

THE EMERGING CHURCH: A FUNDAMENTALIST ASSESSMENT

by
Jeffrey P. Straub¹

Contemporary evangelicalism is in a state of flux. Numerous proposals have been put forth to offer definition. One can be evangelical and yet not conservative, which seems to be a radical departure from early roots.² Within the broad contours of 21st century evangelicalism is a diversity of narrow subgroups that all lay claim to some piece of the evangelical pie. The collective ranges from the narrowly conservative fundamentalist, even hyper fundamentalist wings, to those on the far left—the Emergent Church. Not to be confused with the *emerging church*, many in the Emergent Church suggest that “everything must change,” which includes our narrow views on certain Bible doctrines as well as our attitudes toward our world and our culture.³

Fundamentalism generally has not been captivated by the emerging church, but its influence is certainly on the rise. In the past decade—about the lifespan of the *emerging church* (EC), as it is called by insiders—the EC has travelled in some sectors from what might be called a centrist evangelical position to a more radical leftward position that borders on a *neo-liberalism* in some of its more radical spokespersons. Theologically, the EC covers the theological spectrum from conservative to theologically liberal, from Calvinist to Arminian. Today, it includes sectors in traditional evangelicalism, mainline denominationalism, and even Roman Catholicism. The movement is too large and too diverse to deal with it in a monolithic fashion. Though it contains a large evangelical, doctrinally conservative component, a fair amount of cross-pollination is taking place in the emerging

¹Dr. Straub is Associate Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Plymouth, MN.

²For example, see Roger E. Olson, *How to Be Evangelical Without Being Conservative* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008). Many, Olson argues, see “conservative evangelical” as a tautology (p. 19). Olson sets forth a proposal that disabuses his reader of the notion that evangelicals are by necessity conservative. For a recent survey on the birth of modern American evangelicalism, see Garth Rosell, *The Surprising Work of God: Harold John Ockenga, Billy Graham and the Rebirth of Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008).

³Brian D. McLaren, *Everything Must Change* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007).

community.

I will use the term EC as a broad category for at least four main tributaries of *younger evangelicals*.⁴ That term has been used to designate postmodern,⁵ evangelical thinkers, mostly in their *thirty-somethings*,⁶ who are in the driver's seat of a fast-growing Christian subculture. This subculture boasts a greater sensitivity to the current postmodern world and a rejection of the late 20th-century pragmatism that drove some of the largest mega-churches across the evangelical spectrum.

NARROWING THE FOCUS

The history of twentieth-century evangelicalism is filled with adjectivally defined sub groups. The *new evangelicals*, the early progenitors of the broad evangelical movement of today, consisted of men (nearly all the early leaders were men) who grew up in or around fundamentalism but who came to reject their fundamentalist practices, but not its essential theology. Well-known among them are names like

⁴Robert E. Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).

⁵No attempt will be made to discuss postmodernism as opposed to its antecedents—pre-modernism and modernism. There is significant debate as to its nature and chronology. It is suggested that pre-modernism existed until about the Age of the Enlightenment and held to a theistic, authoritarian worldview. Modernism began with the Enlightenment and lasted until the late 20th century. The beginning and ending dates for modernism are debated. Choices range from the invention of movable type in the mid-15th century to the publications of Freud in the late 19th century. The end of modernity has likewise a variety of dates ranging from the French Revolution (1789) to the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989). Modernity emphasized a worldview, theistic or otherwise, defined and defended by rationalism. Postmodernism, while its definition is elusive, began (allegedly) where modernism ends. It is characterized by relativism and antifoundationalism. It is driven by culture and, most importantly, has little room for absolutes, especially in religion. Some suggest that postmodernity is just a radicalized form of modernity. For a discussion of postmodernism, see Harold Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), pp. 55–91, or D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), pp. 25–27, passim. Also see Gene E. Veith, Jr., *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thoughts and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), pp. 27–46; Diogenes Allen, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989); David S. Dockery, ed. *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1995); and Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Post-Modernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

⁶Ironically, the leaders of the EC today are aging. When the movement began, it started out as a way to allow *twenty-somethings* a voice in evangelical leadership. The movement is now more than ten years old and the leadership is now pushing forty. Nevertheless, the target audience of their ministries remains the *twenty-somethings* or *millennials* as they are also called.

Carl F. H. Henry, Harold John Ockenga, and Edward John Carnell.⁷

The *new* evangelicals soon were challenged by the radical left-of-center group of *young evangelicals* who pressed evangelicalism to shift further away from old fundamentalist theological sensibilities. They rejected dispensationalism while embracing neo-orthodoxy, feminism, and showing openness to biblical criticism and modern science. At the same time these young revolutionaries pushed for a greater social consciousness.⁸ Many of these men and women—the rise of evangelical feminism would give a strong place to women in evangelicalism—would become *worldly evangelicals* who abandoned the rigid sexual mores of their fundamentalist/new evangelical forbearers and make allowances for such things as homosexuality and sex outside of marriage.⁹ Their conservative evangelical colleagues would dub these radicals as the *evangelical left*.¹⁰

A recent contribution to evangelical engagement is *The Younger Evangelicals*. Author Robert E. Webber (1934–2007) grew up in a fundamentalist Baptist missionary's home but came to reject not only fundamentalism but his Baptist heritage.¹¹ Webber taught at Concordia, Wheaton, and Northern, among other places. He was often among the most provocative members of the faculty. *The Younger Evangelicals* contrasts three broad groups—*traditional evangelicals* (1950–1975), *pragmatic evangelicals* (1975–2000), and *the younger evangelicals* (2000–present).¹² The pragmatics are typified by Bill

⁷For a recent treatment of American evangelicalism, see Douglas A. Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story: A History of the Movement* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005).

⁸See Richard Quebedeaux, *The Young Evangelicals* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

⁹See *idem*, *The Worldly Evangelicals* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978). On evangelical feminism, see Mary A. Kassian, *The Feminist Gospel: The Movement to Unite Feminism with the Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1992); Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, *Women Caught in the Conflict: The Culture Way Between Traditionalism and Feminism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994); and Pamela D. H. Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism: A History* (New York: New York University Press, 2005). For two recent critiques of the movement, see Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004) and *idem*, *Evangelical Feminism: A New Path to Liberalism* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006).

¹⁰This category has been described in Millard J. Erickson, *The Evangelical Left* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997).

¹¹Webber graduated from Bob Jones University in 1956. He received graduate degrees from Reformed Episcopal Seminary (B.D.), from Covenant Seminary (PCA, Th.M.), and Concordia Seminary (Lutheran, Missouri Synod, Th.D.).

¹²For another chronology of evangelicalism, see Robert Webber, "Introduction: The Interaction of Culture and Theology," in *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*, ed. Robert Webber (Grand Rapids, 2007). Webber refined his dates and categories listing four periods—the High Evangelicals (1946–1964), the Awakened Evangelicals (1964–1984), Evangelical Unraveling (1984–2004), and the

Hybels of Willow Creek and arose out of the church-growth movement. Reacting to both the traditionalists and the pragmatists, a group of *younger evangelicals* wished to return to tradition (as seen in the ancient church) and practice a more culturally sensitive ministry. These younger evangelicals are as much a reaction to the pragmatics as to the traditionalists. This third group has become, for the most part, the *emerging church movement*.

It is hard to call the emerging church a *movement*. One writer suggests that defining the EC is like “nailing Jello to the wall.”¹³ Still, at least four subgroups within this stream have *emerged*. Three of these will be addressed in the paper. Nevertheless, it is not *a* movement as such.

We have repeatedly affirmed, contrary to what some have said, that there is no single theologian or spokesperson for the emergent conversation. We each speak for ourselves and are not official representatives of anyone else, nor do we necessarily endorse everything said or written by one another. We have repeatedly defined emergent as a conversation and friendship, and neither implies unanimity—nor even necessarily consensus—of opinion.¹⁴

This point is emphasized early in this paper because what is true of some or several emerging individuals might not be true of others. It is hard to broad-brush the group outside a few basic notions—the most important of which is the quest for cultural relevance. It is *the* unifying theme that binds the EC as a whole, though how this works out in individual churches varies widely. “Emerging churches are communities that practice the way of Jesus *within postmodern cultures*.”¹⁵

According to Darren Patrick, the lead pastor of The Journey (an EC in St. Louis), the EC began in 1997 at a Young Leaders’ Conference, GenX 2.0, hosted by Leadership Network at Mount Hermon, California. He and about a dozen young pastors had been brought together to discuss the future of ministry. At that conference, an evangelical pastor from Texas named Brad Cecil diagramed on a white board a megashift that was occurring within the contemporary culture—postmodernism. The net effect of that diagram was that a group of these young men realized that to reach the culture, a similar

Emerging church and the Younger Evangelicals (2004–) (pp. 11–16).

¹³Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We’re Not Emergent: By Two Guys Who Should Be* (Chicago: Moody, 2008), p. 17.

¹⁴Response to criticisms of EC by Tony Jones, Doug Pagitt, Spencer Burke, Brian McLaren, Dan Kimball, Andrew Jones, Chris Seay, <http://www.theooze.com/articles/print.cfm?id=1151> (accessed 4 April 2008).

¹⁵Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), p. 44; emphasis added.

megashift would have to occur in the way church was being done. A few of the participants in the room (Doug Pagitt, Mark Driscoll, Patrick, et al.) “got it” and began to network. Brian McLaren, former pastor of Cedar Ridge Church of Baltimore, eventually joined the group. The conversation grew as more meetings were held and more sympathetic church leaders were recruited to join the conversation.

As time passed, however, the conversation began to fragment. While the group saw the need for an ecclesiastical paradigm shift, the theological presuppositions that each brought to the table differed—radically on some points. Some members wanted to rethink everything. Not only did ministry praxis need contextualization but so also the gospel itself. The present culture could not be reached using methodology or theology useful to or developed by and for an older, now dead generation.¹⁶

The fragmentation was at times bitter but eventually it led to the coalescence of identifiable subgroups. Mark Driscoll (b. 1970), the pastor of the large Seattle church, Mars Hill, and cofounder of the Acts 29 Network, states that the broad EC consists of four main groups or lanes on the highway of evangelicalism.¹⁷ The first group is the *emerging evangelicals*. It is typified by Dan Kimball, pastor of the Vintage Faith Church of Santa Cruz, California. Kimball has authored a number of books, including *The Emerging Church*¹⁸ and

¹⁶Darrin Patrick, “History of the Emerging Church,” a message delivered at Covenant Theological Seminary, 22 October 2007, <http://www.journeyon.net/sermon/session-one-the-history-and-streams-of-the-emerging-church> (accessed 20 July 2008)]. This is one of several brief histories of the EC movement available online or in print. For the purposes of this paper, I will use the history and taxonomy of Mark Driscoll cited below, though even in a survey of these progenitors of EC, they disagree among themselves as to how to describe what EC has become in its ten-year history. An alternate taxonomy may be found in Scot McKnight, “Five Streams of the Emerging Church,” *Christianity Today*, February 2007, pp. 34–39. As an insider, McKnight describes five ideological tributaries that blend together to create the emerging movement or “conversation.” The brief history of the emerging church has been chronicled most recently in Tony Jones, *The New Christians: Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), pp. 41ff. The first few pages (pp. 41–43) are remarkably similar (almost *verbatim*) to the presentation Patrick did more than six months earlier. Jones’s presentation is, however, the fullest history of this brief movement I have yet found either in print or audio. Tony Jones is the national coordinator of the Emergent Village.

¹⁷Mark Driscoll, “Navigating the Emerging Highway,” *Christian Research Journal* 31:4 (2008): 11–21. For an early version of his taxonomy with three strands defined, see Mark Driscoll, message at Convergent Conference hosted by Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 21 September 2007, <http://www.sebts.edu/Convergent/GeneralInfo> (accessed 18 July 2008).

¹⁸Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003. This book is the work that finally gave the movement its name. The concept of *emerging* is a horticultural idea that speaks of new growth that comes up to replace the old, dead growth, especially in the forest. A distinction at this point should be made between *emerging churches* (EC) and *emergent*. This latter name is the term that is applied by those on the left to describe the

They Like Jesus but Not the Church.¹⁹ This is the “cool church crowd” who accept the basics of Christianity coupled with cultural innovations for contemporary ministry. Kimball is an avid rock music fan, particularly of Bruce Springsteen, and is essentially evangelical, though he is open to some nontraditional evangelical beliefs, such as a denial of a literal hell.²⁰

The second group is the *house church evangelicals*. This group is “dissatisfied with the current forms of the church.” They have overreacted to the megachurches by withdrawing from churches altogether and meeting in homes. George Barna is the best known example among this strand.²¹

A third group is made up of the *revisionists* or *emerging liberals*. This stream, which is more or less focused around the website www.emergentvillage.com, includes evangelicals and mainline church leaders, including Catholics. In fact, Emergent Village is planning a conference for March 2009, billing it as “the first-ever Emergent-Catholic Conference.”²² Leaders among this more radical wing include Brian McLaren;²³ Doug Pagitt, founding pastor of Solomon’s Porch of Minneapolis;²⁴ and Rob Bell, founding pastor of Mars Hill Church of Grand Rapids, MI.²⁵ Phyllis Tickle²⁶ has described

adherents of the philosophy of Emergent Village. See below.

¹⁹ Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2007.

²⁰ “It was natural to use the garbage dump of Gehenna to symbolize the horror of hell. Jesus didn’t necessarily mean that hell would have literal worms and literal flames” (*They Like Jesus*, p. 199). Kimball also is an egalitarian. His set of theological sensibilities places him left of the evangelical center but not as far left as the revisionists.

²¹ Driscoll, “Navigating the Emerging Highway,” p. 14.

²² See <http://www.emergentvillage.com/weblog/first-ever-catholic-emergent-conference-being-planned-for-march-2009> (accessed 18 July 2008).

²³ McLaren is considered the elder statesman of the Emergents and was listed among the twenty-five most influential evangelicals in America (“The 25 Most Influential Evangelicals in America,” *Time*, 7 February 2005). McLaren is a featured speaker for the upcoming Catholic Emergent Conference.

²⁴ Pagitt graduated with an M.A. in Theology from Bethel Seminary and served as youth pastor for almost ten years at the Minneapolis megachurch led by Leith Anderson, Wooddale Church, before starting Solomon’s Porch in 2000.

²⁵ Bell earned an M.Div. from Fuller Theological Seminary and went to Grand Rapids to serve with Ed Dobson of Calvary Church before starting Mars Hill in 1999. His literary contributions include *The Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005). Mars Hill of Grand Rapids has no connection with Mars Hill of Seattle. Driscoll rues the perceived connection that the identical name suggests.

²⁶ Phyllis Tickle, an Episcopalian, is another leading voice for the emerging/Emergent phenomena. See Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008). Until her retirement in 2004,

McLaren as the Martin Luther of our day.²⁷

This group could rightly be called *neo-liberalism*.²⁸ It is by far the least evangelical segment of the emerging church, and Driscoll himself stated that he broke away from them because the leaders began to question some of the essential tenets of Christian orthodoxy. Examples of the *neo-liberal* tendencies of this stream demonstrate the general direction of the leaders. The first instance comes from Rob Bell. Granted that what follows may amount to extreme hyperbole, one is left believing that he has pushed the limitations of Christian propriety too far with the following statement:

Somebody recently gave me a videotape of a lecture given by a man who travels around speaking about the creation of the world. At one point in his lecture, he said that if you deny that God created the world in six literal twenty-four-hour days, then you are denying that Jesus ever died on the cross. It's a bizarre leap of logic.

But he was serious.

It hit me while I was watching that for him faith isn't a trampoline; it's a wall of bricks. Each of the core doctrines for him is an individual brick that stacks on top of the others. If you pull one out, the whole wall starts to crumble. It appears quite strong and rigid, but if you begin to rethink or discuss even one brick, the whole thing is in danger. Like he said, no six-day creation equals no cross. Remove one and the whole wall wobbles.

What if tomorrow someone digs up proof that Jesus had a real, earthly, biological father named Larry, and archaeologists find Larry's tomb and do DNA-samples and prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that the virgin birth was really just a bit of mythologizing the Gospel writers threw in to appeal to the followers of the Mithra and Dionysian religious cults that were hugely popular at the time of Jesus, whose gods had virgin births? But what if as you study the origin of the word *virgin*, you discover that the word *virgin* in the gospel of Matthew actually comes from the book of Isaiah, and then you find out that the Hebrew language at that time, the word *virgin* could mean several things. And what if you discover that in the first century being 'born of a virgin' also referred a child whose mother became pregnant the first time she had intercourse?

What if that spring was seriously questioned?

Could a person keep jumping? Could a person still love God? Could

she was the founding editor of the Religion Department of *Publishers Weekly*, a trade magazine for the book industry.

²⁷ Phyllis Tickle, "Foreword," *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), pp. 9–12.

²⁸ Mark Driscoll has been quick to identify this wing of EC as a new manifestation of liberalism: "I had to distance myself, however, from one of the many streams in the emerging church because of theological differences. Since the late 1990's, this stream has become known as Emergent. The emergent church is the latest version of liberalism. The only difference is that old liberalism accommodated modernity and the new liberalism accommodates postmodernity" (Mark Driscoll, *Confessions of a Reformission Rev.* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006], p. 21).

you still be a Christian?

Is the way of Jesus still the best possible way to live?

Or does the whole thing fall apart?

I affirm the historic Christian faith, which includes the virgin birth and the Trinity and the inspiration of the Bible and much more. I'm a part of it and want to pass it on to the next generation. I believe that God created everything and that Jesus is Lord and that God plans to restore everything.

*But if the whole faith falls apart when we reexamine and rethink one spring, then it wasn't that strong in the first place, was it?*²⁹

A second and more compelling example of the theological drift of the revisionists is a recent collection of essays published under the editorship of Doug Pagitt and Tony Jones. Among the essays is one entitled "What Would Huckleberry Do?" Its author describes her path to Jesus through the influence of a Hindu meditation master:

She taught me some things Christians had not. She taught me to meditate, to sit in silence and openness in the presence of God. She taught me to love God, which allowed me to experience God's love for me. She also taught me to honor Jesus and suggested that Jesus could teach me. She provided the divine touch through human hand and showed me how to be an active participant in my own spiritual life.³⁰

What is missing from the essay is anything resembling an orthodox confession of faith. In fact, she describes a childhood experience of her minister (Presbyterian) discussing spiritual things with her, after which she concluded she was not a Christian because she did not believe certain doctrinal affirmations. "He was defining Christian identity as assent to a list of certain beliefs, and he was defining Christian community as those people who concur with those beliefs."³¹ She goes on to quote her personal doctrinal statement that included a classic tenet of liberalism—the universal fatherhood of God.³² This she was also challenged to reconsider by another doctrinaire pastor.

The penchant to avoid precise doctrinal expression, typical of old liberalism,³³ can be seen in the prolific writings of Brian

²⁹ Bell, *Velvet Elvis*, pp. 26–27; emphasis added.

³⁰ Nanette Sawyer, "What Would Huckleberry Do?" in *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, ed. Doug Pagitt and Tony Jones (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), p. 44.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

³² "I believe that all people are children of God, created and loved by God, and that God's compassionate grace is available to us at all times" (*ibid.*, p. 45).

³³ It would take a lengthy monograph to compare and contrast the revisionists of the EC with old liberalism (1870–1930). A brief comparison, however, is warranted at this point. One characteristic of old liberalism was doctrinal ambiguity. A non-liberal never quite knew to what a liberal was referring when he spoke. He would use familiar language but invest the words with a different meaning. In the height of the fundamentalist/modernist controversy of the 1920s, J. C. Massee, a prominent fundamentalist leader, bid the liberals depart the Northern Baptist Convention "in

McLaren:

Missional Christian faith asserts that Jesus did *not* come to make some people saved and others condemned. Jesus did *not* come to help some people be right while leaving everyone else be wrong. Jesus did *not* come to create another exclusive religion—Judaism having been based on genetics, and Christianity being exclusively based on belief (which can be a tougher requirement than genetics!)³⁴

McLaren has been accused of leaning toward universalism, especially because he answers questions with a certain amount of ambiguity, which tends to obfuscate the truth:

But what about heaven and Hell? you ask. Is everybody in?

My reply: Why do you consider me qualified to make this pronouncement? Isn't this God's business? Isn't it clear that I do not believe this is the right question for a missional Christian to ask? Can't we talk for a while about God's will being done one earth as in heaven, instead of jumping to how to escape earth and get to heaven as quickly as possible? Can't we talk for a while about overthrowing and undermining every hellish stronghold in our lives and in our world?...³⁵

peace” because they differed so radically from the fundamentalists in their views. Henry Clay Vedder (1853–1935), professor of Church History at Crozer Theological Seminary from 1895–1926 and Baptist liberal, responded to Masee's open letter: “I am quite willing to accept, as a basis for discussion, his statement of the Baptist fundamentals as to Christian doctrine: ‘The inspiration of God's word, the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, the bodily resurrection, the present lordship of Jesus Christ and his return to the earth.’ I believe everyone [*sic*] of these fundamentals. I have no doubt that I should state everyone [*sic*] of them differently than Dr. Masee” (Henry C. Vedder, “Must We Go—Where?” *The Baptist*, 23 October 1920, p. 1329). For a summary of this conflict, see Jeffrey P. Straub, *The Making of a Battle Royal: The Rise of Theological Liberalism in the Northern Baptist Convention* (Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2004).

This ploy has been called elsewhere “doublespeak.” It also occurred during the “Genesis Controversy” in the Southern Baptist Convention. It was “the tendency on the part of the seminary professors who tried to please everyone and maintain support from all.” “They were critical scholars who spoke clearly within a critical tradition when they were with other scholars, but in church and convention settings they sounded as if they agreed with the least-educated persons present” (Morris Ashcraft, “Foreword,” Ralph H. Elliott, *The Genesis Controversy and Continuity in Southern Baptist Chaos* [Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1992], p. xv). See also Elliott's description of how this worked in the Southern Baptist conflict of the late twentieth century (*ibid.*, pp. 33–34).

³⁴ McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, p. 120. McLaren especially has been the subject of numerous strong critiques by conservative evangelicals for his theology and general handling of the Scriptures. For example, see Carson, *Becoming Conversant*, pp. 157–82, or R. Albert Mohler, “A Generous Orthodoxy—Is It Orthodox?” http://albertmohler.com/commentary_read.php?cdate=2005-06-20 (accessed 27 July 2008).

³⁵ McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, p. 122.

More important to me than the hell question is the *mission* question.³⁶

A final example of the revisionist *neo-liberalism* is Pagitt's recent book, *A Christianity Worth Believing*.³⁷ Pagitt denies such evangelical essentials as inerrancy,³⁸ human depravity,³⁹ God as a sovereign judge who demands payment for sin,⁴⁰ and redefines sin itself.⁴¹ Finally Pagitt,⁴² like his liberal predecessor, Walter Rauschenbusch, places a

³⁶ Ibid., p. 125. McLaren's obfuscation also extends to his views on homosexuality, according to Mark Driscoll. He refuses to take sides on this contentious issue, suggesting that no matter what he says, someone will be offended (see also Driscoll, message at Convergent Conference, 21 September 2007). Driscoll rightly pointed out that by McLaren refusing to state publicly his view, McLaren would be offending God, which would be a greater sin.

³⁷ San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 65.

³⁹ "It's one thing to recite these confessions (e.g. the Westminster Confession) and statements (Franklin Graham's affirmation of human inherent sinfulness) in a Sunday School class. It's a very different thing to live out a theology of inherent depravity (that humans start out lacking anything good). We can say we believe that humanity is evil and depraved and that we enter the world this way. But I don't think this fits the Christian story, nor do many of us hold to it. I mean, I've never heard of someone walking the halls of a maternity ward and saying, 'Oh what a collection we have here of dirty, rotten little sinners who are separated from God and only capable of evil'" (ibid., p. 124).

⁴⁰ "Our image of God as all-powerful, removed, holy king is really much more influenced by Zeus and other gods than by the story of our faith" (ibid., p. 100). Pagitt never openly identifies himself with open theism, but talks about God in descriptions that open theism would affirm (ibid., pp. 108–9). Apparently, one of the reasons Pagitt left his former ministry as youth pastor is that his flirtation with *avant garde* theology like open theism meant that he would never be used as a Wooddale church planter (Jones, *The New Christians*, p. 46). On open theism, see Clark Pinnock, *The Most Moved Mover* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001) or Greg Boyd, *The God of the Possible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).

⁴¹ "I believe that there are better ways to talk about sin than with the language of distance [i.e., sin separating the individual from God]. I think that sin is best described as disintegration" (Pagitt, *A Christianity Worth Believing*, p. 112).

⁴² Recently Pagitt and Rob Bell joined in a broadly ecumenical conference in Seattle, *Seeds of Compassion*, which featured Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, Catholics, and Sikhs. Participants included the Dalai Lama, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and Dr. Ingrid Mattson, president of the Islamic Society of North America. The conference was co-founded by a Buddhist monk, Ven. Lama Tenzin Dhonden, who is a close associate of the Dalai Lama. The intention of the meeting was to "mark the beginning of a broad-based collaboration to bring concrete public awareness, public will, and an empowering call to action to address our local and global need for the social and emotional well-being of children. We see this as part of the emerging global Compassion Movement. As an outcome, we seek to bring social and emotional learning into families, to caregivers, and to schools so that all who touch the lives of children have the tools and empowerment to provide the foundation for kinder and more compassionate children, communities, and society," <http://www.seedsofcompassion.org/who> (accessed 25 July 2008).

heavy emphasis on the kingdom of God and its current status. To hear him describe a Christianity worth believing, it is less about preparing for eternity and more about right living in the kingdom now. Rauschenbusch affirmed much the same thing: “The essential purpose of Christianity was to transform human society into the kingdom of God by regenerating all human relationships and reconstituting them in accordance with the will of God.”⁴³ For Pagitt,

At the heart of Jesus’ kingdom language is the idea that God is at work in the world and that we are invited to enter into the work. The kingdom-of-God gospel of Jesus calls us to partner with God, to be full participants in the life God is creating, to follow Jesus as we seek to live as people who are fully integrated with our Creator.⁴⁴

Brian McLaren also focuses on the kingdom of God in Jesus’ message, which he too defines to suit his own agenda:

This message of the kingdom—contrary to popular belief—was not focused on how to escape this world and its problems by going to heaven after death, but instead was focused on how God’s will could be done on earth, in history and during his life. We described God’s kingdom in terms of God’s dreams coming true for this earth, of God’s justice and peace replacing injustice and disharmony.⁴⁵

The fourth subgroup within the EC that Driscoll describes is the one he is a part of—the *reformissionists* or the *emerging reformers*. Theologically, the men in this subgroup (most are men leading these churches as they tend to reject egalitarianism) are theologically conservative, even *neo-Calvinist*, as some might call them.⁴⁶ Driscoll describes himself as a “devoted Biblicist...seeking to be as faithful to Scripture as possible.” He holds a high view of Scripture, affirms the Trinity, sees humanity as totally depraved, and Jesus’ death as the satisfaction for divine judgment upon sin. Finally, he sees hell as a literal place of “unending torment”:

The Bible is one story about the Trinitarian God who created us, mercifully endures our sin, and sent Jesus Christ to live and die in our place, thereby saving us from eternal wrath if we repent of sin and trust in him alone. This is the true gospel revealed to us by God through Scripture.⁴⁷

⁴³ Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York: MacMillan, 1906), p. xiii; also idem, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: MacMillan, 1917), esp. pp. 131ff.

⁴⁴ Pagitt, *A Christianity Worth Believing*, p. 226.

⁴⁵ McLaren, *Everything Must Change*, p. 21.

⁴⁶ Darrin Patrick identifies himself as a Calvinist in “History of the Emerging Church.”

⁴⁷ Mark Driscoll, “The Emerging Church and Biblicist Theology,” *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches*, p. 35. A summary of Driscoll’s theology may be found

For him, the EC movement is more than simply couches, coffee, and candles.⁴⁸ It is about *contextualization*, which lies at the heart of the practice of emerging churches. Contextualization was first coined 1972 in a publication of the Theological Education Fund entitled *Ministry in Context*. It was defined as “the ability to respond meaningfully to the gospel within one’s own situation.”⁴⁹ It has been widely used in mission circles to describe the process that takes place when a missionary takes the gospel from a sending culture to a receiving culture. Depending on the recipient culture, the degree of distance between the sending and the receiving culture can be great. Language, customs and traditions, worldview, etc. all come in to play and the missionary must discern just how to deliver the message of 1st-century Christianity into the 21st-century *sitz im leben* in Africa, in South America, and elsewhere. Early in the debate over contextualization, the issues were relatively simple. How is the notion of sin communicated to someone whose culture that has no such concept? How does one offer communion in a world that has no grapes? How should the biblical material regarding shepherds or sheep be conveyed in a world where such do not exist?

The word is now being *contextualized* to the contemporary church scene. Driven largely by the epistemological shifts of postmodernity, the postmodern church must contextualize if it is to reach the Gen. X or Millennial generation. Evangelicals must adapt the delivery of the Gospel without changing the Gospel itself. It is here that Driscoll has his biggest rift with the revisionists. The revisionists argue that *everything must change*,⁵⁰ while Driscoll wants to hold on tightly to biblical truth and change only its delivery.

in this chapter as well as on the church website at <http://www.marshallchurch.org/content/DoctrinalStatement> (accessed 20 July 2008). As far as the Pentecostal/Charismatic doctrines, he considers himself a Pentecostal “with seatbelt.”

⁴⁸In describing the EC as “couches, coffee, and candles,” *couches* refers to different style of church worship—couches arranged in conversational fashion. *Coffee* suggests that most worshippers have a cup in their hands or can get one before they enter the “gathering” room. *Candles* is a reference to the return to traditional Christian practices like the burning of candles. On a recent visit to “The Porch,” as Solomon’s Porch is affectionately dubbed, I was reminded of my 1970s Jesus-movement era “Christian nightclub” in Atlanta. We could go and listen to CCM (though that genre had not been so named when I listened to it) in a darkly lit room, drinking coffee and conversing about Christianity. At the Porch, we sat on a mixed variety of old furniture arranged almost haphazardly around the room (a former liturgical church), though in such a way that small groups could chat with each other while listening to the service.

⁴⁹*Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, s.v. “Contextualization,” by Dean S. Gilliland, pp. 225–28.

⁵⁰Revisionist Brian McLaren has written a recent book by this title—*Everything Must Change* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007).

He argues that there are three models for ecclesiology—sectarianism, syncretism, and subversionism. Christians should “be biblically faithful and culturally fruitful.” Christianity has two hands. How the hands are positioned will make the difference in how well the message of the gospel is given and received. The relativist or syncretist has two open hands—theologically everything is subject to change as cultural changes. This is typified by Pagitt’s book, *A Christianity Worth Believing*. Pagitt repeatedly juxtaposes what Christianity believed under the influence of Greek thought with what he has come to understand now. Christianity must be adapted to meet contemporary needs—its message needs to be updated and the manner in which it is delivered must reach our present-day world.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is sectarianism or fundamentalism. The sectarian, according to Driscoll, has two closed hands. He holds tightly to his theology, which never changes, and he also holds on to his cultural forms, which also remain static. His music and his sensibilities, like the consumption of alcohol, or his ideas of dress or his openness of sexuality⁵¹ are shaped by older, outdated cultural norms.

The correct approach to culture is the *reformissionist* model. This position has a closed hand to hold theology as unchanging and an open hand to hold the ever changing culture. Driscoll is *subversive*. He wants to undermine the contemporary culture’s corrupting influence with the gospel. Culture is simply to be embraced and used to reach our world for God. “Reformission churches have to continually examine and adjust their musical styles, websites, aesthetics, acoustics, programming and just about everything but their Bible in an effort to effectively communicate the gospel to as many people as possible in the cultures around them.”⁵²

This is not to say that everything in culture is acceptable. Clearly there are some things that must be rejected as we interact with culture. Things that he rejects are things that are clearly outside the biblical order, such as homosexuality or sex outside of a monogamous, married relationship. At the same time, some things must be reclaimed from the culture around us. For instance, the world does not hold human sexuality as their domain. God gave it, and it falls under his dominion. Therefore, it should be spoken of candidly in the church. There are some items that must be recovered and corrected. The world’s view of human sexuality has been corrupted, and in reclaiming it we need to correct the false notions that many people have regarding it.

⁵¹Not to unbiblical forms like homosexuality, but to open, frank conversations about human sexuality.

⁵²Mark Driscoll, *The Radical Reformission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), p. 100.

WHY SHOULD FUNDAMENTALISM CARE?

At this point in the discussion, this essay has merely tried to describe a movement within evangelicalism that some might argue is not really an issue in fundamentalism. This in itself has been no small task since the *movement*, if it can be called such, is diverse and growing. It is true that it has little influence currently within fundamentalist circles. Few fundamentalist churches, if any, will likely go the route of Solomon's Porch and or even Mars Hill of Seattle. Few, if any fundamentalist pastors will exhort their men to learn to brew good beer and say, "I personally long to return to the glory days of Christian pubs, where God's men gather to drink beer and talk theology."⁵³ So, if this is the case, why should fundamentalists even care about what goes on in the EC?

According to many EC leaders, fundamentalists are a significant part of the problem in contemporary Christianity. Robert Webber suggested that it was the profound legalism of his youth that kept him from truly understanding the grace of God:

I grew up in a home of rules, most of which would be considered quaint today. In my home it was forbidden to go to movies, play cards, drink alcohol, dance, smoke, neck, use words like *darn* or *gosh*, or do anything on Sunday other than go to church and rest.

Spiritually was clearly defined. It was a discipline of do's and don'ts. The problem with this kind of spirituality is that it resulted in legalism and stood in the way of affirming the biblical concept of spirituality, which is to become free to be fully human.⁵⁴

Webber cites examples of twenty-somethings that have rejected

⁵³Ibid., p. 147. What is interesting to note is the widespread, open conversation of the consumption of alcohol being carried on in emerging churches. Traditionally, the use of beverage alcohol has been considered unbiblical in many segments of evangelicalism as well as fundamentalism. The openness crosses the spectrum of the movement. Karen Ward, for instance, a member of the Emergent conversation, abbess of the Church of the Apostles in Seattle, hopes to meet Mark Driscoll at a local pub and enjoy a cold beer because "Mark enjoys a good beer" (*Listening to the Beliefs of the Emerging Church*, p. 47). Cf. Norm Miller, "Alcohol, Acts 29 and the SBC" (posted 20 Mar 2007), for a discussion on how this problem among emerging churches is impacting the SBC, which has taken an official anti-alcohol stand, <http://www.bpnews.net/BPFirstPerson.asp?ID=25221> (accessed 20 September 2008). For a recent conservative reiteration of the non-use of beverage alcohol from a prominent evangelical voice, see Russ Moore and R. Albert Mohler, "Alcohol and Ministry," given on campus at Southern Baptist Seminary in September 2005, <http://www.sbts.edu/MP3/Mohler/Alcohol&Ministry.mp3> (accessed 19 September 2008). Mohler considers the libertarian approach to the consumption of alcohol typical among emerging evangelicals little more than "adolescent immaturity" for flaunting their liberty in the faces of those who reject its use.

⁵⁴Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals*, p. 174.

this kind of legalism in favor of the genuine spirituality of a postmodern Christianity.⁵⁵ Postmoderns have turned away from the legalism and are turning toward the emerging church.

Mark Driscoll describes fundamentalists as Christians who “love their Lord and their brothers, but not their neighbors.”⁵⁶ By failing to contextualize the methodology, fundamentalism really is not interested in reaching the world with the gospel. In some ways this criticism is tied to the previous one, but here is a critique that can be evaluated. Is fundamentalism a movement that is more interested in wrangling over idiosyncratic doctrinal views rather than working for global evangelism? Perhaps at times it appears so. How often has the KJV-only controversy sidetracked fundamentalist pastors or its schools from doing what is really important? More often than many would care to admit. If this was the only example that the emerging church could direct our way, perhaps we might deflect the criticism. Or, should we reflect and seek to change? Do these indictments have enough truth in them to make many fundamentalists feel uncomfortable? It is true that one’s adversaries will often tell you what your friends will not.

The EC critique of fundamentalism, however, does not stop here. From the view of the EC, fundamentalism’s problem is philosophical, and not merely a lack of consistency or sinful practice. Fundamentalism is a main problem with the Church, or at least a significant part of it. But exactly *what* problem is fundamentalism? It seems to be *the* reason why the evangelical church fails to reach its world. The tenacious determination to *separate* from all things unbiblical keeps the conservative church too far removed from the very people that most need to be reached—the world.

Fundamentalism is really losing the war, and I think it is in part responsible for the rise of what we know as the more liberal end of the emerging church.... Because a lot of what is fueling the left end of the emerging church is fatigue with hardcore fundamentalism that throws rocks at culture. But culture is the house that people live in, and it just seems really mean to keep throwing rocks at somebody’s house.⁵⁷

Maybe fundamentalists could simply dismiss some criticisms as bitter memories or mean-spirited responses from a troubled younger generation, or simply as myopic or misinformed responses. But for many emerging church leaders, fundamentalism is a whipping boy.

⁵⁵This is a perennial problem in all movements that place a strong emphasis on externals.

⁵⁶Driscoll, *The Radical Reformation*, p. 22.

⁵⁷Mark Driscoll, quoted in Collin, “Pastor Provocateur,” *Christianity Today online*, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/september/30.44.html> (accessed 25 July 2008).

The fundamentalist straw man often comes up in EC literature and conversation as one of the significant church troubles. At least on this point, all the streams of the EC seem to agree.

On the other end of the Christian spectrum, the extreme fundamentalist camp has made Jesus out to be an angry avenging figure. Instead of having compassion and love for sinners, he has only anger and points his finger at their sins to condemn them. This Jesus probably votes for one political party and has strong opinions on all types of things outside of what he said in the Bible, including the role of women in the church, what type of music to listen to, and which Bible version to use. This Jesus is talked about a lot in terms of his judgment and coming in the clouds to separate the goats and the sheep. A favorite response from this group to those who disagree with them is Matthew 10:35, where Jesus said, “For I have come to turn ‘a man against his father, a daughter against her mother.’” Sometimes there is even a hint of delight in their voices. Again, I’m exaggerating to make a point, but nevertheless this Jesus is out there too.⁵⁸

Fundamentalism is the Charybdis from which the church must steer away. Secularism is the Scylla. Fundamentalism is a “turning inward and circling the wagons with likeminded people. Consequently, the focus narrows to two questions: what makes us distinct, and how can we keep ourselves pure?”⁵⁹

Again, the fundamentalist might ask the question, why do we care? Driscoll, Kimball and Jones are the outsiders to fundamentalism. They do not know us, or they only know some of us. Their perception about us is often skewed, at best, and utterly false, at worst. Why not simply forget about them?

Let me suggest a couple of reasons why fundamentalists should care about the emerging church—why we simply should not dismiss their critique out of hand. First, we should care because they might be right. At least *some* of what they say at *some* level about *some* of us may be right. Fundamentalism may describe some who read this article, but the term is also used to describe a wide and growing diversity of individuals who often have little in common with each other. Some forms of fundamentalism are not much more than new forms of idiosyncratic monasticism, bordering on a cult—complete with a strict set of rules, an order, and a code of discipline. These new monastic

⁵⁸The citation is ambiguous. Is Kimball talking about all fundamentalism as extreme, or a subset of fundamentalism that even we would consider extreme? Apparently, Kimball thinks that complementarians are “extreme fundamentalists” (*They Like Jesus*, pp. 54–55). Cf. pp. 190–91 for Kimball’s opinion of how our fundamentalist subculture was created.

⁵⁹Jones, *The New Christians*, p. 39. For Brian McLaren’s critique on fundamentalism, which he closely associates with Calvinism, see *A Generous Orthodoxy*, pp. 205ff. He is particularly dismissive of “hot, pushy fundamentalism,” which he describes as “fearful, manic, violent, apocalyptic” (McLaren, *Finding Our Way Again* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008], p. 5).

orders even have their vicar generals or father abbots.⁶⁰

In this case, perhaps even Brian McLaren is right. He suggests that one of fundamentalism's problems is that it fights for the wrong things. Nothing is wrong with fighting so long as we fight for the right reasons. "The challenge for all fighters, of course, is to be sure they find out what is now truly worth fighting against, and then to be sure they have something that is truly worth fighting for."⁶¹ As a historian of fundamentalism, I have read some stories about fundamentalist battles that were poorly picked. This criticism has been true of at least part of our movement.⁶² But perhaps that description fits too few of those who will ponder this article today. So why else should we care?

A second reason we should care is the so-called "young fundamentalist" phenomenon with which we are often confronted. An online survey, done several years ago, considered the views of those under 35.⁶³ The concern was then, and still remains, that fundamentalism seems to be losing many of its best and brightest leaders to movements that are orthodox but not fundamentalist. These young people leave fundamentalism never to return. Why do they leave? Many express disgust with the sins of fundamentalism and pine for the serenity of broader evangelicalism. Many think that the grass is greener elsewhere.

Is the grass truly greener on the other side of the hill, and will they be leaving for EC pastures soon? The question of why they leave is for another paper to answer, but among the reasons some young fundamentalists move on is the influence of some heavy-hitters in conservative evangelicalism. Conferences like *Together for the Gospel*, *The Bethlehem Pastor's Conference*, or the *Shepherd's Conference* provide a great lineup of biblically oriented gospel preachers. Not one of these men is a self-confessed fundamentalist, but all are known for

⁶⁰What is missing in emerging literature is any real definition or critique of what fundamentalism is. A fundamentalist is seen as the ubiquitous ultra-conservative Christian who uses a King James Bible and does not go to movies. Their wives and daughters do not cut their hair, etc. Numerous attempts have been made by this author to dialogue with Mark Driscoll about this and other issues, but these attempts have met with no success. Neither phone calls nor emails to him or his staff are returned.

⁶¹McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, p. 206. I could not agree more with McLaren *on this point*.

⁶²When I began my Ph.D. in Louisville in 2000, as a self-identified fundamentalist, I found myself often qualifying just what kind of fundamentalist I was. Many of the prominent fundamentalist churches in Louisville were of a variety that would not support the fundamentalist school where I currently teach.

⁶³The results of this survey may be found at <http://www.sharperiron.org/downloads/2005%20Young%20Fundamentalists%20Survey%20Results.pdf> (accessed 5 October 2008).

generally sound handling of the text of Scripture. Many of them are even considered *fundamentalists* by their less conservative evangelical brethren.⁶⁴

So what connection does this have with the emerging church? None of the aforementioned conferences are particularly oriented toward the EC. Why exhaust the effort to know what the EC believes and craft carefully worded responses to the movement? Why should fundamentalism be concerned about the emerging church?

Mark Driscoll is one reason. The casually dressed, indie-rock-loving preacher is a man on the move. His influence is growing rapidly. He appears on national and international platforms widely across conservative evangelicalism. His church in Seattle has more than 8,000 members, and he is on his way to building a church of 20,000. Driscoll is a rising star in evangelical leadership. Gerry Breshears co-authors books with him, and numerous ecclesiastical venues host him. Driscoll is on the board of the Gospel Coalition and will deliver a plenary address at their 2009 conference in Rosemount, IL. He already has spoken twice at Bethlehem's Pastor's Conference (2006) and again this year. He is speaking at conservative schools and seminaries far and wide.⁶⁵ His influence is growing, as is his list of published books.⁶⁶

This is not to say that *everyone* within conservative evangelicalism has jumped on his bandwagon. John MacArthur in late 2006 wrote a stinging critique of Mark Driscoll's methodology. MacArthur was especially critical of his worldly methods and crude language in the pulpit.⁶⁷ But sadly, despite the occasional critiques, he is being widely and prominently used. Those that hear him will buy his books, adopt

⁶⁴For example, in the literature regarding the battles within the Southern Baptist Convention, 1979–1990, the conservatives are often depicted as fundamentalists. See Walter B. Shurden, *The Struggle for the Soul of the SBC: Moderate Responses to the Fundamentalist Movement* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993).

⁶⁵For example, Daniel Akin hosted him at Southeastern Baptist Seminary in 2007. In the summer of 2008, Driscoll was speaking in Australia, promoting his views.

⁶⁶Driscoll is featured on the cover of *Church Executive* magazine in September 2008, and the magazine included an interview done by Ronald E. Keener with Mark Driscoll regarding his ministry and influence.

⁶⁷See John MacArthur, "Grunge Christianity" *Pulpit Magazine* (December 2006), <http://www.sfjulpit.com/2006/12/11/grunge-christianity> (accessed 27 July 2008); also available as John MacArthur, "Grunge Christianity and Cussing Pastors—What Next?" <http://www.crosswalk.com/11530376> (accessed 27 July 2008). MacArthur has apparently made more recent comments that reiterate his earlier concerns. The comments were made on a broadcast of The Way of the Master Radio, 7 April 2008. A transcript of the comments may be found at http://alindsey4.blogspot.com/2008/06/john-macarthur-critique-of-mark_21.html (accessed 27 July 2008).

some or much of his methodology, and maybe even brew his beer.⁶⁸

His theology is for the most part sound. His methodology, however, lacks clear biblical engagement. In fact, what the EC lacks generally, and what Driscoll seems to lack individually, is any serious critique of culture. Culture is often treated as neutral or amoral.⁶⁹ It is just the way people think and act. While one would not expect the revisionists to offer a *biblical* critique of culture, it is surprising that one who wishes to be “biblically faithful” does not seem to offer any extended cultural critique.⁷⁰ What exactly does John the Apostle mean when he suggests that Christians *not* love the *world* (1 John 2:15), if, in fact, some Christians have wrongly applied this text? Or how would Mark Driscoll apply Romans 12:2, “Do not be conformed to this world”?⁷¹ Perhaps Driscoll has commented on that text extensively somewhere. Many would agree with John MacArthur, “I frankly wonder how any Christian who takes the Bible at face value could ever think that in order to be ‘culturally relevant’ Christians should participate in society’s growing infatuation with vulgarity. Didn’t *vulgarity* and *culture* used to be considered polar opposites?”⁷²

This is not to suggest that Driscoll has no notion of worldliness. It is “the collective sinfulness that flows from the human heart to

⁶⁸In recent years, Driscoll has expressed great remorse for much of his crude pulpit language. Nevertheless, he still uses expressions in both his pulpit discourses and written materials that are offensive to some. It is unnecessary to reproduce examples of the coarse language in this article, but examples may be found in a recent online review of *Vintage Jesus* by Tim Challies, “Book Review of *Vintage Jesus* by Mark Driscoll,” <http://www.challies.com/archives/book-reviews/book-review-vintage-jesus-by-mark-driscoll.php> (accessed 27 July 2008).

⁶⁹This is not to say that Mark Driscoll offers no critique of culture at any level. He is clear and unmixed in his critique of the immorality of his Seattle community and elsewhere. However, one is left wondering if he does not tacitly embrace a normative principle with regards to culture—whatever is not expressly forbidden is allowed. For example, I can find no criticism of music from Mark Driscoll. Presumably he would argue that *some* music is unbiblical. Even if he would argue normatively regarding culture, is there any such thing as unbiblical music? If so, what constitutes unbiblical music? Lyrics? Form? Is there any substantive difference between a symphony and grunge?

⁷⁰At the time of this writing, I am unable to find such a critique by Mark Driscoll or a close associate.

⁷¹The subject of *worldliness* is at the heart of this discussion. Is there such a thing as being too much like the world? John MacArthur seems to think so. “Even when you marry such worldliness (speaking of Mark Driscoll’s use of crude language) with good systematic theology and a vigorous defense of substitutionary atonement, the soundness of the theoretical doctrine doesn’t sanctify the wickedness of the practical lifestyle. The opposite happens. Solid biblical doctrine is trivialized and mocked if we’re not doers of the Word as well as teachers of it” (MacArthur, *Grudge Christianity?*).

⁷²Ibid.

pollute God's good creation."⁷³ This is an excellent starting point to define worldliness. But one looks in vain for any suggestion of what constitutes worldliness at a concrete example. Several biblical texts are engaged at this point such as 1 John 2 and Romans 12:2, but absent is a discussion of the concrete. Conservative Christians have historically looked at things like beverage alcohol consumption and attendance at movies or even theatre as worldly. Ironically, as evangelical Christians speak more openly about the use of beverage alcohol, the NCAA is considering a total ban on alcohol advertising for their games. This is due in part to the serious problem that drinking has become on the college campus with an estimated 40 percent of college students involved in binge drinking. Alcohol contributes to about 600,000 injuries, 700,000 assaults and 100,000 sexual assaults in the 18–24 age group. R. Albert Mohler's view of total abstinence of beverage alcohol makes much more sense than does Mark Driscoll's promotion of brewing good beer when these staggering statistics are considered.⁷⁴

Driscoll has an interesting list of biblical principles for cultural decision-making. In the first principle, taken from 1 Corinthians 6:12, Driscoll suggests that an activity be measured by whether it is beneficial personally and to the gospel generally. If this principle were applied to the use of beverage alcohol, one would ask, "What does drinking do for me?" What does drinking do for the gospel? More to the point, how would having a champagne bar at a church-sponsored activity or a non-Christian jazz festival *really* promote the gospel? Even if one might make a case that the limited use of beverage alcohol has some personal redeeming value, what can it possibly do to *promote* the gospel? Principle three, based on 1 Corinthians 1:8–9 asks, "Will I be doing this in the presence of someone I know will fall into

⁷³ Driscoll, *The Radical Reformation*, p. 123.

⁷⁴ For a discussion on the debate over alcohol and advertising by the NCAA, see "Pressure Grows to Expel Beer Advertising from NCAA Basketball," published by Center for Science in the Public Interest, <http://www.cspinet.org/new/200808051.html> (accessed 3 October 2008).

Driscoll does not merely allow for Christians to consume beverage alcohol, he actually promotes it. At Mars Hill Church's 2008 New Year's Eve party, a champagne bar was included as part of the festivities. People were invited to "Ring in 2008 in Red Hot Style. This New Year's Eve party features internationally known artist, Bobby Medina & his Red Hot Band [a secular band]. This 12 piece big band does it all, from Swing, to Latin to Motown and beyond and are widely considered one of the top dance bands in the Northwest. We'll be transforming our auditorium into a Red Hot Spot, bringing in an enormous dance floor, refreshments, dessert, champagne, photos in an awesome backdrop designed for the event and all the noise-making party favors you could want. At midnight, countdown with 1000 other revelers with fireworks live from Seattle's Space Needle on the big screens. This is going to be an unforgettable party. Get ready to sizzle!" From the website advertising the party, <http://www.redhotbash.com> (accessed 7 October 2008).

sin as a result?” This is an impossible principle to break. How can any believer infallibly know what anyone else *will* do? However, if the principle were reworded to ask what a person *might* do as a result of our liberty, that principle would be a strong deterrent to the beverage use of alcohol. My liberty to drink surely *might* set a bad example causing a weaker brother to fall into sin. Paul’s argument is not based upon his perception of what someone *would* do, but what one *might* do. In that case, his choice was clear—he would not eat meat!⁷⁵

Some might think that this article is an exaggerated attack focusing on one narrow issue—beverage alcohol. Other illustrations could be cited. For a Christian who wishes to maintain a distinct testimony from the world, one might wonder how a Christian could justify the following statement: “We also host a non-Christian jazz festival that boasts some world-renowned musicians along with free clinics for young student musicians, thereby providing us with a great opportunity to practice hospitality to our city.”⁷⁶ Those who oppose this kind of pragmatic approach to evangelism are accused of being narrow. But the question remains, what do non-Christian jazz festivals have to do with the work of the church? What New Testament model could be cited to suggest that the early church practiced anything like this? This seems to be worldly pragmatism at its best. These methods have attracted large crowds and produced a large church of more than 8,000. Some might argue that it is hard to argue with success.

Do not expect Mark Driscoll to fade into the background anytime soon. Perhaps it is the case that some of the conservatives are mentoring him and trying to help him on some of his extreme positions. Will they convince him to abandon his methodology for a more biblical approach? His view of contextualization defines him. He would have to repudiate his entire approach to ministry and much of his early writings. It seems that ultimately worldliness defines him. He wants to be as much like the world as he can in order to win them. Worldliness is a pandemic within the Church today and fundamentalism will likely feel that pressure.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ *The Radical Reformation*, p. 104. Similarly, principle eleven asks if something can be done in a way that glorifies God? How does having a champagne bar *glorify* God? Or a non-Christian jazz festival? Other principles on the list could be similarly critiqued.

⁷⁶ Driscoll, *Confessions of a Reformation Rev.*, p. 158. The worldliness of men like Mark Driscoll has caught the attention of some Southern Baptists. See Roger Moran, “The Emerging Church Movement Calls for Biblical Scrutiny by Missourians,” *The Pathway*, a bi-weekly publication of the Missouri Baptist Convention, 2 October 2007, <http://www.mbcpathway.com/article97073c485613.htm> (accessed 7 October 2008).

⁷⁷ A recent example of the worldliness of evangelicalism is the recent review of the Hollywood movie “Sex and the City” found in *Christianity Today*. Despite its R-rating for strong sexual content, the reviewer further described it by saying,

What are we to do? Now that we have identified the attitude of the EC to fundamentalism, what should we say to these things? How shall *we* respond to the emerging church? What options do we have if we are to be biblically faithful without being culturally obscurantist?

1. We need to know and understand the movement, and this comes only by reading and engaging the literature. We must read widely and think deeply about the conversation, not simply address surface issues, like the drinking of alcohol or crass language, no matter how offensive these particular things might be. We must go deeper into the conversation by challenging their whole approach to culture. What *is* culture? How is it shaped and how is it to be engaged? A wholesale dismissal of either contemporary culture or contextualization simply will not do.
2. We need to evaluate the criticism of the emerging church regarding fundamentalism. We need to hear what they say and correct the legitimate flaws that they reveal. This may be a painful, humbling process but one that will bear fruit for the glory of God if we allow the process to be a sanctifying influence in our movement. If our friends will not tell us the truth, then maybe listening to our adversaries will help us correct bad theology and bad practice. It is not enough to trade on our victories of the past. We need to walk biblically today and jettison unbiblical ideas.⁷⁸
3. We need to engage the debate through carefully worded responses. Simply drafting a resolution will not stem the flow of young men out of our movement and into another (or church members for that reason into other churches). We

“There *is* a lot of sex and nudity in the movie. Be warned: There’s a threesome, a naked man in a shower, some steamy makeup sex. The sex scenes between married folk are somewhat less offensive, but there were too many times when it seemed that the producers were simply trying to shock.” See “Sex and the City” reviewed by Cameron Courtney, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/movies/reviews/2008/sexandthecity.html> (accessed 30 September 2008).

Can a Christian be too worldly? If so, by doing what? Is worldliness merely an attitude of the heart or does it encompass actions as well? Can one who genuinely loves God do things that should be considered worldly yet not have a heart that is worldly? For a good contemporary starting point on this discussion, see *Worldliness: Resisting the Seduction of a Fallen World*, ed. C. J. Mahaney (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008) or R. Kent Hughes, *Set Apart: Calling a Worldly Church to a Godly Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003).

⁷⁸It would take another paper to suggest things that we *might* wish to consider changing. Certainly one of the hot issues in our circles remains our music. What constitutes good music is more than a matter of personal taste or preference. The Bible brings much to bear on this issue. Moreover, this is not merely a matter for musicians! Theologians can, and should, engage the music debate.

cannot respond to what we fail to understand adequately. Admittedly each of us individually cannot respond, but some of us must. But our responses must be measured, and guarded, and carefully reasoned with more than simple proof-texting. Thoughtful biblical engagement requires careful exegetical work.

4. We need to choose our battles carefully and articulate our views as positively as we can. Fundamentalism is too often viewed as “too little fun,” “too much damn,” and “too little mental.” Too many times we are known more for what we are against rather than what we are for. We have written numerous statements regarding why we separate but few definitive statements regarding how we can cooperate for the sake of the gospel. We have Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, and others among us. We are Arminians, Calvinists, and everything in between. To be sure, some things we cannot do together. But when we can, we must work together. Rather than repeatedly highlighting our differences, we ought to point out periodically our commonalities.
5. We need to consider carefully how to engage the modern culture without selling out to it. This may mean making some changes in our approach, especially in our methodology. The issue of contextualization is a thorny one, but not one that is without merit when handled biblically. How can an eternal message delivered in a 1st century context be delivered to a 21st century world? It will not do simply to give this a pat answer—just preach the Bible. Which texts? To what end? What will it look like in this world?

Perhaps other things can and should be done if we are to engage in this important conversation. Perhaps some think that I am making more out of the emerging church movement than needs to be made. I believe that we are being naïve if we think it is simply a passing fancy that will burn itself out. It will doubtless change, as the first ten years of its history demonstrate. But some of these emerging men will shape the way Christianity—even evangelicalism—is perceived and the way ministry is done in the future. I am not willing to simply let Mark Driscoll set the agenda for 21st-century ministry. Is it not possible to love Jesus, our brothers, and our neighbors without becoming like them?