

A Declaration on the Emerging Church Movement

The 2008 General Assembly of the Reformed Presbyterian Church General Assembly in keeping with the historical determination of the Westminster Standards, hereby asserts the following:

Whereas, the 'emerging church' or the 'emergent church movement' is a "nominal Christian movement" originating at the end of the late 20th century that is seeking to engage postmodern society in a culturally acceptable gospel, and a movement that is seeking to deconstruct and reconstruct Christian beliefs and practices by embracing a postmodernism's epistemological theory and a pluralistic approach to religion and spirituality, it is an errant teaching, anchored in heretical theology that will ultimately lead the Church into apostasy.

The emergent church movement believes that postmodernity represents a break with the past and that only an extreme transformation in the church can keep the church relevant and effective in postmodern culture, it maintains that what is needed is a new kind of Christianity, and therefore a new kind of Church with a neo-gospel message. Further, it is believed that the Church has been culturally bound to the past for so long that it must reexamine and question its every belief and practice, seeking to find new ways to define and express its message and existence. This is an attempt to engage in a complete reinvention of Christianity accompanied by a radical redefinition of Christian terms. Because we have no foundation for any beliefs, according to the emerging church movement, we therefore cannot know anything as being 'absolute truth'. The basis for such a philosophical view is structured on an antithesis which demands that unless one can know all that God knows, we are forever condemned to knowing nothing objective and therefore in capable of possessing an absolute truth about anything. Therefore, since we cannot know absolute truth, neither the Church, or Christianity can be dogmatic about doctrine or morality. Thus, Christianity must include many of the beliefs that have historically been held to be errant, heretical, or apostate. Further, since we cannot know absolute truth, exegetical and dogmatic preaching must give way to a dialogue (conversation) between people (community) of all beliefs. Since propositional truth is uncertain and there can be no absolute truth, the Church is left only with spiritual feelings and social actions as the only reliable guidance for 'true' Christianity. Propositional truth, they maintain, is an outmoded method for a culturally outdated Christianity. The postmodern approach is not to try to persuade people to believe in absolute doctrines or morality, rather it is to try to befriend people into joining the Christian community, within the context of their cultural identity.

The ultimate goal, according to the emergent church movement, is to make the world a better place, and that requires the church to envision a utopian society in which the oppressed of the world are free, the poor are no longer impoverished, and the environment is protected and clean. This utopianism is achieved, they believe, through social activism, which is characteristically the earmark of the 'social gospel' of liberal and liberation theology, with philosophical overtones of Marxists ideology. This approach to postmodern society is the evidence that the Church is emerging to reach the culture by adapting Christianity to the postmodern culture, rather than Christianity seeking to 'transform culture' according to the absolute truth of Holy Scripture.

Whereas, historical Christianity believes that we can possess real knowledge which is God given, and therefore an absolute knowledge of the truth, and because this movement is a denial of the infallibility and inerrancy of the Scripture as the revealed absolute truth of God, the Reformed Presbyterian Church General Assembly rejects this movement as errant and apostate because it is nothing more than the submerging of Christianity, and therefore, the Church, into postmodern humanistic culture, wherein the absolute standards of truth and morality according to the Holy Scripture are rendered irrelevant and replaced with what ever dominate socio-cultural environment is currently being taught and maintained.