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concept is wrong. Christianity grew tremendously, most strikingly in Africa. It was the spiritual darkness that engulfed much of the Global North that brought the numbers down to blot out the advances in the Global South.⁵² And the advances made in Africa were in the interior mostly the results of the work of the evangelical missions, and in the other two thirds of Africa, where the advance was mostly made by the classical missions, their character was more evangelical than in the Global North.

Edinburgh 1910 expected great advances in Eastern Asia. Advances were made there, but far less than hoped for, at least initially. And when finally the great advance was born during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the baby looked much more evangelical than ecumenical. Not that the united Three Self Church did not grow, but its growth was eclipsed by that of the dis-united House Churches. Without overlooking the work of the Holy Spirit, I argue that diversity and evangelical piety promoted the expansion of the Christian faith in China far more than

unity and the concept of God's activity in the secular world.

At that time some classical missiologists even found themselves on the wrong side of the equation, arguing that God has set aside the churches in China (hopefully only for a time) so that he could work (more effectively) through the Cultural Revolution for the liberation of China's millions. A hundred years before Hudson Taylor had been convinced that China's millions should be liberated by faith in Jesus Christ.

VIII Conclusion

At Edinburgh 1910, elder brother and little sister met, recognized the same Father, but did not start living in the same house, and I am convinced that that was right. Big brother has grown older since, little sister has become a mature woman, and while growing they have met and should meet more often. Since then, two more sisters have been born, to the elder siblings' surprise. Let them all recognize each other, and together fulfil that great vision to reach the non-Christian world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. The geography has changed since 1910,⁵³ the task has not, and (too) much of it still needs to be done.

⁵² In the 'Edinburgh' part of the Global North (the Protestant countries dominated by the churches of the Reformation), the darkness grew faster and remained deeper than in the Roman Catholic sections of it. In the USA many mainline churches lost half of their members in half a century while evangelical churches frequently grew and the new Charismatic denominations flourished.

⁵³ For an excellent study of these changes, including all the numbers, see: Todd M. Johnson and Kenneth R. Ross (eds), *Atlas of Global Christianity 1910-2010* (Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

A Theological Critique of the Emerging, Postmodern Missional Church/movement

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KEYWORDS: *Contextualization, culture, evangelism, spirituality, paradox, praxis, consumerism, spiritual warfare*

I. Introduction

This paper presents a theological critique of the emerging movement (EM), which is understood as a conversation about how to contextualize the gospel for the emerging postmodern and post-colonial culture, and a call to action in this regard. It will be argued that EM makes important contributions to our ecclesiology, but that it is not without some concerns.

After defining EM, this critique focuses on three main issues. The first issue raised is EM's desire for cultural relevancy, with an evaluation of its approach to spirituality and engagement with culture. The second issue is the contention that our lives are the main medium through which the emerging culture will understand the message. Thirdly, the shift from

'church and mission' to 'missional church' will be considered. After reflecting on EM's relevance and application for ministry, it will be concluded that the movement's contribution to ecclesiology outweighs the concerns presented. Thus, the movement should be encouraged.

II. Defining the Emerging Movement

There is scholarly consensus that the western church is undergoing a massive paradigm shift in response to similar changes in culture. Discussions regarding the effects of postmodernity or postcolonialism¹ on the church have

¹ McLaren suggests 'postcolonialism' is a more helpful term than 'postmodernism'. B. McLaren, 'Church Emerging: Or Why I Still Use the Word Postmodern but with Mixed Feelings', in *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, eds. D. Pagitt and T. Jones (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 143 and 146.

become commonplace.² Consequently, it seems that God has ignited concern for the generations emerging from postmodernist and postcolonialist contexts, exemplified in the following example of a church's vision,

Our Dream—To bring together Christians from all walks of life, including pastors, church planters and leaders across denominational and national borders, who want to reach out to people in postmodern culture, and who understand that, in order to do so, significant changes need to be made in the way we run and organize our churches.³

Some see an ecclesiological shift as essential if the church is going to be able to reach the emerging generation,⁴ and EM is the result.

In contrast with Sayers who contends that EM has begun, 'to fracture and...now has broken up into a number

of mini movements',⁵ I contend that the extent to which it is permeating and transforming the existing church is evidenced by the many groups identifying with it. In this sense, EM can be compared to the charismatic movement: it is bigger than one group can claim, although some groups may be more committed to it and are transformed more fully by it.

While the emerging church resists being 'boxed-in',⁶ we can identify three core characteristics: 'identifying with the life of Jesus, transforming secular space, and commitment to community as a way of life'.⁷ Foundational to this understanding are congregations who are deliberately engaging with the outside culture.⁸ The term 'Emerging churches' is thus used for those congregations who are positively responding to the EM conversation, and for those churches associated with the movement.

III. Three Issues in the Emerging Movement

1. Cultural Relevancy

EM's desire to contextualize the gospel for the emerging generation is neces-

sary and commendable. Indeed the gospel is relevant for all cultural contexts as it 'transforms and sanctifies traditions, speaks to specific world-views, and employs vernacular expressions and modes of argumentation'.⁹ Although there are some concerns to be noted, EM has great potential to reach a generation that is growing up not knowing the Lord (Judg. 2:10).¹⁰

One of the strengths of EM is its view of the gospel as being about community and creating community (Eph. 2:14-19; Rev. 21:1-5).¹¹ This development challenges the existing church to examine the ways in which it has been too accommodating to modernism regarding individualism.¹² The importance of community is easily defensible biblically, so EM's drive is a good corrective to the existing church, which can often reduce 'fellowship' to a greeting and small talk.¹³

By creating space for others to explore their spirituality,¹⁴ EM has built bridges with emerging generations; and this is obviously a positive contribution as it affirms that natural human instinct speaks to a sense of divinity.¹⁵ Certainly welcoming whoever will come (Is. 55:1-7; Mt. 22:1-14), even unbelievers, and furthering interest in Jesus are to be encouraged (Acts 17).¹⁶ Christians authentically and passionately worshipping God, recognizing the mystery and paradox in the Bible as it is studied, enjoying creativity and art, and connecting to Christianity's ancient traditions can indeed convey an experience of God to the spiritually hungry.¹⁷

However, issue must be taken with any attitude that spirituality can be

² See for example, D. Kimball, *The Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 44, 63-64; E. Gibbs and R. K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 17-18; D. Tomlinson, *The Post-Evangelical* (London: Triangle, 1997), 140-141; D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 49; T. Conder, *The Church in Transition: The Journey of Existing Churches into the Emerging Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 32, 43.

³ Next Wave, 'About Next Wave' <<http://www.the-next-wave.org/about/>> (2009, cited 20 April 2009).

⁴ T. Conder, 'The Existing Church/Emerging Church Matrix: Collision, Credibility, Missional Collaboration, and Generative Fellowship' in *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, 103.

⁵ M. Sayers, 'The Emerging Missional Church Fractures into Mini Movements' <<http://mark-sayers.wordpress.com/2009/03/25/the-emerging-missional-church-fractures-into-mini-movements/>> (2009, cited 21 April 2009).

⁶ Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 14.

⁷ Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 235, also 45.

⁸ Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 330; J. Long, *Emerging Hope: a Strategy for Reaching Postmodern Generations* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 186. 'Outside' here refers to being outside of the church.

⁹ C. Ott and H. Netland, *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 212.

¹⁰ Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 58. See also Barna Group, 'Christianity is no Longer America's Default Faith' <<http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/12-faithspirituality/15-christianity-is-no-longer-americans-default-faith>> (2009, cited 20 April 2009).

¹¹ Grenz, *Theology*, 481; Long, *Emerging Hope*, 220-221; Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 95; Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 94.

¹² M. Horton, 'Better Homes & Gardens', in *The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives*, 112-113; F. Mathewes-Green, 'Under the Heaventree' in *The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives*, 158; Conder, *The Church*, 163.

¹³ Ex. 12:3, 6, 47; 16:9; Lev. 4:13; Num. 1:2; Jn. 15:5; 17:11-23; Acts 4:32; Rom. 15:5; Eph. 2:14-20; Phil. 2:1-2; Col. 3:11-15; 1 Tim. 3:15.

¹⁴ T. Perry, 'Young People Consider Themselves Spiritual' <<http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?id=30274>> (15 April 2009, cited 20 April 2009).

¹⁵ See J. Calvin, 'John Calvin on the Natural Knowledge of God' in *The Christian Theology Reader*, ed. A. McGrath (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 57.

¹⁶ D. Kimball, *They Like Jesus but not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 94; cf. Is. 66:19; Num. 15:14; Jn. 10:16; Acts 2:12-13, 41; cf. Acts 2:1; 1 Cor. 14:23-25).

¹⁷ T. Bronsink, 'The Art of Emergence: Being God's Handiwork' in *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, ed. D. Pagitt, and T. Jones (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 70, 73. Also, Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 26, 36, 115. Also, Conder, *The Church*, 84. See also, Emergent Village, 'About Emergent Village', <<http://www.emergentvillage.com/about/>> (2009, cited 03 April 2009); and Emergent Village, 'Values and Practices', <<http://www.emergentvillage.com/about-information/values-and-practices>> (2009, accessed 03 April 2009).

self-generated or found within (Jn. 1:18; Rom. 1:21),¹⁸ for God chooses to be known only in Christ;¹⁹ there is no ability to hear or understand God on our own part unless God first reveals.²⁰ This is something that EM leaders must address. Because spiritual experiences are unverifiable, they must be interpreted in the light of theology rather than vice versa.²¹ It is absolutely essential that good teaching and theology accompany experience.

While trying to avoid becoming a 'consumer-driven church',²² the emerging church must recognize that attempts to create a spiritual experience may actually be encouraging a new kind of self-centredness and consumer-driven church.²³ Care must be taken that our 'future hope' does not become associated primarily with a spiritual experience of the 'now' instead of with the 'not yet' of Christ's return.²⁴ Additionally, it is a by-product

of our consumer-driven culture to accept 'pure interest' as enough to gain access into a spiritual community. EM is right to be critical of consumerism infiltrating the church, but it must also realise how immersed our society is in consumerism, and how difficult it is to break free from culture.

Nonetheless, the commitment to include others in authentic community and the reticence to speak against other belief systems²⁵ are necessary components in contextualizing the gospel for a generation that associates exclusion with ethnic cleansing.²⁶ As Kimball says,

I hope we will consider how to believe that Jesus is the only way and yet show the utmost respect for those who practice other faiths, changing the perception that we think that everything about all other religions is wrong and that we arrogantly slam other faiths.²⁷

Some see EM as being too culturally accommodating in this regard,²⁸ especially as this paradox-accepting gener-

ation may well place Jesus alongside other religions' beliefs, even if there is an apparent contradiction between them.²⁹ This is an obvious danger that emerging leaders themselves seem to be holding in tension.³⁰ For example, McLaren recognises that, 'The gospel must be translated into postmodern culture, just as it has been in modern culture. In that translation there is danger, of course: of being neutered or domesticated by the culture.'³¹ Additionally, Kimball affirms that, 'All the emerging churches I know believe in the inspiration of the Bible, the Trinity, the atonement, the bodily resurrection, and salvation in Jesus alone.'³²

Furthermore, Gibbs and Bolger clarify:

Emerging churches hold to Christian orthodoxy, affirming the uniqueness of Christ. This understanding, however, rather than being a reason to exclude, empowers them to include those of other faiths, cultures, and traditions.

Because of their confidence in Jesus, members of emerging churches venture out and truly listen to those of other faiths and even seek to be evangelized by them. They no longer feel that they need to argue for the faith. Instead, they believe their lives speak much louder than their words.³³

Thus many EM leaders recognize the idolatrous danger³⁴ inherent in dialoguing with those of other faiths³⁵ and they also are concerned about maintaining the uniqueness of Christ.³⁶ EM highlights the need to empathise with the high value the current generation places on tolerance in order to contextualise the gospel for emerging culture.

However, the movement is in danger of neutralizing spirituality. In our attempts to be holistic, tolerant, and accommodating, we must never lose the distinction between light and dark (1 Pet. 2:9).³⁷ For example, Carson predicted that emerging church leaders would address concern about evil in

18 Wells, *The Courage*, 69, 237; Grenz, *Theology*, 240-241.

19 M. Luther, 'Martin Luther on Revelation in Christ', in *The Christian Theology Reader*, ed. McGrath, 55-57.

20 K. Barth, 'Karl Barth on Revelation as God's Self-Disclosure' in *The Christian Theology Reader*, ed. McGrath, 69.

21 A. E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, second edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 226-227; Bloesch, *The Church*, 34.

22 Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 95.

23 Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction*, 228; Wells, *The Courage*, 107, 111, 123, 229; Carson, *Becoming Conversant*, 140-141.

24 A. Crouch and also response by E. R. McManus in A. Crouch, 'Life After Postmodernity', in *The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives*, 88; Grenz, *Theology*, 611-612, 647-649; Rom. 8:19-20; 2 Thes. 1:7-10; Tit. 2:11-13.

25 See, for example, Emergent Village, 'Values and Practices'.

26 See M. Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 57.

27 Kimball, *They Like Jesus*, 184.

28 D. Wells, *The Courage to be Protestant: Truth-lovers, Marketers, and Emergents in the Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 92; D. Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers: Christ in a Postmodern World* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 313, 316; D. G. Bloesch, *The Church: Sacraments, Worship, Ministry, Mission* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 110, 246.

29 Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical & Global Perspectives* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 159; Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 73; S. J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 13.

30 Conder, *The Church*, 21. For a good example, see B. McLaren, 'Seeking to Do One Thing Well: A Response to Three Helpful Reviews', *Reformation and Revival Journal* 14 (3) (2005): 124.

31 McLaren, 'Seeking', 124.

32 D. Kimball, 'Please Don't Stereotype the Emerging Church'. Blog Post. <http://www.dankimball.com/vintage_faith/2006/12/saddened_by_joh.html> (05 December 2006, cited 20 April 2009).

33 Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 133.

34 For an accusation that such accommodation is idolatry, see R. S. Smith, *Truth and the New Kind of Christian: the Emerging Effects of Postmodernism in the Church* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2005), 189.

35 See the comment made by E. R. McManus to B. McLaren in B. McLaren, 'The Method, the Message, and the Ongoing Story', in *The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives*, ed. L. Sweet (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 206.

36 On maintaining the uniqueness of Christ, see J. Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 5.

37 Volf, *Exclusion*, 52.

other religions by pointing out the evil in our religion too.³⁸ However, emerging church leaders do not seem to have addressed the issue at all.

While people may no longer be motivated to faith by hell and God's wrath,³⁹ we must not altogether ignore that we are under God's wrath and judgment outside of his covenant with us. Encounters with the holy God in the Bible cause fear, trembling, confession, and awareness of our sin and weakness (Is. 6; Hos. 1:9-10).

Thus EM must recognize the tension and maintain the awareness that some things are not of God. Things are not intrinsically sacred, and spiritual experiences are 'holy' only if God declares them thus and accepts our worship (Mt. 21:43-44). EM desires to see the church more affected 'by the transforming presence of the living God' through spiritual experiences.⁴⁰ However, EM must take care not to confuse experience with genuineness, nor to elevate tolerance above discernment, nor to substitute acceptance for love. Spiritual experiences and inter-faith dialogues ought to be tested against God's Word.

Additionally, EM must acknowledge and fight against the spiritual attack that will work against the movement's good, especially in a culture which no longer believes that Satan

and his minions are real.⁴¹ If EM succeeds in drawing people to Christ, then Satan will seek to devour EM leaders and new believers (Eph. 6:11-13). It is essential to remember that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light and is a deceiver.⁴² So it is a matter of concern that in his criticism of McLaren, Frame twice mentions the fact that he does not address spiritual warfare, yet in his response McLaren fails to acknowledge or address this point.⁴³ If EM avoids discussion of spiritual warfare, it will be restricted inevitably in extending its influence beyond the western church, regardless of the global effects of a postcolonial worldview.

The movement must also take care that its revolutionary mindset is not a defence against being 'open to authentic scrutiny'.⁴⁴ For example, some accuse those with reservations about the 'new' insights as being immovable or wanting certainty,⁴⁵ but this could perhaps be seen merely as a tactic to

avoid criticism. All things must be tested, and just because something is 'new' or 'dynamic' this does not mean we should accept it on equal terms with our traditional expressions of faith; the 'new' is by nature under scrutiny until it proves itself to be authentic. This does not invalidate EM anymore than we would invalidate children as humans; but children are children, not adults, and only time and rigorous testing will reveal their true character.

Conder helpfully suggests that the existing church needs to analyse critically its culture from within, thus challenging the fallacy of a pure church which is 'unadulterated by external cultural threats'. However, the emerging church also needs to apply the same cultural critical analysis to avoid becoming 'so enamored with our engagement of culture that essential distinctives and practices of the Christian community vanish or become indiscernible'.⁴⁶ It is thus essential that the movement be self-critical.⁴⁷

While there are some concerns regarding engagement with culture, EM's commitment to the contextualization of the gospel for the current generation certainly remains a strength the movement has to offer the existing church. Thus, it is agreed with Kimball,

As long as we are not conforming to the world (Rom. 12:1-2) and not failing to pay attention to sound

doctrine (1 Tim. 4:16), and as long as we are producing disciples (Mt. 28:19), we should press ahead in seeking to reach others for Christ. But our modern categories and values just might need to be rearranged if we want to reach emerging generations.⁴⁸

2. The medium IS the message⁴⁹

The emerging church rightly insists that orthodoxy is meaningless without orthopraxy.⁵⁰ Of course, this is the view of faith found in the Bible, whose authors arguably never conceived that belief might become so abstracted as to be elevated above praxis.⁵¹ Many existing churches also call for practice to flow from belief. But EM differs in seeing our authentic witness in practice as the primary message to reach our culture, thus reallocating the evangelistic message from written media to concrete living and relating.⁵² So experience and action become the way of

38 Carson, *Becoming Conversant*, 134.

39 B. McLaren, and also response by M. Horton in the same article, McLaren, 'The Method, the Message, and the Ongoing Story', 213-214.

40 E. R. McManus, 'The Global Intersection' in *The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives*, 247.

41 Barna Group, 'Most Americans Do Not Believe that Satan or the Holy Spirit Exists', <<http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/12-faithspirituality/260-most-american-christians-do-not-believe-that-satan-or-the-holy-spirit-exists>> (2009, cited 20 April 2009).

42 See G. E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, revised edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 47-48; Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 472-473; Jn. 8:44; 2 Cor. 4:4; 11:14; Eph. 2:2.

43 J. M. Frame, 'The Road to Generous Orthodoxy', *Reformation and Revival Journal* 14 (3) (2005): 100, 102; B. McLaren, 'Seeking', 121-140.

44 Conder, 'The Existing', 107.

45 D. Pagitt, 'Communities of Hope' in *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, 75.

48 Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 64-65.

49 Long, *Emerging Hope*, 206.

50 Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 215. S. McKnight, 'Five Streams of the Emerging Church', *Christianity Today* 51 (2) (February 2007): 36-37.

51 See N.L. von Zinzendorf, 'Nicolas Ludwig von Zinzendorf on Reason and Experience' in *The Christian Theology Reader*, ed. McGrath, 62; Job 28:28; Ps. 19:13; 24:3-6; 37:27-28; 97:10; 119:1-3; Ezek. 33:30-32; Mt. 7:16-27; 12:33; 13:19-23; Lk. 3:8-9; 6:43-45, 49; 8:11-15; 11:28; Rom. 2:11-16; 3:30-31; Gal. 5:22; Eph. 5:8-9; Phil. 2:13; Tit. 3:8, 14; Heb. 6:9-12; 13:20-21; Jas. 1:22-25; 2:14-26; 1 Pet. 2:20-21; 2 Pet. 1:3-5; 1 Jn. 3:18; Rev. 22:12-14.

52 Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 70. Also, Long, *Emerging Hope*, 206.

46 Conder, 'The Existing', 104. Carson also expresses this concern. Carson, *Becoming Conversant*, 125.

47 See Moltmann, *The Church*, 6.

translating the gospel into the emerging culture's local language.⁵³ This has significant merit in providing context and understanding to a world that is no longer familiar with Christian ethics and terms (cf. Mt. 5:13-16; Jn. 3:21; 13:34-35).⁵⁴

EM consequently de-focuses the written word and doctrinal statements in favour of relationships and actions. For example, consider The Emergent Village 'Statement of Faith', which says,

We believe in God, beauty, future, and hope—but you won't find a traditional statement of faith here. We don't have a problem with faith, but with statements. Whereas statements of faith and doctrine have a tendency to stifle friendships, we hope to further conversation and action around the things of God.⁵⁵

This leads some to question whether absolute truth and authority are being rejected, or whether the Bible is somehow seen as insufficient for the church's life.⁵⁶ However, it is unfair to

associate hesitancy and distaste for reductionist propositions with a rejection of authority and outright denial of any absolutes. Ericson points out that believing there are many perspectives to consider inherently means that there is something 'objective' to consider from varying viewpoints.⁵⁷

EM's defocusing of dogma is perhaps necessary for contextualising the gospel for the emerging generation. For example, if the emerging generation learns in school that 'always' and 'never' statements on tests can be assumed to be false, then using absolute statements in evangelism undermines its reception. If the emerging generation is trained to disregard generalised claims, then a generalised or simplified message will be disregarded. Furthermore, television shows focusing on forensic investigation have indoctrinated the emerging generation with a 'burden of proof' that must extend beyond 'circumstantial evidence' (arguments, reason, and propositions) to concrete evidence, such as fingerprints and DNA. So using arguments and reason in evangelism is unlikely to meet the 'burden of proof' required by this generation—there must be concrete evidence of transformed lives, spiritual experience, and loving action in community too. Thus, EM is absolutely right to offer such living 'DNA proof' of the gospel through relationship and action. As Kimball explains, 'We can no longer with integrity merely quote a few isolated verses and say "case closed" with the sometimes heartless and naive confi-

dence we used to.'⁵⁸ Surely it is commendable that EM is seeking to personalize the objective truth about Jesus in relationships rather than in propositions about Jesus.⁵⁹

Still it must be recognized that organising a set of beliefs and systematizing theology is not just about following propositions and rational logic—there is a beauty in this when it is done well, an order that shows our Creator's character; it also attempts to understand and embody the whole of Scripture as it relates to current issues. The emerging culture may appreciate the tensions with which theology wrestles—for example the idea that God is transcendent and imminent. The emerging generation may agree with the suggestion that, 'The more irreconcilable various theological positions appear to be, the closer we are to experiencing truth'; and that by practising such an 'orthoparadox theology' we can better hold, 'competing truth claims in right tension.'⁶⁰ If the emerging culture indeed accepts paradox, then we should be giving a higher place to theological evidence and logic in the current climate.

Unfortunately, some within EM are guilty of provoking those within the evangelical tradition by using potentially inflammatory phrases like 'the message itself changes'⁶¹ (cf. Ps. 119:89-91; Is. 40:6-8; Lk. 21:33; Rom. 14:1, 13). It difficult to see what is actually meant or intended by this idea, and evangelicals are likely to be disturbed by it. Evangelicals rightly strive to, 'preserve the gospel at all costs. When the gospel is modified, the vitality of the church is lost.'⁶² Yet McLaren acknowledges that if the gospel, 'changes to the point that it stops being about Jesus...it has stopped being the gospel'.⁶³ If that is what is intended, then it would be less provocative to say, for example, that the message translates into new situations, or that what is highlighted varies according to context. This might avoid putting the evangelical church on the defence.

Likewise, some who consider themselves 'emergent' must also guard against a reductionist view of the Reformation⁶⁴ and a misrepresentation of *sola Scriptura*⁶⁵ in ways that suggest the exclusion of the Holy Spirit's work,

53 McLaren, 'Seeking', 124. Mathewes-Green, 'Under the Heaventree', 159.

54 Crouch, 'Life', 88.

55 Emergent Village, 'About Emergent Village'.

56 Wells, *The Courage*, 4, 8, 16, 227, 230. D. Groothuis, 'Truth Defined and Defended', in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, eds. M. J. Erickson, P. K. Helseth, and J. Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004), 78-79. C. O. Brand, 'Defining Evangelicalism' in *Reclaiming the Center*, 304. Carson, *Becoming Conversant*, 131, 145-146, 188-200, 216-219. See also T. N. Smith, 'A Generous Orthodoxy or the Garden Path?', *Reformation and Revival Journal* 14 (3) (2005): 89.

57 Ericson, *Christian Theology*, 171.

58 Kimball, *They Like Jesus*, 137. See also Conder, *The Church*, 75.

59 See, for example, Crouch, 'Life', 91; Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 76; McLaren, 'The Method', 200-201, 205; Mathewes-Green, 'Under the Heaventree', 155; McManus, 'The Global', 248, 256; Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 63, 70; R. S. Smith, *Truth*, 133; Kimball, *They Like Jesus*, 208.

60 D. J. Friesen, 'Orthoparadoxy: Emerging Hope for Embracing Difference', in *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, 208-209.

61 McLaren, 'The Method', 210, 215.

62 Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1075.

63 McLaren, 'The Method', 218; See also Michael Horton's response to B. McLaren in this same article, 224.

64 Some take issue with their treatment of history in general. See Carson, *Becoming Conversant*, 64.

65 For the historical understanding of *sola Scriptura*, see McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 71-72, 219-220; and Bloesch, *The Church*, 289-290.

ignoring human fallibility⁶⁶ or 'the creation of a paper pope in place of a flesh and blood one.'⁶⁷ If provocative language can be avoided on both sides (Eph. 4:1-3), EM stands to offer the existing church an approach to reaching a generation that requires substantial proof.

While it is commendable to call Christians to be living testimonies of biblical truth, we must confess that we are highly insufficient as messages. Michael Horton reminds us 'the gospel is never anything that we do. To identify out struggles for justice, our compassion, our sacrifices, as the gospel is a confusion of law and gospel.'⁶⁸ But if orthodoxy and orthopraxy do indeed become inseparable in the movement, it will undoubtedly show its superiority to existing ecclesiology.

3. Everything is mission

Van Gelder recognizes EM's reframing of 'church and mission' in declaring itself a 'missional church'—for the church is thus 'missionary in its very nature'.⁶⁹ Moltmann sees that this

focus makes a valuable contribution to theology:

What we have to learn from them is not that the church 'has' a mission, but the very reverse: that the mission of Christ creates its own church. Mission does not come from the church; it is from mission and in the light of mission that the church has to be understood. The preaching of the gospel does not merely serve to instruct Christians and strengthen their faith; it always serves to call non-Christians at the same time....Mission embraces all activities that serve to liberate man from his slavery in the presence of Godforsakenness.⁷⁰

So we are no longer waiting for unbelievers to come into the church;⁷¹ rather, we join God in his mission. There is much here to applaud. This attitude recognizes the patience required in evangelism, seeing it as a process and relationship.⁷² This correctly de-focuses our programs, our strategies, our buildings, and ourselves as religious specialists and emphasizes that everything ultimately

belongs to God⁷³ who is filling all things:

There is no outside. There is no place where God is not, even now. Even those who do not know the truth of Christ are also created, beloved, and known by Him. He is closer to them than their own breath, though they do not know Him.⁷⁴

However, EM can have merit only if the whole world is kept at the forefront of our understanding of 'missional'. It is good to encourage cooperation with local initiatives and avoid being 'an extension of colonialism',⁷⁵ but we must not forget that there are still places in the world with little or no Christian witness and insufficient resources for evangelism. If by 'missional' we neglect the church's responsibility to other nations, then we introduce a new kind of cultural imperialism—deciding that our culture's spiritual needs are more important (or just as important) than that of other nations. While everything is mission and everyone should be a missionary, this must not marginalise the needs in other countries, or the needs of those

who join God's mission to those in other countries (Mt. 28:19). Our missional ecclesiology must develop a strong theology of intervention for social justice and Kingdom reasons.

IV. Relevance and Application

EM challenges the existing church to question the ways it has adapted to modernity, and calls the church to transform its practices so it can better reach the emerging generation. By practising 'cultural exegesis', the gospel can thus be contextualized for any place and for any generation.⁷⁶ This is relevant for any ministry. As we contextualize the gospel, we benefit from deepening our understanding of God and the cultures he has called into being:

As the gospel engages new cultures within various contexts, and as the translation of the gospel takes place in these new cultures, missional congregations anticipate new insights into the fuller meaning of the gospel. The very act of translating the gospel into new vernacular languages often opens up fresh understandings regarding its meaning.⁷⁷

It is also extremely helpful to remember that how we engage in ministry now may not be appropriate in twenty or thirty years' time. As culture is always changing, so we must remain flexible in our methods in order to reach all people with the gospel (1 Cor. 9:19-23). EM prompts us to provide

⁶⁶ W. Samson, 'The End of Reinvention: Mission Beyond Market Adoption Cycles', in *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, eds D. Pagitt and T. Jones (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 155-156;

⁶⁷ P. Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 46. For a contrary view of *sola Scriptura*, see Wells, *The Courage*, 21.

⁶⁸ M. Horton as a response to B. McLaren in McLaren, 'The Method', 214.

⁶⁹ C. Van Gelder, 'How Missiology Can Help Inform the Conversation about the Missional Church in Context', in *The Missional Church in Context: Helping Congregations Develop Context-*

tual Ministry, ed. C. Van Gelder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 27. For an example of the emerging church calling itself missional, see Emergent Village, 'Values and Practices'. Also, Kimball, *They Like Jesus*, 20.

⁷⁰ Moltmann, *The Church*, 10.

⁷¹ Origen, 'Origen on the Church and Salvation' in *The Christian Theology Reader*, ed. McGrath, 260.

⁷² Long, *Emerging Hope*, 220. Also, Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 201.

⁷³ F. Mathewes-Green's comment to M. Horton within Horton, 'Better', 105-138; H. Kirk-Davidoff, 'Meeting Jesus at the Bar: Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Evangelism', in *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, 36; Horton, 'Better', 119; Van Gelder, 'How Missiology', 30; Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 152-153.

⁷⁴ Mathewes-Green, 'Under the Heavens-tree', 178; M. Scandrette, 'Growing Pains: The Messy and Fertile Process of Becoming' in *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, 28.

⁷⁵ Conder, *The Church*, 173.

⁷⁶ Conder, *The Church*, 54.

⁷⁷ Van Gelder, 'How Missiology', 39.

more context for the 'unChristianized' emerging generation. Practically, this means that we must provide more background as we teach from Scripture. For example, we cannot assume understanding of phrases like 'doubting Thomas' without first supplying context. In any ministry, we should seek to be living examples of the gospel and join in God's mission. Existing churches and ministries would no doubt benefit from entering into the EM dialogue. Let us pray that God will use this movement for his glory.

V. Conclusion

There are issues that EM must consider. Experience should not be elevated above theology, although they may sit side by side. Spirituality must not be seen as self-centred or as neutral, and spiritual conflict must be expected and addressed. The movement must remain self-critical, critical of current culture, and open to the criticisms of others. Phrases that unnecessarily incite the existing church and reductionist views of church history must be avoided. And God's mission to the wider world must not be marginalized.

However, the contributions that the EM has to make to ecclesiology and the existing church outweigh these issues. Tapping into the current culture's desire for spiritual experience is

remarkable. Embracing those who are different and including them in authentic community is extremely important in redeeming the church's image as elitist and irrelevant. As Ian Mobsby says,

The elitism that is so prevalent in the church has created a chasm between the church and popular culture...The gap between traditional church and contemporary culture reveals the sin of the church in failing to be incarnational and requires repentance an innovation that the emerging church seeks to live and create.⁷⁸

Contextualizing the gospel with our very lives is a crucial marrying of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Realizing that mission is not something we do but is who we are meant to be is noteworthy.

Time will tell whether EM is as significant as it appears; EM could very well be another Reformation of sorts. Kimball suggests that we measure EM's success 'by looking at what our practices produce in the called people of God as they are sent out on a mission to live as light and salt in their communities (Mt. 5:13-16)'.⁷⁹ This is certainly reasonable.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 71.

⁷⁹ Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 15.

Mission, Missionaries and the Evangelization of Europe: Towards an Integrating Missiology from a Latin American Perspective

Samuel Cueva

KEYWORDS: *Encounters, reciprocal encounter, spontaneous evangelization, reciprocal integration, amalgamation.*

I Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to promote reflection on the missionary task which will help foster an integrating missiology between missions, missionaries and the need for evangelization in Europe. The spiritual need of Europe is no longer simply the subject of missiological reflection, but rather a reality which requires new models through which the redemptive mission can be accomplished. We shall therefore assume the integrating model which we find in the initial missiological encounter between Peter and the Gentiles as related in Acts chapter 10.

The question which we would like to

ask has to do with diachronic mission and synchronic mission for the present millennium. What legitimizes the missionary presence of Latin Americans in Europe? To attempt an answer, we shall focus on three topics: missions and their present reality in Latin America; missionaries and their present reality in Europe, and evangelization and its present reality in Europe. Our methodology involves an analysis of both the past and the present; we shall explain the reason for certain encounters as well as disencounters (related to missiological dislocation or fragmentation, which produces a lack of mission reciprocity; i.e., failures of people and groups to encounter each other authentically and reciprocally). In so doing we shall propose a practice which is motivated by an alternative missiology which promotes more encounters and fewer disencounters.

Through its mission activity, the evangelical movement produces differ-

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