

Lamar E. Cooper, Sr.
Executive Vice President & Provost
Criswell College

Emerging Church Dogmas

A Brief Synopsis of Beliefs

Introduction

Throughout the history of the church there have been periodic attempts to redefine the Gospel, the church and the Christian faith. In the early days of the church through the Middle Ages, attempts were made to define the Gospel as a set of dogmatic propositions called a catechism. To receive the Gospel one had to memorize and affirm these statements. The statements were good, and basically true, but affirming them was not the Gospel. In the age of Enlightenment, Christianity supposedly matured, and everything was redefined in accord with human reason. The Scriptures were evaluated and subjected to human judgment and the Gospel was redefined in human terms. The emerging church of that day was the church of liberal ideas and thought that produced a redesigned Gospel of human proportions. This gave rise to the human analysis and revision of Scripture in terms of human principles of logic.

In the late 20th continuing into these opening years of the 21st century, the so-called emerging church has sought to redefine Christianity by totally dismissing past history as irrelevant and flawed, without so much as looking into the content of past belief. Interpretation of Scripture is the whim of the individual. Truth is of one's own design. This movement sees itself as post-Christian and has set out to create a Christian worldview compatible with human preferences alone. God, the Gospel, the Church and its doctrine, and practices, are all dismissed as totally foreign to being or becoming a spiritual person. The following is a brief list of leading ideas and statements that reflect the thinking of the emerging church movement:

1. The institutional church is irrelevant to human needs and is culturally bound by empty traditions. It should be dismissed.
2. Systematic theology and the use of propositional teaching must be avoided.
3. The church has no need for buildings or organizational structures.
4. Evangelism should focus on building a better world rather than getting people into an institutional framework of a church.
5. Jesus is an example of "missional" living rather than a Savior to trust for salvation. Missional living is living like Jesus as an example in the community.
6. The culture is to be changed by living "missional" lives in the community.
7. The professional clergy is dismissed as unnecessary and irrelevant.
8. Conservative Christian emphasis on goodness is seen as a meaningless façade.

9. Christian beliefs must be "deconstructed" [destroyed] and replaced with dialogues about a widening parameter of human conduct [fewer or no restraints]. A diversity of opinions, beliefs, and practices should be the outcome of this dialogue.
10. A plurality of interpretations should be the norm for understanding Scripture.
11. Exegesis of Scripture is unnecessary and even dangerous as it produces dogmatic conclusions. The culture should dictate the meaning of the Word.
12. Theology is a narrative of faith rather than principles by which to live.
13. Dialogue with other religions is helpful in understanding there are many ways to approach God.
14. Dogmatic beliefs have been responsible for events such as the Salem Witch Trials, murder of innocent people during the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, extermination of the Jews, etc and therefore should be avoided.
15. A person becomes a believer by sharing experiences, interpretations, ideas, testimonies, communal meals, and other communal practices.
16. The church is to be uncoordinated and spontaneous meeting in homes.
17. True worship is "creative" and may involve a wide range of experiences such as films, art, politics, social justice, philosophy, the internet, reflecting on local community tastes, contemporary music including secular music, celebrating a variety of ancient liturgical customs as seen among Roman Catholics, Celtic worship, Greek Orthodox, Anglican and other traditions.
18. Each individual chooses and defines their own moral standards. Any form of behavior is acceptable as long as no one is harmed.
19. God is whoever you want Him or Her to be. You make God in the image that suits your own desires.
20. The Kingdom of God comes by the promotion of social justice within the community.

These elements blend to create an a-religious system that has no definition of what constitutes true faith, no certainty of salvation, no ultimate truth, no biblical theology, evangelism without commitment, syncretistic spirituality [you pick and choose what you like]. Christ is a model of spiritual living, not the Savior of humanity.

For an excellent critique of this movement read D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.