
Thoughts from Jim's Brother

Posted by Che - 2009/06/26 08:56

I am a pastor in KY. I sent this message to my people this week for discussion. Perhaps it will generate some discussion amongst the Moriah-ites.

I want to think out loud with you this morning, perhaps even get a response from you on an issue. In recent days, I have stumbled across literature dealing with what people have named, 'the emerging church.' No, this is not a reference to a new start church that is now emerging on to the scene as a mega-church. It refers to a movement within the ecumenical church that seeks to make the church relate to the emerging culture. In the book: *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*, a fellow name Jonny Baker characterizes the emerging church as a 'catchall term' saying, "I quite like it for that. Church, as we have inherited it, is no longer working for vast groups of people. The world has changed so much. So I think the term emerging church is nothing more than a way of expressing that we need new forms of church that relate to the emerging culture." Perhaps the most striking and central tenant of the movement is that it does not see church as necessarily being the center of God's intention. The author of the aforementioned book writes, "God is working in the world, and the church has the option to join God or not."

Grant it, I have reductionistically tried to introduce a movement that is ambivalent at best, or at least a movement that is defined/described in a plethora of ways. But because it is movement within Christendom, Christians should be aware of it. With this said, what do you think? Does this look like a beneficial avenue for the church to traverse?

Here are my thoughts (and I'd love to hear yours):

For my part, I am uncomfortably suspicious of it, at least uncomfortable with its seemingly disparate view of the church. What would the Apostle Paul think about saying the church has the option of joining God's work in the world? Did not Paul say the church was Christ's body? Did he not say Christ was the head of the church?

I suppose what is in view here is the institutional character of the church in contrast to the 'spiritual', real presence of the church not constrained by hierarchy, polity and doctrine. Though I am mindful of the book, *What's Right with the Church*, by William Willimon, who argues that the presence of the church, with her flaws and fragments, is the real church - the presence of Christ in the world. The church's calling is not to profess the absence of sin and imperfection(s) among her membership; rather, it is to confess the savior through him the church and the world is restored, saved and transformed. How, then, can the church be seen as an appendage to the work of God? Do we not know the work of God through the testimony, witness of the church?

Another issue, it seems, is the idea of the church adapting to the changing culture. The very terms here is fraught with danger/problems (it seems). For starters, who is the one setting the agenda for Christians: the world or the church? If the world, than migration and adaptation are key ingredients for Christian action. If the church, than I would imagine Christians would be concerned with doing what Jesus called people do, that is, "leave the world and follow him." A great Scripture story comes from Jesus' call to discipleship in Luke 11:

57 As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." 58 And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." 59 To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." 60 But Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." 61 Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." 62 Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

It does not seem like Jesus is at all concerned with keeping up with culture, outside of posturing himself to call people out of the present culture/world and into the kingdom. Further, the institution, for better or worse (and yes, the word 'institution' is poor substitute for 'ecclesia') is what Jesus left us with to relate to fellow saved brother and sister and to the world. Why, then, scoff at the church as if the church is not relevant any longer? Is the family not relevant because families don't have the time to sit down for family meals? Are gardens not relevant because people don't have time to grow them? Are family heirlooms not relevant because they're antiquated and now replaced with newer and better. Hmm...I'd say not!

I cannot help but think about the identity struggles that our own country is having when I think about this idea of "emerging church(es)." Coming home yesterday, I was listening to a report about the Supreme Court nominee and how she believed the Constitution ought to be interpreted. Apparently there are those who want to interpret it as close as they can to its original context. Others see it is a document that is to be interpreted in light of different era, that is, apply in principle its terms understanding that its meaning will appear differently today. Problematic, for my part, is who we moderners have the tendency to disdainfully look upon the past as if its inferior to the present. So, in terms of Constitutional law, the Constitution and its context are central to the interpretation/application of its law. In terms of the church, its context and intent are central to Christian action in the world. Otherwise (and here is the kicker I think), we move so far away from the 'beginning' that we scarcely resemble the idea and character we supposed to.

Ten years ago, I probably would have thought differently, chanting the mantra with the rest, "Change, change, change! Keep up with change" As I get older, I'm so very uncomfortable with what that change brings us. To use the above examples, our changed nation and even church has a perilous appearance - or rather, 'ambiguous' appearance which is frightening! With the speed culture is moving, there will be no need to come to church (for example), the pastor could just "Text" the songs and sermon to the parishoners. YIKES!

Well...some thoughts for you to delete and sigh about. If you do have a second, I'd love to hear your thoughts. This notion of 'recontextualization' is a BIG issue whether its in the church, country, family, workplace, etc. Given the direction and status of the 'emerging culture' I'm not convinced its a culture we need to be keeping up with and chasing after; rather, I think we need to be calling/moving ourselves out of it.

Re:Thoughts from Jim\'s Brother

Posted by jimmoretz - 2009/06/26 11:48

The problem the "emergent church" is trying to confront is an age old one. How do we root out apathy within the believing community?

However, I always take issue with approaches to church that begin with the negative, i.e. the church is dead so we must revive her. The only way for the church to be dead is for God to be dead. Via the resurrection of Christ, the church is eternally alive.

That said, I have, as of late, begun to have compassion for the concept behind the "emergent church," though the claims are still misguided.

I, too, want the church to be relevant. Better yet, I want people to see the relevancy that is always there. If we say the church is not relevant, I fear we have reduced our vision of the church to whatever corner facade we "grew up in" or attend(ed).

I am beginning to be more and more convinced that the decline in effectiveness of the American church is directly related to the decline of reading in American culture. Americans, in general, do not read. Therefore, the Bible remains largely unread. If we do not read the story, how can we become a part of the story?

Actually, we may live in the most exciting chapter of the story. Satan has been defeated and evil put to flight. Yet we live not as conquerors, but as the vanquished. We do this through ignorance.

The emergent churches seem to have a strong emphasis on reading the Bible. Granted, it often devolves into biblicism, yet they are more successful at motivating their constituents to read (seemingly).

There can be no doubt that Christianity in America is wanting, but I cannot see a specifically emerging church self-consciously set apart from the one handed down via the Creed as the answer. Unfortunately, this "movement" is inherently sectarian, and to have a successful post-Luther reformation, we must be thoroughly ecumenical, that is classically Christian.

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Posted by rslifE01 - 2011/10/21 21:34

Backup - What you do when you sight wow gold a skunk in the woods. Bar code rift platinum - Them's the fight'n rules down da buy wow gold local tavern. Bug - The reason you rift plat is a giv'n for calling in sick. runescape gold Byte - What yer pit bull dun cheap wow gold to cusin Jethro. Cache - Needed when buy swtor credits you go to da store.O'Connell was staggering rs gold for sale home with a pint of booze in buy runescape gold his back pocket when he slipped and fell heavily. Struggling to his feet, he felt something wet running down his leg. "Please, God," he implored, "let it be blood!"