

FROM THE EDITOR

THE EMERGENT CHURCH

The Spring 2006 edition of *Criswell Theological Review* (CTR) deals in its entirety with the controversial Emergent Church movement. Few topics have generated as much heated discussion among evangelicals. Based on the belief that modernism is dead and postmodernism reigns, Emergent leaders are calling upon Christians to do church differently, particularly evangelism. This involves abandoning many of our cherished practices, ascribing irrelevancy to many of our fundamental doctrines, and viewing the lost world through new lenses. Simply put, Emergent leaders believe that postmoderns (those born after 1982) will not be reached by formularistic gospel presentations and methodologies that had their origin in the modern era. A new approach to Scripture, gospel, and church is not only desired, but necessary.

Upon reading CTR, we hope you will understand the issues surrounding the Emergent Church movement and be able to articulate them clearly to others. Just as important, we hope you will gain some practical knowledge.

CTR opens with the editor's exclusive interview with Brian McLaren, recognized universally as the most influential leader in the Emergent Church movement. McLaren not only responds to this editor's questions about the nature of the movement, but also candidly tackles accusations that the movement rejects inerrancy, objective truth and is adrift in the sea of theological uncertainty. The reader will find McLaren's answers clarifying, refreshing and controversial.

Robert Webber, the William R. and Geraldine B. Myers Professor of Ministry at Northern Seminary and editor of the eight volume set, *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*, calls on the Church to rediscover the story-formed nature of the good news and re-situate its beliefs and practices in the divine narrative as found in Scripture. Webber believes the Emergent Church movement is making a serious effort to accomplish this task, while most evangelical churches continue to fall prey to cultural accommodation.

John Hammett, Professor of Theology at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, offers our readers, “An Ecclesiological Assessment of the Emergent Church,” based on a paper he presented at the 2005 annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society. Hammett, while commending the Emergent Church for its desire to reach postmoderns for Christ, warns that it, too, must avoid the danger of becoming like the culture. He also calls upon traditional churches, whenever possible, to encourage rather than hinder the Emergent Church in its efforts to be relevant to the times.

Conservative evangelicals often accuse Emergent leaders of abandoning inerrancy and embracing theological and cultural relativism. While denying these charges, the leaders have convinced few outside their circles. David M. Mills, Associate Professor of Philosophy at Cedarville University, seeks to alleviate these suspicions by addressing the issues of epistemology, truth, and relativism from an Emergent perspective in his article “Mountain or Molehill? The Question of Truth and the Emerging Church.”

One of the more vocal opponents of the Emergent movement is R. Scott Smith, Assistant Professor of Ethics and Christian Apologetics at Biola University. In his article, “Some Suggestions for Brian McLaren (and his Critics),” Smith challenges McLaren’s view about foundational epistemology and his thesis that modernity is the cause for the spiritual malaise in the traditional church. Smith then makes the case that a proper understanding of God’s grace is the solution to much that ails the Church.

Mark Driscoll, one of the early voices in the Emergent Church, and founding pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle, WA, gives an insider’s perspective of the movement. Named one of the top young preachers in America by *Christianity Today*, Driscoll voices his concerns over the direction of the movement, especially as it struggles with internal conflicts over doctrine and practice.

To aid those interested in doing additional reading on the Emergent movement, Andrew D. Streett, Assistant Director of the

Library at Criswell College, has compiled a five-page bibliography of essential books and websites. This would be a good place to begin.

As always, we conclude *CTR* with several informative book reviews, designed to help you build your theological library.

Yours for Christ and the Kingdom,
R. Alan Streett, Ph.D.
Editor

