A THEOLOGY OF ACTION: FOUNDATIONAL SHIFT FROM
OBJECTIVE TRUTH TO ACTIVE CHRISTIANITY

BY EMERGING CHURCH PROPONENTS

A Paper
Presented to
Dr. Keith E. Eitel
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for MISSN 7654

by
Mark W. Christy
November 15, 2010
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emerging Church and Postmodernism</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>View of Postmodernism within the Emerging Church</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective Truth in Paradox</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication of Truth through Narrative and Dialogue</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Theology of the Emerging Church</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rejection of <em>Sola Scriptura</em></td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communal Hermeneutic</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personhood of Truth and the Call to Action</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Gospel of Love for the Present World</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications of the Emerging Church's Theology of Action</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A THEOLOGY OF ACTION: FOUNDATIONAL SHIFT FROM OBJECTIVE TRUTH TO ACTIVE CHRISTIANITY
BY EMERGING CHURCH PROPONENTS

Tony Jones, an emergent Christian, describes emergents as those Christians who are held together not by doctrine but by dissatisfaction with “modern American Christianity” due to their desire to be inclusive (open and non-judgmental) and their optimistic view of the future of this world.¹ This inclusivism makes determining their doctrinal stances quite difficult especially since “there is no single theologian or spokesperson for the emergent conversation.”² Having no authorized spokesperson, their conversational approach to Christian doctrines makes it difficult for students of the Emerging Church to ascertain their views on God, the Bible, and even the Church.³ This lack of doctrinal basis within the Emerging Church has led to the development of a new theology constructed on the action and experience of emerging believers apart from foundational beliefs.

Discussing the views of the emergent church requires, first and foremost, making a determination of what is the Emerging Church. Gibbs offers a broad definition of Emerging Churches: “[E]merging churches are missional communities arising from


³Tony Jones, “Introduction: Friendship, Faith, and Going Somewhere Together,” in An Emergent Manifesto of Hope: Key Leaders Offer an Inside Look, ed. Doug Pagitt and Tony Jones (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 14-15. In his introduction to this book which has contributions from many emergent authors, Jones introduces them as friends in a conversation and the Bible is portrayed as “beautiful” when viewed holistically but in its parts, it becomes “disharmonious” and apparently “contradictory.”
within postmodern culture and consisting of followers of Jesus who are seeking to be faithful in their time or place.\textsuperscript{4} This understanding of the Emerging Church, however, can be applied to many churches that seek to be biblically faithful within a postmodern context but do not see themselves as an Emerging Church. Perhaps it is best to identify the Emerging Church by what Gibbs’ definition lacks. Since many people may consider themselves part of the Emerging Church, this paper will limit the term Emerging Church to only those authors whose works demonstrate postmodern epistemology. The following terms will be applied to this group of authors even while others may claim these descriptions as well: Emerging Church, Emerging Church movement, emerging, and emergent.

Any study of the Emerging Church must begin with the difficult task of determining whose voice speaks for the Emerging Church. For this present analysis, authors are considered to be members or spokespersons of the Emerging Church based on the following guidelines: 1) Author has been a proponent leader in the movement since its inception in 1997; 2) Author is a member of the Emergent Village; 3) The author admits membership within the Emerging Church; 4) The author receives critical praise from one of the major leaders (Brian D. McLaren, Doug Pagitt, Tony Jones, and Dan Kimball); and/or 5) The author coauthors books with these leaders. Along with these spokespersons, the views of several prominent critics will also be given.\textsuperscript{5}


This study will be arranged in three major sections followed by a discussion on the implications of Emerging Church’s theology. The first section will discuss the relationship between the postmodern culture and the Emerging Church and demonstrate how their postmodern worldview has influenced their epistemology. The second section will reveal how the emergents’ low view of Scripture has led to development of a theology of action based individual experience where salvation of humanity becomes a call to engage in good works in this present life.

**Emerging Church and Postmodernism**

**View of Postmodernism within the Emerging Church**

McLaren, considered by many writers within and without the Emerging Church to be the leader of the movement, believes that “[p]ostmodernism is the intellectual boundary between the old world and the other side . . . [and] opposing postmodernism is as futile as opposing the English Language.” According to McLaren,

[on-line]: accessed 1 October 2010; available from http://www.dankimball.com/vintage_faith/2008/09/emerging-and-em.html; Internet. Driscoll, a former Emerging Church leader, discusses the history of the movement from an insider’s perspective. He states that the movement has its roots in the Leadership Network and included Doug Pagitt, Brian D. McLaren, Tony Jones, and Dan Kimball among others as members. Jones traces the beginning of the movement to 1997 when Pagitt was hired by the Leadership Network to gather leaders “to discuss ministry to Gen Xers.” Eventually, this group broke from the Leadership Network and took the name Emergent. This group, also known as the Emergent Village, includes Pagitt, McLaren, and Jones according to Scot McKnight. Kimball, it seems, has distanced himself from the Emergent Village. From studying his published materials and online blogs, he seems to be more conservative than members of the Emergent Village. Driscoll distinguishes between the Emergent Village and the Emerging Church: “the [e]merging church is a broad category that encompasses a wide variety of churches and Christians who are seeking to be effective missionaries wherever they live” and bound together in a “missiological conversation about what a faithful church should believe and do to reach Western culture.” Those within the Emerging Church, like Kimball, may or may not hold to the doctrine of *sola scriptura*. Even so, Emerging Church members need to declare their stance on this foundational doctrine.

---

those in the old world were trapped in the Enlightenment’s view that truth could be rationally discerned by the autonomous self while those in new world of postmodernism have become free of the restraints imposed by the notion that truth can be objectively known. McLaren lists five tenets of postmodernism: uncertainty, truth as a social construct, no authoritative source of truth, replacement of truth with experience, and emphasis on community.\(^7\) While McLaren’s understanding of postmodernism may be accurate and his contention that postmodernism must be acknowledged by the church may be timely, it seems that those within the Emerging Church have gone one step further to apply the core tenets of postmodernism to the Church and its teaching.

**Uncertainty.** Many writers within the Emerging Church have embraced a postmodern pessimistic view of the reliability of knowledge which deconstructs “tools that modernists used” including “science, language, and even the mind itself.”\(^8\) In place of these foundational components adhered to by modernists in the quest for reliable information, postmodernists, according to Stanley Grenz, see all descriptions of reality as human “constructions that are useful but not objectively true” and all humans are trapped within these “constructions of reality.”\(^9\) Since all humans cannot escape their created view of reality, they are unable to identify absolute truth with any degree of certainty.

\(^7\)Ibid., 162-64.


**No Source for Truth.** Since absolute truth cannot be known, truth then becomes a social construction that is arrived at through discourse. Leonard Sweet, Brian D. McLaren, and Jerry Haselmayer seem to hold this view when they write that no particular component of a discussion holds the truth, rather the truth is found in the discussion as a whole.¹⁰ This holistic approach to truth, which arises from a lack of certainty about any particular truth claims, embraces image which contains no explicit propositions and community which offers the best means to arrive at the unknowable truth.¹¹

**Replacement of Truth with Experience.** For postmodernists, image/action contains truth but does not define truth objectively. Rather, they embrace a spirituality “more internal than external, more individual than institutional, more experiential than cerebral, more private than public.”¹² This subjective truth relayed by image can be found in art, action, and narratives, all of which combined are part of the

---


¹²Wade Clark Roof, “God Is in the Details: Reflections on Religion’s Public Presence in the United States in the Mid-1990’s,” *Sociology of Religion* 57 (1996): 149-62; Leonard Sweet, *SoulTsunami: Sink or Swim in New Millennium Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 199. Sweet refers to Roof’s description of postmodernism which seems to differ with the commonly held view of many Emerging Church leaders that truth can only be discerned (but absolutely known) through a communal interpretation of the Scripture among other sources used by the community to discover truth. The community, however, is ultimately composed of individuals who make up the community and arrive at their particular communal interpretation of reality by examining their particular experience. In this way, Sweet acknowledges the role of the individual, albeit within a community, as being the primary interpreter of truth.
human experience. While McLaren believes that experience is the best way to seek out truths, he does not argue that one’s experience is truth.\textsuperscript{13}

McLaren’s elevation of experience as the primary, if not, sole method for discerning reality fits well with Sweet’s understanding of the postmodern way of seeking out truth: “Postmodernists want a God they can feel, taste, touch, hear, and smell—a full sensory immersion in the divine.”\textsuperscript{14} Sweet may offer an accurate description of the postmodern generation, but one wonders whether or not all generations have desired to relate to God in such a way. The tendency of many nations including the Israelites to embrace idolatry suggests that all nations have this in common with postmodernists. Even so, God has not offered His presence in such a way as to appeal directly to the human senses; rather, He has offered the truth about Himself, His Son, and humanity in His revealed word. Moreover, He has pointed to faith as being the means of an ongoing right relationship between God and a person.\textsuperscript{15}

**Emphasis on Community.** Besides looking within their personal experience for truth, postmodernists, according to Jimmy Long, look within their communal experience as well.\textsuperscript{16} This search for truth within the community does not affirm that postmodernists believe they can attain certainty in their pursuit of absolute truth because

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{13}{McLaren, *Church on the Other Side*, 164.}
\footnote{14}{Sweet, *SoulTsunami*, 210.}
\footnote{15}{Traditional evangelicalism holds that a right relationship between God and a person requires repentance and faith from the believer. While all people may have a relationship with God in the sense that He is their God, they do not have a saving relationship with Him because they have yet to repent and believe in Jesus Christ.}
\end{footnotes}
postmodernists, as Tim Conder suggests, believe that all communities are collectively seeking the truth that stays elusive from the human mind and those communities that claim to have found it are, by default, viewed with skepticism.\textsuperscript{17} As a result, the postmodern search for truth through communal experience continues to be an ongoing and never ending search because objective, knowable truth remains in paradox.

\textbf{Objective Truth in Paradox}

Sweet, McLaren, and Haselmayer declare that objectivity “is a figment of the Enlightenment” and those who bought into it are “brainwashed” modernists.\textsuperscript{18} These authors argue that “nothing in the universe is purely objective” because God is a “Personal Subject” and, therefore, everything in the Bible must be viewed as “subject-object interaction.”\textsuperscript{19} Orthodox Christians may agree that God is a Subject because God is a personal God. Even so, there are qualities of God’s being and actions throughout history which can be objectively known through propositional content within the Bible. This propositional content, however, should never displace a personal relationship with God, but it should help build the foundation of that relationship with God and offer parameters for an ongoing relationship with God. Viewing God as a Subject may be correct, but understanding God’s subjectivity requires the definitive knowledge of God revealed in Scripture. While humans may be able to perceive God as a Subject and even seek to develop a relationship with Him, they would be unable to relate to God as He truly is without Him revealing objective knowledge about Himself.

\textsuperscript{17} Conder, \textit{Church in Transition}, 20.

\textsuperscript{18} Sweet, McLaren, and Haselmeyer, \textit{A is for Abductive}, 163.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
Emerging Affirmation of the Nicene Creed. Despite the claims among emerging leaders that objective knowledge about God cannot be known with certainty, some Emerging Church proponents agree that all Christians should be devoted to the apostle’s teaching based on the instruction of Paul in Acts 2:42. This devotion to Scripture, however, is to the Scriptures as a whole and not necessarily to its individual parts. Emergents take this position because of their strong aversion to propositions in general and doctrines in particular. Sweet, McLaren, and Haselmeyer clearly demonstrate their distrust of doctrines: “[W]hat good are doctrinal statements, really? They are designed to eliminate paradox and exclude—two things [one] may not want to do, at least right off the bat. . . . [Does one] really need to sharpen the doctrinal point beyond say, the Apostle’s Creed or the Nicene Creed?”

Many Emerging Church leaders claim to accept these two Creeds and the various doctrines which they support. Even so, these Creeds have different versions and the Emerging Church writers do not define which version they support. For the Apostles’

---

20Ibid., 231.

21Ibid.

Creed, the Greek version dates around 340 A.D. and is somewhat shorter than the Latin version which dates after the sixth century A.D.\textsuperscript{23} The original Nicene Creed came from the Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.) but was eventually displaced by the Constantinopolitan Creed (451 A.D.) and is now broadly known as the Nicene Creed.\textsuperscript{24}

These two ancient Creeds establish many orthodox teachings: God as Creator of all things, Christ’s incarnation, resurrection, and glorification, the Trinity, among others. It seems odd that many Emerging Church proponents would affirm these two Creeds yet maintain broadly held uncertainty about the truthfulness of other doctrines (which are propositional truth claims based on Scripture just like those found in the creeds) without providing evidence from Scripture to support their stance. Kimball, for instance, is willing to trust these two Creeds even while he maintains a general mistrust of all other doctrines.\textsuperscript{25} Pagitt, however, disagrees with Kimball and refuses to see any creedal expressions as final and completely trustworthy beyond all uncertainty.\textsuperscript{26}

While many emerging Christians may affirm the truthfulness of the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds, they are very skeptical of any doctrines that are not explicitly included in these Creeds. McLaren labels such doctrines as “distinctives” or “secondary doctrines beyond the core beliefs contained in the ancient creeds that are unique to this or


\textsuperscript{25}Kimball, “The Emerging Church and Missional Theology,” 92.

that denomination.” In this way, McLaren and many of his contemporaries appear to be orthodox even while embracing (though not necessarily accepting) various conflicting doctrines.

To understand why these emerging Christians are not orthodox, one should look no further than the process behind which the Nicene Creed (which largely includes the content of the Apostles’ Creed) was formulated. This Creed, as ratified by the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D., combats Arianism which is considered to be heresy by orthodox Christians. But how could this Council judge Arianism to be a heresy especially if they maintained the Emerging Church’s low view of Scripture as a definitive source for objective truth?

The only conceivable answer is that they held a high view of Scripture as the ultimate source of authority. Proof for this can be found by looking at the contents of the Nicene Creed and observing how they clearly arise from biblical teachings. More proof can be found in the decision of a previous Council, the Third Council of Carthage in 397 A.D., which is the “first” of many “church councils to make a formal pronouncement on the canon” whereby they affirmed it as it exists today (sixty-six books in all). If proponents within the Emerging Church wish to maintain propositions listed within the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds, then it seems fair to ask them to ratify the process with which those decisions were made; otherwise, one must wonder how they can believe the councils were able to make conclusive and binding decisions and claim, at the same time,

---

27 McLaren, Generous Orthodoxy, 32.

28 The council of Chalcedon must have had certainty that their position against Arianism was correct.

29 F. F. Bruce, The Canon of Scripture (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1988), 97.
that humans are trapped in their own interpretations of Scripture and, therefore, unable to
reach the level of certainty with which the participants in these councils were able to
reach.

While one may agree that doctrines as human interpretations of God’s message
in Scripture are certainly fallible, authors within the Emerging Church must identify any
doctrine which they believe to be untrue and provide evidence for their position.
Unfortunately, many emerging writers choose to undermine key doctrines and beliefs
held by many Christians based primarily on their postmodern view concerning the
uncertainty of objective truth claims. The afterlife, the traditional view of homosexuality,
and religious pluralism are three common examples of their postmodern approach.

**Emerging Position on the Afterlife.** In a response to Driscoll’s conservative
evangelical views of the afterlife, Karen Ward responds that she “feel[s] no need to know
with certainty the final destination of those of other faiths who either have no knowledge
of Christ or who do not accept the Christian claims of the atonement.” With this one
statement, Ward dismisses any further discussion of the afterlife without addressing any
of the biblical and historical evidence that supports it based simply on the foundation of
her uncertainty. This uncertainty allows her to offer no word of correction or rebuke to
those who do not believe and/or possess another faith. As a result, she ends up with an
accepting tolerance of the beliefs of those who do not embrace Christian orthodoxy.

---

God even while she remains committed to being a witness for Christ.
When one looks to the example of Jesus for evidence to support Ward’s approach, one finds that Jesus confronts wrongly held views and turns to the Scriptures when necessary (Matt 21:42; 22:29). On the road to Emmaus, Jesus appears to two disciples that were discussing His death and the empty tomb because they were uncertain about the truth. In response to their uncertainty, Jesus does not accept their uncertainty because he shares their uncertainty; rather, He rebukes them and explains to them the truth of the events surrounding His life by using the Scriptures: “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter [H]is glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, [H]e explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning [H]imself” (Luke 24:25-27).

McLaren approaches the doctrine of hell in a slightly different way than Ward. He prefers to diminish the afterlife in favor of focusing on this world because he believes that a “person who wants to leave this world” is not going to be as effective for Christ as the “person who wants to participate in the healing of the world.” At first glance, many evangelicals may find his position quite alluring because most evangelicals are focused on maintaining an active witness through both word and deed in this present life. They also may broadly agree with McLaren that Christians must not allow their eternal future (heaven) to keep them from engaging this present world for Christ. Even so, evangelicals will still include their doctrines of heaven and hell within their message in this life.

31 All biblical references in the English language in this paper are from the New International Version. Biblical references in Greek are from The Greek New Testament, 4th ed.

McLaren, it seems, is demanding that Christians focus on this life exclusively even while they may maintain internally some views on the afterlife. This approach to the afterlife, however, is not the approach modeled by Christ. Christ certainly engages in ministry that benefited this present world as seen in his feeding the hungry and healing the sick, but He also speaks frequently about the afterlife (Matt 25:46; Luke 18:29-30; John 4:13-14). McLaren may readily agree but then he would likely respond that Jesus may teach about the afterlife but His focus is on this life. Perhaps, but Jesus also helps people in this life join Him in heaven in the afterlife; therefore, Christians must have an active witness for Christ in this present life even while they bear His message about the afterlife.

In another work, McLaren further explains his views on hell:

With no apologies to Martin Luther, John Calvin, or modern evangelicalism, Jesus (in Luke 16:19) does not prescribe hell to those who refuse to accept the message of justification of grace through faith, or to those who are predestined for perdition, or to those who don’t express faith in a favored atonement theory by accepting Jesus as their ‘personal Savior.’ Rather, hell—literal and figurative—is for the rich and comfortable who proceed on their way without concern for their poor neighbor day after day.”

Based on the James declaration that “faith without deeds is dead,” McLaren’s position seems biblically correct (James 2:26). The problem, however, rests in his understanding of hell. For him, hell is what this present world becomes when humans neglect to act for the good of others: “The language of hell . . . is not intended to provide literal or detailed fortune-telling or prognostication about the hereafter, nor is it intended to satisfy

33The Gospels are replete with examples of Jesus’ speaking about the eternal life.

intellectual curiosity, but rather it is intended to motivate in the here and now.”

Therefore, it is no one’s “business who does or does not go to hell. . . . Now stop speculating about hell and start living for heaven!”

By focusing exclusively on the problems in this present world and viewing them as hell, McLaren is no longer willing to establish with certainty the eternal future of those who are not Christians. This uncertainty about biblical teachings like the existence of hell by McLaren can also be found in the emerging views on homosexuality.

**Homosexuality.** Along with the doctrine of hell, some Emerging Church proponents also struggle with taking a position against homosexuality. Conder, for instance, believes that Christians must quit focusing so heavily on the issue of homosexuality and place more emphasis on the broader “topic of human sexuality” which includes such things as “mutuality, community, and intimacy.” To be fair, the Church needs to develop and maintain positions on human sexuality in general but, at the same time, they must also address contemporary issues like homosexuality in relation to how the Word of God addresses those issues. If the Church follows Conder’s advice, they may never be able to address specific issues delivered to the Church by the culture at large.

---

35Ibid., 78-79.


37McLaren, *Generous Orthodoxy*, 112.

38The intent of this discussion is not to prove conclusively from Scripture that homosexuality is sin; rather, the intent is simply to demonstrate that the Emerging Church’s position of this issue is based on their position that propositional truth (even those derived from the Bible) must be viewed with skepticism. The author of this paper considers homosexuality to be an abominable sin against God.

Instead of dismissing the issue of homosexuality like Conder, Kimball believes the issue of homosexuality is still open to question within the Church; after all, the Church “can no longer with integrity merely quote a few isolated verses and say ‘case closed.’”40 While Kimball is unwilling to make a determination on homosexuality based on the biblical texts, he does accept the “truth” that homosexuality is not a behavior that results from a person’s choice.41 It seems odd that Kimball embraces this position with such certainty but retains so much uncertainty concerning the meaning of Scripture. It would help if Kimball would identify the source for his conclusion and explain why that source has more validity than the Bible.

Like Kimball, Jones admits that he struggled to make a decision regarding homosexuality until recently when he finally decided to go with his feelings. He “now believe[s] that GLBTQ [Gay, Lesbian, Bisexuals, Transgender, and Queers] can live lives in accord with biblical Christianity (at least as much as any of us can!) and that their monogamy can and should be sanctioned and blessed by church and state.”42 Jones chooses to condone homosexuality based not on objective truths within Scripture, but on his own feelings.

McLaren, for his part, “hesitate[s] in answering ‘the homosexual question’ because he wants to be “pastoral” and “pastors have learned from Jesus that there is more to

40Dan Kimball, They Like Jesus But Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 137.

41Ibid., 138.

answering a question than being right or even honest.” If McLaren were simply suggesting that a pastor must approach the issue of homosexuality with wisdom, gentleness, and respect for the person who is asking questions, many evangelicals would affirm his statement. Further examination, however, reveals that McLaren is unwilling to take a stance on the issue of homosexuality, and, therefore, he has no answers and only questions himself.

He simply chooses to remain undecided on how to view homosexuality and wishes to establish “a five-year moratorium on making pronouncements” because “there may actually be a legitimate context for some homosexual relationships”; after all, “the biblical arguments are nuanced and multilayered, and the pastoral ramifications are staggeringly complex.” McLaren’s belief that objective truth within the Scripture is obscured by the language of its authors and the faultiness of human interpretation keeps him from making a decision on the issue of homosexuality and leaves him as a pastor unable to help someone who is asking questions about this issue. His position, however, does offer him the ability to identify with many postmodernists who question the existence of absolute truth and it allows him to remain somewhat open to the teachings of other religions.


44Ibid.; McLaren, Church on the Other Side, 62. McLaren calls homosexuality an “unsolved dilemma.”

45This distrust for doctrinal constructions arises from the postmodern contention that the meaning of any given author (even the biblical authors) cannot be known objectively; therefore, all that is left is one’s interpretations of what the author may have meant.
Emerging View of All Religions. The emerging openness to other religions can be seen in Ward’s declaration that all people (Christians and non-Christians) are “heretics and idolaters” because their conception of God inevitable differs from God’s true nature.\textsuperscript{46} Like many Emerging Church proponents, Ward is not saying that all religions are equal or right in their own truth claims; rather, Ward is declaring the truth to be unknowable and, therefore, every religious expression of faith is a human attempt to ascertain and/or construct the truth. Since all religions by default can never arrive at the truth with certainty, then all religions are equal. This form of pluralism pervades the Emerging Church movement because it is the end result to their claim that truth ultimately cannot be known with certainty.

McLaren, for example, writes, “The Christian faith . . . should become . . . a welcome friend to other religions of the world.”\textsuperscript{47} For him, Jesus only condemns social evils and not the evil of proposing truth claims that directly contradict the teaching within God’s Word. For many emergents, there is no such thing as evil associated with proposing truth claims that contradict Scripture, because all people are caught in the same quagmire where no one knows the truth with certainty and all are free to converse on the truth and propose alternative truth claims. In this way, the Emerging Church can arrive at friendship with the world based not on truth but on doubt.

Pagitt agrees and argues for the creation of “new understandings of the church” that are not perceived “as a negative, judgmental, homophobic organized religion that . . .


\textsuperscript{47}McLaren, \textit{Generous Orthodoxy}, 254.
arrogantly thinks all other religions are wrong, and takes the whole Bible literally, but instead will be seen as a positive agent of change.”⁴⁸ While Pagitt is correct in saying that a person should certainly not construct truth claims that contradict those claimed by other faiths, orthodox Christians believe that God contradicts the claims (some or all) of other religions in Scripture. Therefore, Pagitt must either have a low view of the Bible as God’s inspired Word, or he must believe that the meaning of the biblical text is beyond human comprehension, a view which makes God’s work in revealing His word to and through human authors to have been an utter waste of time.

**Biblical Truths and Mystery.** Despite the wariness among emerging writers to formulate precise doctrinal statements, some are at least willing to acknowledge the propositional content that is found in Scripture. Conder admits the presence of objective statements, but he also wishes to avoid a reductionist approach to Scripture: People “devalue the Bible when [they] reduce it to a set of simple principles that can be easily communicated, understood, and acted upon. Some portions of the Bible are certainly very propositional. But whole genres of the Bible are ignored or damaged by an excess of this impulse.”⁴⁹

Primarily concerned with “the complexity of the Scriptures” and “the mysteries of the Bible,” Conder, like many Emerging Church leaders, believes that “[t]he reduction of the biblical narrative and message into doctrinal or ethical propositions also

⁴⁸ Pagitt, *They Like Jesus But Not the Church*, 251.

⁴⁹ Tim Conder, *Church in Transition*, 62.
provokes an air of certainty.”50 Therefore, “Emergents” prefer to “embrace paradox, especially those that are core [theological] components of the Christian story.”51 By viewing the Bible as a complex set of mysteries, emerging leaders become trapped in a paradox where truth exists but can never be accurately discerned. These leaders want everyone to study God’s Word, but it seems they do not want those who study it to arrive at any objective conclusions even concerning the clear propositional content of the Bible.

Kevin DeYoung offers another criticism of those within the Emerging Church who replace objectivity with paradox: “Mystery as an expression of [one’s] finitude is one thing. Mystery as a way of jettisoning responsibility for [one’s] beliefs is another thing.”52 The emerging leaders rightly point out that the finitude of humanity will always require them to retain some humility concerning their knowledge of God. Christians, for example, will probably never fully understand the doctrine of the Trinity. This, however, does not mean that Christians cannot affirm the objective information about the Trinity which is revealed in Scripture.

Perhaps the reason why Emerging Church leaders refuse to affirm the propositional content of the Scripture is their demand for absolute certainty before they affirm a particular truth. DeYoung calls this demand for absolute certainty a “false dichotomy” where one “must know something omnisciently in order to know something truly.”53 Whereas the modernists believed that certainty of knowledge could be attained through

50Ibid., 63.

51Jones, New Christians, 163.

52Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, Why We’re Not Emergent: By Two Guys Who Should Be (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 39.

53Ibid., 41.
scientific inquiry and rational thought, postmodernists, whose thought clearly impacts
Emerging Church proponents, maintain a skeptical view of all truth because they feel that
certainty could never be attained. In contrast to this skeptical view of the epistemology of
truth, Carson argues that people can know the objective truths in Scripture conclusively
(but not “exhaustively and omnisciently”) by continuous study of the Bible over a period
of time. 54

R. Scott Smith also offers criticism of the Emerging Church concerning their
epistemology. He observes that some things are simply known to be true because they are
obvious. 55 For example, a person knows the home in which he was raised. If simple truths
can be known by finite human beings, then omniscience is not required to know at least
some objective truths. Proponents within the Emerging Church may readily acquiesce to
this contention, but they still reject any foundational approach to truth that demands
absolute certainty. They might respond to Smith’s idea that one can know a simple truth
like where they were raised by saying that even if in this case the person may be confused
for some reason or another no matter how unlikely.

This skeptical view of truth, even simple truth which seems so obvious, is a
hallmark of the Emerging Church movement because they reject traditional
foundationalism which, according to them, demands absolute certainty. According to

54D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emergent Church: Understanding a Movement
and Its Implications* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 116-120. Carson offers two models that help
demonstrate how a person may determine the truths of Scriptures. First, the hermeneutical spiral shows
how the interpreter keeps returning to the text, albeit with their own biases, and gradually develop an
accurate understanding of the objective truths revealed in Scripture. Second, “[t]he asymptotic approach” to
obtaining knowledge of the truth “suggests that with time the knower gets closer and closer to the reality,
though without ever touching [it]” because no one can have “perfect knowledge.

55R. Scott Smith, *Truth and the New Kind of Christian: The Emerging Effects of
Postmodernism in the Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), 112.
Smith, philosophers today no longer make such ridiculous demands for “certainty in [one’s] foundational beliefs.” Instead of traditional foundationalism, Smith proposes a “modest foundationalism” which understands the Bible to be true “beyond a reasonable doubt” (objectively and propositionally) based on intrinsic and extrinsic evidence even while particular propositions derived from its contents may be based on less evidence and therefore be believed with less certainty. Not wishing to lower their demand for absolute certainty, emerging leaders propose the communication of the unknowable truths through the use of narrative and dialogue.

Communication of Truth through Narrative and Dialogue

“Drop any affair you may have with certainty, proof, argument—and replace it with dialogue, conversation, intrigue, and search,” says McLaren. For the Emerging Church, any mode of communication that avoids propositional truth claims has become the preferred way to disseminate truth. Emergents believe in the existence of truth, but they prefer to communicate through narratives and dialogues in such a way that the truth remains within these communication devices without the communicator having to define any particular part of the communication as truth. Only when the narrative or dialogue is taken as a whole can the label of truth be placed on it by emerging writers. After all, [C]ulture forms the embedding context for the theological task. The Spirit's speaking through scripture is always a contextual speaking; it always comes to its hearers within a specific historical-cultural context. The specificity of the Spirit's speaking means that the conversation with culture and cultural context is crucial to

56Ibid., 113.
57Ibid., 115-119.
58Brian D. McLaren and Tony Campolo, Adventures in Missing the Point: How the Culture Controlled Church Neutered the Gospel (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 84.
the hermeneutical task. We seek to listen to the voice of the Spirit through scripture, who speaks to us in the peculiarity of the historical-cultural context in which we live. This hermeneutical process occurs in part as the discoveries and insights of the various disciplines of human learning inform our theological construction.\(^{59}\)

This assertion seems plausible so long as one assumes that God has not revealed Himself in Scripture or He has not done so in such a way that people can understand that which He has revealed. Emergents appear to choose the latter alternative because they perceive that the story of God as a whole within the Scripture to be true. The problem comes when people attempt to make any specific determinations based on that revelation. With this approach to God’s revelation in the Bible, one wonders how the emerging leaders construct a sermon.

**Emerging Sermons.** In many evangelical churches, the sermon is viewed as a primary means of communicating the truths revealed in Scriptures within the church. Instead of disseminating revealed truth, “the emerging approach to sermons,” according to Dan Kimball, “is telling the ‘story of God’ and inviting others into that story instead of outlining propositional principles out of the Bible and turning them into sermon application points.”\(^{60}\) While many evangelical scholars may agree that the Bible does indeed contain the story of God and his relationship with people, one wonders how a


\(^{60}\)Dan Kimball, *Emerging Worship: Creating Worship Gatherings for New Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 88; idem, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 179. Kimball thinks pastors should preach from “whole sections of Scripture” instead of using individual verses. This advice seems reasonable given that context does help define the meaning within a given verse. However, pastors must also help people derive meaning from the stories within Scripture instead of simply reading the Scriptures to the congregation. Emphasis is his.
sermon might be constructed to invite people into that story without delivering propositional truths within the sermon.

In his construction of sermons, Pagitt prefers to do more than recite biblical stories by engaging his congregation in a dialogue. He invites the congregation to decide upon the sermon topic by holding a dialogue during the week before the sermon is given. This process does not follow the traditional approach to sermon development which calls for the pastor to determine the sermon topic because Pagitt considers the sermon to be a dialogue that is ongoing. Pagitt’s approach is due to his belief that the postmodern community which he serves no longer shares a common identity and, therefore, must be approached as individuals within the community do to their vast array of positions in relation to the sermon topic. Whether or not Pagitt chooses to use a dialogical approach to his sermons, he must not neglect to be faithful to the contents of Scriptures and must communicate in an orderly manner (1 Cor 14:26, 40).

**Truth as Narrative.** Within the Emerging Church, some proponents take an extreme view of the ability of biblical stories to communicate truth. Ray S. Anderson argues that “[t]he truth of the narrative is in the narrative itself and in its affect on the

---


62 Doug Pagitt, “Seven: Explorations of the Future of the Church,” in Practitioners: Voices within the Emerging Church, ed. Greg Russinger and Alex Field (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2005), 188; Kimball, Emerging Worship, 104.

63 Doug Pagitt, Reimagining Spiritual Formation: A Week in the Life of an Experimental Church (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 94.

64 Michael Duduit, “Preaching as Dialogue: An Interview with Doug Pagitt.”
listener or reader.” The Bible, according to Anderson, was meant to be read as a story and not to be a source for truth; after all, one should “listen rather than probe and dissect.” Sweet, McLaren, and Haselmeyer appear to agree with Anderson: “This narrative approach . . . helps turn the Bible into what it is, not a look-it-up encyclopedia of timeless moral truths, but the unfolding narrative of God.” While many emergents would say the Bible is truth, they also add that truth cannot be gleaned from it by asking questions and seeking answers. For many within the Emerging Church, it seems the truths of Scripture are trapped within the narrative and cannot be accessed by contemporary individuals and communities.

Telling God’s story and inviting people to join that story are two different points. For those who wish to accept the invitation to join God’s story, the Bible lists some propositional truths that must be believed by the one who would join. According to Scripture, joining the story of God by becoming a Christian requires repentance and faith according to Isaiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, John the Baptist, Jesus, Peter, and Paul. Paul, who


66Ibid., 124. Anderson also informs readers that they can also listen by the power of the Holy Spirit to “the work of God.” While many evangelicals will agree that God’s Spirit is currently doing God’s work, why does Anderson call on his readers to listen when they will be unable to discern any truth from what they hear; furthermore, they will not be able to identify the source of God’s work as the Holy Spirit with any certainty if they are not to positively claim any particular characteristics of the Holy Spirit. Identifying the Spirit of God would require knowledge of the Spirit of God. That knowledge, by default, must be knowledge derived from the ‘biblical stories.’ If not, those who claim to have knowledge must produce their source for such supernatural knowledge and prove it to be a reliable source for such knowledge.

67Sweet, McLaren, and Haselmeyer, A is for Abductive, 171.

uses many propositions in his writings, declares that no individual is righteous and those who would become righteous must do so by believing in Jesus Christ (Rom 3: 9, 22).

While Kimball may argue that Paul is simply inviting people to enter into the story of Jesus Christ, Paul instructs believers to accept Christ’s life (as articulated in the Scripture) by faith as a proposition. Christ’s life was not just some abstract story that happened in the past and continues in the present, His life continues to be a propositional truth that must be believed by all who claim to be Christians. If Kimball is willing to invite people to join God’s story which certainly includes the story/life of Christ, it would seem that Kimball would first have to view the story of God and His Son as objective reality, both as a whole and in the particulars.

Instead of delivering an invitation that calls on people to accept the particular parts of the biblical message, Sweet says the invitation should “not [be] made through propositions and arguments, but with feelings, moods, music, and energy” because “truths do not need to be proven before they can be believed.” Sweet’s primary claim is that someone can believe without being certain of the truth. This contention, however, may be somewhat faulty.

While someone may choose to believe anything with little or no evidence, this does not mean that they lack certainty concerning the beliefs they hold. Those who require less evidence to believe may indeed require little or perhaps no proof before they believe, but what about those who do want more evidence. To this argument, Sweet and postmodernists will likely respond that modern thinkers require rational evidence while postmodernists require experience. While this may be so, postmodernists will probably

---

69 Leonard Sweet, SoulTsunami, 215.
not be able to encounter truths in Scripture through their senses because the truths revealed in Scripture are founded on the God who inspired the biblical authorship.

Postmodernists may have a sense of that revealed truth, but that sense will never be equivalent in reliability to God’s intended meaning within His Word. It would seem that true faith (the kind of faith required by God for salvation) must be the kind of faith originally intended by God and the kind of faith spoken about in His Word. Postmodernists may rely on their experiences as the sole means of believing what is or is not true, but God’s Word and His meaning behind His Word remains the only truth upon which saving faith can be built. To put it another way, the postmodern experience of truth which leads to faith must line up perfectly with the revealed truth of God if it is to have saving power. Given this, the messenger of God must make sure that God’s message is accurately declared and portrayed so that those who believe will have the opportunity to believe in God and His Son as They have revealed Themselves to be in the Bible. Such an exposition of God’s Word may appeal to ration and the senses, but ultimately, it will disseminate objective truths about God.

Steve Rabey observes a danger of delivering objective truths solely in a logical manner: “Christians have long spoken about the importance of having a relationship with God, but too often God has been reduced to a series of theological propositions. Instead of having a genuine relationship with God, many people have subsisted on a rational understanding only.”⁷⁰ James 2:19 teaches that rational knowledge of the truth (which is

---

possessed by demons) has no saving power; therefore, something more is needed to have a proper relationship with God. This, however, does not mean that the objective truths found in biblical stories, personalities, and propositions are no longer necessary to the Christian’s relationship with God.

New Theology of the Emerging Church

Rejection of Sola Scriptura

Will Samson argues that *sola scriptura* “downplays the role of God’s Spirit” and exalts “the subjectivity of human interpreters.” Samson, like many emergents, is not arguing that the Bible is not the authoritative Word of God; rather, he is saying that the biblical message cannot be ascertained due to the finiteness of humanity. Therefore, he exalts the authority of God’s Spirit above that of the Scriptures. The argument becomes very problematic when the authority of God’s Spirit is no longer constrained by God’s Word because human interpreters can have no way of determining with any degree of assurance that the Holy Spirit has indeed communicated with them. By distributing and/or sharing authority with sources beyond the Bible, the issue of human interpreter books or through their co-authoring books with McLaren, Jones, Pagitt, and/or Kimball. Rabey is identified as a spokesman for the Emerging Church because his book is listed on a recommended reading list on the subject on a paper by Dan Kimball.

---

71 Some stories in the Bible may be true stories concerning the lives of various biblical characters or even God Himself (such as the account of creation in Genesis). Some stories may be parables which are accurately recounted in Scripture and intended to impart various objective truths. Personalities in the Bible were real people unless they were depicted in a parable. These personalities demonstrate objective truths through the depiction of their fallenness, their need for God, and their communication with God and about God.

still remains causing the Emerging Church member to retain the same level of uncertainty regardless of the authoritative source that is employed. This uncertainty over propositional truth content with the Bible is eliminated by those who accept the doctrine of *sola scriptura*, at least as it has been traditionally construed.

**Authority of the Community.** According to Rob Bell, “[C]ontinually insisting that one of the absolutes the Christian faith must be a belief that ‘Scripture alone’ is our guide . . . sounds nice, but it is not true.”73 To support this argument, Bell says Canonical books were decided upon by the churches themselves; therefore, the church community and the Holy Spirit which guides the church also possess authority.74 Bell correctly points out that the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit does indeed play an authoritative role in determining the makeup of the Cannon. But that role involved the examination of the contents of each biblical text along with determining apostolic authorship.75

By looking within the text to determine the orthodoxy of its teachings and affirming apostolicity, the Early Church determined the authority of Scripture. The historical evidence of apostolicity could not supplant the requirement for orthodoxy placed upon each component of Cannon. Therefore, Bell is wrong to suggest that the Early Church as a community was, in some way, as authoritative as the Scriptures


74 Ibid., 67-68.

themselves because the Early Church had to appeal to the Scriptures first and foremost in their decision-making process.

**Authority of God’s Work.** Anderson offers another way to understand the authority of Scripture, “The work of God must be read and interpreted along with the Word of God. Both are gospel narratives and each interprets the other. The Holy Spirit is the bond between them.” Anderson argues, is the combined actions of churches. These actions of churches, it seems, share the same level of authority as the Bible and become unified by the presence of God’s Spirit. Advocating this emergent position, Jones believes “that theology and practice are inextricably related, and each invariably informs the other.” In this way, Anderson and Jones have caused the doctrine of *sola scriptura* to be eroded by exalting the actions of people to the same level of authority.

Since the actions of Christian communities are incredibly diverse, one wonders how these collective actions if understood as an authoritative source for interpretation can lead to anything other than chaos. The problem with viewing the work of God through people as authoritative is that there is no objective way to determine whether a person’s work comes from God or arising from their own fallibility. In the end, the work of individuals must be evaluated objectively by an outside source. The Scripture, if viewed as divine revelation, serves as the outside source to determine whether or not human action is indeed in line with God.

---


Despite Anderson’s placement of human action as an equal to Scripture in the interpretation of truth, he still maintains that “the Scripture narrative [is] infallible and only source of revelation as the Word of God.”\(^{78}\) This affirmation of the Bible as divine source of truth, however, does not mean that Anderson believes that the Bible should be the final authority on the interpretation of truth. Because of his skeptical view of the interpretive abilities of humans, Anderson, like many other Emerging Church proponents, is forced to look beyond the Scriptures for other interpretative sources of truth.

**Authority of Scripture as a Metaphor.** Dave Tomlinson offers another attack on the doctrine of *sola scriptura*: “To say Scripture is the word of God is to employ a metaphor; God cannot be . . . literally speaking words, since they are an entirely human phenomenon that could never prove adequate as a medium for the speech of an infinite God.”\(^{79}\) Here, Tomlinson erodes the authority of Scripture to determine objective truth by arguing for the fallibility of the human authorship. While evangelicals support the contention that the Bible was written by human authors (a fact supported by the contents of the Scriptures themselves in 2 Pet 1:19-21), they argue that these authors were inspired by the Holy Spirit who kept them from attaching fallibility to the Scriptures they pinned.\(^{80}\) This doctrine of the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures arises from claims within the Bible itself. Biblical authors claim that the Bible is perfect (Ps 119:96), true (Prov

---


\(^{79}\)Dave Tomlinson, *The Post-Evangelical*, ed. John Suk (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 113-14. One wonders how Tomlinson can state with such assurance that God does not speak human languages. How can Tomlinson claim to know such a thing? What is his source?

\(^{80}\)The writers of some books of the Bible even identify themselves within the books that they wrote.
30:5), “God-breathed” (2 Tim 3:16), and inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:21).

Tomlinson’s argument that the Bible cannot be construed as the Word of God because of human authorship may be his interpretation, but his view does not align with the intrinsic claims of Scripture.

**Removal of Scripture as a Foundation for Christianity.** McLaren also undermines the Bible as the foundation for Christianity, a central tenet of the doctrine of *sola scriptura*, when he states, “[T]he Bible never calls itself the foundation.” Before accepting McLaren’s contention that the Bible cannot be foundational because it does not call itself foundational explicitly, one must first understand the difference between identifiers and concepts. Identifiers like ‘foundation,’ ‘Trinity,’ ‘sola scriptura,’ and even ‘Bible’ itself refer to a concept. The Bible is an identifier of a concept because it is a name given to what people perceive to be the collective works of biblical authors. While the Bible may not contain the identifier ‘foundation’ within its contents, ‘foundation’ may be used by people to identify a particular concept within the Bible. Those who apply ‘foundation’ to the Bible are typically suggesting that the Bible serves as an authoritative source of the truth. If McLaren does not agree with this concept which is identified by foundation, he must refute the internal evidence within Scriptures that are used to support this concept.

---


82 McLaren, *Generous Orthodoxy*, 163. McLaren points out “‘the Word of God’ is never used in the Bible to refer to the Bible.” Here McLaren makes the same mistake by confusing identifier and concept.
**Lowest Common Denominator Approach to Authority.** Despite the unwillingness of many Emerging Church proponents to support *sola scriptura*, they broadly support the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds as authoritative sources of truth even while they view many orthodox creeds with various degrees of uncertainty. The goal of the Emerging Church, it appears, is to offer a “minimalist concept of orthodoxy” to which the majority of its proponents can adhere. While this approach may bring a unified core theology for emerging Christians, it appears fallacious because it leads a lot of ambiguity concerning the more controversial elements within emerging theology even while “secur[ing] the widest possible agreement.” Furthermore, their skeptical epistemology may allow them to what appears to be truth claims even while they claim to be culturally biased and trapped in their own language community. In effect, this affords them the ability to present ‘truths’ to one another and those who read their works and still maintain unity based on their skepticism.

**Communal Hermeneutic**

Many emerging leaders prefer to rely on community to make the best interpretation of the truth that is somehow encapsulated in Scripture. Phyllis Tickle

---

83 Ibid., 28.

84 Ibid.

85 D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 119. Carson discusses a fallacy where a group of people use language to conceal meaning. Each member of this group agrees to the language used by the group even while interpreting the language differently. The result is the appearance of unity, but this conceals the truth that no unity exists. Many emergents call their movement a conversation and recommend (and/or praise) one another’s works even while claiming not to support the particular of any given member of their community. The effect of their approach to one another is the appearance of unity even while they claim no unity on the specifics in most cases.

86 Sweet, McLaren, and Hasemeyer, *A is for Abductive*, 88.
writes, “When one asks an emergent Christian where ultimate authority lies, he or she will sometimes choose to say either ‘in Scripture’ or ‘in the Community.’ More often though, he or she will run the two together and respond, ‘in Scripture and the community.’”

Traditionally, mainstream Protestants have viewed Scripture as the final authority in all matters concerning the Christian faith. Many emerging Christians have rejected this assumption in favor of the community as the ultimate authority. This does not mean that the Scripture is not true nor does it mean that the community is the final authority; rather, it means that the community provides a person with the most reliable interpretation of the truths in Scripture among other extra-biblical sources.

**Community as Source of Truth.** In this community, emerging Christians can exalt the community as the ultimate source of ‘truth’ while maintaining the typical postmodern skepticism that views truth as elusive and impossible to know conclusively. Sweet, McLaren, and Haselmeyer, for example, rely on the community as the primary means for interpreting truth and, at the same time, remain “aware of how easily communities of interpretation can create a bubble where they are certain they are in touch with reality, but to those on the outside, it doesn’t look that way at all.”

This skeptical approach to the epistemology of truth which portends to exalt community as the ultimate interpretative guide ends up exalting the individual who continues to remain skeptical even of the community.

---


88 Sweet, McLaren, and Hasemeyer, *A is for Abductive*, 89.
The skepticism of truth and the community’s role, as understood by emergents, in the construction of truth, causes Pagitt to believe that all theology is contextual informed creations. While the emergents may embrace community as the best possible means to know the truth, they separate themselves from the community in their books and other publications to declare that the truths are contextual. By mistrusting the community’s version of the truth, the individual winds up making all decisions as to what is or is not truth. Taking such a position, Jones states, “[H]uman life is theology. Virtually everything [people] do is inherently theological.”

Since objective truth has been deconstructed, all that remains is the interpretation(s) of truth by individuals and communities. The communal interpretation is preferred because it is thought to be more trustworthy than an individual interpretation. Whereas modernists relied heavily on the autonomous self to objectively define truth, the postmodernists rely on the community to provide a truth that is relative to that particular community and may vary greatly between autonomous communities. Ed Stetzer observes popular deconstructionism on the Oprah Winfrey Show, “When someone from the audience says ‘the Bible says’ Oprah will . . . say something like, ‘That may be true for you, but who are we to judge, as long as people are happy and are not hurting anyone else.’”

---


91 Ed Stetzer, *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 134.
While postmodernists look to the community for truth, the communities themselves become elusive as this example from Oprah demonstrates. Oprah posits objective truth as unknowable and relative to the individual. As an individual, postmodernists seek out truth from the community but still retain the ability to determine which community deserves their attention. In this way, the individual is exalted even while the community becomes relative. While emerging Christians strongly insist that the community is the ultimate interpretative source for truth, the mosaic of communities that surround individuals in the postmodern, globalized world forces postmodernists to make decisions concerning which community they will give their attention. Emerging writers may respond that postmodern people are already members of a community, but they must realize that individuals in the western individualized society which has become increasingly nuclear are often members of several communities including the workplace, the neighborhood, associations, etc. Given this, Emerging Church proponents need to carefully delineate the exact characteristics of an interpretative community in relation to other communities within which a postmodern individual belongs.

Linguistic Trap. Within the Emerging Church, many writers also believe that individuals are trapped within the language of their community and unable to know objective truths. Grenz states, “The simple fact is, [people] do not inhabit the ‘world-in-itself’; instead, [people] live in a linguistic world of our own making.”92 This world delineated by language which separates each individual and each community from any

objective reality at least in terms of their ability to know that reality. Grenz, in apparent agreement, says that one “cannot escape from [one’s] cultural context into some transcultural intellectual vantage point.”

By embracing Grenz’ assertion that no final authority exists in matters of interpretation of the biblical text, Emerging Church proponents are able to downplay the differences that exist between various faith communities (Christian and non-Christian) in favor of dialogue as the point of unification. John R. Franke puts it this way: “Residents of the liberal and conservative precincts of the church are engaging in respectful and constructive dialogue across the metaphorical divide that has separated them for nearly two centuries.” Franke argues that the language of faith communities, not any specific truth declarations, is the cause of division because he believes that all communities can only speak about a truth that ultimately cannot be known with absolute certainty. It is this uncertainty which now allows for unity between liberals and conservatives.

Since humans are trapped within the linguistic communities, Grenz replaces the authority of Scripture with the authority of the Holy Spirit speaking through Scripture by developing a theology that makes “a close connection . . . between biblical authority and the phenomenon of the illumination.” Aware of the subjective pitfall that this connection can become, Grenz seeks to overcome this problem by placing the community

---


95 Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 67-68.
before the person in the “articulation of theology.” Many evangelicals will agree that the Christian community along with the Holy Spirit and individual study serve as aids in the task of understanding the truths of God’s Word. However, the Scriptures must retain final authority on matters of faith because the Scriptures are the only source of divine truth that can be objectively studied by all.

Communal Subjectivism. To further understand why Grenz’s elevation of the authority of God’s Spirit over the intrinsic authority of the Spirit within God’s Word, two problems must be considered. The first problem arises at the foundational level when the Spirit is considered to have more authority than the biblical text itself. The Bible can be objectively studied and applied not only to itself but also to individuals and whole communities; the Holy Spirit, on the other hand, can only be known through that which has been revealed about Him in God’s Word. Even if one wishes to appeal to the Holy Spirit as the final authority in theological construction, one must first appeal to the Scriptures to make such an assertion. By making this appeal, however, one reveals that the Bible itself supplants the authority of the Holy Spirit (that is, authority that is not connected to the Spirit’s inspiration that remains permanently affixed within the text) in the construction of sound theology.

The second problem for Grenz is his portrayal of a communal interpretation of Holy Spirit’s directives as a means to avoid subjectivism. While his intention is to avoid individual subjectivism whereby everyone can appeal to the Holy Spirit as the authoritative voice behind their biblical theology, now Grenz has developed a communal

96 Ibid., 68.
subjectivism where each community (whose parameters may still remain uncertain) determines theology based on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In this way, the community becomes the hermeneutical lens from Scripture is to be understood. Whereas many evangelicals traditionally contend that Scripture itself is the foundational component of biblical hermeneutics, Grenz replaces Scripture with the community as the primary means of interpreting the Bible.

McLaren appears to embrace the communal hermeneutic proposed by Grenz and then takes it to its obvious conclusion. Since the community has become the final authority for determining truth and is composed of finite individuals, McLaren can declare that the church’s “message is not perfect,” even though “God’s message is perfect.” In this way, the communal hermeneutic ends up offering no definitive truths from God’s Word even while it affirm that God’s Word contains those truths. This uncertainty offered by the Emerging Church leaders causes their individual church members to affirm the truth of Christianity even while mistrusting their particular versions.

**Belonging Before Believing.** The mistrust of the Emerging Church for all truth claims causes them to emphasize belonging before believing, a position, which at first, seems synonymous with the practices of many evangelical churches who desire to make outsiders feel welcome and to give the ample time to decide for themselves concerning the truths of the Christian faith. To their credit, the Emerging Church may

---

97 McLaren, *Church on the Other Side*, 68.

98 Ibid., 172.
have rightly identified the need among postmodern seekers to witness the lives of Christians as they live out the faith they confess so that they might understand and accept the doctrines and become Christians as Conder suggests. Noting the need among postmodernists to ask questions, Long states, “‘Belonging before believing’ means [churches] draw pre-Christians into an exploratory community, where they can ask their questions and experience open-hearted support for their search for a sense of identity and self.”

Long’s description of the emergent understanding of belonging before believing reveals some critical differences between the emerging understanding of belonging and the evangelical understanding. First, the evangelical Christian community, that is the local church, is only an “exploratory community” in the sense that they have found the truth in Scripture and seek only to understand more fully its contents. They are not exploratory in the sense that they have yet to discover truth with any certainty.

Second, the goal of evangelical churches is to help seekers answer their questions by discovering the truths revealed in Scripture. Their goal is not to help seekers discover the truth within them. While they may wish that all seekers developed “a sense of identity and self,” evangelical Christians will argue that such things can only come through faith in God’s Word. Third, it is through God’s Word that evangelical Christians find their common identity and even their self identity because God’s Word is the source of their beliefs about God and themselves. These three distinctions between the Emerging

---


Church and evangelical churches reveal a struggle within the Emerging Church to find a source for truth even while they may “belong” to the emerging community.

**Personhood of Truth and the Call to Action**

Many Emerging Church writers consider objective truth to be faulty construction from the Enlightenment and replace this construction with a view that perceives Truth as the Person of Jesus Christ. In this way, truth becomes mysterious and undefined objectively. Sweet, aware of the postmodern mistrust of dogma, portrays Jesus as the personification of Truth because postmodernists are interested in relationship: “Truth is not a principle or a proposition but a Person. Truth is not rules and regulations but a relationship. God did not send us a principle but a Presence.”

**Jesus as the Embodiment of Truth.** Many evangelicals may agree that Jesus is the embodiment of truth. In John 14:6, Jesus declares that He is indeed the truth. But one must ask: Does Jesus mean to say that He is the personification of truth and, therefore, truth can only be subjectively known through a relationship with Him? The evidence within Scripture suggests that the answer must be no. Jesus Himself repeatedly says, “I tell you the truth,” and then proceeds to state what he clearly believes to be an objective truth (Matt 5:18; 6:5; 10:42). Jesus spent much of His time communicating truths to people; therefore, he must want people to encounter objective truths even as they are drawn into a relationship with Him.

---


102 Sweet, *SoulTsunami*, 385.

103 Jesus declares objective truths throughout His earthly ministry. The biblical references that are provided are but a small portion of the evidence found in Scripture to support this contention.
While Jesus may embody the truth as the Son of God, one should not infer that truths concerning His person cannot be known so long as those truths are revealed by Jesus Himself. If one accepts that orthodox Trinitarian doctrine, which presents Christ as fully God, and if one believes that the Scripture is indeed the inspired Word of God, then one must conclude, at the bare minimum, that the Bible contains objective truths even if the human interpreter may struggle to correctly understand those truths. Sweet, who appears to support both of these doctrines, disagrees, however, and says that “The Bible doesn’t make ‘truth claims’ because one “can never separate the Scriptures and Christ.”

If Sweet is correct, how can he support the Holy Spirit’s inspiration of the Scriptures and the orthodox view of the Trinity and present them as truth claims when the Bible does not make truth claims? If he is merely submitting his opinion, then he must state that fact but if he is relying on Scripture or some other source, he must reveal that source. If he is relying on Scripture to make his claims that the Bible has no objective truths and the Scripture is somehow dissolved into the Christ, then he is by default making his argument from an objective claim that he believes is contained within Scripture.

The source used by Sweet appears to be Sweet himself especially since he denies the presence of objective truths in the Bible. Without these truths, he must ultimately rely on himself to construct his view that Jesus and God’s Word are

104 Leonard Sweet and Frank Viola, Jesus Manifesto: Restoring the Supremacy and Sovereignty of Jesus Christ (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 16; Sweet, McLaren, and Haselmeyer, A is for Abductive, 9; Leonard Sweet, So Beautiful: Divine Design for Life and the Church (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009), 122.
indistinguishable. Given Sweet’s contention that “the only thing certain is uncertainty,” one wonders how Sweet can make any objective statements about Christ or the Scripture.\(^\text{105}\) Another problem with Sweet’s blending of God’s message with the Person of Christ is the idolatry that it may lead to when people view God’s revelation of Christ (the Bible) as God Himself because His Word, as Sweet argues, is a part of God to the extent that it cannot be viewed as separate.

Ward, who also prefers to see truth as encapsulated in the Person of Christ states, “Because God’s truth became flesh in Jesus, [Christians] seek to be an authentic community in the presence of truth. [Christians] do not possess truth or seek to correct the truths of others, but we seek to live faithfully in light of the truth of God in Jesus Christ.”\(^\text{106}\) Ward claims to possess authenticity merely because she stands in the presence of Truth (Christ) even while she claims not to know (at least conclusively) objective truths about Christ.

If Ward’s position that the authenticity before God only requires presence, then it would seem that all people are equally authentic before God despite their sins and conflicting views of God. Since Ward does not know the truth and remains unable to correct those who hold different views of what and/or who is truth, one must wonder how she may know how to live a faithful Christian life unless her faithfulness is merely her best attempt to please God even while she remains uncertain of whether or not God is


\(^\text{106}\)Ward, “The Emerging Church and Communal Theology,” 179.
pleased. If she possesses this uncertainty and it seems that she does, why does Ward offer such an uncertain path as a way to live before God faithfully?

**Emerging Abolition of Sola Fide.** Ward and many others within the Emerging Church propose an “authentic” relationship with God built on the works of humanity whereby acquiescence to any particular truth claims is practically irrelevant. According to Kimball, a way to “measure success in the Emerging Church” is by the active witness of their members to those around them.  

107 This standard, on the surface, appears to be the same standard given by Christ Himself: “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.” (John 15:16). Upon further examination, however, it ends up undermining the doctrine of *sola fide*.

**Current Debate on the Doctrine of Sola Fide.** Scholarship has continued to struggle with the doctrine of sola fide due to apparent differences between the theology of James and Paul at least since the time of Luther. Günther Bornkamm, Rudolf Bultmann, and Sophie Laws, among others, support the claim that the theology of Paul and James cannot be harmonized.  

108 Those who oppose lordship salvation are uncomfortable with James’ insistence on the presence of works in the believer’s life.  

109 Some would argue

---


109 Strict opponents to lordship salvation seek to separate faith in Jesus as savior and faith in Jesus as Lord. They argue that a true Christian can have intellectual faith and heartfelt conviction without the presence of works and still be saved through the merit of Christ. Hebrews 11:1 says, “Εστιν δὲ πίστις ἐλπιζομένων ὑπόστασις, πραγμάτων ἔλεγχος οὐ βλεπομένων. If one truly has πίστις ἐλπιζομένων ὑπόστασις, then how could they not acknowledge Christ as Lord and act accordingly unless they still do not
with Luther and his supporters by saying that Paul and James had the same position but were defending their common faith; however, they just used different starting points to begin their discussion.¹¹⁰ C. Leslie Mitton and Alexander Ross agree with this view.¹¹¹

Paul’s discussion of faith is focused on the obtainment of it, as seen in Romans 3:28, where he argues that a person is saved by faith and not by works. In 2:24, James says that both faith and works must occur together if one is to be justified. Curiously, both Paul in Romans 3:28 and James in 2:24 use Genesis 15:6 to prove the validity of their argument. If one accepts the apostolicity of both the Epistle of James and the writings of Paul in the New Testament, then one must find how the arguments of the two apostles are based on sound doctrine. Historically, Protestants have followed in Luther’s steps and supported the doctrine of *sola fide*.

Most scholars affirm the solid basis of the *sola fide* doctrine in Paul’s New Testament writings, but as mentioned previously, widespread disagreement exists on whether or not James affirmed this doctrine. A closer examination of James’ discussion in 2:22–23 reveals that James was arguing that works are a proof of salvation rather than

have πίστις? The opponent of lordship salvation would respond by distinguishing the free will of the believer from his or her faith. But in Eph 2:8, Paul calls faith a gift of God. Those who receive the gift of faith from God must receive the same active faith as that of Abraham and Rahab since God does not show favoritism (cf. Acts 10:34; Rom 2:11).

¹¹⁰ C. Ryan Jenkins, “Faith and Works in Paul and James,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159 (2002): 63–64. This paper will take the view that Paul and James were in agreement but were focused on different audiences. James does not undermine Paul’s teaching in Ephesians 2:8 that one is saved by grace through faith; rather, he merely defines faith. Other views listed by Jenkins include the argument from James that justification depends on faith and works. Another is that works are required for temporal deliverance. Both of these arguments run contrary to Pauline theology and are presumed incorrect for the purposes of this paper. Instead, the canonicity of James is accepted and therefore expected to be harmonized with Pauline theology.

a means of salvation. John Calvin states that the Lord “cannot be known apart from the sanctification of his Spirit.”\textsuperscript{112} As William Barclay says, a person is “not saved by deeds” but “for deeds.”\textsuperscript{113}

**Living in God’s Presence.** Jesus never intended to say that external actions are the final measurement of success because in Luke 3:8, he says, “Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.” True success for the Christian, therefore, requires the internal action of repentance first and foremost. In addition, Jesus constantly chides people throughout His earthly ministry concerning their need to have faith in Him (Matt 14:31; 16:8; Luke 8:25; 12:28). Those “Christians” who truly possess repentance and faith intrinsically will, according to Jesus in John 14:12, model His actions.

Many emerging Christians seem to place their focus primarily if not wholly on the external action of Christians. Even if Kimball agrees that Christians must repent and believe in Christ, his definition of success based solely on outward actions without any demands for orthodoxy is flawed because right action (in the sense that it appears right to people because true right action must be right in the sight of God and only God’s people could produce it) does not necessarily infer right belief.

Rob Bell takes Kimball’s position to an even more extreme level: “If the gospel isn’t good news for everybody, then it isn’t good news for anybody. And this is because the most powerful things happen when the church surrenders its desire to convert


people and convince them to join. It is when the church gives itself away in radical acts
of service and compassion, expecting nothing in return, that the way of Jesus is most
vividly put on display.”¹¹⁴ Like Kimball, Bell is very focused on the actions of believers,
but Bell goes even further when he downplays the role of conversion to Christianity
(which requires replacement of non-Christian truth claims with Christian truth claims). If
Christians truly believe they possess truths that will help people, they should “desire” to
help by communicating those truths to them even as they demonstrate those truths
through acts of service.

This active faith, which holds firm to biblical teachings and expresses those
teachings within and through the actions of the believer, does not appear to be the faith
espoused by Sweet, McLaren, and Haselmeyer:

“Do you believe? Do you even believe that God raised Jesus from the dead?

No big deal! Even Satan believes that. You can believe something and not act
on it. Authentic Christianity is a full faith, not thin beliefs. We are saved by grace
through faith, not by beliefs. If you have faith in something, it transforms how you
live. You cannot not act on it. Satan believes in God. But Satan doesn’t believe God.
Believing God is living faith. That’s be-living.”¹¹⁵

Their initial question appears to be drawn from James 2:19 where James says that
demons “believe that there is one God,” but then they add a second question that does not
appear in James. Their answer to this question reveals their understanding of faith. Faith,
for them, can only be faith if it acted out in relationship with God.

¹¹⁴Rob Bell, Velvet Elvis, 167.

¹¹⁵Sweet, McLaren, and Haselmeyer, A is for Abductive, 43. Emphasis is theirs.
While James and Paul teach that true faith is indeed active and living, they do not teach that authentic faith occurs without first agreeing with the biblical teaching concerning but not limited to Christ’s resurrection. As Paul says in Romans 10:14-17,

> How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’ But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed our message?’ Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

According to Paul, people must first hear and accept the message (truth) about Christ before they can become active Christians. The message that was to be preached was not some call to actively live before a God who could not be known. This type of faith requires no message, no truth, and no preacher. For that matter, a person with this emerging faith proposed by Sweet, McLaren, and Haselmeyer, need not hear any message at all; rather, they simply need to get started in the task of doing good works, a task which will prove difficult since they will have no way to determine if the works they do is indeed good works.

McLaren believes that emerging Christians “would rather be known primarily as Christ-followers than as adherents to the Christian religion.”¹¹⁶ Wary of legalism, many Christians may prefer to be viewed as Christ-followers, but following Christ by modeling his actions is not sufficient. Even though Jesus desires us to follow him by putting His words into action, He also states that those actions must occur within a right relationship with Him (Matt 7:21-24). In Matthew 7:21-23, Jesus clearly rejects those

who perform actions which seem to follow the actions of Christ and yet are not in right relationship with Him.

**Emerging Relationship to God.** Many Emerging Church proponents strongly promote the idea of being in a relationship with Jesus. Marcus J. Borg writes,

“Being Christian is not about meeting requirements for a future reward in the afterlife, and not very much about believing. Rather, the Christian life is about a relationship with God that transforms life in the present. To be Christian does not mean believing in Christianity, but a relationship with God lived within the Christian tradition as a metaphor and sacrament of the sacred.”

Many evangelicals strongly encourage people to seek a relationship with God that is more than mere adherence to a legal code. After all, evangelicals believe that God is a Person, and people, as persons, can relate to God assuming they follow His path to have that relationship. While evangelicals affirm the existence of the afterlife and want all people to have a relationship with God that prepares them for a good afterlife, they do not want Christians relating to God through Christ for the sole reason of being saved. They want Christians to genuinely love God more than themselves. This evangelical position on the maintenance of a proper relationship with God does not appear to be the same as Borg’s position.

Borg argues for a relationship with God that does not affirm any propositions about God because such propositions are just metaphors that may hint at the truth but can never objectively identify truth. This type of relationship, according to Borg, somehow has the power to transform the believer’s life even while the believer is never able to arrive with any degree of certainty at any objectively true statements about God that

---

might correct the believer’s behavior or encourage behavior that may not need correction. Theoretically, the believer’s life could be transformed in such a way that the believer’s relationship with God is tarnished because the believer is never able to know the exact requirements for a right relationship with God.

**Emerging Experience of Following Christ.** Along with calling on people to develop an ongoing relationship with God by simply following Christ’s actions without any propositional knowledge of Jesus, many Emerging Church proponents emphasize the experience of Christianity over and above any particular truth claims within it. Sweet, for example, declares, “Faith is not a matter of doing or even being, but an experience of becoming. Experiencing is faith’s most fundamental activity.”¹¹⁸ Dan Scott, however, argues that “mystical experience should not define [one’s] faith. If [one’s] faith is true, then experience must accommodate itself to the faith.”¹¹⁹ In other words, one who participates in the Christian experience must be a Christian. Those within the Emerging Church who claim that experience trumps truth within Christianity must be defining Christianity based on some other standard than repentance of sin and faith in the claims the Bible makes.

The overarching focus on action and experience as opposed to objective truth is how the Emerging Church seeks to gain an audience in the postmodern world. Speaking about the postmodernists, Long says, “For them, truth is not so much stated as experienced. These generations need to have truth lived out before them, not stated to


them. Words, in and of themselves, mean little to them; image means everything."\footnote{Long, Emerging Hope, 47.}

While many scholars who study the postmodern generation will agree that this generation has a strong aversion to truth in favor of experience, this does not mean that the church should provide experience as a replacement for truth. Rather, the church continues to offer an active witness of Christ that plays out in word and deed.

Postmodernists may need to have the truth of Christ lived out before them before they consider becoming Christian, but ultimately they will need to learn, understand, and accept that claims that are made in Scripture. Long, however, argues that postmodernists do not need to have the truth stated to them. Even if the Christian simply models the Christian truths, ultimately the postmodernists will need to ask the Christians about the reasons behind the Christian’s behavior or turn to the Scriptures for answers. Either way, truths of Christianity will be stated to the postmodernists. If postmodernists choose to not ask the Christian or consult the Scriptures to gain a proper understanding, then they will be forced to rely on themselves or some outside source for their understanding. When they do, they will be engaging in a logical fallacy that Carson calls “[a]ppeal to selective evidence” because they have neglected to consult legitimate sources to ensure the formation of their understandings of the Christian’s actions: the Christian and the Scripture which the Christian holds to be true.\footnote{Carson, Exegetical Fallacies, 93.}

**Word and Deed Evangelism.** Some emerging authors do see a place for the actions and beliefs of Christians in the task of reaching postmodernists. McLaren, for
example, wants the message of the Church to be “words plus deeds” because the
Christian’s “words will not stand alone.”

He claims not to devalue the importance of
words while at the same time proclaiming that words “will convey a message that is clear
yet mysterious, simple yet mysterious, [and] substantial yet mysterious.”

By claiming that Christian truth is “mysterious,” McLaren, it would seem, undermines Christian truth
by suggesting that it remains uncertain.

While many evangelical Christians may agree
that God’s revelation in the Bible is mysterious, they also will claim in contents to be
knowable. When the Christian uses words to communicate the Christian message, those
words can still carry statements of truth even while those truths concern something that
remains mysterious.

McLaren may wish to present biblical truth as mysterious because he believes
that Christian truth is learned by following Jesus as opposed to the evangelical position
which says that truth must be known before one can decide to follow Jesus.

Jesus certainly invites people to follow Him, but does He only mean to require an
active/experiential response or does he also want them to accept certain truth claims
(Matt 4:19; 8:22)? When one examines Mark 10:17-22, one finds that Jesus does require
something of people before they follow Him. In this passage, a rich man claims to be
keeping God’s commandments and wishes to have eternal life (a gift that Jesus can


122 McLaren, Church on the Other Side, 88.

123 Ibid., 89.

124 Ibid. McLaren states that words cannot be used to capture mystery “precisely.” This claim,
however, undermines even the testimony of Jesus about Himself. For example, Jesus says, “I and the Father
are one” (John 10:30) While many will agree that Jesus’ claim is mysterious, orthodox Christians have
declare the statement to be true nonetheless.

125 Ibid., 178.
bestow), but Jesus tells the man that he must still do one more thing before he could follow Jesus—give his wealth to the poor. Since the rich man was not willing to accept this truth claim made by Jesus, he was not able to follow Jesus and simply went away.

Even so, McLaren argues that doctrines without actions have very little value: “[O]rthodox understandings of the Trinity that don’t lead to” orthopraxis “are more or less worthless.” While one may agree that words and deeds must both remain an active part of the Christian witness, McLaren seems view truth and action to be co-dependant. Doctrines, which are derived from biblical truths, must be understood to have intrinsic value because they arise from the Word of God. While one may appreciate McLaren’s desire for Christians to live out the truths they claim to believe, one must give truths that arise from God’s word a high degree of autonomy because their source is divine. Without this certainty in God’s Word, emerging writers have turned to love as a means to reach this world apart from biblical truth claims.

New Gospel of Love for the Present World

Proclamation without Truth. “Good evangelism,” McLaren writes, “is the process of being friendly without discrimination and influencing all of one’s friends toward a better living, through good deeds and good conversations.” At first glance, one may view McLaren’s approach to evangelism to be friendship evangelism, but authentic evangelism must contain the message of repentance of sin and faith in Christ.

126 McLaren, Generous Orthodoxy, 31.


Unfortunately, some emergents like Dwight J. Friesen, see orthodox teachings, even those that lead to salvation, as “conversation stoppers.”

Upon examination McLaren’s message accomplishes Friesen’s goal of keeping the conversation alive by promoting “better living” with little or no any reference to the sinfulness of humanity and the saving work of Christ. While his emphasis on a relational approach in evangelism, one wonders how the actions and conversation of the evangelist may help a potential prospect become a believer in Jesus especially when the evangelistic conversation must remain “short on answers, long on questions” and “short on abstractions and propositions, long on abstractions.” Bell also prefers questions because they bring freedom from being God and knowing everything.

While Bell’s assertion may be correct, his emphasis on questions and his avoidance of definitive answers allows the truth to remain elusive and seekers to remain seekers because they will never find answers and never know God as He has revealed Himself to be. All that remains for the seeker and the emerging believer is an abstract relationship with God who cannot be known personally. Any characteristics that are applied to this God by the emerging believer or the seeker must be seen, in the logic of

---

A Scott Moreau, Harold Netland, and Charles Van Engen (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 376. Ginn notes that friendship evangelism “emphasizes the crucial role that relationships play in constructing a platform from which the gospel can be communicated effectively.”


McLaren does mention the sinfulness of humanity and the saving work of Christ but not as traditionally conceived by evangelicals.

McLaren, More Ready than You Realize, 15.

Bell, Velvet Elvis, 30.
McLaren and Bell, as self-creations of God which is also known as the sin of idolatry by orthodox believers.

Further evidence provided by emergents for the believer’s inability to know God is found in McLaren’s contention that an evangelists can best help a seeker by being a seekers themselves: “If [Christians] can present [them]selves to [their] postmodern neighbors not as an exclusive inner circle of ‘in the know’ finders but rather as seekers [them]selves . . ., then the seekers around [them] will feel a kinship with [them] and many will join [them] on the path.”133 Instead of presenting objective truths to seekers even while maintaining a living witness to Christ, McLaren wants Christians to join seekers by doubting any propositional truth claims within Christianity.

As a result, Christianity becomes a group of friends seeking to know about God but never knowing any specifics about God including any specifics related to the gospel. This friendly presentation of the gospel simply “influenc[es] all of one’s friends toward better living, through good deeds and good conversations.”134 Emerging writers can claim that this type of evangelism is friendly but it does not present any of the truth claims that Christ presented about Himself. McLaren, in response, believes that a friendly approach to evangelism incarnates the truth in the life of the Christian witness.

The incarnational evangelism, proposed by McLaren, is presented by Frost who distinguishes between an evangelistic and an incarnational gospel presentation.135

133 McLaren, *Church on the Other Side*, 183.

134 McLaren, *More Ready than You Realize*, 15; Jones, *New Christians*, 111. McLaren says that there is “a place for Buddhist or Hindu or Jewish evangelism.” Friendly evangelism, it seems, includes the evangelistic works and words of all faiths gathered together in one conversation. This desire for friendship to other faiths may be why “[e]mergents believe that theology is local, conversational, and temporary.”

135 Michael Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture* (Peabody, MA:
He describes an evangelistic presentation as one that consists of a “formulaic” approach that includes “doctrinal points” delivered through a “monologue.” An incarnational presentation includes an “exchange of ideas” delivered “through conversations [and] experiences” in a “dialogue.” While Frost maintains that gospel truths must still be communicated, his emphasis of incarnational evangelism as a dialogue where truth is seemingly lost in conversation may need revisiting. While Christians may wish to incarnate the gospel through their actions and words, they must also deliver doctrinal truths as a part of their incarnational witness just as Jesus did in His earthly ministry.

Sweet, who also desires to be evangelistic among postmodernists, emphasizes relationships and love as the primary means of evangelizing the postmodern generation.\(^{136}\) While both of these aspects may have been a part of the evangelistic model demonstrated by Christ, Sweet, along with his coauthor Frank Viola, argues that Christ’s evangelistic practices excluded propositional truth claims: “Jesus was an evangelist of the God who is love; He was an evangelist not of principles and beliefs and leadership skills, but of a reign of divine love. Thus, Christianity is highly relational and communitarian. It’s neither individualistic nor abstract. Christianity centers not on points, principles, or propositions, but on a person and a people.”\(^ {137}\) Sweet and Viola correctly state that Christianity is based on the Person of Christ, but it is also based on the biblical teachings about Christ, some of which came directly from Christ during His earthly ministry. Knowledge of the Person of Christ can only be known through the Scriptures if one

\(^{136}\) Sweet, *SoulTsunami*, 60, 196.

\(^{137}\) Sweet and Viola, *Jesus Manifesto*, 83.
accepts that the Scriptures are the inspired Word of God. Any other source for knowledge of the Person of Christ should be suspect, especially since such a source is not provided by Sweet and Viola.

As far as the contention that Christ’s evangelistic practices excluded an exposition of propositional truth, any cursory examination of His own statements proves this to be incorrect. Jesus in John 14:6, for example, declares: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Even though Christ often spoke in dialogue and to people whom he had an ongoing relationship, he offered many statements of truth like this one in John 14:6. Jesus even uses the truths within the Old Testament to explain that He was indeed the prophesied Messiah (Luke 24:27).

**Good News for Everyone.** Along with promoting their particular incarnational, evangelistic model, many within the Emerging Church argue that evangelism should be understood as good news for this world. Ward argues that evangelism is an invitation given to all people to join the church and become “part of what God is doing in the world . . . and to help [the Church] put God’s eschatology into practice in doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God.” For Ward, it seems that evangelism is not so much an invitation to receive salvation; rather, evangelism is an invitation to perform social ministries. According to Ward, the Good News that God invites all people to believe in Jesus and receive salvation is no longer the

---

138 Since Sweet and Viola claim that propositional truth claims were not part of Christ’s evangelistic message, they need to discuss at length the proper understanding of the words of Christ communicated in the Gospels at the very least.

139 Ward, “The Emerging Church and Communal Theology,” 171.
Good News; rather, the good news is that people can do the work of God whether they believe in God or not.\textsuperscript{140}

The focus on this world within the Emerging Church can also be seen in their conception of the kingdom of God. Pagitt, for instance, “imagine[s] a people who . . . are about the kingdom of God and not a far away heaven.”\textsuperscript{141} Instead of the traditional understanding of salvation whereby God saves believers from hell and grants them entrance into heaven, Rob Bell believes, “[S]alvation is the entire universe being brought back into harmony with its maker” because “God’s desire is to restore all of it.”\textsuperscript{142} While Bell does employ the ‘kingdom of God’ metaphor, it seems clear that he views this present reality as integral and even eternal part of the kingdom of God. If Bell is correct, one wonders how Peter could speak about the promise of a new heaven and earth and how John could foresee the passing of the present world and its replacement with a new one (2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1).

McLaren views the kingdom of God to be Christ’s “essential message” because it is “focused on how God’s will could be done on earth, in history, [and] during this life.”\textsuperscript{143} Unfortunately, McLaren does not cite biblical verses that support his position.

\textsuperscript{140}It is possible that Ward may be simply applying the term ‘evangelism’ to God’s desire that people actively follow Him. If this is the case, Ward needs to inform the reader that she is deliberately changing the definition of evangelism to make a point and then she needs to affirm/deny her beliefs concerning the traditional view of evangelism.

\textsuperscript{141}Pagitt, “Seven: Explorations of the Future of the Church,” 177.


\textsuperscript{143}McLaren, \textit{Everything Must Change}, 21.
on the kingdom of God. When one turns to Scripture for further clarification, one finds
that Jesus teaches that the kingdom of God required repentance and faith of those who
would enter (Matt 21:32; Mark 1:5). Jesus even teaches that some people will not be in
the kingdom of God (Matt 21:43; Mark 10:15; Luke 13:28).\(^{144}\) Paul declares that
unrepentant sin can keep someone from being in the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal
5:19-21). In 1 Corinthians 15:50, Paul teaches that entrance into the kingdom of God will
ultimately require bodily resurrection. After examining the biblical evidence, McLaren’s
suppositions seem to be faulty. The Bible teaches that the kingdom of God is not about
God’s work in this life; rather, the kingdom of God is the full reunification of God and
humanity after bodily resurrection for those who repent and believe.

**Salvation for All.** Perhaps McLaren’s views on the kingdom of God arise
from his belief that Christ is saving the world and everyone who lives on it because “the
grace of God is more powerful and expansive than the evil of humanity. Justice and
mercy kiss; judgment and forgiveness embrace. From their marriage a new future is
conceived.”\(^{145}\) While one may agree that God is capable of forgiving sins based on strong
evidence in the Bible for this claim, McLaren needs to provide biblical evidence for his
assertion that God’s grace renders His judgment on the sinfulness of humanity
completely impotent.

To help readers understand his views of God’s judgment, McLaren offers the
following information:

---

\(^{144}\) Jesus also declares in John 3:3 that one must be born again to enter God’s kingdom.

\(^{145}\) McLaren, *Generous Orthodoxy*, 97.
“Sometimes God saves by judging. To speak of judgment as a form of salvation surprises people who have religious baggage and don’t actually read the Bible, but only hear it filtered by sermons or theological systems. They assume that judgment is something bad or awful. But in the biblical context, judgment is generally a good thing. It means the coming of truth and justice into our deceived and oppressed world. If some bad and dishonest people are out to deceive or oppress others, God brings justice by bringing judgment—the natural consequences of their bad actions.”

Within this passage, McLaren takes an unusual approach for emerging writers by chastising those who use a communal hermeneutic (i.e. sermons and theological systems) to ascertain the truths of Scripture instead of searching the Scriptures for propositional truths themselves. Furthermore, McLaren even declares that he has found some propositional truth concerning the judgment by examining the Bible, a task that emerging writers like him claim is impossible to perform with any degree of certainty.

Despite this conflicting approach to truth discovery, it is important to examine McLaren’s views on God’s judgment from Scripture, even more so because McLaren himself desires that the task be performed by all Christians. First, does the Bible teach that judgment is “bad or awful? In Matthew 5:22, Jesus uses “judgment” and “the fire of hell” synonymously. In Luke 10:13-15, Jesus does not seem to think judgment will be a good experience for Korazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. Whereas McLaren speaks of God’s judgment applying to the task of bringing justice to and within this world, Peter uses judgment to refer to God’s final and eternal condemnation for the unrighteous (2 Pet 2:9). While McLaren’s desire for justice in this present is commendable, his view that God’s justice occurs within the “natural consequences” of a person’s actions does not seem to agree with Isaiah who declares that human sin drove God’s justice away and led

\[146\]Ibid., 93. Emphasis is his.
to God's decision to send Jesus (Isa 59:12-16). Isaiah, therefore, teaches that God's justice was brought to people through Christ and not directly to them by dealing out consequences for their actions.

McLaren goes even further in his views of God’s judgment by redefining Christianity to the religion/faith of those who “believe that Jesus is the Savior of the whole world.” The whole world, for McLaren, refers to this “earth and all life on it.” He also asserts that the “[m]issional Christian faith” proclaims “that Jesus did not come to make some people saved and others condemned.” Christ’s message, it seems, is an invitation to all humanity to receive something other than eternal salvation because eternal salvation, in his thinking, is guaranteed to all people or so it seems.

**Social Justice and Salvation.** With eternal salvation being a given for all people, Christ’s invitation to all people, according to McLaren, is a call to join Him and His Church in the fight for social justice. Instead of Christians inviting those outside the faith to accept the teachings of Christ, McLaren believes the “church must call people to join a mission, to sign up in the fight against evil” because a “religion that can enlist people in a fight with evil—wherever it is found, including in [their] hearts and religious communities and systems—that will win their hearts.” While Christians are expected

---

147 Ibid., 100, 114. Emphasis is his. McLaren also states that he is “more interested in a gospel that is universally efficacious for the whole world before death in history.” Such a gospel may indeed be appealing to McLaren, but what should matter is the gospel message found in Scripture, regardless of whether its focus is on this life or the next or both.

148 Ibid., 97.

149 Ibid., 109.

150 McLaren, *Church on the Other Side*, 83-84.
to engage in good works without condemning non-Christians who seek to do good, one wonders how non-Christians can join in a fight against evil apart from receiving salvation from Christ.

The Psalmist teaches, “All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one” (Psa 14:3).” Jesus says, “No one is good” (Mark 10:18). Because all are “under sin,” Paul declares, “there is no one righteous, not even one; no one who understands; no one who seeks God” (Rom 3:9-11). To overcome this state of being not good, the Bible teaches that people must repent of their sins along with the “teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” of the Bible (Ps 37:7; Isa 45:22; Acts 3:19; 2 Tim 3:16-17). Only afterwards will a person be able to do good works (2 Tim 2:20-21; 3:16-17). If McLaren wishes to invite everyone to join Christians in “the fight against evil,” he must eventually confront them with the truths of Scripture so that they know their need for repentance and so that they know how to do good works in this world. He must not simply view action without propositional truth claims as the primary means of helping people identify the evil within their own beings.

Like McLaren, many emergents remain focused on the evils in society which for them may or may not result from the misdeeds of humanity, but they are unwilling to see humanity as completely and utterly sinful, a position that orthodox Christians label as total depravity or the doctrine of the original sin. Steve Chalke and Alan Mann, for example, announce that “Jesus believed in original goodness!”151 At first, this may seem

151 Steve Chalke and Alan Mann, The Lost Message of Jesus (GrandRapids: Zondervan, 2003), 67. Emphasis is theirs.
to be a statement of God’s original creation before the fall of humanity, but then Chalks and Mann make it clear that they deny the total depravity of fallen humanity: “To see humanity as inherently evil and stepped in original sin instead of inherently made in God’s image and so bathes in original goodness, however hidden it may have become, is a serious mistake.” Dave Tomlinson adds, the doctrine of the original sin is “biblically questionable, extreme, and profoundly unhelpful.” Pagitt considers the doctrine to be just “another hand-me-down from the fifth century” as if the doctrine has no roots in any objective source such as the Bible. By doing away with total depravity, Pagitt is able to make this pronouncement: “When we believe that people are inherently godly rather than inherently depraved, it follows that all people have worth, that all people have God-inspired goodness to offer.”

Jones apparently agrees because he chooses to “reject the notion of [original sin]” because he “consider[s] it neither biblically, philosophically, nor scientifically tenable.” McLaren, who remains somewhat elusive in his views on this doctrine, chooses to focus on the love of God and deemphasizes God’s judgment at one point, but in another publication, he states that “human beings have gone bad, both as individuals

---

152 Ibid. Emphasis is theirs.
153 Tomlinson, Post-Evangelical, 126.
154 Doug Pagitt, Christianity Worth Believing, 125. Pagitt lists the Scriptures from which Augustine developed the doctrine of original sin. However, Pagitt’s belief that Augustine’s inability to know the truth with any certainty led Augustine to construct a faulty doctrine.
155 Ibid., 137.
and cultures.” If humans have “gone bad” as McLaren argues, then they must not have been bad originally. Pagitt’s views seem similar to McLaren when he argues sin is a human destruction of good within this world and not the cause of a formal break between the relationship between God and people.

While the purpose of this present discussion is not to affirm the doctrine of the original sin or to condemn the particular views of these emerging leaders on this matter, the information about the Emerging Church’s views on original sin has been provided to demonstrate how the Emerging Church’s lack of a solid basis for propositional truth leads them away from orthodoxy. In their arguments against total depravity, these leaders avoid dealing with the primary proof texts which underlie the doctrine. If they are going to take a position against a doctrine that dates to the fifth century and remains broadly held by orthodox Christians, the burden should be rightly placed on them to discuss the biblical evidence used to support the doctrine. For example, Paul declares that “just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned” (Rom 5:12). The Psalmist goes even further to say that people are sinful from conception (Ps 51:5).

157 McLaren, Generous Orthodoxy, 195; idem, The Story We Find Ourselves in: Further Adventures of a New Kind of Christian (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 34.

158 The doctrine of original sin states that Adam went bad and his descendant are bad. McLaren does not seem to believe that humans are bad. Furthermore, he seems to deemphasize the ugliness of sin by broadening his understanding of it to include cultures.

159 Pagitt, Christianity Worth Believing, 153-158.

160 Further biblical evidence that demands the attention of Emerging Church leaders includes Jeremiah 17:9, Romans 7:18; Ephesians 4:18, and Titus 1:15. Beyond these verses, emerging writers need to discuss at length why God has neglected to treat the descendants of Adam the same way he treated Adam before the fall if they are born without sin.
After displacing the doctrine of the original sin, many Emerging Church proponents choose to advocate the presence of God in this world, a view which many orthodox Christians hold in their belief about the transcendence of God. Unlike these Christians though, many emerging Christians end up de-emphasizing the separation of God from this world due to the sinfulness of humanity. Pagitt, for instance, believes biblical teaching on sin and forgiveness to be based on God’s desire to have a relationship with people and not on God’s judgment of sin and resulting separation of God and humanity.¹⁶¹

The prophet Daniel, however, states that God’s judgments, as written in Scripture, would come upon Israel because of their sin (Dan 9:11). As God’s chosen people, Israel could certainly be seen as a people with whom God strongly desires to have a relationship; even so, Israel’s sins and refusal to seek God’s forgiveness led to their judgment despite God’s desire for a relationship. In Amos 1:3, the Lord Himself declares that he will “not turn back [His] wrath” on the people of Damascus because of their sin. For the Israelites and the people of Damascus, it seems that sin, judgment, and separation from God were the biblical message concerning their sin despite God’s desire that they repent. God’s desire for a relationship with people is indeed biblical, but sin and the forgiveness of sin (purchased by Jesus on the cross) needs to be understood as humanity’s rebellion, God’s responding judgment, and His grace through Christ.

¹⁶¹Doug Pagitt, “The Emerging Church and Embodied Theology,” in Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches: Five Perspectives: Karen Ward, Doug Pagitt, Dan Kimball, John Burke, and Mark Driscoll, ed. Robert Webber (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 134. Pagitt de-emphasizes the theme of judgment in relation to sin and chooses to focus exclusively on God’s grace. This grace of God, it seems, is based solely on God’s desire for a relationship with people and not on God’s demand that people repent due to His judgment of their sin. Pagitt does not offer any biblical support to prove his position.
**Good News as Love.** By overemphasizing God’s desire for a relationship with people, Pagitt is in danger of deemphasizing the ugliness of sin and the reason why Jesus had to be crucified. The Good News, it seems, becomes solely focused on God’s love for people with little if any condemnation (temporal condemnation perhaps but certainly not the kind of condemnation which will lead separation from God apart from repentance and faith) for the sins of humanity. For McLaren, the Good News is that God so loved the world that he sent Jesus to save humanity from the temporal suffering and called upon them to join Jesus in the task of restoring this world to its intended state of goodness.¹⁶² Sweet appears to agree with McLaren: “The good news is glad tidings of a beautiful new relationship between humans and the divine:

- God so loved the world . . .
- Christ so redeemed the world . . .
- The Holy Spirit so pervades the world . . .
- . . . That a new world is coming.”¹⁶³

McLaren and Sweet choose to focus on the love of God for people as the primary component of the gospel even while they neglect to mention the reason why Jesus’ love for humanity and God ultimately had to be expressed through His horrible death. The death of Christ at the hands of people demonstrates the ugliness of sin as it played out in the lives of those individuals. Emerging writers, for the most part, quickly overlook the need for a change within individuals from a state of ugliness due to sin to a state of righteousness through repentance and faith. Instead, they focus on Jesus (his


¹⁶³ Sweet, *So Beautiful*, 122.
person and actions) without taking His word to be objective truths which can be accurately understood and then obeyed. Erwin McManus, for example, says, “The gospel is an event to be proclaimed, not a doctrine to be preserved.” McManus is correct to say the gospel is a historical event that needs to be retold, but it is also an event that communicates truth itself and has truth communicated about it throughout both the Old and New Testaments.


Implications of the Emerging Church’s Theology of Action

Carson offers the consensus among scholars who study postmodernism: “[T]he fundamental issue in the move from modernism to postmodernism is epistemology.” Modernism, as it is typically construed, views knowledge to be attainable through rational, scientific inquiry. Postmodernism, on the other hand, believes that uncertainty trumps knowledge because the human interpreters are limited by their finiteness and their immersion within a particular context. Whereas modernists seek out foundational sources for the truth, postmodernists deny the existence of these sources. This denial of foundational truths by postmodernists is the primary characteristic upon which the ‘biblical’ theology of the Emerging Church rests. While emerging writers may be correct in their rejection of radical modernism that demands absolute certainty beyond skepticism, their embrace of postmodernism and its characteristic denial of objective truth seems problematic. As Christians, emerging believers should adhere to a biblical


---


165 Carson, Becoming Conversant within the Emergent Church, 27.

166 Ibid.
worldview based on Scripture as opposed to contemporary worldviews like modernism and postmodernism. Even though these believers may be heavily influenced by their culture not unlike all other Christians over the last two millennia, they are still obligated to follow the divine directives within the Bible.

Along with rejection of modernism, Emerging Church proponents also reject post-Constantine church doctrines (other than those within the Apostle’s and Nicene Creeds) as being culturally encoded human interpretation of the truth. Emerging Christians, for the most part, reject historic doctrines like the doctrines of hell, original sin, sola scriptura, and sola fide as mere attempts within a particular interpretive community to determine objective truth. While these Christians believe that they are themselves trapped in these communities, they all seem able to separate themselves from these communities long enough to make the objective truth claim concerning the relationship between these communities and truth claims. This disparity reveals a critical dilemma for the Emerging Church: The Emerging Church repeatedly claims that the truth is unknowable, yet in doing so, they are claiming to know a truth.

Despite this dilemma, emerging leaders steadfastly present the truths in Scripture as unknowable which ultimately leads on to consider the Scripture to be unreliable. In place of Scripture, emerging writers offer God as a Person, Jesus as Truth, and the community as the best hope for the community to know God and Jesus. In doing so, they have offered a god other than the God of the Bible and Jesus His Son because they have left it to communities to determine their identities. Emergents have also neglected to associate the role of the individual in determining the interpretive community to which they would listen especially in the increasingly diverse western
world where individuals are often part of many different communities. Finally, they have
developed a new theology that claims to know God subjectively but not objectively.

This emerging, postmodern approach to theology does not find knowledge of
God in Scripture but rather in the human experience. Sweet argues, “The postmodern
challenge of theology is not to help people ‘think critically,’ but to both ‘feel critically’
and ‘think creatively.’” Postmodernists may desire to use their feelings and
imaginations to construct theology, but one wonders how such an approach will lead
them in the direction of God’s revelation in the Bible. While feelings and creative
thinking can certainly be used in communication, it would seem that propositional
content must also be given as well.

This propositional content, according to Pagitt, comes from the life of the
individual: “[T]heology must come from the life of the one who holds it.”
Ward agrees
with Pagitt when she states that “theology is made fresh daily.” For Ward, “theology is
not a done deal and a sealed canon written for [people] by others, that [they] need to
swallow whole and espouse, but instead it is a living ‘art form’ to which we as Christian
practitioners are all given a brush.”

Traditional evangelicalism has viewed the

---


168 Pagitt, “The Emerging Church and Embodied Theology,” 121, 123. Pagitt believes that
theology can change because he focuses on the role of people in developing theologies. Perhaps he should
view theology as the definitive knowledge of God and look at the sources behind the theologies of people
to determine whether or not those theologies are true. To do this, however, he would have to know with
certainty that theology of God revealed in the Bible (or some other source should he care to make the
argument) is correct before he could make an assessment based on something other than his opinion.

169 Ward, “The Emerging Church and Communal Theology,” 178; idem, “Response to Doug
Pagitt,” in Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches: Five Perspectives: Karen Ward, Doug Pagitt,

Scripture as the sole source of theology (*sola scriptura*), but Pagitt and Ward argue the person is the source of theology. If individuals can create their theology, then theology can no longer be an objective reality. Furthermore, since individuals have constructed a plethora of diverse theologies as evidenced by the world’s many faiths over the known history of humanity, then these created theologies cannot all be authentic theologies of God since they contradict themselves. As Driscoll puts it, “If theology is evolving, then truth itself is relative and constantly changing.” Pagitt and Ward’s argument for self-created theology ends up being no theology at all and just another creative work by a finite being that no one can rely on with any degree of certainty. After all, Jones does say, “Emergents believe that truth, like God, cannot be definitively articulated by finite beings.”

When individuals construct their theology based on their experiences, they ultimately find themselves with many gods because they have no common source for their knowledge of God. Those who study the writings of emerging leaders can observe the wide range of opinions which exist within their movement. Even they have noted this and have decided to view their movement as a conversation among friends who may disagree on various subjects. While they may choose to label their Christian gathering as a conversation, Christianity must not be viewed as such. Christ, the prophets, and the apostles all delivered truths in their discussion and many of them were severely persecuted if not killed for their conversation. This being so, the Emerging Church must


communicate the same message as Scripture including its truth claims within their discussion; moreover, they must be willing to allow their ‘friends’ to part company before they choose to deny the truths that many biblical personalities and Christians over the centuries have lost their lives. While they may hold that some doctrines are erroneous because of the human interpretive role in their creation, they must isolate these doctrine and provide convincing evidence from Scripture for their opinion.

To accomplish this challenge, emerging leaders will need to have a more moderate approach to foundationalism. Instead of demanding certainty beyond any doubt, they must look at the proofs that are available concerning the reliability of the Bible. They must examine how the Bible was written and bound in its present form and search it for internal inconsistencies. After examination, Emerging Church proponents must show proof for their suspicions regarding the Bible, or they must align themselves with its contents. For those emergents who question their interpretative abilities and not the Bible itself, they must apply hermeneutical spiral over time and in concert with believing Christians so that they might arrive at the best understanding of God’s word. At the same time, emerging Christians must receive what the Bible says by faith as opposed to doubting its essential message.

By embracing the biblical message, emerging believers will avoid syncretism and pluralism, both of which seem are present currently in the movement due to their view that truth cannot be known. These postmodern believers can keep their friendships with those outside the Christian faith and continue to dialogue with them, but they must hold firm to the truths of Christianity revealed in the Bible. They must not separate Christ’s
person apart from His testimony about Himself amongst themselves or among their relationships with others.

If emerging believers are going to follow Christ as revealed Himself to be in Scripture, they certainly need to do more than develop their knowledge about Him. These believers must, as they profess, engage in doing good work within this present world, but they also must take the truths of Scripture to those they gladly serve in this world. While they live the truths of Scripture, they must also claim to know decisively those Scriptures. Without such knowledge, the Emerging Church will have no divinely inspired message of hope for this world and only the works of finite beings which bring temporary relief but no eternal hope. Since emergents claim an incarnational approach to evangelism that incorporates words and deeds, they must remember to serve others and speak biblical truths to them as well.

**Conclusion**

The Emerging Church offers Christianity with some great insight into the postmodern culture from which all evangelical Christians can benefit. Their understanding of postmodern epistemology with all its uncertainty demonstrates the need for an incarnational approach to evangelism that models Christianity through the lives of witnesses. This approach, however, must also contain the verbal communication of biblical truths despite the postmodern wariness of any truth claims. As long as the emerging leaders claim to not know these truths, their incarnational witness will at best be limited to good works even while the gospel message delivered in Scripture will remain untold.
While not delivering the gospel in their incarnational witness to the world, emergents have developed a new theology which emphasizes a subjective approach to God. While evangelicals seek to know God relationally because He is a person, they must also know God objectively less they end up worshiping some other god. Since emerging Christians seek knowledge of God through their communities, experiences, and human works, they are not likely to know God as He is and as He has revealed Himself to be in Scripture. Therefore, they must reclaim the doctrine of sola scriptura among their churches so that they will not wind up with a false god. Emerging believers must also restore the doctrine of sola fide to their churches so that Christ is given glory for His salvation of humanity instead of the works and experiences of people being glorified for God’s gracious work through Christ. If emerging believers continue to deny these two doctrines, evangelicals must continue to be wary of their message.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Books


SoulTsunami: Sink or Swim in New Millennium Culture. Grand Rapids:


**Articles**


Internet Documentation


2009/01/original-sin-a-depraved-idea.html; Internet.


Secondary Resources

Books


Articles


Internet Documentation