The **"*EMERGING CHURCH*"**
&
Postmodernism's impact on Christianity[1]

DEFINITION: "*The 'Emerging Church' …is the popular name for an informal affiliation of Christian communities worldwide who want to revamp the church, change the way Christians interact with their culture, and remodel the way we think about truth itself.*" (p. ix)

Basically, the Emerging Church movement has been spawned by a desire to fit in with our present postmodern culture. Following typical postmodern thinking, there are no absolutes, no certainty, little or no objective truth. As Webber has observed, the Emerging Church is "essentially a Generation-X happening, a reaction to the seeker-driven approach of the Baby Boomers and many who preceded them…Every week followers gather to drink coffee, listen to Christian music, and hear a story-sermon under church names like '*The Journey*,' '*Pierced Chapel*,' and '*Scum of the Earth Church*.' They have rejected the structure of the megachurch movement had have minimal concern for performance."[2]

Webber goes on to add: "At heart, the Emerging Church is a protest movement, deeply disillusioned with the previous three or four generations. They have a great respect for ancient forms and traditions [see under I, p. 6, below], but feel that their 'modern' forbearers have failed them. Emergents are turned off by the traditional worship patterns of the Builder generation and by their absolutism. They reject what they describe as 'rational' preaching, dogmatic teaching, and confrontational evangelism. They are even more appalled at the commercialism of Baby Boomers and are determined to replace 'programs' with 'relationships,' 'excellence' with 'realism.' They refer to this as the 'rebooting of being church.'"[3]

SOME SIGNIFICANT PERSONS IN THE "*EMERGING CHURCH*" MOVEMENT:

- **Rob & Kristen Bell** – "husband and wife team who founded Mars Hill—a very large and steadily growing Emerging community in Grand Rapids, Michigan." (p. ix) Rob is the author of "*Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith*"

- **Brian McLaren** – "McLaren alone has written or coauthored about a dozen books including "*A Generous Orthodoxy*"[4] [plus "*A New Kind of Christian*"[5] "*The Story We Find Ourselves In*"[6] & "*Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises & a Revolution of Hope*"] and his utter contempt for certainty is a motif he returns to again and again." (p. x-xi)

- **Tony Campolo** – Author of "*Speaking My Mind*" and coauthor with McLaren of "*Adventures in Missing the Point.*" (p. xi) What an appropriate title, as MacArthur wryly observes!

- **Stanley Grenz** – He co-authored "*Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*" which has given Emerging Church ideas a big shot in the arm. He also co-authored a book advocating complete egalitarianism [i.e. women being able to hold any and all ministry positions and roles previously reserved for men e.g. pastoring, evangelism, teaching theology & practical theology courses in seminaries, etc]

- **John Franke** – Coauthor [with Grenz] of an influential Emerging Church book [see above].

- **John Armstrong** – Writer, conference speaker, former pastor and "at one time…a defender of Reformation theology and a student of revival… [who] after reading *Beyond Foundationalism*…wrote a series of articles in his ministry newsletter declaring that he has changed his mind about several vital points of doctrine—including faith and understanding, the sacraments, the doctrine of revelation, and Christology—among other things.[!] Crediting Grenz and Franke for helping him see the light, Armstrong writes, '*I have been forced, upon deeper reflection about theological method, to give up what I call epistemological certitude*.' He goes on to explain: '*Reformed dogmaticians and teachers on the conservative side seek a steady, unshakable and certain knowledge…John Franke*

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[1] With the exception of quotes either footnoted or otherwise identified in the text, the following quotes and information are taken from "*The Truth War*" by Dr. John MacArthur (Thomas Nelson: Nashville, Tennessee, 2007). Statements appearing in parentheses ( ) appear that way in the original text. Words in brackets [ ], as well as all bolding and italicizing has been added, unless otherwise indicated. Compiled by Rev. Mike Edwards, Baptist Bible College of the Caribbean, P.O. Box 127, St. Vincent, West Indies, May, 2008, revised Nov, 2011.

[2] Gerald K. Webber, "*The Emerging Church: Emerging from What to Where?*" (Schaumburg, Illinois: The Baptist Bulletin, October, 2005), online version: www.baptistbulletin.org., p. 1.

[3] Webber, ibid, p. 2.

[4] Zondervan Publishing House: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2004.

[5] Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, California, 2003.

[6] Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, California, 2003.

suggests that the agenda employed by such theologians "glorifies reason and deifies science." I have changed my mind about the way to do theology, and I confess I now agree with Franke's conclusion.'" (p.20, italics added)

- **Leonard Sweet** – "Author of 'Post-Modern Pilgrims' and 'Jesus Drives Me Crazy.' [He says] 'Our faith is ancient. Our faith is future. We're old-fashioned. We're new-fangled. We're orthodox. We're innovators. We're postmodern Christians.

- **Donald Miller** – Author of the book "*Blue Like Jazz*." Two biblically conservative reviewers of the book make the following comments: "Miller's improvisation on Christian spirituality clarifies his transformation from a traditional church perspective to his present view. Miller presents a spirituality that is genuine and mysterious, not the mathematical, systematic evangelical Christianity. It is a spirituality that learned unconditional love by living with modern-day hippies and the sin nature by participation in a Bush war protest…One…hopes [Miller] might come to the right conclusions, but it all becomes clear when he writes, '*I wanted tolerance. I wanted everybody to leave everybody alone regardless of their beliefs…I wanted people to like each other* (p. 216). Miller unveils his struggle to merge the acceptance he found in '*the Unitarian church…and yet not abandon the truth of Scripture*' (p. 216). In the end, *Blue Like Jazz* does not resolve. It reveals a postmodern Christian for whom tolerance seems more important than truth."[7] "[Miller]…finds expression in all faiths, including the Greek Orthodox…one sees why Miller made the transformation [to the Emerging Church]. He '*wanted everything to be cool…wanted tolerance…wanted everybody to leave everybody alone, regardless of beliefs…*'[readers] will find in the end a spirituality for which tolerance seems more important than truth."[8] Probably one of the most disconcerting occurrences in regard to Miller is that back in March, 2006 he was invited to speak at rapidly degenerating Cornerstone University in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Their official website posted the following comment: "*Cornerstone University chapels were packed last week to hear best-selling author of Blue Like Jazz Donald Miller speak about life, social issues, loving people and living out the Christian faith. He spoke at four different chapel services and held a Q & A session as well.*"[9]

WHY "*EMERGING CHURCH*" IDEAS & THINKING HAVE BECOME POPULAR:

MacArthur: "The idea that the Christian message should be kept pliable and ambiguous **seems especially attractive to young people who are in tune with the culture and in love with the spirit of the age and can't stand to have authoritative biblical truth applied with precision as a corrective to worldly lifestyles, unholy minds, and ungodly behavior**…But that is not authentic Christianity. Not knowing what you believe (especially on a matter as essential to Christianity as the gospel) is by definition a kind of unbelief. Refusing to acknowledge and defend the revealed truth of God is a particularly stubborn and pernicious kind of unbelief. Advocating ambiguity [and] exalting uncertainty…is a sinful way of nurturing unbelief. Every true Christian should know and love the truth. Scripture says one of the key characteristics of '*those who perish*' (people who are damned by their unbelief) is that '*they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved*' (2 Thess. 2:10). The clear implication is that a genuine love for the truth is built into saving faith…Certain avant-garde evangelicals sometimes act as if the demise of certainty is a dramatic new intellectual development, rather than seeing it for what it actually is: an echo of the old unbelief. **It is unbelief cloaked in a religious disguise and seeking legitimacy as if it were merely a humbler kind of faith. But it's not faith at all. In reality, the contemporary refusal to regard any truth as sure and certain is the worst kind of infidelity**." (pp. xi; xvi)

"Even at the very heart of the evangelical mainstream, where you might expect to find some commitment to biblical doctrine and at least a measure of concern about defending the faith, what you find instead is a movement utterly dominated by people whose first concern is to try to keep in step with the times in order to be 'relevant.'" (p. 150)

MacArthur sarcastically comments: "*Sound doctrine?* Too arcane for the average churchgoer. *Biblical exposition?* That alienates the 'unchurched.' *Clear preaching on sin and redemption?* Let's be careful not to subvert the self-esteem of hurting people. *The Great Commission?* Our most effective strategy has been making the church service into a massive Super Bowl party. *Serious discipleship?* Sure. There's a great series of group studies based on *I Love Lucy* episodes. Let's work our way through that. *Worship where God is recognized as high and lifted up?* Get real. We need to reach people on the level where they are…

"…Evangelicals and their leaders have doggedly pursued that same course for several decades now—in spite of many clear biblical instructions that warn us not to be so childish (in addition to Eph. 4:14, see also 1 Cor. 14:20; 2 Tim. 4:3-4; Heb. 5:12-14). **What's the heart of the problem? It boils down to this: Much of the evangelical movement has forgotten who**

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[7] Zach Deitrich, "*Book Review: Blue Like Jazz*," (staff member, Walnut Ridge Baptist Church, Waterloo, Iowa), quoted in "Baptist Bulletin Online," (2006?)
[8] Rich Van Heukelum, (Pastor, Walnut Ridge Baptist Church, Waterloo, Iowa), "Baptist Bulletin Online," (2006?)
[9] "*Donald Miller Speaks on Campus*," Cornerstone University official website, March 28, 2006, www.cornerstone.edu/news/inside_cu/?news_ID=2117.

is Lord over the church. They have either abandoned or downright rejected their true Head and given His rightful place to evangelical pollsters and church-growth gurus." (p. 150, italics in the original)

A COUPLE OF GENERAL STATEMENTS BY "*EMERGING CHURCH*" ADVOCATES:

"[the Bells] found themselves increasingly uncomfortable with church. '*Life in the church had become so small*,' Kristen says. '*It had worked for me for a long time. Then it stopped working.*' The Bells started questioning their assumptions about the Bible itself—'*discovering the Bible as a human product*,' as Rob puts it, rather than the product of divine fiat. '*The Bible is still in the center for us*,' Rob says, '*but it's a different kind of center. We want to embrace mystery, rather than conquer it.*' '*I grew up thinking that we've figured out the Bible*,' Kristen says, '*that we know what it means. Now I have no idea what most of it means. And yet I feel like life is big again—like life used to be black and white, and now it's in color.*'" [sic] (pp. ix-x)

"What all these [Emerging Church] groups have in common is this: They believe Jesus intended his followers to interact with the culture around them, not become an alien subculture. They adhere to the ancient creeds of the church. They …acknowledge the enormous influence pop culture has on society…they believe in the communal and missional aspects of the church…and they believe that as we draw closer to God, we draw closer to each other, despite the denominational boundaries that divide us. Emerging Church evangelicals comfortably draw on the rich traditions and practices of the diverse streams of Christianity, believing that by genuinely living where our common faith intersects, we can surpass the efforts of even the most successful ecumenical programs."[10]

SPECIFIC "*EMERGING CHURCH*" DISTINGUISHING MARKS & BELIEFS:

A. **Little or no genuine objective truth exists.** "Truth (to whatever degree such a concept is even recognized) is assumed to be inherently hazy, indistinct, and uncertain—perhaps even ultimately unknowable…Emerging Church leaders profiled [in a *Christianity Today* article] expressed a high level of discomfort with any hint of certainty about what the Bible means, even on something as basic as the gospel. Brian McLaren, for instance, is a popular author and former pastor who is the best-known figure and one of the most influential voices in the Emerging Church movement. McLaren is quoted in the Christianity Today article, saying at one point: '*I don't think we've got the gospel right yet…I don't think the liberals have it right. But I don't think we have it right either. None of us has arrived at orthodoxy.*' " (p. x, italics added)

B. "**Certainty about anything is inherently [*considered*] arrogant**. That view is wildly popular today…that no one can really know anything for certain is emerging as virtually the one dogma postmodernists will tolerate. **Uncertainty is the new truth. Doubt and skepticism have been canonized as a form of humility**. Right and wrong have been redefined in terms of subjective feelings and personal perspectives." (p. 16) McLaren suggests that clarity itself is of dubious value. He clearly prefers ambiguity and equivocation, and his books are therefore full of deliberate doublespeak. In his introduction to *A Generous Orthodoxy*, he admits, '*I have gone out of my way to be provocative, mischievous, and unclear, reflecting my belief that clarity is sometimes overrated, and that shock, obscurity, playfulness, and intrigue (carefully articulated) often stimulate more thought than clarity.*' A common theme that runs throughout most of McLaren's writings is the idea that '*there is great danger in the quest to be right.*'" (pp. 18-19) "Brian McLaren epitomizes this mentality in the introduction to his book *A New Kind of Christian*: '*I drive my car and listen to the Christian radio station, something my wife always tells me I should stop doing* ("because it only gets you upset"). *There I hear preacher after preacher be so absolutely sure of his bombproof answers and his foolproof biblical interpretations…And the more sure he seems, the less I find myself wanting to be a Christian, because on this side of the microphone, antennas, and speaker, life isn't that simple, answers aren't that clear, and nothing is that sure.*'" (p. 155)

Webber gives another example of this typically postmodern aversion to criticizing anyone's beliefs or thinking that you have found the truth: "By emphasizing the primacy of relationship over reasoned belief, by elevating God's (almost indiscriminate) lover for mankind over His essential holiness and justice, by raising unity above truth, the Emerging Church creates an atmosphere where peace is the summum bonum (supreme good, from which all others are derived). Cedar Ridge's doctrinal statement…declares, 'We do not press for uniformity in these (nonessential) areas [whatever they are!-mwe], but rather encourage people to search the Scriptures, seeking balance, mutual understanding, humility and love. Additionally, we seek to respect one another's differences without a quarrelsome, arrogant or divisive spirit, and to return continually to the great commandment, to love God and one another.'"[11] Webber wisely adds, "Aversion to divisiveness is laudable; refusal to confront error is not."[12]

C. **A belief that postmodern thinking should be embraced**. "Postmodernity is a major theme in the literature of the Emerging Church movement. Several leading voices in the movement have suggested that postmodernism is something the church should embrace and adopt…Some in the movement have openly questioned whether there is even any legitimate role

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[10] Webber, op cit., pp. 1-2, quoting an unidentified Emerging Church advocate
[11] Webber, op cit., p. 3.
[12] Ibid.

for preaching in a postmodern culture. '***Dialogue***' is the preferred method of communication. Accordingly, some Emerging-style congregations have done away with pastors altogether, and replaced them with '***narrators***.' Others have replaced the sermon with a free-ranging dialogue in which no one takes any leading role. For obvious reasons, an authoritative '*thus saith the Lord*' is not welcome in such a setting." (p. 17) [See also the 2nd paragraph above, under "*A Couple of General Statements by Emerging Church Advocates*"]

Postmodern thinking surfaces in the Emerging Church movement under the guise of the term "*Story*." "The Christian faith is understood as a story by a postmodern generation that sees itself as part of the developing storyline…Instead of breaking down the Bible and analyzing it as in the modern era, postmodern believers see the Bible stories as part of a bigger picture and larger story, explained Brian McLaren, during the Washington National Cathedral's Sunday Forum...*'How we understand the faith as a story…is in some ways relatively new territory because we just haven't practiced seeing our faith that way…And then understanding how our story relates to other stories and figuring out the role that we all play in this story-because its not finished yet-that comes to me as a very motivating and exciting way to understand our faith.*' Emerging Christian leaders are interested in understanding the shift in culture and how it affects Christianity because it helps them grapple with the problem of making the faith relevant to a younger generation that has increasingly left the faith, noted McLaren…*'When we move into the postmodern world, people realize there is another way of thinking...Analysis is good, from the whole down to the parts, but there is another way of thinking going from the whole to bigger wholes. We try to understand whatever we're looking at as part of larger wholes. That shift in thinking has huge implications on how we preach, how we teach, how we evangelize*' [that's for sure!-mwe], said the founding pastor of the nondenominational Cedar Ridge Community Church outside Washington, D.C."[13]

D. "*Contextualization*" **leading to outright denial of biblical truths.** MacArthur observes: "Postmodern influences have [also] come into the evangelical movement through other avenues [such as the book] *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*, by Stanley Grenz and John Franke…published in 2001 [it] has made a significant impact in the evangelical academic community…as the subtitle suggests, **the book pleads for a whole new approach to theology, with the goal of '*contextualizing*' Christianity for a postmodern culture**. 'The categories and paradigms of the modern world' are in collapse, the authors note in the book's opening sentence. They go on to assert that Christian theology therefore needs to be rethought, revised, and adapted in order to keep in step and remain relevant in these changing times. Grenz and Franke argue that the Spirit of God speaks through Scripture, tradition, and culture, and theologians must hear the voice of the Spirit in each one.[14] Moreover, since culture is constantly in flux, they say, it is right and fitting for Christian theology to be in a perpetual state of transition and ferment too. No issue should ever be regarded as finally settled. The obvious casualty of all this is any sure and certain knowledge of biblical truth. That is okay with Grenz and Franke. They are convinced that every desire to gain a fixed and positive knowledge of any truth actually belongs to the collapsing categories of enlightenment rationalism. That is precisely what they mean by the reference to '*foundationalism*' in the book's title. They define Classical foundationalism as 'a quest for complete epistemological certitude.'"[15] (p. 19)

E. **Doctrinal indecisiveness.** "Listen to how Brian McLaren sums up his views on orthodoxy, certainty, and the question of whether the truths of Christianity are sound and reliable in the first place: '*How ironic that I am writing about orthodoxy, which implies to many a final capturing of the truth about God, which is the glory of God. Sit down here next to me in this little restaurant and ask me if Christianity (my version of it, yours, the Pope's, whoever's) is orthodox, meaning true, and here's my honest answer: a little, but not yet. Assuming by Christianity you mean the Christian understanding of the world and God, Christian opinions on soul, text, and culture...I'd have to say that we probably have a couple of things right, but a lot of things wrong.*'" (p. 18)

Webber states: "The Emerging Church depreciates doctrine. The Emerging Church may well be the leading edge of an ecumenical updraft for the twenty-first century. Reflection a postmodern mind-set, adherents prefer an individualist whatever-works-for-you approach to theology. One website (www.emergingchurch.org) states: 'The modern creedal orientation of "*we believe*" has been subverted by the postmodern creedal orientation summed up by Sheryl Crow in her song which proclaims, "*if it makes you happy, it can't be half bad*.""[16]

"Seminary president Albert Mohler observes…The Emergent movement represents a significant challenge to biblical Christianity. Unwilling to affirm that the Bible contains propositional truths that form the framework for Christian belief, this

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[13] Brian McLaren, "*Postmodern Christianity Understood as Story*" www.christianpost.com/pages/print.htm?aid=31238.

[14] It should be noted that a *LOT* of Roman Catholic formalism [candles, incense, chants, rote prayers, etc] has recently begun to be brought into evangelical churches. Emerging Churches are in the forefront of much of this. That is just one more problem in addition to the much larger theological error of putting tradition and culture on the same plane as Scripture, not to mention the gross biblical & doctrinal errors of Roman Catholicism. The equating of tradition/culture & Scripture is simply heresy, and goes against 500 years of biblical teaching that resurfaced at the time of the Reformation (i.e. s*cripture alone, faith alone*, & g*race alone*).

[15] Note for instance that Cedarville University recently fired two Bible professors (and two others resigned) due to the school rewriting/tweaking a part of their doctrinal statement in order, apparently to accommodate this kind of doctrinal fuzziness.

[16] Webber, op cit., p. 2.

movement argues that we can have Christian symbolism and substance without those thorny questions of truthfulness that have so vexed the modern mind. The worldview of postmodernism—complete with an epistemology that denies the possibility of or need for propositional truth—affords the movement an opportunity to hop, skip and jump throughout the Bible and the history of Christian thought, in order to take whatever pieces they want from one theology and attach them, like doctrinal post-it notes, to whatever picture they would want to draw."[17]

Some specific areas of Emerging Church doctrinal denial or fuzziness:

[1] **The Substitionary Atonement of Christ.** MacArthur states: "To cite one rather serious and significant doctrinal example, the principle of substitutionary atonement (always a favorite target of modernists) has recently been under heavy assault again at the hands of those who insist that evangelicals need to adapt their message to accommodate *post*modern sensibilities. Scripture is clear: Christ suffered on the cross as a substitute for sinners (Isa. 53:4-10), taking the full brunt of the punishment we deserved (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 9:27-28; 1 Pet. 3:18). His death was a *propitiation*, or a satisfaction of divine wrath against sin on believers' behalf (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 2:17; 1 Jn. 2:2; 4:10). But that view has been forcefully attacked in recent years by people who insist it makes God seem harsh and barbaric. They are in effect advocating the elimination of the offense of the cross because it is too uncouth for their tastes. One influential author [Steve Chalke] referred to the principle of substitutionary atonement as 'twisted,' 'morally dubious,' and 'a form of cosmic child abuse.' Others in the Emerging Church movement have said similar things. Brian McLaren, for example, has repeatedly voiced misgivings about whether it is appropriate for Christians to describe the atonement as a penal substitution. At one point, the hero in one of McLaren's quasi-fictional books says the notion of Christ being punished for others' sins 'just sounds like one more injustice in the cosmic equation. It sounds like divine child abuse. You know?'"[18]

[2] **Denial or questioning of the inspiration and authority of Scripture.** "Various Emerging Church books and weblogs have repeatedly advocated the dismantling and wholesale re-imagining of some of the very same doctrines earlier evangelicals have fiercely defended for generations against modernists and theological liberals—including the inerrancy and authority of Scripture, the doctrine of original sin, and the exclusivity of Christ. Almost any biblical doctrine and evangelical distinctive you can name has at one point or another been maligned by this or that celebrity in the Emerging Church movement." (p. 169)

[3] **Fuzziness regarding a clear understanding of The Gospel.** Brian McLaren: "*I don't think we've got the gospel right yet…I don't think the liberals have it right. But I don't think we have it right either. None of us has arrived at orthodoxy*" (ref. above). **"**McLaren, for example, goes so far as to suggest that followers of other religions can also be followers of Christ in practical terms without leaving other religions or identifying with Christianity. '*I don't believe making disciples must equal making adherents to the Christian religion*,' he says. '*It may be advisable in many (not all!) circumstances to help people become followers of Jesus and remain within their Buddhist, Hindu, or Jewish contexts.*' [MacArthur observes]…McLaren is leading the parade for those who do not seem to think wrong beliefs, superstition, false religion, and false gods are evils that people need to be delivered from. Instead, he suggests that even the false religions themselves may ultimately be redeemable: '*Although I don't hope all Buddhists will become (cultural) Christians, I do hope all who feel so called will become Buddhist followers of Jesus; I believe they should be given that opportunity and invitation. I don't hope all Jews or Hindus will become members of the Christian religion. But I do hope all who feel so called will become Jewish or Hindu followers of Jesus. Ultimately, I hope that Jesus will save Buddhism, Islam and every other religion, including the Christian religion, which often seems to need saving about as much as any other religion does. (In this context, I do wish all Christians would become followers of Jesus, but perhaps this is too much to ask. After all, I'm not doing such a hot job of it myself.*")" (pp. 34-35)

[4] **A questioning or outright denial of Christ as the only way of salvation.** As far as I know, Prince Charles has never professed faith in much of anything, apart from New-Age type beliefs. However, as heir apparent to the British throne, upon his coronation he would become "head" of the Anglican Church. He also has a well-stated postmodern mentality regarding the way of salvation. As MacArthur points out: "In England, where the reigning monarch is titular head of the Anglican Church, one of the important subsidiary titles that goes with the crown is '*Defender of the Faith*.' (The common abbreviation appears on all British coins as *FD*, for *fidei defensor*.)…Prince Charles…announced in 1994 that he would prefer to tweak the title so as not to elevate Christianity over Islam, Hinduism, or Wicca: '*I personally would rather see it as Defender of Faith, not the Faith*,' he said. In a verbal cascade of perfect postmodern eloquence, the prince went on to say that he views himself as a defender '*of the divine in existence, the pattern of the divine which is, I think, in all of us, but which, because we are human beings, can be expressed in so many different ways*.'[19] …**Prince Charles discomfort with the kingly title is an exact parallel to what has happened in the evangelical movement. After years of neglecting to defend the faith, many evangelicals now simply refuse the duty**. They have become uncomfortable with the whole idea of militancy in defense of the truth. They have in effect embraced the postmodern axiom that dialogue is morally superior to debate, a conversation is

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[17] Quoted by Webber, ibid.
[18] MacArthur, pp. 168-169, italics in the original.
[19] "The statement appears on Prince Charles's own Web site, in an article titled 'The Prince's Work: Religion' at http://www.princeofwales.gov.uk/wrk_religion.html.

inherently more edifying than a controversy, and fellowship is always better than a fight… Scripture clearly says otherwise. If we want to be faithful, we are required to become warriors in defense of truth." (p. 99) "Citing missiologist David Bosch, McLaren affirms that we have no assurance that salvation is found outside the work of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, he believes that we cannot jump from this to a claim that there is no salvation outside belief in Jesus Christ."[!][20]

[5] **Doubts regarding the assurance of salvation &/or Deity and Lordship of Christ.** Webber: "The Emerging Church is deficient in discernment. One cannot deny the intelligence of the Emerging Church's proponents. Some are obviously astute and articulate. Native intelligence and Biblical discernment, however, are two different things. It's most eloquent spokesman, Brian McLaren, is pastor of Cedar Ridge Community Church in Spencerville, Maryland. McLaren is a smart guy; he graduated summa cum laude from the University of Maryland and obtained his Master of Arts degree with a 4.0 grade point average. He left academia to found the church he pastors. The author of '*A Generous Orthodoxy*,' McLaren is an illustration of the distinction between intelligence and discernment. On Cedar Ridge's website is the church's doctrinal statement. It includes a paragraph about Jesus Christ with no indication of His eternal deity, a reference to the Holy Spirit with no suggestion that He is God, and a declaration that 'God speaks to us in the Bible' with not a word about its inspiration or inerrancy. Regarding 'unity,' the statement reads, 'Cedar Ridge recognizes diversity among Christians in nonessential areas'; the paragraph gives no hint of what those nonessentials are. Such looseness may not be universal, but it is typical of the Emerging Church's lack of discernment." (Webber, pp. 2-3)

F. **Capitulation on a host of moral issues.** "Tony Campolo, for example, explained to a reporter why he wrote his book *Speaking My Mind*: '*My purpose in writing the book was to communicate loud and clear that I felt that evangelical Christianity had been hijacked. When did it become anti-feminist? When did evangelical Christianity become anti-gay? When did it become supportive of capital punishment? Pro-war? When did it become so negative towards other religious groups?*' Brian McLaren says he is not sure '*what we should think about homosexuality*.' He called for a five-year moratorium on making any pronouncements about whether homosexuality is a sin or not. '*In five years, if we have clarity, we'll speak*' he said. '*If not, we'll set another five years for ongoing reflection*.'" [!!!] (p. 139)

While the Anglican & Presbyterian churches would not be considered "Emerging Churches," they nonetheless provide excellent examples of bankrupt postmodern, Emerging Church type thinking. For instance: "*An Anglican committee commissioned to study the morality of extramarital sex suggested that the church should drop its opposition to cohabitation between unwed adults and regard the practice as 'a new path from the single state to the married one*.'"[!] (p. 141)

G. **Blatant vulgarity.** "The recent wave of popular books written by leading figures in the Emerging Church movement has unleashed **an unprecedented flood of vulgarity and worldliness onto Christian booksellers' shelves. Obscenity is one of the main trademarks of the Emerging style**. Most authors in the movement make extravagant use of filthy language, sexual innuendo, and uncritical references to the most lowbrow elements of postmodern culture, often indicating inappropriate approval for ungodly aspects of secular culture. In the popular book *Blue Like Jazz*[21], for example, Donald Miller writes of his experience in one of the best-known Emerging churches in the Pacific Northwest, referring to the pastor as 'Mark, the Cussing Pastor':

> '*Even though Mark said cusswords, he was telling a lot of people about Jesus, and he was being socially active, and he seemed to love a lot of people the church was neglecting, like liberals and fruit nuts. About the time I was praying that God would help me find a church, I got a call from Mark the Cussing Pastor, and he said he had a close friend who was moving to Portland to start a church and that I should join him. Rick and I got together over coffee and I thought he was hilarious. He was big, a football player out of Chico State. At the time we both chewed tobacco, so we had that in common. He could do a great Tony Soprano voice, sort of a mafia thing. He would do this routine where he pretended to be a Mafia boss who was planting a church. He said a few cusswords but not as bad as Mark.*'" (pp. 139-140)

H. **An acceptance of and proud immersion in the entire ungodly, postmodern culture of our day.** "A secular writer doing an article on the Emerging Church movement and postmodern Christianity summed up the character of the movement this way: '*What makes a postmodern ministry so easy to embrace is that it doesn't demonize youth culture—Marilyn Manson, "South Park," or gangsta rap, for example—like traditional fundamentalists. Postmodern congregants aren't challenged to reject the outside world*.'" (p. 140)

MacArthur agrees: "I've noticed the same thing. Whole churches have deliberately immersed themselves in 'the culture'—by which they actually mean 'whatever the world loves at the moment.' Thus we now have a new breed of trendy churches whose preachers can rattle off references to every popular icon, every trifling meme, every tasteless fashion, and every vapid trend that captures the fickle fancy of the postmodern, secular mind. **Worldly preachers seem to go out of their way to put**

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[20] Webber, op cit., p. 3.
[21] Thomas Nelson Publishers: Nashville, Tennessee, 2003, pp. 133-134.

their carnal expertise on display—even in their sermons. In the name of 'connecting with the culture' they boast of having seen all the latest programs on MTV; memorized every episode of South Park; learned the lyrics to countless tracks of gangsta rap and heavy metal music; or watched who-knows-how-many R-rated movies. **They seem to know every fad top to bottom, back to front, and inside out. They've adopted both the style and the language of the world**—including lavish use of language that used to be deemed inappropriate in polite society, much less in the pulpit. They want to fit right in with the world, and they seem to be making themselves quite comfortable there...

"Let's face it. **Scripture speaks quite plainly against such a mentality (James 4:4). Many of the worlds' fads are toxic, and they are becoming increasingly so as our society descends further into the death-spiral described in Romans 1**. It's like a radioactive toxicity, so while those who immerse themselves in it might not notice its effects instantly, they nevertheless cannot escape the inevitable, soul-destroying contamination. And woe to those who become comfortable with sinful fads of secular society. The final verse of Romans 1 expressly condemns those '*who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.*'" (pp. 140-141)

[I] **A return to Roman Catholic &/or New Age type rituals and practices.** "Many [Emerging Church] leaders, most of whom have evangelical backgrounds, saw Catholic ritual and mysticism as a necessary spiritual ingredient that was lost for evangelicals at the Reformation…Catholic mysticism has returned with a vengeance. Its occult techniques can be found nearly everywhere, from *Youth Specialties* [a youth ministry organization] to Richard Foster's Renovar'e organization to Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Life*. 'Many Christian leaders started searching for a new approach under the banner of "*spiritual formation*." This new search has led many of them back to Catholic contemplative practices and medieval monastic disciplines,' Brian McLaren writes approvingly. Tony Jones, co-editor of *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope* has written a manifesto of mysticism for emerging churches titled *The Sacred Way: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Life*. Jones's acknowledgement of those who supported his effort reads as a Who's Who of emergent leaders, not to mention the Catholic priests he thanks and the ancient Orthodox and Catholic mystics he quotes…*The Sacred Way* endorses mystical techniques that are gaining acceptance among evangelicals today…Tony Campolo declares, '*In my case intimacy with Christ has developed gradually over the years, primarily through what Catholic mystics call "centering prayer." Each morning, as soon as I wake up, I take time—sometimes as much as a half hour—to center myself on Jesus. I say his name over and over again to drive back the 101 things that begin to clutter up my mind the minute I open my eyes. Jesus is my mantra, as some would say.*'"[22]

WHAT SHOULD BE THE BIBLICAL, CHRISTIAN RESPONSE?

A. Affirm Truth…*unapologetically***!** The **Bible** claims that there is such a thing as absolute truth (Jn. 8:32) and it teaches that *it* is a source of authoritative truth (Jn. 17:17; Jn. 10:35; I Pet. 1:23). **Jesus Christ** also claimed to be truth incarnate (Jn. 14:6). Furthermore, **God the Father** is called a *God of truth* (Dt. 32:4; Ps. 31:5; Isa. 65:16). **So objective truth *DOES* exist, it is contained in Scripture, and it should be preached and proclaimed without apology—even though it cuts against the current of our age!** MacArthur observes: "*A biblical perspective of truth also necessarily entails the recognition that ultimate truth is an objective reality. Truth exists outside of us and remains the same regardless of how we may perceive it… It seems there is no shortage of people nowadays willing to kill for a lie. Yet few seem to be willing to speak up for truth— much less die for it…Much of the visible church nowadays seems to think Christians are supposed to be at play rather than at war. The idea of actually fighting for doctrinal truth is the furthest thing from most churchgoers' thoughts. Contemporary Christians are determined to get the world to like them—and of course in the process they also want to have as much fun as possible. They are so obsessed with making the church seem 'cool' to unbelievers that they can't be bothered with questions about whether another person's doctrine is sound or not. In a climate like that, the thought of even identifying someone else's teaching as false (much less 'contending earnestly' for the faith) is a distasteful and dangerously countercultural suggestion. Christians have bought into the notion that almost nothing is more 'uncool' in the world's eyes than when someone shows a sincere concern about the danger of heresy.*" (pp. xii; xiv-xv)

"Christians, of all people, ought to be most willing to live and die for the truth. Remember, we know the truth, and the truth has set us free (John 8:32). We should not be ashamed to say so boldly (Psalm 107:2). And if called upon to sacrifice for the truth's sake, we need to be willing and prepared to give up our lives…that is exactly what Jesus was speaking about when He called His disciples to take up a cross (Matt. 16:24). Cowardice and authentic faith are antithetical… **This is a battle we cannot wage effectively if we always try to come across to the world as merely nice, nonchalant, docile, agreeable, and fun-loving people**. We must not take our cues from people who are perfectly happy to compromise the truth wherever possible 'for harmony's sake.' Friendly dialogue may sound affable and pleasant. But neither Christ nor the apostles ever confronted serious, soul-destroying error by building collegial relationships with false teachers. In fact, we are expressly forbidden to do that (Rom. 16:17; 2 Cor. 6:14-15; 2 Thess. 3:6; 2 Tim. 3:5; 2 John 10-11)." (p. xv, 76)

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[22] T.A. McMahon, *Evangelical Mysticism* (The Berean Call, Vol. XXIII, No. 2, February 2008), p. 2.

B. <u>Recognize that truth is truth, whether anyone acknowledges it or not.</u> MacArthur: "Historically and collectively, Christians have always been in full agreement that whatever is true—whatever is objectively and ontologically true—is true whether any given individual understands it, likes it, or receives it as truth. In other words, because reality is created, and truth is defined by God, **what is really true is true for everyone, regardless of anyone's personal perspective or individual preferences**." (p. xxii)

C. <u>Point out that the Emerging Church's "*Hermeneutic of Humility*" is nothing of the sort.</u> **It is an attack on the perspicuity (lucidness, clarity) of Scripture!**

MacArthur makes some wise observations: "This has been referred to by some as 'a hermeneutic of humility—as if it is inherently too prideful for any preacher to think he knows what God said about anything. **Of course, such a denial of all certainty has nothing to do with true humility. It is actually an arrogant form of unbelief, rooted in an impudent refusal to acknowledge that God has been sufficiently clear in His self-revelation to His creatures**. It is actually a blasphemous form of arrogance, and when it governs even how someone handles the Word of God, it becomes yet another expression of evil rebellion against Christ's authority. Christ has spoken in the Bible, and He holds us responsible to understand, interpret, obey, and teach what He said—as opposed to deconstructing everything the Bible says. Notice that:

[1] **Christ repeatedly rebuked the Pharisees for twisting Scripture, disobeying it, setting it aside with their traditions, and generally ignoring its plain meaning**. Not once did He ever excuse the Pharisees' hypocrisy and false religion by apologizing for any lack of clarity in the Old Testament…

[2] "**Jesus held not only the Pharisees, but also the common people responsible for knowing and understanding the Scriptures**. '*Have you not read…?*' was a common rebuke to those who challenged His teaching but did not know or understand the Scriptures as they should have (Matt. 12:3, 5; 19:4; 22:31; Mark 12:26). He addressed the disciples on the road to Emmaus as '*foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe*' because of their ignorance about the Old Testament's messianic promises (Luke 24:25). **The problem lay not in any lack of clarity on Scripture's part, but in their own sluggish faith**…

[3] "**The apostle Paul, whose writings are most under debate by scholars today, wrote virtually all his epistles for the common man, not for scholars and intellectuals**. Those addressed to churches were written to predominantly *Gentile* churches, whose understanding of the Old Testament was limited. **He nevertheless expected them to understand what he wrote (Eph. 3:3-5) and he held them responsible for heeding his instruction** (1 Tim. 3:14-15). Paul and Christ both consistently made the case that it is every Christian's duty to study and interpret Scripture rightly (2 Tim. 2:15). '*He who has ears to hear, let him hear*!' (Matt. 11:15; 13:9, 16; Mark 4:9).

[4] "**Even the book of Revelation, arguably one of the most difficult sections of Scripture to interpret, isn't too hard for a typical lay reader to understand sufficiently and profit from**. Hence it begins with this blessing: '*Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near*' (Rev. 1:3).

[5] "**Protestant Christianity has always affirmed the *perspicuity* of Scripture. That means we believe God has spoken distinctly in His Word**. Not everything in the Bible is equally clear, of course (2 Pet. 3:16). But God's Word is plain enough for the average reader to know and understand everything necessary for a saving knowledge of Christ. Scripture is also sufficiently clear to enable us to obey the Great Commission, which expressly requires us to teach others 'all things' that Christ has commanded (Matt. 28:18-20).

[6] "**Two thousand years of accumulated Christian scholarship has been basically consistent on all the major issues**: The Bible is the authoritative Word of God, containing every spiritual truth essential to God's glory, our salvation, faith, and eternal life. Scripture tells us that all humanity fell in Adam, and our sin is a perfect bondage from which we cannot extricate ourselves. Jesus is God incarnate, having taken on human flesh to pay the price of sin and redeem believing men and women from sin's bondage. Salvation is by grace through faith, and not a result of any works we do. Christ is the only Savior for the whole world, and apart from faith in Him, there is no hope of redemption for any sinner. So the gospel message needs to be carried to the uttermost parts of the earth. True Christians have always been in full agreement on all those vital points of biblical truth.

"As a matter of fact, **the postmodernized notion that everything should be perpetually up for discussion** and nothing is ever really sure or settled **[a] is a plain and simple denial of both the perspicuity of Scripture and, [b] the unanimous testimony of the people of God throughout redemptive history**. In one sense, the contemporary denial of the Bible's clarity **[c] represents a regression to medieval thinking, when the papal hierarchy insisted that the Bible is too unclear for lay people to interpret it for themselves**. (This belief led to much fierce persecution against those who worked to translate the Bible into common languages.) In another sense, however, **[d] the postmodern denial of Scripture's clarity is**

even worse than the darkness of medieval religious superstition, because postmodernism in effect says *no one* can reliably understand what the Bible means. Postmodernism leaves people permanently in the dark about practically everything. **[e] That…is a denial of Christ's lordship over the church. How could He exercise headship over His church if His own people could never truly know what He meant by what He said?** Jesus Himself settled the question of whether His truth is sufficiently clear in John 10:27-28, when He said, '*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand*.'[23] (pp. 156-158)

D. <u>Accept & embrace the fact that Christians are called to fight for truth</u>. Jude 3: "*earnestly contend for the faith…*" MacArthur: "We…happen to be living in a generation when many so-called Christians have no taste for conflict or contention…Controversy and conflict in the church are never to be relished or engaged in without sufficient cause. But in every generation, the battle for the truth has proved ultimately unavoidable, because the enemies of truth are relentless. Truth is always under assault. And it is actually a sin not to fight when vital truths are under attack… **When we stand before the judgment seat of Christ, believers from this generation will not be able to justify their apathy by complaining that the strife of conflict over truth just seemed '*too negative*' for the kind of culture we lived in—or that the issues were '*merely doctrinal*' and therefore not worth the effort**. Remember, Christ rebuked the churches in Revelation 2-3 who had tolerated false teachers in their midst (2:14-16; 20-23)." (pp. xxiii-xxiv, xxvi)

E. <u>Recognize the futility & silliness of trying to mimic and fit in with the world, or pander to any culture</u>. Webber: "The answer to the veiling of people's hearts is regeneration—not an adaptation of the message to pander to a culture that denies absolutes and embraces contradiction, but the unambiguous preaching of that message in the power of God, resulting in a lifting of the veil and an expression of true faith."[24]

In regard to the seemingly endless attempts by biblical Christianity to fit in with and follow the culture of the day, I have been saying for years that Christians who try to climb onto the world's bandwagon always seem to be getting on about the time it's coming to a stop! MacArthur expresses this same sentiment: "**Evangelicals who are so desperate to follow the culture invariably lag several years behind anyway, somehow managing to look awkward and clumsy by always failing to keep in step, no matter how hard they try**. But, then, the church is not supposed to ape the world's fads or court the world's favor anyway. Jesus said, '*If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you*' (John 15:18-19)."

Webber, quoting Os Guinness, points out a further problem with trying to fit in with, and march in step with culture of this, or any other day: "The Emerging Church is destined for disuse…[It] will ultimately go the way of philosophies that are driven by culture. Os Guinness warned, quoting Dean Inge in '*Dining with the Devil*,' 'He who marries the spirit of the age soon becomes a widower.' Enthusiasts of the Emerging Church should take note. Contextualization of a message can be a valuable tool in communicating across cultures; but when the context is allowed to determine the message, no good will come of it. When the world tires of this new phenomenon, it will go the way of other trendy ideas."[25]

<u>WHAT IS "*TRUTH*" ANYWAY?</u> MacArthur replies: "Here is a simple definition drawn from what the Bible teaches: *Truth is that which is consistent with the mind, will, character, glory, and being of God. Even more to the point: truth is the self-expression of God*…Because the definition of truth flows from God, truth is *theological*. **Truth is also *ontological*—which is a fancy way of saying it is the way things really are**. Reality is what it is because God declared it so and made it so. Therefore God is the author, source, determiner, governor, arbiter, ultimate standard, and final judge of all truth…An obvious corollary if what I am saying is that truth means nothing apart from God…Since He alone is eternal and self-existent and He alone is the Creator of all else, He is the fountain of all truth. If you don't believe that, try defining truth without reference to God, and see how quickly all such definitions fail. The moment you begin to ponder the essence of truth, you are brought face-to-face with the requirement of a universal absolute—the eternal reality of God…human philosophers have sought for thousands of years to explain truth and account for human knowledge apart from God—and all who have tried have ultimately been unsuccessful.[26]" (pp. 2, 4-5, italics in the original)

<u>CONCLUDING THOUGHT</u>: "*If there is 'emerging' to be done, it is the emergence of the true church of Jesus Christ from its resting place. With love for God and the souls of mankind … [It] has the power to impact people—and cultures—of the world's waiting mission fields*."[27]

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[23] Italics in the original, except for the Bible verse.
[24] Webber, op cit., p. 4.
[25] Webber, ibid, p. 3.
[26] See MacArthur, pp. 5-9, for a brief historical overview.
[27] Webber, op cit., p. 4.

GLOSSARY: A FEW DEFINITIONS.

MODERNITY. "Modernity, in simple terms, was characterized by the belief that truth exists and that the scientific method is the only reliable way to determine that truth. In the so-called '*modern*' era, most academic disciplines (philosophy, science, literature, and education) were driven primarily by rationalistic presuppositions. In other words, modern thought treated human reason as the final arbiter of what is true. The modern mind discounted the idea of the supernatural and looked for scientific and rationalistic explanations for everything. But modern thinkers retained their belief that knowledge of the truth is possible." (cf. with postmodernism, below) (p. 9)

POSTMODERNISM. MacArthur: "[Postmodernism] is not an easy term to explain, because it describes a way of thinking that defies (and even rejects) any clear definition. Postmodernism in general is marked by *a tendency to dismiss the possibility of any sure and settled knowledge of the truth*. Postmodernism suggests that if objective truth exists, it cannot be known objectively or with any degree of certainty…Nothing is certain, and the thoughtful person will never speak with too much conviction about anything. Strong convictions about any point of truth are judged supremely arrogant and hopelessly naïve. Everyone is entitled to his own truth. Postmodernism therefore has no positive agenda to assert anything as true or good. Perhaps you have noticed that only the most heinous crimes are still seen as evil…That is because the notion of evil itself does not fit in the postmodern scheme of things. If we can't really know anything for certain, how can we judge anything evil? Therefore, postmodernism's one goal and singular activity is the systematic deconstruction of every truth claim…If you were to challenge me to boil down postmodern thought into its pure essence and identify the gist of it in one single, simple, central characteristic, I would say it is *the rejection of every expression of certainty*. In the postmodern perspective, certainty is regarded as inherently arrogant, elitists, intolerant, oppressive—and therefore always wrong." (pp. 10-11, italics in original, bolding added)

The situation today: "The goal of human philosophy use to be *truth without God*. Today's philosophies are open to the notion of *God without truth*—or to be more accurate, personal '*spirituality*' in which everyone is free to create his or her own god. Personal gods pose no threat to sinful self-will, because they suit each sinner's personal preferences anyway, and they make no demands on anyone else." (p. 8)

"**The attack on propositional expressions of truth is the natural and necessary outworking of postmodernism's [a]** *general distrust of logic,* **[b]** *distaste for certainty*, **and. [c]** *dislike for clarity*…[the] notion that certainty about *anything* is inherently arrogant…[is a] view that is wildly popular today. The belief that no one can really know anything for certain is emerging as virtually the one dogma postmodernists will tolerate. Uncertainty is the new truth. Doubt and skepticism have been canonized as a form of humility. Right and wrong have been redefined in terms of subjective feelings and personal perspectives…These views are infiltrating the church too…a prime example of that cynicism [is] seen in the so-called **Emerging Church** movement." (p. 16, italics in original)

Emerging Church proponents fail to distinguish between *RATIONALISM &. RATIONALITY*. "*Rationalism* [i.e. thinking that man, by his natural reason can figure everything out without the need to posit God-mwe] needs to be rejected without abandoning *rationality*. Rationality (the right use of sanctified reason through sound logic) is never condemned in Scripture. **Faith is not irrational. Authentic biblical truth demands that we employ logic and clear, sensible thinking**…Nor is logic a uniquely 'Greek' category that is somehow hostile to the Hebrew context of Scripture. (That is a common myth and a gross oversimplification that is often set forth in support of postmodernism's flirtation with irrationality.) Scripture frequently employs logical devices, such as [1] *antithesis*, [2] *if-then arguments*, [3] *syllogisms*, and [4] *propositions*. These are all standard logical forms, and Scripture is full of them (See, for example, Paul's long string of deductive arguments about the importance of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:12-19…truth cannot survive if stripped of propositional content. While it is quite true that believing the truth entails more than the assent of the human intellect to certain propositions, it is equally true that authentic faith never involves anything less." (pp. 13-15, italics in the original)

NARRATORS. "Some Emerging style congregations have done away with pastors altogether and replaced them with '*narrators*.'" (p. 17)

ORTHOPRAXY. A term popularized by Emerging Church advocates, who place more value on "practice" than on doctrine (Orthodoxy). They have it completely backwards. Right behaviour comes from right belief, not the other way around. Emerging Church leaders go so far as to imply that "*living the life*" is more important than determining and believing the truth. Unfortunately, as noted earlier, even their pastors fail to evidence a holiness in their speech & conduct.