

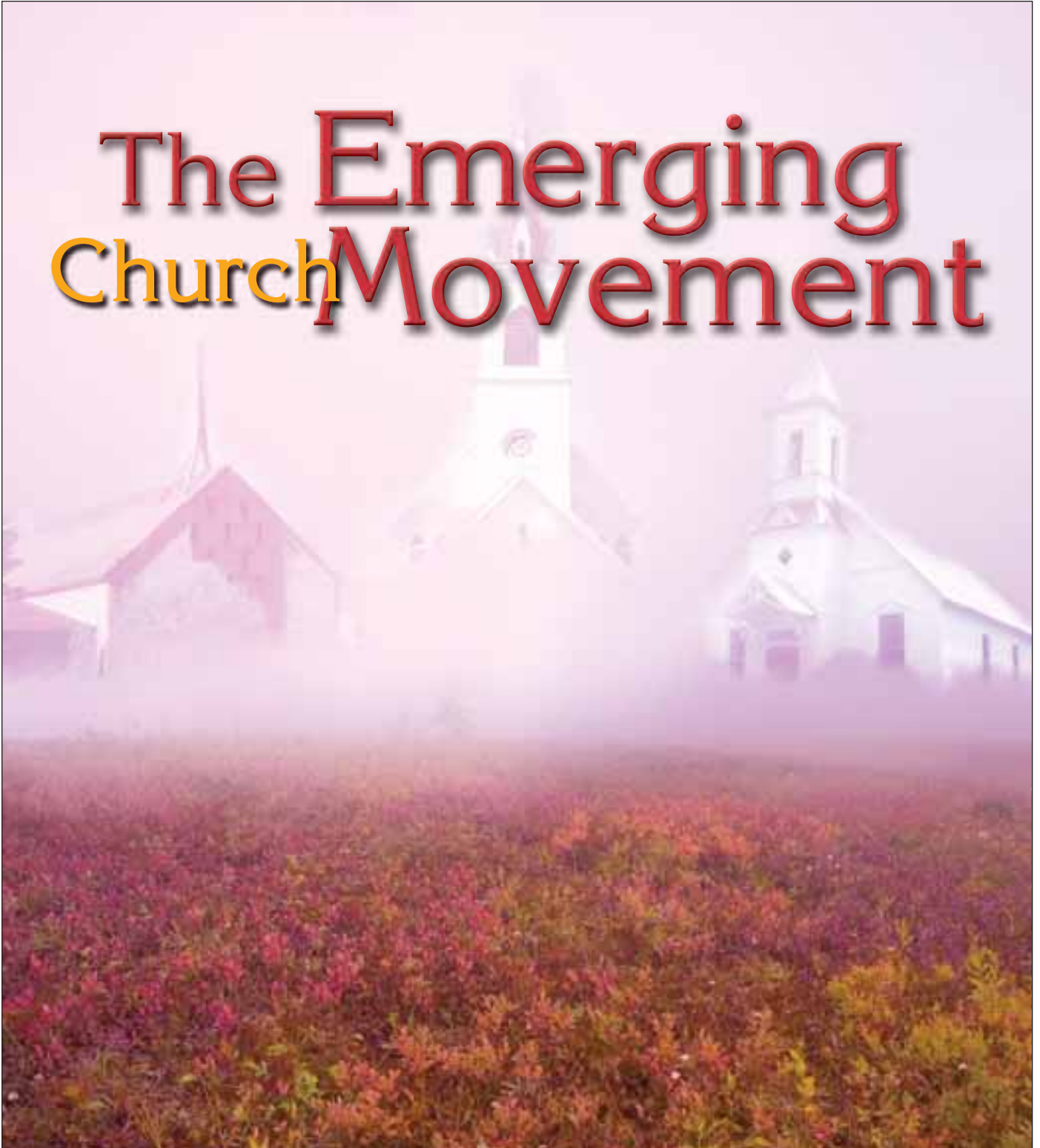
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GOSPEL

ADVOCATE

The Emerging Church Movement



Trojan Horses

Editorial by
Neil W. Anderson,



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When I drive past the replica of the ancient Greek Parthenon in midtown Nashville, I am reminded of Greek mythology and the epic poems of Homer – like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

The “Trojan War” is the subject of one such legend chronicled in the *Iliad*. For 10 years, the Greeks and Trojans fought to a draw. Then Ulysses, a Greek hero, devised a scheme where the Greeks would pretend to retreat in their ships. But first, they left a gift of a very beautiful large wooden horse outside the walls of Troy.

Inside the Trojan horse, Greek soldiers were hiding, ready to invade the city of Troy as soon as the horse was within the city walls. The next night, with the horse inside the city and the Trojans celebrating their war trophy, Greek soldiers slipped out of the horse and conquered Troy. The soldiers of Troy had become vulnerable when they

let their guard down thinking the Greeks had retreated. Although this story was probably a mixture of fact and fiction, historians believe that Troy fell in 1184 B.C.

The Greeks had an agenda – they wanted to destroy Troy and avenge the kidnapping of their beloved Helen. They were willing to fight to the end – whatever the cost! The expression “Trojan Horse” is defined as “intended to undermine or subvert from within” (Merriam-Webster’s American English Dictionary).

Is history being repeated within the Lord’s church with modern-day Trojan horses? I see evidence that such horses are appearing across our brotherhood. Their messages appear beautiful on the outside, but inside they are filled with deceivers, hypocrisy, uncleanness and ultimately destruction. The Bible graphically describes this phenomenon in the gospel of Matthew: “You also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness” (Matthew 23:28 NKJV).

These Trojan horses are adversely affecting the church today through the influence of certain brethren who are determined to change the church. They have carefully worked from within for more than 50 years, gathering followers in each generation to support teachings that are not upheld by God’s Word. With subtle influences from popular contemporary re-

ligious books, charismatic speakers and liberal university lectureships, they have enabled the Trojan horse to slip into the church and undermine its nature. Now these influences are being widely accepted as truth.

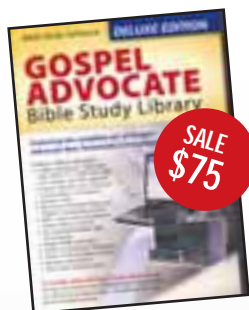
This new breed of church leaders is trying to restructure the church. They want to make the church broad enough to accept compromised beliefs, conflicting values, and practices taken from false religions. This leaves us with a group who are Christians in name but not in essence.

A generation ago “marketing the church” was the hot-button of church-growth schools. It has resulted in some churches treating members, and potential members, like consumers in an effort to increase their market share in the community. They are willing to do whatever it takes to attract and hold a great number. It’s all about results!

An editorial in the Nashville *Tennessean* (Sept. 21, 2008), reminded its readers of a time when the elders of Israel asked Samuel to give them a king so that Israel could be like the nations around them (1 Samuel 8:1-5). Paul Proctor, a member of the Southern Baptist church, objected to his church’s stance saying, “We want to be just like the world around us so the world will like us and want to join us when, in fact, it is we who are joining them.” Substituting the word “church” for “world” helps us see clearly what is happening within our brotherhood.

Jesus wants us to submit to His Word and His way without hypocrisy. He said of the foolish man: “But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46).

Christians accept Scripture as trustworthy and authoritative – nothing more, nothing less. We should take what is happening with these Trojan horses as a warning and maintain a strong vigil against all forms of false doctrines (Romans 12:2). □



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The Mindset of the Emerging Church

by Phil Sanders

The number of adults who have had little or no spiritual training in life increases daily. The fastest growing religious group in America identifies itself as “no religion.” Nearly one in four Americans (23 percent) are unattached to any faith group. The number of adults who attended church as children but now disdain church is growing rapidly. Six in 10 “unchurched” people once attended church (Rainer).

People steeped in postmodern culture are often distrustful of Christianity and think it to be a humanly developed religion filled with man-made rules. They consider churches who think they have the truth to be dogmatic, arrogant and judgmental. Some among the unchurched would not consider Christianity because they believe all religions and world views have equal beauty and value.

Like many movements before, the Emerging Church Movement (ECM) began in a state of discontent. Those adherents share with the unchurched many of the postmodern criticisms of Christianity. Leaders in this movement are disgruntled with established dogmas, rituals and institutions of

modern, organized Christianity. They argue against the many abuses they believe arose out of the modern era. They believe they must deconstruct traditional Christianity and rethink how to follow Christ in order to reach a postmodern culture.

Brian McLaren in *The Church on the Other Side* argues that because we have a new world we “need a new church” (14-15). McLaren regards everyone as a pilgrim who is always searching but never arriving. He believes we should get over our hang-up with absolute truth and be more pluralistic. He says we need to get rid of the modernistic views of inerrancy and the uniquely absolute significance of Jesus Christ as the only way to salvation. For him, the emerging church must be open, flexible and pluralistic.

The ECM is made up of many diverse elements. Not all emerging adherents believe alike or act alike. For this reason I do not wish to overstate the case. Some will embrace classical liberalism whereas others remain quite conservative. Some will race to ancient forms of worship and contemplative prayer. Others abandon traditional worship in favor of conversations and vis-

its to a museum or a park. Many emergents desire to experience God with all five senses. At this point the ECM is a hodgepodge of sometimes contradictory ideas united by their rejection of modern fundamentalism.

Because postmodernists reject the foundations of the modern world view, emergents deny the ability to have any certainty of knowledge. They think such certainty causes one to be arrogant and even to exert manipulative power over others. Because they are sure no one can be certain of absolute truth, they feel free to embrace religious pluralism and to despise judgmentalism.

The postmodern mindset rejects modern rationalism, objective truth and absolutes. Some emergents have oddly grown close to classical, liberal theology and embraced the teachings of higher criticism. Some no longer regard the Scriptures as verbally inspired, inerrant or authoritative in their original intent. They believe the authority of Scripture arises from how the reader lives out the message in a postmodern context. Emergents see little need for *orthodoxy* (believing the right doctrines) but emphasize *ortho-*

praxy (living the right life). They believe if you live the right life, you will have the right doctrine.

Although emergents deny they are merely a movement to accommodate the culture, one can hardly imagine how they could be more accommodative. Their goal is to reshape the beliefs and rituals of Christianity in order to address the diverse, postmodern culture in which we live.

Reimagining the Faith

Emergents believe that they have been gifted to re-create how to “do Christianity” for the coming generation. Concentrating on what they consider to be defects in the church as it has been passed down, they feel called to reshape Christianity in ways that appeal to our diverse, skeptical culture.

They often quote 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 to justify their new ways of doing church. Emergents have a smorgasbord identity in which individuals serve as their own authorities and piece together their own theological and devotional practices somewhat as a diner would put together his salad at a salad bar.

Although Paul sought to identify with the cultures in which he lived (1 Corinthians 9:19-23), he kept his focus on standing in the apostolic traditions he received (11:1; 15:1-3). Among pagans or Jews, Paul understood he was under the law of Christ. Although removed a generation out of Palestine and into a fleshly and pagan culture at Corinth, he did not suggest a “reimagined” faith for a new generation. He held to what he received.

Paul advised the Romans: “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2 NASB). Non-Christians need to see Christians prove that God’s will is good and acceptable and perfect. When emergents desert Christ’s eternal Word in order to connect, they forfeit the foundation of their faith (Matthew 7:24-27). They may lead someone somewhere, but the house they build is likely on sand.

Emergents feel the need to “experi-

ence” God in some physical sense. They believe the visual arts, candles, incense and nature provide a means to connect with God. They practice contemplative prayer in order to open the soul to God’s message. One wonders why they need some new message when the eternal message has always been available in Scripture.

Emergents are the true children of the anti-establishment. They think they must deconstruct traditional Christianity and re-create it. They especially do not like doctrine because they consider it exclusive and divisive. As a movement they are usually not generous toward those who are orthodox. People with strong, conservative convictions about Christ are often not wanted in emerging churches. There is often greater fear of identify-

Emergents have a smorgasbord identity – individuals piece together their own theological and devotional practices somewhat as a diner would put together his salad at a salad bar.

ing with fundamentalism than there is with the world.

Their mission is not so much to convert as it is to converse. They believe they have evangelized if they simply talk to someone about religion. According to them, conversions happen when people come closer to the image of Christ whether they obey the gospel and whether they confess the name of Jesus. McLaren, an evangelical emergent who has spoken at some Christian schools associated with churches of Christ, said:

“I don’t believe making disciples must equal making adherents to the Christian religion. 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. ... Rather than resolving the paradox via pronouncements on the eternal destiny of people more convinced by or loyal to other religions than ours, we simply move on. ... To help Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, and everyone else experience life to the full in the way of Jesus (while learning it better

myself), I would gladly become one of them (whoever they are), to whatever degree I can, to embrace them, to join them, to enter into their world without judgment but with saving love as mine has been entered by the Lord” (Generous 260, 262, 264).

The Value of God’s Word

Although emergents disparage doctrine and dogma, Jesus treasures His words. People who talk against “doctrine” are actually speaking against what the Lord Jesus teaches, His personally revealed, divine words. We could not know the person Jesus if we did not have His authoritative and life-giving words that teach, reprove, correct and train us (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Jesus valued His words and teaching. Hearing and acting upon His

words distinguishes the wise from the foolish (Matthew 7:21-27). His words impart the truth that sets us free. True disciples abide in His Word (John 8:31-32). If we are ashamed of Him or His words, He will be ashamed of us (Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26). His words are eternal life (John 6:63). We will be judged by His words (John 12:48). We become His mother and brothers by hearing and doing His word (Mark 3:35; Luke 8:21).

Heaven and earth will pass away but not Jesus’ words (Matthew 24:35). Whoever is of God hears the words of God (John 8:47). Whoever does not love Jesus does not keep His words (14:23-24). Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he will never see death” (8:51). Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth” (17:17).

Because Jesus is the truth, we can trust His words. To deny that we can know the truth about God as it is found in the words of Christ is to abandon any opportunity for a relationship. There can be no relational spirituality without the Lord’s doctri-

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nal spirituality. It is nonsense to speak of a relational spirituality with Jesus Christ apart from hearing and practicing the teaching of His words.

Emerging churches sometimes think of themselves as restoring the radical ways of Jesus in a postmodern context. They believe they are the new, radical restoration movement of how Jesus would live in America in

the 21st century. They think they must break away from the arrogant power structure of the fundamentalist, traditional church as Jesus broke away from the Pharisees.

Although Christians ought to recognize the error of human traditions (Matthew 15:1-14), one must be careful not to throw away the faith that has been once for all handed down

(Jude 3). One can imagine Jesus speaking out against human innovations. One cannot imagine Jesus leading a movement away from His own teaching. A house divided against itself cannot stand.

One cannot imagine Jesus saying in one breath that He is the only way to the Father (John 14:6) and in the next breath endorsing other world religions as equally valid. One cannot imagine Jesus cleaning up a park or visiting a museum in lieu of preaching the good news of the kingdom. Jesus did not merely have conversations with sinners; He lovingly preached repentance to them. He gave them hope by repentance that enabled them to leave their sins and find a new life.

Jesus built His church, purchased His church with His own blood (Matthew 16:18; Acts 20:28). He did not embrace the world but transferred people out of the domain of darkness into His kingdom, where they found forgiveness (Colossians 1:13-14). Jesus did not die to build spiritual coffee houses that converse by candlelight with compromised convictions. He sent forth apostles who would die to preach the one gospel to build up the one body in the one faith with one Lord and one baptism.

Jesus died on the cross with salvation from hell on His mind. He talked more about hell than anyone. To suggest, as emergents do, that hell is not a significant matter rips the purpose of the cross out of the gospel.

Let us hold fast to what we have received so that we may not believe in vain (1 Corinthians 15:1-2). □

Phil Sanders is minister of Concord Road Church of Christ in Brentwood, Tenn., and the author of Adrift: Postmodernism in the Church. He may be contacted by e-mail at phil@God-answers.org.

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Emerging Church Movement Glossary

- **Authentic:** Emergents strive to be “authentic” in their religious lifestyle and to avoid any pretense, which they believe plagues the traditional church. For emergents, an “authentic” life assures them of the favor of God and the correctness of their doctrine. In some cases an emerging, “authentic” Christian permits open sin in his life so that he may connect with people of the world.

- **Contemplative Prayer:** A borrowed practice from the Buddhists, where in a person empties his mind of all thoughts but a special one in the hope that God will speak to him.

- **Emerging Church Movement:** A network of churches and house churches that seek to experience God and to reach out to the postmodern culture. They are diverse in their practices and pursue their beliefs by means of dialogue rather than by preaching the Scriptures. They believe because we are in a new culture we need a new church. Emerging church leaders believe they have been “gifted” to reinvent how to “do church.” The emerging church is fluid, meaning different things in different places.

- **Emerging:** Although those in the Emerging Church Movement generally come from boomers, busters and millennials, their focus is in emerging from traditional beliefs and practices in Christianity in order to address the postmodern culture. They frequently focus on leading young people to emerge out of the “traditional” and into their reinvented way of doing church. The traditional Christianity most emergents disdain is the enterprising, seeker-sensitive evangelical church.

- **Emergent:** Some in the Emerging Church Movement insist on being called “emergent.” “Emerging” is the wider, informal, church-based, global movement. “Emergent” refers to an official organization, the Emergent Village. This sub-movement, a large intellectual and philosophical network, is sometimes called the “emergent stream” within the larger emerging church.

- **Pluralism:** The belief that permits several competing, alternative theologies to coexist and that suggests that such a state is not only approved by God but also healthy. Such a belief argues there is no such thing as heresy.

- **Postmodern:** An era of time beginning in 1989 when the wall fell in Berlin, suggesting the truths once held as absolute are instead relative. The postmodern era is thought to be the time when Christianity as we know it is torn down (deconstructed) so that newly constructed spiritualities and lifestyles built of many religions may emerge.

- **Postmodernism:** A mindset or mood characterized by a deep distrust in anything held to be absolute or true in the modern era, including reason and revealed religion. Because postmodernists believe truth is humanly manufactured, they seek to deconstruct the traditional faith and church and to reinvent them in a way appealing to the postmodern culture.

- **Post-Christian:** Emergents believe the day of Christian dominance in culture is over and Christians must adapt to the culture. They believe they must “do church” differently in order to reach out to the postmodern world.

A Church for All Seasons

by Dewayne Bryant

Churches in the Restoration Movement have sought to return to authentic Christianity for 200 years. Although other movements in church history have attempted to reform or restore aspects of New Testament Christianity, few have tried to bring first-century faith back into practice. Many may be completely unaware that a second movement is underway that also describes itself as a modern restoration of the church. Billing itself as a return to vintage Christianity, this is the Emerging Church Movement (ECM).

The emerging church consists of members who identify themselves as Christian but think it is necessary to radically alter the identity of the church. For too long, they argue, Christianity has failed to reach out and touch human culture. Its relevance is marginal because it no longer tries to engage others. It has stagnated and must retool if it is to survive.

The difference between the emerging church and traditional churches is found in its postmodern foundation. Postmodernism is most notable for its rejection of absolute truth and any authority claiming to represent that truth. Because of this, the emerging church does not deal in answers but

with questions, conversations and journeys. In true postmodern fashion, authority is denied and truth deemed unknowable. Certainty is virtually non-existent.

It would seem at first glance that postmodernism and Christianity make poor companions. The New Testament is clear that the faith has, once and for all, been delivered to the saints (Jude 3). It is called a “good deposit” that is entrusted to the Christian’s care (1 Timothy 6:20; 2 Timothy 1:14 NIV). In the pastoral epistles, Paul advises his young protégées, Timothy and Titus, to employ sound judgment and wisdom in evaluating sound doctrine (Titus 1:9; 2:1). These statements rest on a foundation that assumes certainty in making theological, doctrinal and moral decisions, yet this is the certainty with which the emerging church is most uncomfortable.

A few congregations in the ECM have reached megachurch status. Their members are disgruntled and dissatisfied with traditional churches and have found a refuge among like-minded souls snugly nestled in postmodern thought. They have found new ways to interact with culture. Unfortunately, this includes altering the message of the gospel to make it

more palatable for a postmodern audience. With the death of absolute truth, virtually any moral or theological position can be twisted, tortured or rewritten (cf. 2 Peter 3:16).

Negativity De-Emphasized

Doctrines that could be construed as having negative overtones are de-emphasized. Atonement, sin and hell receive very little attention. So does holiness, although some have taken it upon themselves to redefine it to mean something like “showing love to others” rather than the biblical definition of being “set apart.” Being set apart connotes passing judgment, and judgment requires adherence to standards of right and wrong – the very standards to which postmodernism is so allergic. Preaching a message of love is only half the story, however. God may love the sinner, but His nature requires Him to hate the sin.

Matters dealing with sin often take a back seat. Two figures, Mark Driscoll and Paul Tripp, have gained notoriety for their use of foul language and coarse humor. As a result, Driscoll bears the unflattering moniker of “the cussing pastor.” Although this use of language is a clear violation of the

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apostle Paul's teaching against obscenities and inappropriate humor (Ephesians 5:4), it fits with the ECM's avoidance of appearing to be too holy.

The ECM de-emphasizes doctrine to the extent that one wonders why it should be considered relevant.

Furthermore, postmodernism's discomfort with absolutes has made for poor theology. Driscoll, in his article "A Pastoral Perspective on the Emerging Church," identifies eight discussions currently taking place, including whether the crucifixion was efficacious or merely an example of suffering and whether hell will be eternal, temporary or non-existent (91). Other doctrines such as sin, holiness, atonement and who belongs in the community of faith are met with equal uncertainty.

The emerging church also marries the unknowable to morality. For in-

past in postmodernism. Emerging church writers proudly proclaim that they live rather comfortably in a gray area. Or, as some have put it, "We no longer see things in black and white. We see them in color." However, seeing things in moral technicolor requires that standards of truth be jettisoned in favor of subjectivity.

The title of McLaren's book *A Generous Orthodoxy* illustrates this point perfectly. Rather than having a strict standard by which everyone is judged, McLaren believes one should adopt a more inclusive outlook on life and other faiths. Although having a "generous" orthodoxy sounds rather cordial and pleasant, human beings do not have the authority to negotiate important doctrinal matters on God's behalf. The ECM has become so generous that it has ceased to be orthodox. Many would argue it has ceased to be

obeys the will of God and another who does not. Peter makes this distinction clear, telling his readers that they have been called from darkness into light and are a people who only now are eligible for mercy by virtue of their inclusion into God's people (1 Peter 2:9-10).

Blurring the lines between Christianity and other religions is becoming more commonplace. In many quarters, Eastern mysticism has been embraced by the emerging church. One example is the practice of Christian yoga. The term "yoga" is more than just stretching. It is intended as a means of uniting with the concept of a universal consciousness. Some embrace and encourage this discipline without its overt pagan elements, but its pagan ancestry remains nonetheless. Another example is the use of the labyrinth, a maze-like structure through which participants walk, sometimes stopping at prayer stations in order to connect more deeply with God. Although attention to one's relationship with God is important, it cannot be aided by mysticism. It is an attempt to improve upon a faith that is already complete.

Blurring the lines between Christianity and other religions is becoming more commonplace.

stance, Brian McLaren, a popular leader in the emergent church (a very similar but slightly more radical form of the emerging church), has called for a moratorium on making moral and theological pronouncements, specifically on the issue of homosexuality. McLaren has called for a five-year study of the issue before any decisions should be made. Likewise, in *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, Dan Kimball says about homosexuality: "We must approach the Bible with humility, prayer, and sensitivity, taking into consideration the original meaning of Greek and Hebrew words and looking into the historical contexts in which passages were written. ... We can no longer with integrity merely quote a few isolated verses and say 'case closed' " (137). Scripture is clear about the sinfulness of homosexuality (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:9-11), and these statements serve as dangerous examples of how the culture can imprint itself upon the church if one is too careless.

Embracing the Gray Area

Black and white is a thing of the

Christian.

Participants in the emerging church have sometimes been guilty of failing to distinguish between those who are saved and those who are lost. In part, this is intentional. In a context where absolutes are unwelcome and unwanted, the line between the redeemed and the reprobate is hardly noticeable. In the emerging mindset, every person is on a journey. Some may be farther along and closer to God than others, but this does not diminish the value of those who are a little behind everyone else.

In his book *Becoming Conversant With the Emerging Church*, D.A. Carson addresses the issue of insiders and outsiders in the kingdom of God. The teaching of Jesus and His apostles makes it clear that some will be included among God's people while others are excluded. The New Testament consistently presents a picture of the Christian as a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15) and of the Christian community as being one set apart from the world (John 15:18-19; Ephesians 5:8). A difference exists between one who

Dangerous Inroads

There is no denying that the ECM is making dangerous inroads into Christianity. Indeed, members in the emerging movement would argue that their version of Christianity is more genuine and authentic than that practiced in traditional churches. Some emerging church members have even gone so far as to state that the traditional church is an illegitimate one (Yaconelli 20).

In some ways, the emerging church has done biblical Christianity a favor. Leaders in the movement have a laundry list of complaints against traditional churches, some that are not completely unfounded. Some traditional churches give the impression of being more concerned with day-to-day business than soul-winning. Others may take little interest in visitors. People might attend for several weeks with very few people knowing their names or noticing their absence when they leave. Many

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Christians fall into the trap of “doing church” rather than being the body of Christ in a fallen world. The ECM’s passion for being involved in the church and reaching out to those outside it is admirable, as is their commitment to deepening their relationships with God.

Despite the points in its favor, the leaders of the movement have manufactured a church that bears only a resemblance to the one found in Scripture. Rick Warren has stated that the Reformation Movement was about believing the right things whereas the Emerging Church Movement is about doing the right things (Kuo). One cannot escape the fact that proper belief is vital in the life of the faithful (1 Timothy 6:20-21). Sound doctrine is not optional (2 Timothy 1:13-14). This is the difference between biblical Christianity and postmodern Christianity.

Some have already sounded a death toll for the emerging church. The evangelical world has learned from the insights that the emerging church has provided while throwing away the theological liberalism and inclusivism inherent in the movement. The strength of the ECM is its commitment to helping others and building community, but that concern is already found in the pages of Scripture (Leviticus 19:9-17; Mark 12:30-31; Acts 6:1-7). The traditional churches they oppose could easily focus on outreach just as much, showing that one does not have to buy into bad theology to do good works.

A great deal of disagreement is obvious between the ECM and the church as depicted in Scripture. The emerging church may be savvy and culturally relevant, but its preoccupation with culture and conformity to postmodern thinking have made it something other than God’s special treasure. Its followers try to be holy but not too holy, and they are absolutely certain about their uncertainty on doctrine. Preaching the Word has given way to conversation and dialogue. They have replaced the cross with the coffeehouse.

Plenty of material has been written by members of the ECM that could be pulped and recycled with more gained

than lost. Their work is perfumed with the elitism inherent in postmodernism. They sit comfortably upon the shoulders of the theological giants who preceded them, enjoying the luxury of criticizing the very faith they claim to practice. Their belief may be vintage, but it is not authentic. Their work is decidedly different from that of the apostles, who went to their graves preaching the gospel of Christ with conviction. Christ’s messengers did not merely engage in dialogue; they preached truth. They still do. □

Dewayne Bryant is a doctoral student and adjunct Bible instructor at Amridge University. He also conducts seminars on archaeology and biblical history. He can be reached at dewaynebryant@mac.com.

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Meditative Prayer

by David Morris

Recently I phoned a dear friend, a retired preacher, and discovered his voice mail was a prayer. His recording said, "Father, I thank You that when we call upon You we never get an answering machine. I pray for this person who is calling me. May this be one of the best days of his or her life. Help this person to grow closer to You through the truth of Your word. In Jesus' name, Amen."

That kind of upbeat prayer is a reflection of the heart of a servant of God. This man has struggled with severe health issues for many years, yet his love and concern are natural and genuine. That is humbling, especially considering the fact that if you call my answering machine you get, "Hello, this is David. Leave a message. Keep it brief!"

Prayer is vital to the spiritual health of a Christian. Prayer is the expression of the human heart in conversation with God. It gives us access to our heavenly Father, and He invites His children to pray to Him (Matthew 7:7-11). But a kind of prayer is being promoted today by the Emergent Church Movement that is quite different from the biblical examples of prayer. It is known as meditative prayer.

Emergent churches, because they lack a solidified pattern of doctrine, have differing emphases depending upon the author they read, the preacher they follow, or the church they attend. But many do have some common trends, including meditative prayer. Emergent author Dan Kimball has outlined some of the most common worship practices of the emergent church in his book *Emerging Worship*. These include:

- Stations that include objects to assist in meditation (seeds, sand, vines, rosary beads);
- The lighting of candles and the burning of incense to promote a "spiritual" feeling;
- Art stations that may be used during the sermon to express an image that comes to mind; and
- The use of liturgies, icons and chants commonly used in other religious faiths.

Josh Reich, in his article "Creating Worship Gatherings for the Emerging Church," writes, "Some of the values of the emerging church are an emphasis on emotions, global outlook, a rise in the use of arts, and a rise in mysticism and spirituality."

Churches of Christ are not immune to these trends. Many youth groups find these principles appealing. Some colleges and many individual congregations in the Lord's church are actively promoting worship gatherings that incorporate these practices. It is essential to be informed so that God's people will not accept anything unbiblical (Acts 17:11).

What Is Meditative Prayer?

Years ago I saw a newspaper cartoon depicting a preacher trying to communicate a message to his audience. The preacher was balancing himself on a unicycle and holding a sparkler in both hands. The caption read, "I have to do *something* to hold their attention."

Entertainment-based worship has begun to lose some of its novelty. It was inevitable that it would eventually become too commonplace and lose its freshness. To fill the void, emergent worship principles are gaining

popularity. Praise teams are being replaced by the desire to experience God in a new way. *Newsweek* magazine recently reported that "Americans are looking for personal, ecstatic experiences of God" and noted how many Christian groups are becoming more open to mysticism, meditation, candle-lighting and chanting prayers (Adler).

Emergent worship focuses on meditative prayer as a mystical way of experiencing God's presence. The Bible exhorts God's people to meditate on His Word: "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it" (Joshua 1:8 ESV). But emergent meditative prayer does not meditate, or focus, on God's Word. It seeks to clear the mind entirely, allowing a person to descend into a trance-like state. When the Word of God is no longer actively contemplated, meditative prayer ceases to be biblical.

Meditative prayer has been around for centuries and is rooted firmly in Buddhist and Hindu traditions. Emergent teacher Tony Jones admits this type of prayer originates in the monastic traditions of "the Desert Fathers" (70). This practice was popularized in the 1970s by three mystic Roman Catholic monks seeking a "method of prayer, a prayer of silence, which prepares us to receive the gift of God's presence." These monks were influenced by teachers of Buddhist and Hindu meditation who regularly came to their retreat to instruct them. One of these monks, Thomas Keating, said meditative prayer "is beyond thoughts, words, and emotions. ... We open our

awareness to God whom we know is closer than thinking, closer than consciousness itself” (118). The emergent movement has adopted this practice as a centerpiece for their worship.

Sitting in a comfortable position for meditation, individuals are instructed to select a word (such as “Jesus” or “Father”) and repeat it for 20 minutes. If distracting thoughts enter the mind, you must return to the selected word as a means of clearing the mind again. “Do not reflect on the meaning of the word; thinking and reflecting must cease, as all mystical writers insist” (Jager 31). Emerging church teachers encourage this subjective meditative experience by explaining when your mind is in a blank state, it is able to absorb anything. Another emergent leader advocates emptying the mind through staring at candles. Duane Cottrell believes that such practices “will play a huge part in the church of the future, and candles are just the beginning.” In reality, this is the exact opposite of how the Bible instructs Christians to pray (Luke 11:1-4).

Meditative prayer has many variations. For “the Jesus prayer,” while in a state of meditation, the practitioner breathes in while saying “Lord Jesus, Son of God” and breathes out saying “have mercy on me.” Repetitions are tracked by counting beads. The tradition of *Lectio divina* (praying the scriptures) involves repeating a single phrase or word of scripture over and over, leading to an experience of union with God. For the “labyrinth prayer,” something similar to a maze, but with only one path, is drawn on the floor. The person is to walk slowly to the center, where they are to experience the presence of God. Many such labyrinths have stopping points along the way for meditating on certain words, phrases or symbols.

The ultimate goal of meditative prayer, as one emergent blogger wrote, is to “enter into what is called the Silence, a place where God is encountered. Once you are fully immersed into this emptied state of mind, you encounter God in the spirit realm. Into this silence, God speaks. You sense his presence

through a sensation of heat or cold, tingling skin, or a gentle wind seemingly blowing through your body.” To this, the apostle John might ask, “What spirit is being experienced?” (1 John 4:1).

Reflecting the Heart of the Movement

Emergent worship practices are the ultimate reflection of what the movement believes. The worship of a church is a reflection of its teaching. In worship, thinking meets practice.

In an age that seeks experience often to the detriment of truth, we should not be surprised at the rising popularity of these practices. Dan Kimball says, “Meditative prayer resonates with hearts of emerging generations” (Kimball, Warren, McLaren and Hendricks).

Emergent meditative prayer seeks to clear the mind entirely, allowing a person to descend into a trance-like state.

As a person who falls within the demographic of those who normally find emerging principles appealing, I find myself drawn to the idea of experiencing closeness with God. But devotion to the truths of Scripture ultimately determines a person’s closeness with the Father. The Word of God will not endorse the sacrifice of true spirituality just so that we can feel closer to God. The mystical experiences of emergent worship dismiss a faith based on objective truth and evidence (Hebrews 11:1) in favor of a faith based on subjective experience. This ultimately leads to the rejection of sound biblical teaching, replacing it with emotion-driven beliefs and skepticism.

But some in our brotherhood are exploring these practices. One professor recently held a lectureship course on exploring mysticism. In preparation, he spent time at a monastery, a Buddhist retreat, a Celtic retreat, and a hermit community for 40 days of meditative prayer.

Kimball writes, “If you can’t go to church and at least for a moment be

given transcendence, then I can’t see why anyone should go” (Kimball, Warren, McLaren and Hendricks 143). Respectfully speaking, perhaps Kimball has forgotten the essential principles of “holding fast the confession of hope,” “stirring one another to love and good works,” “encouraging one another,” and “putting away sin” (Hebrews 10:23-26).

Biblical Prayer

When meditative prayer is contrasted with biblical prayer, the difference is striking. None of the practices of meditative prayer are taught in Scripture.

Some advocate the use of meditative prayer by appealing to Psalm 46:10: “Be still, and know that I am God.” Yet this statement is addressed to the hostile nations, indicating they should

cease their efforts to destroy God’s people. The passage requires knowing God’s sovereign character, not falling into a trance. The kind of meditation commanded by Scripture involves grasping God’s instructions with our minds and allowing those precepts to change our hearts (1:1-2; 119:15).

Although Keating states that vocal prayer is “not the most profound prayer” and advocates emptying the mind (89), the apostle Paul clearly commands us to pray with our mind (1 Corinthians 14:15; Philippians 4:6; Colossians 4:2). Emptying the mind is contrary to the active, conscious transformation commanded by Scripture (Romans 12:1).

Did Jesus instruct His disciples to pray using meditative principles or with repetitive words? In Matthew 6:7, Jesus said, “When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases [“meaningless repetition” NASB] as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words” (NRSV). Instead He commands thoughtful prayers about the kingdom and

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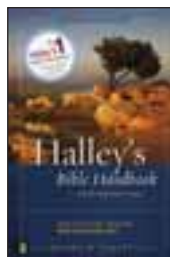
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God's compassion (vv. 9-13). To take away the cognitive aspect of prayer is to carve out its heart.

True Intimacy With God

Biblical prayer brings true intimacy with God. Through it we have access to a God who wants to listen to the desires of our heart and who cares about our everyday lives and burdens (1 Peter 5:7). Emergent meditative prayer is not what God wants from us; He wants us to remember who He is and who we are. As long as we remember those two things, we will approach Him in the proper manner, and we will draw nearer to our Father in conversation. Meditate on these things (Philippians 4:8; Psalm 145:5). □

David Morris is the minister for the Highland Church of Christ in Columbia, Tenn., and an instructor at Nashville School of Preaching and Biblical Studies. He may be contacted by e-mail at davidmorris444@hotmail.com.

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Missional Evangelism

by Matthew Morine

The idea of missional evangelism is a relatively new concept that is growing in popularity through the spreading of the emergent church agenda. If the term “missional” is unfamiliar to you, do not feel bad; my computer does not even recognize it as a real word.

The word “missional” is rooted in the background of being missionaries within a particular culture. As America shifts from a Christian perspective to a mindset not grounded in Christian beliefs, an increasing emphasis calls for members of Christ to embody the mindset of a missionary who bridges the culture through proper contextualization.

The idea of contextualizing the gospel is the approach of communicating the gospel in a form and style that resonates with the audience. The methodology of a missionary is to learn to adapt to the culture in order to embody the Christian message faithfully to those outside of Christ. This approach is focused on learning, understanding and faithfully responding with the truth of God’s saving love and judgment.

The Roots of Missional Evangelism

The roots of the missional agenda can be discovered in a reaction to the attractational mindset of the mega-church movement that became extremely popular in the 1990s. As Saddleback and Willow Creek expanded to unknown numerical heights, churches across America desired to follow the “purpose-driven” plan for congregational success. At the foundation of these marketing giants was the attractational approach to evangelism. These mega-churches developed a multiplicity of programs and events that would draw in non-Christians from society. These programs were used as a bridge into the corporate life of the congregation. The coffee club, the leadership club and the mothers society were portals into the collective worship on Sunday.

In addition to using these programs to lead into the Sunday worship event, the mega-churches led a push to develop an entertainment-based worship hour designed to appeal to non-Christians. It was well structured with

Christian rock bands, dramatic presentations of the gospel, and feel-good sermons from the head pastor. The worship was used to attract the most worshipers possible. The attractational model of church lures people to the church building with the aim of someone becoming a Christian.

The missional method of evangelism rejects the attractational method and believes the best way to bring others to Christ is by allowing their Christian light to shine within society. This is the idea of having a leavening influence on culture in a particular place. It is built on the goal of a Christian’s bridging the gap between the Christian culture and the worldly culture instead of expecting the non-Christian to leave his or her comfort zone to search out Christian faith.

A quick illustration of the differing methodology is this: the attractational church holds a worship service on a congregational campus whereas the missional church holds a worship service in a community park where people are already gathered. One method is attempting to draw out those with

The Emerging Church Movement

an interest in Christianity, and the other is seeking to go to those who show an interest in the gospel. The missional mindset is one that desires to infiltrate the culture with a salt and light influence on behalf of Christ.

The predominant rationality for the shift from attractional to missional evangelism is the emergence of the postmodern culture within America. Often the missional community sees this style of evangelism as an apostolic expression of outreach. The reason

Frost and Alan Hirsch in *The Shaping of Things to Come* state four major agendas of the missional expression of evangelism. The first one is “proximity spaces.” This concept means that places or events are evident where Christians and not-yet-Christians can interact in a meaningful way. The practical expression of this has been Christians or churches purchasing coffee shops to provide a communal atmosphere.

The second agenda is “shared pro-

er building in the community but rather desires to incorporate a church within a business. The desire is to add a tangible value that will be desirable for the local residents. It can be anything from a coffee shop to a modern shoe shop. As the community enters into the business, perhaps an impact for Christ can be made.

The fourth agenda is “emerging indigenous faith communities.” This final value seems to be the end result desired among the missional community. All of the other desires should lead to this conclusion. As people are impacted for Christ, a community of believers is developed. Through this community, people are mentored into the Christian faith (Frost 24-27). This is the organizational level for missional evangelism.

On a personal level in missional evangelism, a radical shift from teaching to establishing a spiritual connection with the non-Christian takes place. In the past when Christians reached out to interact with the culture, it was done through a logical presentation of the gospel with a teacher/student format. One was the Christian; the other was a sinner. This method sometimes created an adversarial relationship. One was right; the other was wrong.

To a postmodern person who rejects judgments and absolute truths, this approach would be perceived as offensive and rude. Instead of carrying on the conversation, the person would simply tune out the speaker. Brian D. McLaren advocates in *More Ready Than You Realize* that the missional mindset of evangelism seeks to remove the instructor mindset and replace it with the spiritual friend relationship. This method focuses on developing a safe dialogue about spiritual concerns without the non-Christian feeling judged (38-39).

McLaren also advocates that salvation is more of a process than an event. The spiritual friend is to oversee the process of one’s becoming a Christian without focusing on a “punctiliar salvation.” The idea of a “punctiliar salvation” is from the Greek usages of the aorist tense and means an action occurring in a single

Throughout emergent literature, authors advocate drinking, smoking and carousing with non-Christians in the name of connecting.

“apostolic” is used is that it parallels first-century culture and 21st-century American culture. The first century was a pre-Christian world, and some are claiming that America is a post-Christian world. The attractional method worked in a predominantly Christian America where people felt the need to be involved in a Christian community, but in the post-Christian world, people typically reject organized religion.


jects.” The missional church values the development of shared or joint projects between the Christian community and its host community. The belief is that increased casual interaction between the two parties can occur. The practical expression of this desire would be seen in joining a community co-op for the beautification of the community. It allows Christians and non-Christians to work shoulder-to-shoulder for a lengthy period of time.

The third agenda is “commercial enterprise.” This value rejects the desire to plant a church by adding another

The Missional Methodology

On a congregational level, Michael

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point of time. This approach is advocated because of the high level of tolerance within the postmodern matrix. No one desires to be judged concerning whether one is a Christian. The missional mindset seeks to remove almost all judgments of a person's spiritual condition in the name of tolerance and acceptance (103-111).

The Missional Compromise

The missional mindset seems to be parallel to a southern catfish. There is some tasty meat, but there are also some harmful bones. The desire to "go" instead of expecting people to "come" is in line with biblical teachings (Matthew 28:19-20). The desire to create safe spiritual friendships with non-Christians instead of adversarial interactions is a proper interpretation of the need to adapt to the changing times and culture (Acts 8:30). But before embracing the missional mindset, one must have an awareness of two serious compromises within the philosophy, especially as they relate to the emergent church.

The first serious compromise seems to be regarding morality. In the desire to connect with non-Christians, some who practice this methodology have developed moral laxity. *The Shaping of Things to Come* has an account of a preacher going to a strip club by himself to meet with a young lady who responded during an evangelistic campaign. The young girl invited him to meet with her at her work establishment. Instead of arranging a morally safe place to talk, he ended up going to the strip club in the name of missional evangelism.

As the story progresses, the young stripper invited the minister to watch her dance. Instead of declining, the preacher felt that it was an act of love to watch her strip before him (Frost 160-161). The authors of the book use this illustration as an heroic act of missional evangelism.

Throughout emergent literature, authors advocate drinking, smoking and carousing with non-Christians in the name of connecting. Instead of maintaining a holy presence before non-Christians, a moral compromise seems to provide a sense of acceptance of the

unchristian behavior of those who have not been redeemed. Paul's statement of "becoming all things" is stretched to unscriptural limits with some in the ECM. One of the most effective means of evangelism is the unique moral life that Christians live.

The second serious compromise regards doctrinal truth. Doctrinally, the ECM has serious problems in living up to biblical truth. A sense of being missional comes from adding Jesus Christ to the religious expression of those in a pagan faith. Instead of teaching that one must come out of the belief systems of Buddhism and Hinduism, some in the emergent community are satisfied with the person just adding Jesus to the panoply of gods.

In addition to rejecting Jesus as the only way to the Father, some within the ECM reject the normative plan of salvation within the book of Acts. The reason that those within the movement reject salvation within a point of time is based on the assumption that baptism is not necessary for a person's sins to be washed away (Acts 2:38; 22:16). A fuzzy sense of salvation exists within the emergent movement. Because of the emphasis placed on tolerance within the emergent church, no one wants to exclude someone from being a Christian if he believes in his heart that he is saved. However, a time must come when a person is

transformed from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light (Colossians 1:13-14).

The missional style of evangelism is not 100 percent bad or good. Some of its principles are in line with the biblical text that should be reemphasized because of the condition of the present culture. The idea of meeting people where they are, as long as it does not involve moral compromise, is a biblical expression of evangelism (John 4:6-7). But one must not be so scared of speaking the truth that he falls into compromise (vv. 17-18). Rather than simply supplying coffee or shoes in the name of Christ, the ultimate end is to lead the person into a saving relationship with the Christ (v. 39). □

Matthew Morine is pursuing a doctorate from Harding Graduate School of Religion. He is the pulpit minister for the Waynesboro Church of Christ in Waynesboro, Tenn., and may be contacted by e-mail at mmorine@hotmail.com.

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