn't reflect the rich complexity of their everyday experiences and beliefs, struggles and triumphs. If we were organic, **we would be much more sensitive to the cultural forces,** the patterns and structures and energies of the people we were trying to reach. We would think like missionaries and spend more time listening to, eating with, and playing with the subculture or neighborhood we were trying to minister to. We would not assume to develop a model of church/community life until we had recognized and discerned the “natural” ways in which a given group gathers and assembles. In other words, **we would seek to redeem the organic, existing culture rather than impose an alien model on it.** We understand that many church planters these days spend considerable time interacting in a particular neighborhood or subculture before launching public church services, but we still find many church planters who, having done substantial “research” into a particular community, then go ahead and plant churches that look basically like every other church in the West, in a classic attractional mode. Instead, **why not allow the rhythms and lifestyle patterns of the people we're trying to reach determine the shape our communal life and worship meetings take?** As missionaries, we need to ask, “What is **good news** to these people (What are **the existential issues these people are grappling with before God?**)?” and “What would the church look like for these people?” The answers will give us clues as to what element of the gospel we need to communicate first. The inventor of the stethoscope was noted as having said, “Listen to your patients. **They're telling you how to heal them.**” – Michael Frost & Alan Hirsch, “The Shaping of Things to Come”, p. 63

“...**the conventional sermon has negatively impacted the church...the sermon makes the preacher the virtuoso performer of the regular church gathering.** As a result, **congregational participation is hampered at best and precluded at worst.** The sermon turns the church into a preaching station. **The congregation degenerates into a group of muted spectators** who watch a performance. There is no room for interrupting or questioning the preacher while he is delivering his discourse. **The sermon freezes and**

imprisons the functioning of the body of Christ. It fosters a docile priesthood by allowing pulpiteers to dominate the church gathering week after week...the sermon often stalemates spiritual growth. Because it is a one-way affair, **it encourages passivity. The sermon prevents the church from functioning as intended.** It suffocates mutual ministry. It smothers open participation. This **causes the spiritual growth of God's people to take a nosedive...the sermon preserves the unbiblical clergy mentality. It creates an excessive and pathological dependence on the clergy.** The sermon makes the preacher the religious specialist—the only one having anything worthy to say. Everyone else is treated as a second-class Christian—a silent pew warmer. ('While this is not usually voiced, it is the unspoken reality.)...How can the church learn from the pastor when its members cannot ask him questions during his oration? How can the brothers and sisters learn from one another if they are prevented from speaking in the meetings? The sermon makes "church" both distant and impersonal. It deprives the pastor of receiving spiritual sustenance from the church. And **it deprives the church of receiving spiritual nourishment** from one another... the sermon is one of the biggest roadblocks to a functioning priesthood." – Frank Viola & George Barna, "Pagan Christianity?", pp.97-98

"...rather than equipping the saints, **the sermon de-skills them.** It matters not how loudly ministers drone on about "equipping the saints for the work of the ministry," the truth is that **the contemporary sermon preached every week has little power to equip God's people for spiritual service and functioning.** Unfortunately, however, many of God's people are just as addicted to hearing sermons as many preachers are addicted to preaching them. By contrast, New Testament—styled preaching and teaching equips the church so that it can function without the presence of a clergyman...the contemporary sermon fails to meet its billing at promoting the kind of spiritual growth it promises. In the end, it **actually intensifies the impoverishment of the church.** The sermon acts like a momentary stimulant. Its effects are often short-lived...the church needs fewer pulpiteers and more spiritual facilitators...**We move far outside of biblical bounds when we allow teaching to take the form of a conventional sermon and relegate it to a class of professional orators.**" – Frank Viola & George Barna, "Pagan Christianity?", pp. 98-100

"Is preaching and teaching the Word of God scriptural? Yes, absolutely. But **the contemporary pulpit sermon is not the equivalent of the preaching and teaching that is found in the Scriptures.** It cannot be found in the Judaism of the Old Testament, the ministry of Jesus, or the life of the primitive church...**the contemporary sermon does not have a shred of biblical merit to support its existence...**most Bible-believing pastors and laymen fail to see that they are affirming and perpetuating an unscriptural practice out of sheer tradition...**How can a man preach a sermon on being faithful to the Word of God while he is preaching a sermon?** And how can a Christian passively sit in a pew and affirm the priesthood of all believers when he is passively sitting in a pew? To put a finer point on it, how can you claim to uphold the Protestant doctrine of sola scriptura ("by the Scripture only") and still support the pulpit sermon?" – Frank Viola & George Barna, "Pagan Christianity?", pp. 101-102

"The New Testament church had no fixed order of worship. The early Christians gathered in open-participatory meetings where **all believers shared their experience of Christ,** exercised their gifts, and sought to edify one another. No one was a spectator. All were given the privilege and the responsibility to participate. The purpose of these church

meetings was twofold. It was for the mutual edification of the body. It was also to make visible the Lord Jesus Christ through the every-member functioning of His body. **The early church meetings were not religious “services.” They were informal gatherings** that were permeated with an atmosphere of freedom, spontaneity, and joy.” – Frank Viola & George Barna, “Pagan Christianity?”, p. 247

“These (modified seeker) churches might change their style, but they don’t alter who gets paid, who tells the community what to do, or the weekly nature of church (i.e., meeting at a particular place at a particular time each week). **They do not change who is able to preside at the Lord’s Supper**, and they do not change the marks of success, usually translated into money and numbers of people. To **allow the kingdom to deconstruct these issues** is to touch the 90 percent, and that is taboo for most churches.” – Spencer Burke in Gibbs & Bolger, “Emerging Churches”, p. 94

“I guess **our ecclesiology has been evolving** since before we even started Vaux. We work things out through praxis. **Our theology is not static—a stone tablet that informs what we do**. Rather, **what we do informs our theology through a process of exploration**. This has been particularly true of our views on church, in that we didn’t start with some grand idea about how to set up a new style of church, all planned out and documented on paper first. Quite the opposite. In a sense, even that mode of beginning has come to mean a lot to us in our idea of what **church is: It is simply a meeting point for those who are journeying**.” Kester Brewin (Vaux, London) in Gibbs & Bolger, p. 95

“These (modified seeker service) models constitute a minor change to the existing megachurch model. After a time, leaders become disillusioned with the entire megachurch model and the kind of Christianity it represents. They then move to a house church model in which leaders are not paid and there is no official institution to support. At some point, however, they realize that the church simply moved location, from the church building to the house, and that the fundamental structure of church did not change. Such leaders develop a growing conviction that the real issue is not where a church meets, the style of the service, or even the structure but that **the kingdom of God is embodied in the life of the community. They move to establish their practices around Jesus and the kingdom, and the church “service” decreases in importance. Emerging churches utilize the kingdom as a tool to deconstruct all aspects of life, including virtually all church practices. They understand that the kingdom gives rise to the church, not the other way around**. Forms and structures of church are variable in emerging churches, especially in comparison to new paradigm, purpose-driven, and seeker churches, which keep most of the traditional structures intact. These older movements maintain an emphasis on paid senior pastors, the Sunday service as what constitutes church, outreach that focuses on lapsed suburban professionals, and the idea that Christians come to church, primarily understood as the church building. **Utilizing the kingdom of God paradigm as a tool of deconstruction**, emerging churches dismantle many forms of church that, although viable at one time, increasingly represent a bygone era.” – Eddie Gibbs & Ryan Bolger, “Emerging Churches”, p. 96

“Christianity was the first and only religion the world has ever known that was void of ritual, clergy, and sacred buildings. **For the first 300 years of the church’s existence, Christians gathered in homes**. On special occasions, Christian workers would sometimes make use of larger facilities (like Solomon’s Porch [John 10:23, Acts 3:11] and the

Hall of Tyrannus [Acts 19:9]). But **they had no concept of a sacred edifice nor of spending large amounts of money on buildings.** Nor would they ever call a building a “church” or the “house of God.” The only sacred building the early Christians knew was the one not made with human hands.” – Frank Viola & George Barna, “Pagan Christianity?”, p. 247

“When you come on Sunday morning we laugh a lot and I think people think we’re sacrilegious, you know God created us to enjoy and to laugh and so if you’d come yesterday you would’ve seen about a 10 minute dance piece, entirely original in its composition that took you through the whole book of The Barbarian Way the dance. They were absolutely extraordinary. Two short films created in our congregation, one comedic, one very serious to express the journey of what it means to be a barbarian. We had a guy that came to faith in Jesus Christ in our congregation, I talked to him in a restaurant and now right there in the restaurant I do declare Jesus as Lord and God. He wrote an original piece and sang it yesterday and there’s people painting on the sides and they express what it means to walk in this barbarian way. And so when you come in you have this multi-textured, it’s **an immersion into spiritual creativity** and I think that’s a part of the beauty of the barbarian way, that every person is called out to find their God-given uniqueness and to **discover that path that God calls them** and have the courage to live it.” – Erwin McManus, interview with Crosswalk.com

What does the emerging church say about the Reformation?

“**The Protestant Reformation created a church that was closely aligned with the newly literate culture.** Linear progression of thought, highly reasoned exegesis, and expository preaching illustrated the new culture’s focus on the written word. According to different timetables and different degrees in the various traditions, the church removed the symbolic, the mystical, and the experiential to make a space for logical and linear ways of thinking and living. Church leaders must be aware of the ways in which the church has venerated written culture at the expense of oral, aural, and visual worlds... **The Reformation contextualized the gospel for the print era, but there has been no corresponding reformation to bring the gospel to our image-based era.**” – Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger, “Emerging Churches”, p. 20

“Taking his cue from Luther, John Calvin argued that the preacher is the “mouth of God.” (Ironically, both men vehemently railed against the idea that the pope was the vicar of Christ.) It is not surprising that many of the Reformers had studied rhetoric and were deeply influenced by the Greco-Roman sermons of Augustine, Chrysostom, Origen, and Gregory the Great. **Thus the flaws of the church fathers were duplicated by the Reformers and the Protestant subcultures that were created by them.** This was especially true of the Puritans...The Puritans borrowed their preaching method from Calvin. What was that method? It was the **systematic exposition of Scripture week after week**...the Puritans centered all their church services around a systematic teaching of the Bible. As they sought to Protestantize England (purifying it from the flaws of Anglicanism), the Puritans centered all of their church services around highly structured, methodical, logical, verse-by-verse expositions of Scripture. They stressed that Protestantism was a religion of “the Book.” (Ironically, **“the Book” knows nothing of this type of sermon.**)” – Frank Viola & George Barna, “Pagan Christianity?”, pp. 95-96

“Around 500 years ago, a man named Martin Luther raised a whole series of questions about the painting the church was presenting to the world... **But that wasn’t the end of it. Luther was taking his place in a long line of people who never stopped rethinking and repainting the faith...** Because of this movement, the churches he was speaking against went through their own process of rethinking and repainting, making significant changes as a result.” – Rob Bell, “Velvet Elvis”, p. 11

“...**the Reformers carried the Roman Catholic clergy/laity distinction straight into the Protestant movement. They also kept the Catholic idea of ordination...** While the Reformers opposed the pope and his religious hierarchy, they still held to **the narrow view of ministry** that they inherited. They believed that “ministry” was an institution that was closeted among the few who were “called” and “ordained.” Thus the Reformers still affirmed the clergy-laity split. Only in their rhetoric did they state that all believers were priests and ministers. In their practice they denied it. So after the smoke cleared from the Reformation, we ended up with the same thing that the Catholics gave us—a selective priesthood!...Like the Catholic priest, the Reformed minister was viewed by the church as the “man of God”—**the paid mediator between God and His people**. He was not a mediator to forgive sins, but a mediator to communicate the divine will.” – Frank Viola & George Barna, “Pagan Christianity?”, pp. 128-129

“...the term (“pastor”) began to permeate the churches of the Reformation. However, **given their obsession with preaching**, the Reformers’ favorite term for the minister was “preacher”. And this was what the common people generally called him. It was not until the eighteenth century that the term pastor came into common use, eclipsing preacher and minister...The Reformers believed that the pastor possessed divine power and authority. He did not speak in his own name, but in the name of God...The irony here is that John Calvin bemoaned the Roman Catholic Church because it built its practices on “human inventions” rather than on the Bible. But Calvin did the same thing. In this regard, **Protestants are just as guilty as are Catholics**. Both denominations base their practices on human tradition. Calvin taught that the preaching of the Word of God and the proper administration of the sacraments are the marks of a true church...For all the Reformers, the primary function of a minister was preaching. The preeminent place of preaching is best reflected in Luther’s German Mass, which included three services on Sunday...**Such ideas reveal a flawed view of the church**. Luther felt the church was primarily a preaching station. Luther believed that the church is simply a gathering of people who listen to preaching. For this reason, he called the church building a Mundhaus, which means a mouth-house...**we have mistakenly equated preaching and ministry with the pulpit sermon...without biblical justification**. – Frank Viola & George Barna, “Pagan Christianity?”, pp. 131-133, 136

What does the emerging church say about heaven?

“Now if there is a life in heaven, and we can choose it, then there’s also another way. **A way of living out of sync with how God created us to live. The word for this is hell: a way, a place, a realm absent of how God desires things to be. We can bring heaven to earth; we can bring hell to earth. For Jesus, heaven and hell were present realities.** Ways of living we can enter into here and now. He talked very little of the life beyond this one because he understood that the life beyond this one is a continuation of

the kinds of choices we make here and now. For Jesus, the question wasn't, how do I get into heaven? But **how do I bring heaven here?** The question wasn't, how do I get in there? But how do I get there, here?" – Rob Bell, "Velvet Elvis", p. 147

"Western Christianity has been overly preoccupied with the question of who's going to heaven or hell after death, and not focused enough on the question of what kind of life is truly pleasing to God here in the land of the living." – Brian McLaren, Interview with Christianity Today

"I am on a journey to find where heaven and earth come together in order to really experience the gospel. The goal of this is to see the gospel expressed, not necessarily in any terms of budget or number goals." Mark Scandrette (ReIMAGINE! San Francisco), in Gibbs & Bolger, "Emerging Churches", p. 94

"...in the Bible, especially in the Psalms, people are often praying eagerly that judgment will come. That's because they weren't thinking in the binary terms of heaven and hell after this life. Instead, they were looking for God to intervene in history so that the oppressors, the warmongers, the greedy, the abusers, the violent, the careless toward the widow and orphan and poor would be stopped, exposed, and frustrated, so that justice and peace and joy could flourish. I don't think it's insignificant that Revelation ends, not with us going up to heaven (or down to hell) with the earth being "left behind." Instead, John has a vision of the New Jerusalem coming down to earth. **The new heavens and new earth mean, I believe, not the replacement of this world, but its redemption and liberation from injustice and sin.**" – Brian McLaren, Interview with Christianity Today

"I think that **many people pick up along the way that life is about destination.** So they're taught it's about arriving; **it's about having all the answers, it's about creating a nice box that you sit in and defend.** But my fundamental understanding is that life is journey. And journey, is a fundamentally different way to understand life, than destination. And on a journey, all I have, am responsible for, is the next step. And that's all I'm ever asked for—is the next step. **I don't have to have it all figured out; I don't have to defend it all—I don't have to have it all nailed down.** And if you can shift from destination understanding, to embrace—to journey; it frees you to take life as it comes. Let it be what it is, and then do the next right thing." – Rob Bell, comment at "Seed of Compassion" interfaith event

What does the emerging church say about hell?

"This is one of the huge problems is the traditional understanding of hell. Because if the cross is in line with Jesus' teaching then—I won't say, the only, and I certainly won't say even the primary—but **a primary meaning of the cross is that the kingdom of God doesn't come like the kingdoms of the this world, by inflicting violence and coercing people.** But that the kingdom of God comes through suffering and willing, voluntary sacrifice. But in an ironic way, **the doctrine of hell basically says, no, that that's not really true. That in the end, God gets His way through coercion and violence and intimidation and domination, just like every other kingdom does. The cross isn't the center then. The cross is almost a distraction and false advertising for God.**" – Brian McLaren, interview

Mysticism in the emerging church

“...church history is filled with folks who followed God as singles—Jesus, for one; many of the disciples and martyrs, Francis and Claire of Assisi, the desert monastics, to name a few others... At first it was a rational thing; **I was attracted to the idea of God as lover. And then I began to experience God as lover, and I quickly became attracted to the Lover.** I read Hosea and got the sense that life is a romance with the divine. **I started meeting with a Catholic monk, who had taken a vow of poverty and celibacy.** He told me, “We can live without sex, but we cannot live without love, and God is love.” I had come to see God as lover and provider...” – Shane Claiborne, “Irresistible Revolution”, p. 111

“As a **Christian practice** [meditation is] inextricably bound up with...silence, the Jesus Prayer, and Centering Prayer,... Further, **it’s linked with the recent popularity in the West of Eastern religions, resulting in books with such titles as Christian Zen and Christian Yoga.** While this makes some Christians nervous, others revel in the fact that God is revealed in all truth, no matter the religion of origin.” – Tony Jones, “The Sacred Way”, pp. 79-80

“**The heart of God is liberty and freedom for the human spirit. We [Mosaic] are deeply and unashamedly mystical.** We’re really about connecting on a deeply mystical level with the Creator of the universe. Seeing the invisible, hearing the inaudible and living a life that cannot be explained. I love that because I didn’t become a Christian because I thought, “Oh now I can pass the God test when I get to heaven.” I became a Christian because I met God. – Erwin McManus with Relevant Magazine

“**Imagine there was a power that lies hidden at the very heart of God’s people.** Suppose this power was built into the initiating “stem cell” of the church by the Holy Spirit but was somehow buried and lost through centuries of neglect and disuse. Imagine that if rediscovered, this **hidden power** could unleash **remarkable energies** that could propel Christianity well into the twenty-second century—a missional equivalent to unlocking the power of the atom...the idea of **latent inbuilt missional potencies** is not a mere fantasy; in fact there are **primal forces** that lie latent in every Jesus community and in every true believer (Hirsch calls this “energy” the “Apostolic Genius”; crb). Not only does such a thing exist, but it is a clearly identifiable phenomenon that has energized history’s most outstanding Jesus movements, perhaps the most remarkable expression of which is very much with us today. This **extraordinary power** is being recovered in certain expressions of Western Christianity, but not without significant challenge to, and resistance from, the current way in which we do things.” – Alan Hirsch, “The Forgotten Ways”, pp. 15-16

“...much of the thinking about the so-called emerging church leaves the prevailing assumptions of church and mission intact and simply focuses on the issue of theology and spirituality in a postmodern setting. This amounts to a reworking of the theological software” while ignoring the “hardware” as well as “operating system” of the church. In my opinion, this will not be enough to get us through...**What we need now is a new set of tools.** A new “paradigm”—**a new vision of reality:** a fundamental change in our thoughts, perceptions, and values, especially as they relate to our view of the church and mission...The conditions facing us in the twenty-first century not only pose a threat to our existence but also present us with an extraordinary opportunity to discover ourselves in a

way that orients us to this complex challenge in ways that are resonant with **an ancient energy**. This energy not only links us with **the powerful impulses** of the original church, but also gives us wings with which to fly...the church in the West can, by the power of the Holy Spirit, arouse and reengage that **amazing power that lies within us...Apostolic Genius (is) that unique and explosive power inherent in all of God's people...**(Dorothy, the Tin Woodsman, the Cowardly Lion, and the Scarecrow) didn't need the Wizard (of Oz) after all; what they needed was a situation that forced them to discover (or to activate) **that which was already in them.**" – Alan Hirsch, "The Forgotten Ways", p. 17-19

What does the emerging church say about poverty?

"When I was in India working in **Mother Teresa's Home for the Dying**, there was a young man who had been there volunteering for quite some time. He rarely talked, just went from bed to bed caring for the dying men. One day on the train ride home he gently said to me that he wanted to share a confession. **He went on to explain that he was not a Christian**, and often had a tendency to question the mixed motives of evangelical Christians who came to volunteer. He said he was never sure why they were there, if it was because they truly loved the dying, or because they were commanded to, or because they wanted to convert the dying . . . Then he asked me, "When you care for the dying is it because you love them, or because you love God?" A good question. I thought for a while, and then I replied, "Yes, both. In fact, they are indistinguishable to me. I cannot tell where the one begins and the other ends. As I love the dying I am loving Christ, and how I love God is by loving my neighbor." He smiled. As I thought afterward, I wondered about the difference between how this atheist so gently touches and cares for the dying, and the way I cared for them. **Could he be caring for Christ without knowing it? Dorothy Day said, "The only true atheist is the one who denies God's image in the face of the poor."** Were both our hands the hands of God?" – Shane Claiborne, "Irresistible Revolution", online interview with Tony Campolo, "On Evangelicals and Interfaith Cooperation"

"Today we can hear the whisper (of God) where we least expect it: **in a baby refugee and in a homeless rabbi, in crack addicts and displaced children**, in a groaning creation. In the words that **Indian activist and author Arundhati Roy** proclaimed at the World Social Forum in Brazil, 'Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.' **The whisper cries out for God to save the church from us Christians** and breathe new life into the aging Body." – Shane Claiborne, "The Irresistible Revolution", p. 22-23

"We see teams going into Mexico to **work with impoverished communities and rebuild** cities and work with city governments to try to **bring social change so that the message of Jesus is in context** for being authentic. To me that's the barbarian way." – Erwin McManus, interview with Crosswalk.com

"...This is missional church thinking. Instead of planting a traditional, attractional church, Brock engages in the very rhythms and life of a host culture to genuinely listen to their hopes and fears. A similar experiment, but one that is much further advanced than the Subterranean, is the Hope Community in Wolverhampton, England. **Three Roman Catholic sisters...simply began by listening to the voices of the community.** What

they heard was a litany of despair, pain, and great social need...The missional church assumes that proximity to a host community is essential...Housing project church services have begun, planned and led by local people. The sisters offer computer courses and literacy training, and have hosted holiday events...While the sisters resist calling what they're doing "church," the rest of the community clearly identify the nuns' apartment as their chapel... being Christ in the midst of their respective people groups, they make the assumption that God is already present and already touching peoples' lives." – Michael Frost & Alan Hirsch, "The Shaping of Things to Come", p.24

"The Incarnation embodies an act of profound identification with the entire human race. The medium is entirely the message. The human form which God takes in Jesus is no mere outer garment, like a beggar-cloak of a king who dresses up in order to seek out the love of a beggar-girl in the local village, a garment that flutters loosely about him and so betrays his real status as a king. No, rather it is his true form and figure. In an act of unspeakable humility, God actually takes upon himself all the conditions, even the limitations, the struggles, and **the doubts of humanity** (Phil 2:6—8; Heb 5:7—8). And it is God's distinct greatness that in Jesus his love encompasses not just the great and the strong, but even the smallest—**all of the little and inconsequential people who suffer in their quiet corners**. Nothing is so small that he overlooks it. That is the extent to which God becomes human—the extent to which he loves us and wills **to experience unconditionally** what it means to be human." – Michael Frost & Alan Hirsch, "The Shaping of Things to Come", p. 36