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***[My first stab at getting]* Emerging churches in dialogue with Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A fresh practical theology of discipleship for the church.**

*Disclaimer: These were my beginning reflections on getting Emerging churches in dialogue with Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In fact, I don't get them actually in dialogue with each other all that well in this paper. And this paper has a whole lot of extraneous things to say about the emerging church movement. But, I have a totally rewritten and restructured and revised shorter paper that I will hopefully be finishing this week! Thanks for your prayers, cheers and friendship. – andy. December 1, 2006*

## **Introduction**

Christian Smith's important 2005 book, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* reports the findings of the National Study of Youth and Religion, the largest and most detailed study of teenagers and religion ever undertaken. Smith, a Professor of Sociology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, states one of his major conclusions this way,

“we have come with some confidence to believe that a significant part of Christianity in the United States is actually only tenuously Christian in any sense that is seriously connected to the actual historical Christian tradition, but has rather substantially morphed into Christianity's misbegotten stepcousin, Christian Moralistic Therapeutic Deism”<sup>1</sup>

Teens have learned from their parents that Christianity is about “feeling good, happy, secure, and at peace.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 171.

<sup>2</sup> Smith, *Soul Searching*, 164.

This understanding of Christianity diverges sharply from the words of Jesus himself who said: “But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also.”<sup>3</sup> The juxtaposition of the description of the American religious teenager by Smith and the description of a faithful follower by Jesus evokes one critical question from concerned Christians. How do we bridge the gap? This paper presents an interdisciplinary model of how concerned Christians might approach this important question.

In this paper, I use a practical theology framework to describe how the practices of the emerging church movement have the potential to educate young adults towards more faithful discipleship. I have chosen to focus specifically on how to teach young adults to practice “turning the other cheek” as described in Matthew 5:38-42. If we can teach young adults to act redemptively and sacrificially in daily life, we will be on the way towards teaching them the range of practices that constitute the Christian life. Christians who practice “turning the other cheek” will not leave the impression that Christianity is in essence “feeling good, happy, secure and at peace.”<sup>4</sup>

This interdisciplinary quest needs an adequate approach. Richard Osmer, professor of Christian Education at Princeton Theological Seminary, has identified the tasks undertaken by practical theologians.<sup>5</sup> Practical theology attempts to bridge the theology-practice chasm that too often typifies church practice and academic discourse. Theologians often do not spell out the implications of their insights. Practitioners often

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 5:39b NRSV which is part of the larger section 5:38-42.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, *Soul Searching*, 164.

<sup>5</sup> Osmer gives this definition of practical theology. “Practical theology is that branch of Christian theology that seeks to construct action-guiding theories of Christian praxis in particular social contexts.” Richard Robert Osmer, *The Teaching Ministry of Congregations* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), xiv. Don Browning, Professor Emeritus of Religious Ethics and the Social Sciences at the University of Chicago and one of the leading voices in the recovery of practical theology in the late twentieth century, calls Osmer’s 2006 book *The Teaching Ministry of Congregations*, “a groundbreaking book in the new practical theology. It will be a leading text in religious education for years to come” Osmer, *The Teaching Ministry of Congregations*, back cover.

function pragmatically in the areas of technique and strategy. Practical theology attempts to intentionally bridge Christian theology and practice.

In looking historically at the discipline of practical theology, Osmer believes that four tasks have emerged as central to the field. These four tasks are the *descriptive-empirical* task which explores “What is going on?”; the *interpretive* task which explores “Why is this going on?”; the *normative* task which explores “What forms ought Christian praxis take in this particular social context?” and the *pragmatic* task which explores “How might this area of praxis be shaped to more fully embody the normative commitments of the Christian tradition in a particular context of experience?”<sup>6</sup> Osmer makes clear that these tasks are interdependent and need not flow in any particular order.<sup>7</sup> The organization of this paper is based on Osmer’s four tasks of practical theological reflection. Let’s begin by looking at the first task – “what is going on.”

## **Descriptive Task: What is going on?**

Dorothy Bass, the leading mainline theologian writing on Christian practices, defines Christian practices as “things Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs in response to and in the light of God’s active presence for the life of the world.”<sup>8</sup> A flood of books have been published in the last ten years on the

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<sup>6</sup> Osmer, *The Teaching Ministry of Congregations*, xv-xvi. Osmer is clear to point out that practical theologians bring a host of different methods and presuppositions to these tasks which bring about a plurality of outcomes. Osmer, *The Teaching Ministry of Congregations*, 303-317.

<sup>7</sup> Osmer, *The Teaching Ministry of Congregations*, xv. Osmer has used this framework to describe the diversity of work by James Fowler. See Richard R. Osmer and Friedrich L. Schweitzer, eds., *Developing a Public Faith: New Directions in Practical Theology – Essays in Honor of James W. Fowler* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2003), 1-5.

<sup>8</sup> Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass, eds., *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 18.

subject of Christian practices by both mainline and conservative Protestant authors.<sup>9</sup>

These books arose out of frustration with “mere ideas” and disembodied theology. There was also a deepening sense that traditional forms of church needed to be revitalized in order to better pass on the faith on the next generation. It is important to note however that none of these books anticipated or called for a new group of experimental churches that were based on revitalized Christian practices.

The emerging church movement has come to prominence in the last ten years because many mainline and conservative Protestants under the age of forty believed that a rethinking of Christian practices needed to take place in the light of a variety of cultural changes in the Western world.

The emerging church is notoriously difficult to define.<sup>10</sup> The most comprehensive treatment thus far of the emerging church movement is the book *Emerging Churches* by Fuller Seminary researchers Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger.<sup>11</sup> Gibbs and Bolger conducted interviews over four years with who they determined to be the most influential fifty emerging church leaders in the UK and the United States.<sup>12</sup>

It is important to note that Gibbs and Bolger do not primarily define emerging churches in terms of beliefs but rather practices. Some within the movement and some critics of the movement want to describe the emerging church in terms of its

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<sup>9</sup> See Kenda Creasy Dean, *Practicing Passion: Youth and the Quest for a Passionate Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006) 152 note 19. Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life In God* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> It is probably best to talk about emerging churches as opposed to emergent churches. Emergent Village is the organization. It is probably best not to talk about “emergent churches.” See the Wikipedia article for daily changes to the definition of emerging churches! Online: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emerging\\_church\\_movement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emerging_church_movement)

<sup>11</sup> Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 43.

epistemology or its evolving theology.<sup>13</sup> I do not this appropriately describes the movement and neither do Gibbs and Bolger. There is far more in common in terms of innovative practices than epistemological innovations.

Gibbs and Bolger list nine practices that are common to emerging churches.

Emerging churches (1) identify with the life of Jesus, (2) transform the secular realm, and (3) live highly communal lives. Because of these three activities, they (4) welcome the stranger, (5) serve with generosity, (6) participate as producers, (7) create as created beings, (8) lead as a body, and (9) take part in spiritual activities.<sup>14</sup>

It is important to note that emerging churches look like other churches in many ways. I have compiled recent lists of Christian practices from Mainline, postliberal,

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<sup>13</sup> Some conservatives have misunderstood the movement and then criticized it because they have focused on doctrinal and philosophical issues such as “relativism and absolute truth.” See D.A. Carson, *Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005). North Park University New Testament professor Scot McKnight’s critiques Trinity Evangelical Divinity School New Testament professor D.A. Carson’s book along these lines.

this book (almost) narrows the discussion to one person – Brian McLaren – and narrows the issue – to postmodernist epistemology – and then nearly always defines the latter in “hard” postmodernist categories in spite of the fact that no Christian – at least not Brian McLaren – could ever be a hardpostmodernist. Carson’s awareness of the distinction between “hard” and “soft” did not inform his analysis of McLaren . . . I have probed and prodded emerging church leaders and ordinaries for about two years now, and I have almost never heard anything that resembles what Carson thinks is so typical of the emerging “church.”

See Scot McKnight, “What is the Emerging Church? and Misnomers Surrounding the Emerging Church,” (paper presented at the Fall Contemporary Issues Conference at Westminster Theological Seminary, Glenside, Penn., 26 October 2006): 2. Cited November 27, 2006. Online: <http://www.foolishsage.com/wp-content/uploads/McKnight%20-%20What%20is%20the%20Emerging%20Church.pdf>

In contrast, the movement is primarily about a rethinking of “practices.” Some have said that it is a rethinking of “ecclesiology” but this narrows the issue too much. There is a sense that “new wineskins” are needed for “postmodern cultures.” See the Gibbs and Bolger subtitle – “creating Christian community in postmodern cultures”). Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*. Still, discussions about practices quickly move into discussions about the theological rationale for these practices. Emerging church people want to have “conversation” about theological issues that are grounded in practical or “missional” questions. The organization “Emergent Village” which encourages “conversation” among the emerging church movement in the United States has organized what they have called “Theological Conversations” with N.T. Wright, Stanley Hauerwas, Walter Brueggemann, Miroslav Volf, and Jack Caputo for just this purpose.

<sup>14</sup> Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 45. Gibbs and Bolger specifically identify emerging churches by their practices. They do not identify a source for their terminology and thus may have been unaware of the explicit discussion of Christian practices in some Protestant circles.

evangelical, and Anabaptist writers.<sup>15</sup> Gibbs and Bolger describe emerging churches that encourage all of these standard practices. There are no “new” Christian practices being discovered.<sup>16</sup> Rather, classic “ancient” orthodox practices are simply being

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<sup>15</sup> Let’s briefly compare this list with mainline and conservative Protestant circles.

Kenda Creasy Dean, professor of Christian Education at Princeton Theological Seminary, has summarized Craig Dykstra’s contemporary constellation of Christian practices this way: struggling together to discern, praying, resisting sin and the powers of evil, telling the Christian story, working together for justice, giving generously, worshipping God together, interpreting Scripture and the tradition of the church together, providing hospitality and care, communing life journeys, serving and witnessing, suffering with and for one another, confessing and forgiving sin, encouraging vocation. Dean, *Practicing Passion*, 155.

Randy Frazee, one of the teaching pastors at the “most influential church in the United States” Willow Creek Community Church, lists ten “Ancient Christian Practices” in his 2001 book *The Connecting Church*. They are: Worship, Prayer, Bible Study, Single-mindedness, Biblical Community, Spiritual Gifts, Giving Away Our Time, Giving Away our Money, Giving Away Our Faith, Giving Away our Life. Frazee reports that his list was vetted by USC philosopher Dallas Willard, psychologist Larry Crabb and Reformed theologian J.I. Packer. Randy Frazee, *The Connecting Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 78-79. Jason T. Christy, “TheChurchReport.com July 06, 50 Most Influential Churches,” n.p. [cited 27 November 2006]. Online: [http://www.thechurchreport.com/mag\\_article.php?pageno=1&mid=671&pname=July&pyear=2006](http://www.thechurchreport.com/mag_article.php?pageno=1&mid=671&pname=July&pyear=2006).

David Augsburger, Anabaptist writer and professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, has written a new book encouraging the wider church to adopt eight Anabaptist practices: Radical Attachment to Jesus, Stubborn Loyalty, Tenacious Serenity, Habitual Humility, Resolute Nonviolence, Concrete Service, Authentic Witness and Subversive Spirituality. David Augsburger, *Dissident Discipleship*, Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006), 5.

Dorothy Bass focuses on twelve practices in the book *Practicing Our Faith: Honoring the body, Hospitality, Household economics, Saying yes and saying no, Keeping Sabbath, Discernment, Testimony, Shaping communities, Forgiveness, Healing, Dying well, and Singing our lives to God*. Volf and Bass, eds., *Practicing Theology*, 19.

These lists are helpful for at least three reasons. First, they remind us of the rich diversity of shaping practices available to people who want to follow Jesus. Second, the diversity of wording among the lists remind us that these practices need to be appropriated by Christians in different ways. Third, the commonalities in the lists remind us that unity across denominations may be found in common mission and practices even if some theological differences remain.

<sup>16</sup> Emerging church proponents agree that there is nothing new under the sun despite the infamous title of Brian McLaren’s influential book *A New Kind of Christian*, which popularized the movement. McLaren admits that the “new” in the title was simply intended to evoke hope for those frustrated with their current Christian journey. McLaren urges not separation from the historical orthodox Christianity but rather deeper solidarity with it. He does advocate critically appraising of 1950’s-1980’s American Christianity. Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001).

recommissioned for duty in a new cultural context.<sup>17</sup> If churches are characterized by innovative “this-is-not-your-parent’s-church practices,” I think they are part of the broad emerging church movement.<sup>18</sup> We have now looked at what is going on, let’s move to the:

## **Interpretive Task: Why is this going on?**

People disagree about what to call the cultural changes in Western societies that have spurred the growth of the emerging church movement. Descriptions such as post-colonialism, post-Christendom, postmodernism and postmodernity are often cited. People disagree about whether these changes are threats or opportunities for the future of Christianity. They also disagree about how widespread these changes are currently being felt and how quickly they will spread in the future. But there is some consensus that Western culture is changing and in some places it is changing more quickly than in others. In general, young people and people in urban centers are sensing deeply the effects of these changes.

Psychologists point out that people in their teens and young adult years are in the process of solidifying their identity. Influential developmental psychologist Erik Erikson says that the chief developmental task of adolescence is identity formation which often

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<sup>17</sup> Robert Webber, a former theology professor at Wheaton College, noted students yearning for practices that transcended their 1980’s evangelical upbringings. In this context he attempted to educate young people about ancient Christian practices in his book *Ancient-Future Faith*. Robert Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999). He then chronicled early emerging church movement practices throughout the United States in his book *The Younger Evangelicals*. Robert E. Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002).

<sup>18</sup> Southern Baptist author agrees with the larger definition of emerging churches. Ed Stetzer, "Understanding the emerging church," *Baptist Press* (6 January 2006). Online: <http://www.sbc Baptist Press.org/bpnews.asp?ID=22406>

continues into young adulthood.<sup>19</sup> Often adolescents attempt to achieve identity by differentiating themselves from their parents and other older authority figures – in essence saying, “I’m not sure who I am but I know for sure that I am not like them.”<sup>20</sup>

The history of the emerging church movement in the United States is revealing in this regard. Emerging churches were initially established as worship services to Gen-Xers. These Christian young adults had experienced age-appropriate ministry from the time they were children. They had been taught that Christianity should be relevant to their stage in life. They had a difficult time moving from youth ministry in their teens to church services targeted toward older adults.

Young adult pastors began forming worship services, and later independent churches, that would appeal to young adults. These churches were founded on the principle that churches led by older adults “weren’t working” and therefore innovative practices were needed. Again, we can see here, that these churches were not primarily founded on new theological doctrine but rather on practical grounds.<sup>21</sup>

If I am correct in depicting emerging churches as communities innovatively implementing ancient orthodox practices, it is entirely appropriate to view these churches

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<sup>19</sup> This stage may continue into young adulthood more often today because of what Erikson called “psychosocial moratorium.”

<sup>20</sup> Critics like D. A. Carson, New Testament professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and author of *Becoming Conversant with the Emergent Church* says these churches were founded on reactionary grounds. Carson, *Becoming Conversant*. Sympathizers, like Scot McKnight, New Testament professor at North Park University, agree that emerging churches were founded in protest, but they say these churches were founded to protest the fact that unreached people were not being reached. McKnight, *What is the Emerging Church*. Again we see how this type of mentality is typical of young adults differentiating themselves from older people and establishing their own identity.

<sup>21</sup> “Anecdotally, these churches do have a different demographic than American Christianity at large (and I assume that some of these observations will be corroborated by my census survey later this spring). They are, assuredly, younger than the average church. While every church has exceptions, these churches are made up primarily of persons under 40.” Tony Jones, “Emerging Practices in the Emerging Church” (paper presented at the Faithful Practices Research Conference, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, NJ, 27 March 2006). Cited 27 November 2006. Online: <http://www.faithfulpractices.org/Documents/Jones.pdf>

as what Brian McLaren calls the R&D (research and development) departments of the wider Church. They are experimenting with practices as a kind of laboratory.<sup>22</sup>

Because the whole point of their existence is to apply practices freshly, emerging church leaders often do not want to be formally associated with the wider movement by being called “emerging churches.” Rob Bell, the film-making innovative Grand Rapids pastor of ten thousand, is one example. Many do not want to be associated with the already extremely non-restrictive “Emergent Village” – which is the most visible network of emerging church leaders in the United States. It is worth pointing out that the vast majority of (all perhaps?) emerging church leaders acknowledge being part of the orthodox Church universal – often signifying this by citing their endorsement of the Apostle’s Creed. Many others are accountable to a denomination that permits them to innovate in the areas of practice as long as they hold sufficiently to denominational underpinnings.

Earl Creps, director of the Doctor of Ministry program at the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, teases boomer pastors for inevitably asking him, “What’s working really well in the innovative churches you have visited?” He goes on to explain: “The questioner here determines to elicit a set of best practices that could be imported into her or his ministry.”<sup>23</sup> Creps is right to expose the desire for pragmatic, technique-driven ministry short cuts. But these innovative churches exist to experiment and innovate. It is entirely appropriate to learn from the laboratory’s discoveries and duds.

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<sup>22</sup> Barry Taylor of Sanctuary (Santa Monica, CA), “Our church was always an experiment.” (Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 180). Doug Pagitt, “I am increasingly convinced that what matters in our efforts is our willingness to experiment and try – to develop expressions of faith that are fully of our day and time, recognizing that our efforts will be adapted and changed in years to come” Doug Pagitt, *Church Re-Imagined: The Spiritual Formation of People in Communities of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 216.

<sup>23</sup> Earl Creps, *Off-Road Disciplines: Spiritual Adventures of Missional Leaders* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 3.

In general, emerging church leaders are “trying things” in very small congregations. My critique of Gibbs and Bolger’s *Emerging Churches* is that it dwells almost exclusively on congregations under fifty people.<sup>24</sup> It tacitly implies that larger

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<sup>24</sup> Gibbs and Bolger basically just focus on small house churches. Though there are large church pastors, traditional church pastors, youth pastors, and Next-Gen pastors “in the conversation” at any emergent conference or emerging church website, you will not hear from them in this book.

Gibbs and Bolger have made the crucial decision to exclude Gen-X megachurches and Gen-X/young adult services from their portrait of the emerging church. They admit that these forms of church are often what people think of when they use the term emerging churches. They write, “Popularly, the term *emerging church* has been applied to high-profile, youth-oriented congregations that have gained attention on account of their rapid numerical growth; their ability to attract (or retain) twentysomethings; their contemporary worship, which draws from popular musical styles; and their ability to promote themselves to the Christian subculture through websites and by word of mouth” (Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 41). Though most people consider these youthful expressions of church part of the emerging church movement, Gibbs and Bolger dismiss these expressions as hopelessly “modern.” They write, “Taking postmodernity seriously requires that all church practices come into question. In contrast, Gen-X churches involve simply changes in strategy from what came before (e.g., adding stories, video, raw music, vulnerable preaching, art, and candles). However, to be missional is to go way beyond strategy. It is to look for church practices that can be embodied within a particular culture. In other words, theologies given birth within modernity will not transfer to postmodern cultures” (Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 34). I think they are wrong to dismiss the possibility that Gen-X churches are missional. Popularized by Darrell Guder’s *The Missional Church*, this term simply means a fresh application of the techniques of missiology to Western culture. There is no reason only church plants or house churches can do this. In fact, the book is written by Guder who is a PCUSA person with the intention to shake up the mainline churches especially. Darrell Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). The word “postmodern” is also problematic as all acknowledge that the influence of modernity will be with us for a long time in the form of printed Bibles, automobiles, public transit, computers, phones, etc.

Because of their definition, it seemed to me that the description by Gibbs and Bolger of “emerging churches” sounds a lot like “house churches” to me. A small group of 10-100 people come together, discuss some Scripture, care for one another, stress participation in worship, eat a meal together, share leadership, do good to those in the community, and do friendship evangelism. They write, “When emerging churches meet in a large congregational setting, they widen their community ties and build on the intimacy developed in their small groups. These networks of small groups may gather together on a monthly basis. However, the large group meeting is of secondary importance” (Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 112). There are a lot of church leaders which are not specifically house church-oriented that have been highly involved in discussing how to minister to postmoderns.

It seems to me most of the leaders of the emerging church they interviewed would consider the Gen-X church leaders part of the “emerging church conversation.” Listen to these definitions.

- Jonny Baker: “Church, as we have inherited it, is no longer working for vast groups of people. The world has changed so much. So I think the term *emerging church* is nothing more than a way of expressing that we need new forms of church that relate to culture” (Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 41).
- Ben Edson: “So emerging church for me is quite simply a church that is rooted in the emerging context and is exploring worship, mission, and community within that context” (Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 41-42).

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- Karen Ward: what is “coming to the surface that is new, unformed, still happening, emerging” (Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 42).
  - Mark Scandrette: “The emerging church is a quest for a more integrated and whole life of faith. There is a bit of theological questioning going on, focusing more on kingdom theology, the inner life, friendship/community, justice, earth keeping, inclusivity, and inspirational leadership. In addition, the arts are in a renaissance, as are the classical spiritual disciplines. Overall, it is a quest for a holistic spirituality” (Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 42).
  - Gibbs and Bolger describing Doug Pagitt’s view which they agree with: “He [Pagitt] sees three types of responses to the current context: (1) a return to the Reformation (e.g., Mars Hill in Seattle); (2) deep systemic changes, but Christianity and the church are still in the center and theological changes are not needed (e.g., University Baptist in Waco and Mosaic in Los Angeles); and (3) seeing the church as not necessarily the center of God’s intentions. God is working in the world, and the church has the option to join God or not. The third approach focuses more on the kingdom than on the church, and it reflects the perspective of Solomon’s Porch in Minneapolis and characterizes what Pagitt would classify as emerging” (Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 42).

Gibbs and Bolger essentially decide to accept Pagitt’s most exclusive third approach as their working definition and ignore the more broader definitions articulated by Baker, Edson, Ward and Scandrette. (It should also be said that the third approach is not articulated well in the quote above. How is the church not the center of God’s intentions? I think what they are trying to say is that these churches have a fresh awareness of the importance of a kingdom perspective but this is overstated and unclear in the quote).

I understand that Gibbs and Bolger could not profile everyone who is part of the emerging church conversation. They have to draw the line somewhere. So they have decided to argue that the emerging church is very different from other expressions of church. But it seems to me their definition ends up excluding some of the leading voices in the movement: Brian McLaren, Chris Seay, Rob Bell, Mark Driscoll, and Erwin McManus. McLaren, indisputably one of the leaders of the movement, is rarely quoted in the book and his church is never mentioned as an example of an emerging church. Rob Bell, who is not explicitly part of the movement but was featured in the *Christianity Today* article by Andy Crouch on the emerging church and is extremely influential among young church leaders, is never mentioned (Andy Crouch, “The Emergent Mystique,” *Christianity Today* (November 2004). Cited 27 November 2006. Online: [http://www.culture-makers.com/articles/the\\_emergent\\_mystique](http://www.culture-makers.com/articles/the_emergent_mystique). Chris Seay author of *Faith of My Fathers: Conversations with Three Generations of Pastors about Church, Ministry, and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), who invited Tony Jones (coordinator of the Emergent Village) to speak at the anniversary of his church, is dismissed. I would also recommend older works such as *The Younger Evangelicals* by Robert Webber, *The Church on the Other Side* by Brian McLaren (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2003), and *The Emerging Church* by Dan Kimball (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003) which describe the broader definitions – except they are not international. They include the fact that many young pastors are trying to help traditional, seeker and modern churches become more adept at ministering in a postmodern context. For Gibbs and Bolger, if you haven’t planted it from scratch, then it doesn’t count as an “emerging church.” I would say there is a range of emerging churches who are involved in the conversation. I’m interested in what all of them have to say. However, Gibbs and Bolger limit themselves to just numbers 8-9.

1. Mosaic (Erwin McManus)
2. Mars Hill Church (Mark Driscoll)
3. Traditional churches that are being led by young pastors who are trying to adapt them to reach a postmodern culture
4. Gen-X/young adult services
5. Gen-X Churches
6. Mars Hill Bible Church (Rob Bell)
7. Cedar Ridge Community Church (Brian McLaren)
8. Solomon’s Porch (Doug Pagitt)

churches are too bulky and institutional to introduce radical innovative practices. Though I think this view underestimates the leadership capability of some large church pastors, the point is generally true. These tiny churches can quickly test new ideas. Some will fail. Some will succeed. Some will only succeed in their specific context. And some will impact the wider Church.<sup>25</sup>

Brian McLaren urges denominations to invest financial and human resources into these experimental churches.<sup>26</sup> He cites the oft-quoted-but-origin-unknown statistic that seven out of ten church plants fail in their first five years of existence. He points out that if the point of these churches is to experiment and learn and innovative, then they have not necessarily failed even if they no longer exist. During the time of their brief existence, leaders have had the opportunity to make mistakes and try new things. They

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9. House churches / post-modern church plants

To be fair, Gibbs and Bolger intend to include the overhaul of traditional churches and also large churches in their analysis. They write, “Most of these emerging churches are new, while others represent the rejuvenation of long-standing congregations and ancient traditions. Some of these frontline churches are large, the biggest attracting crowds of several hundreds or even thousands, but the majority are small, consisting of independent groups of less than thirty or clusters of house groups totally less than one hundred” (Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 29). But in the end I had difficulty identifying any churches that have “thousands” in attendance or are the result of a traditional church being adapted. They also try to distinguish these emergent churches from “house churches” (Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 60). “Unlike the stereotypical house church, emerging churches do not exist in isolation but establish networks for mutual support and encouragement” (Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 113). Still I think the churches they describe are very similar to house churches. I think it would have been more fruitful to pick out how all sorts of churches are trying to reach postmoderns.

<sup>25</sup> In some ways, the emerging church movement is functioning like the parachurch movement of the twentieth century – showing the traditional church how to better do: youth ministry (Youth for Christ and Young Life), missions (a plethora of mission organizations), spirituality (Walk to Emmaus and Upper Room), college campus ministry, evangelism (Billy Graham Ministry) and ministry to the disabled (Le Arche).

<sup>26</sup> See Brian McLaren, “The Church Emerging & Mainline Theological Education,” Lecture at Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, NJ, (19 October 2005). Audio. Online: [http://cleave.blogs.com/pomomusings/2005/11/emerging\\_church.html](http://cleave.blogs.com/pomomusings/2005/11/emerging_church.html).

will take these experiences and invest in other churches with greater wisdom and courage.<sup>27</sup>

We have now looked at why the emerging church movement typically appeals to young adults now let's look at the:

## **Normative Task: What forms ought Christian praxis take in this particular social context?**

Richard Osmer recommends that practical theologians have a theologian dialogue partner in looking at practical issues.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian who was executed in one of Hitler's concentration camps, is a particularly helpful dialogue partner in the area of Christian practices – particularly discipleship practices. Bonhoeffer has been influential across typical Protestant denominational boundaries in his writing about practices. A Lutheran pastor, a friend of Karl Barth, a believer in non-violent action, a poet, a biblical scholar, an ethicist – no wonder he is the only person to be quoted in all of the Mainline, evangelical, postliberal and Anabaptist books on Christian practices I mentioned above.

Bonhoeffer's discipleship credentials are exemplary. No one could get the impression from Bonhoeffer that Christianity is "feeling good, happy, secure and at peace."<sup>28</sup> He famously wrote "when Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."<sup>29</sup> Discipleship is costly. This is seen in Bonhoeffer's personal life as he chooses to return

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<sup>27</sup> The concept of churches that intentionally experiment with practices bears some resemblances to "church planting." However, some church plants do not have this mentality. They are rather birthed as imitations with a "successful" large church as the model. George Barna's "revolution" Christian communities differ from emerging churches in that they do not necessarily attempt to fulfill orthodox Christian practices. A Christian may "find community and fellowship" with a group of other home schooling families but no connection is made to ancient ecclesiological practices. George Barna, *Revolution* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2005).

<sup>28</sup> Smith, *Soul Searching*, 164.

<sup>29</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 89.

to Germany to spiritually minister to the German opposition without regard to his personal safety. This choice to be with his own people ultimately led to his death. Furthermore, Bonhoeffer can in some ways be called a “practical theologian” though his official titles were theologian, professor, and pastor.<sup>30</sup>

From Bonhoeffer, we learn four things about Christian practices. First, Bonhoeffer teaches us that implementation of Christian practices will be necessarily flexible and creative. Nazi control over the German Lutheran church forced Bonhoeffer and others to find new wineskins. They worked with a clandestine church movement called the Confessing Church and formed schools to train pastors. Ancient Christian practices had to be innovatively appropriated to a new cultural milieu. He writes,

“The offices [or ‘church order’] exist to serve the Church, and their spiritual rights only originate from this service. That is why the Church has to adapt its offices to the varying needs of time and place. The offices in the Church at Jerusalem had to be different from those in St Paul’s missionary Churches . . . everything is done for the well-being of the Church.”<sup>31</sup>

Second, Bonhoeffer teaches us that education should incorporate Christian practices. While Bonhoeffer was himself a fine student of theology, his pastoral training program as outlined in *Life Together* is heavily oriented toward Christian practices over against traditional theological classroom instruction. His theological instruction is embedded in concrete practices (corporate Scripture reading, hymn singing, mealtime fellowship, meditation, solitude, listening, work, confrontation, confession, and the Lord’s Supper). Like the young pastors in Bonhoeffer’s pastor training school, emerging church leaders are predominantly younger than forty years old. They too hope to learn in

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<sup>30</sup> Andrew Root, “Practical Theology as Social Ethical Action in Christian Ministry,” *IJPT* 10 (2006): 67. Andrew Root, “Seeing his theology as interdisciplinary, practice-oriented, ministry-focused, and interpretively-directed, it seems befitting to claim him as a practical theologian.”

<sup>31</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 252.

the process of experimenting with new forms of practice. They hope to engage in serious theological conversation as it emerges from these practices.

Third, Bonhoeffer emphasizes that Christian practices be experimented with in community. Often writers describe the spiritual disciplines as individual practices which someone might pursue as if training for the Olympic games. If you want to be a great swimmer, you must discipline yourself to wake up early and work out.<sup>32</sup> Bonhoeffer acknowledges the importance of individual discipline but makes clear that the pursuit of discipleship is a team sport. Central to the idea of discipleship is following Christ with others. The person who is too busy working on becoming a disciple to spend time with others has gone astray.

Bonhoeffer says, “This is the deceitful arrogance and the false spirituality of the old man, who seeks sanctification outside the visible community of the brethren. It is contempt of the Body of Christ as a visible fellowship of justified sinners, a contempt which disguises itself as inward humility . . . It is also contempt of the fellowship, for we are then trying to attain sanctification in isolation from our brethren.”<sup>33</sup>

Our experiments with discipleship, (or “dreams” as Bonhoeffer calls them), cannot be allowed to destroy other people! In their passion for innovation, emerging church leaders need to continue to be sensitive about whether a practice builds up the community or sets up a hierarchy of achievers and failures.

Fourth, Bonhoeffer reminds us of something that seems glaringly obvious – that the person of Jesus is central to Christian practices. This needs to be pointed out because in the zeal for innovative practices, people understandably seek insight from a variety of sources including the practices of other religions, recommended of healthy responses by

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<sup>32</sup> John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002). Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).

<sup>33</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 280.

psychologists, and smart habits by the medical community. Yet, the goal of Christian discipleship is closer obedience to Jesus and so all practices need to be finally weighed by that goal. For example, Bonhoeffer writes this about different approaches to teaching Scripture, “Proclamation may take different forms according to the commission and gifts of the preacher. But whether it be Paul, or of Peter, or of the Apostles, or of Christ, the one indivisible Christ must be recognized in them all.”<sup>34</sup> Bonhoeffer eloquently reminds us that Christ is infused in practices in a way we sometimes forget. Emerging church leaders need to be cognizant of the real presence of Christ in the practices of the church to avoid falling into “do gooder” social action.

Thus, Bonhoeffer teaches us that the way of discipleship should be creative, practice-oriented, communal, and Christ-centered.

Before describing what it might look like to teach nonviolent actions using emerging church practices, let’s look briefly at what it means to “turn the other cheek.”

Matthew 5:38-42 (NIV)

<sup>38</sup> “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ <sup>39</sup> But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. <sup>40</sup> And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. <sup>41</sup> If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. <sup>42</sup> Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

The thesis statement of the paragraph is “Do not resist an evil person.” From the context we can see that Jesus does in fact want the disciple to “resist” as opposed to “give in” or “surrender” to the other person but this resistance is subversive.<sup>35</sup> Jesus elaborates

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<sup>34</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 253.

<sup>35</sup> This verse mirrors other verses throughout the New Testament such as “do not repay anyone evil for evil” (Rom 12:17), “Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong” (1 Thess 5:16) and “Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult” (1 Pet 3:9).

what he means by describing how this command might apply in four situations: when “the disciple is (1) personally insulted (2) taken to court then (3) impressed to do a soldier’s bidding then (4) asked to help one in need of funds.”<sup>36</sup> In each case, the disciple does not do exactly what the evil person asks but rather submits in some creative fashion.

Dale Bruner explains the passage this way:

Our immediate reaction to ill-treatment from an “evil one” will be “Get even!” “Pay back!” Jesus’ counsel, on the contrary, is “Don’t!” “Be more creative!” “Surprise him!” In short, “Be a Christian!” Jesus honors us by thinking we can . . . In such situations Jesus commands neither “fight nor flight” but “a third way”: *stay right there and do something surprising!* . . . Jesus advocates an active poise, not a passive capitulation or pessimistic resignation . . . a creative and controlled anger . . . All of Jesus’ Little Steps are “little confrontations.”<sup>37</sup>

As opposed to our natural desire to get our way, we are to think of more creative ways to act. Though not returning evil for evil, our responses will be counter-intuitively confrontational.

The primary emphasis here is on *personal* responses to evil. However, this does not preclude *community* responses as Jesus’ words are directed to a group of his followers. Bruner, captures the plural by translating 5:39a this way, “But I say to you *folks* . . .” Larger groups of Christians can obey corporately obey this practice.<sup>38</sup>

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As opposed to taking an eye for an eye Jesus says not to respond to attacks with like counterattacks. Yet, the KJV translation “do not resist” which other translations follow, does not appropriately capture the original Greek  $\mu\eta\ \sigma\upsilon\sigma\tau\alpha\sigma\theta\eta\iota\varsigma$ . For in every other use of the word in the New Testament, we see stronger actions described than merely “resistance.” Rather, it is explicit direct counterattack. It might be better translated, “Do not attack” or “do not directly oppose” or “do not directly contradict” or Bruner’s “do not ever try to get even with.” (Bruner, *Christbook*, 248). See below the other instances of this word’s use in the New Testament. In each there is strong explicit opposition or resistance. NIV: Acts 13:8: But Elymas the sorcerer . . . *opposed* them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. Gal 2:11 When Peter came to Antioch, I *opposed* him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. 2 Tim 3:6 Just as Jannes and Jambres *opposed* Moses, so also these men *oppose* the truth. 1 Pet 5:9 *Resist* him [the devil].

<sup>36</sup> W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison. *Matthew 1-7: a Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (New York: T. & T. Clark Publishers, 2004), 539.

<sup>37</sup> Dale Bruner, *Matthew, A Commentary: The Christbook, Matthew 1-12* (rev. and enl. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 249, 251.

<sup>38</sup> We see this in the bus boycotts of the American Civil Rights movement. Similar to Jesus’ example about walking further than the one mile required, rather than just sitting in the back of the bus, the African-

The command “not to resist the evil person” does not negate the proper role for government in restraining wrong-doing. God still intends justice in response to evil. It is simply not up to individuals to carry out that justice when they themselves have been harmed. Romans 12:19 reads, “Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. The content of Romans 12:17-21 strongly echoes Matthew 5:38-42. It is important to note that it continues into Romans 13 where the role of the state is delineated. Whether Christians should participate in this governing role described in Romans 13 has been hotly debated throughout Christian history.<sup>39</sup>

This text also does not preclude the protecting of others from harm or minimizing the harm caused to oneself. “Jesus does not say, “When someone knocks out your right eye, offer the other eye also.”<sup>40</sup> Civil rights workers in the 1960’s put their hands over their heads as they were kicked on the ground or fled when a mob attacked. Jesus does not say this to encourage masochism. Pain is not to be pursued for its own sake.

Nor should this passage be used as a weapon by an oppressor. “Do not resist me. The Bible says to turn the other cheek.” This is a clear twisting of the passage.

Jesus makes no guarantees about the effects of these creative actions. Yet, it is not difficult to see that when Jesus responded this way, evil was ultimately overcome by good (Rom 12:21).

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Americans decided to not even ride the buses at all. Responding in kind would have been to respond violently or start a separate bus service on which the whites would not have been able to ride. Nor did they surrender, but rather chose to inconvenience themselves further to make clear the injustice of the original request.

<sup>39</sup> Bonhoeffer urges people not to participate in it. Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 143. Swartley outlines the two schools of thought. See summary at Bruner, *Christbook*, 251. Interestingly, Presbyterian writer Dale Bruner in this revised edition is leaning toward the Peace Church perspective.

<sup>40</sup> Tholuck, 271 quoted in Bruner, *Christbook*, 251.

Jesus knows that often we will not get our way. We will be insulted (cheek), cheated (tunic), inconvenienced (mile), and taken advantage of (loan). He casts a vision for a third response. Not simple ascent to the evil doer. Not getting even and getting my way. Rather, creative, sacrificial, response. But this takes imagination. It is here that the emerging church can help us.<sup>41</sup>

**Pragmatic Task: How might this area of praxis be shaped to more fully embody the normative commitments of the Christian tradition in a particular context of experience?”**

There are four practices which are common to emerging churches that have the potential to form young adults into the kind of people who will turn the other cheek. There are evangelical and mainline churches that do many of these things. I have said above that none of these practices are new. Rather they are fresh expressions of ancient practices. These are not intended to be the main aspects of the emerging church movement. However, they seem to be the practices of the emerging church that have the most potential to form “turning-the-other-cheek” disciples.

These practices are (1) a de-emphasis on the church building in order to radically invest in local secular culture, (2) communal outreach to the poor, (3) emphasis on creative expression, and (4) interactive preaching.

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<sup>41</sup> Richard Hays provides an excellent model of determining the New Testament normative ethical action in his book *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*. He begins by looking at each major section of the New Testament. In doing so he determines that the New Testament has three major ethical foci: community, cross and new creation. Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation, A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996). Our conclusions here resonate with Hay’s foci. We do not have space to describe the ethical authority of the New Testament or how Scripture can be read theologically. See Hays on these issues.

Emerging churches typically take resources that most churches use for church buildings and invest those resources in engagement outside of the church building. Holly Rankin Zaher talks about redeploying the worship band toward more incarnational, missional activity in the world.

We have such a pool of talent in our church that we could have a totally kickin' worship gathering, if that is where we wanted to place our energy. However, we made an intentional decision not to make that happen.<sup>42</sup>

They do this in order to educate people that "church" is not something you attend but is rather a 7-day-a-week commitment. This emphasis helps people realize that their reactions to evil are crucial to their life as a Christian. Joel McClure and Randy Buist (Water's Edge, Hudsonville, MI) agree: "We don't 'hate church.' We are the church. It is the 'church merely as meeting' idea that is so wrong."<sup>43</sup>

While Bonhoeffer puts great emphasis on the importance of baptism and the Lord's Supper as a gathered community, he insists that

Everything the disciple does is part of the common life of the Church of which he is a member . . . There is no department of life in which the member may withdraw from the Body nor should he desire so to withdraw. Wherever we are, whatever we do, everything happens 'in the body,' in the Church, 'in Christ.'"<sup>44</sup>  
"Wherever Christians live together, conversing and dealing with one another, there is the Church, there they are in Christ."<sup>45</sup>

We are to be different from the world but we are not to be different from the world cloistered by ourselves. Talking about Luther, Bonhoeffer writes,

The otherworldliness of the Christian life ought, Luther concluded, to be manifested in the very midst of the world, in the Christian community and in its daily life . . . in order to engage more vigorously in the assault on the world and everything that it stands for.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 100.

<sup>43</sup> Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 101.

<sup>44</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 256.

<sup>45</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 257.

<sup>46</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 265.

In order to teach the importance of “being the church,” emerging church leaders place much less emphasis on church buildings. There is the general feeling that the phrase “going to church” has weakened the church.

Dan Kimball writes:

There is not one verse in the New Testament that says they ‘went to church.’ According to the Bible, it is actually impossible to go to church. If you woke up Sunday morning and said I’m going to church today, you would actually be making a theologically incorrect statement. The church is not the building, nor is it a meeting. The church is the people of God who gather together with a sense of mission. We can’t go to church because we are the church.<sup>47</sup>

Jonathan Campbell asks, “Why do we need a name and address to be church?”

These emerging churches are attempting to place greater emphasis on engaging in their local culture. In this sense, they are attempting to be missional – immersing themselves appropriately in their surrounding culture, and incarnational – seeking to achieve solidarity with the people they are trying to reach.<sup>48</sup>

Bonhoeffer bases his theology of action in everyday life on the incarnation, “The bodily presence of God demands that for him and with him man should stake his own life in his daily existence.”<sup>49</sup> His entry into daily life transforms culture. “This visible Church, with its perfect common life, invades the world and robs it of its children.”<sup>50</sup>

Gibbs and Bolger say that the “first emerging church” was the Nine O’clock Service (NOS) which began in the north of England and ran from 1987-1995. Paul Wilson says about it, “NOS was the most exciting club in the U.K. for Christians or non-Christians . . . It was amazing dance culture . . . and it was a gritty urban expression of the

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<sup>47</sup> Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 91.

<sup>48</sup> Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 48.

<sup>49</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 254.

<sup>50</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 255.

church.”<sup>51</sup> The Christians of NOS would fully participate in club culture. Though any non-Christian was welcome, if you were a Christian the standards were strict. If someone was not willing to “listen to dance music, go clubbing and read club-culture magazines . . . buy clothes and adopt hairstyles that were indigenous to club culture,” you would be asked to find another church.<sup>52</sup> The goal was to “have the clubbers always outnumber the church people.”<sup>53</sup> The leaders of NOS were attempting to create more and more opportunities for Christian people to bump up against non-Christians. They decided that they would not only go be part of the secular culture but provide avenues for secular people to engage their passion of music and dance. In this sense they were creatively responding in the spirit of Matthew 5:38-42 to their surrounding evil culture. As opposed to responding in vengeance or surrendering, they decide to give of their pride by moving to the level of clubbers (turning the other cheek), adapting their clothes to the clubbers (giving their tunic), giving of their time to the clubbers (walking an extra mile), and giving of their resources to the clubbers in creating a space for them (giving when someone asks you).

How might other churches use this emerging church practice to help their congregants learn how to turn the other cheek?

- Think about not investing so much in your worship service. Have fewer choir practices and more engagement in the world on weekday evenings.
- Emphasize not just signing up to be ushers but rather signing up to be little league baseball coaches in the community.
- Preach from the pulpit that what they do throughout the week in their workplaces and schools is “what the church does” not just the church programs in the annual report.
- Invest in spaces that will create interaction with non-Christians and an attempt to keep these spaces from becoming too churchy.

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<sup>51</sup> Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 85.

<sup>52</sup> Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 83.

<sup>53</sup> Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 83.

- Remind people to change their language. Discourage the use of “going to church” or “serving at the church” comments.
- Listen to the insults of non-Christians and exceed their expectations. This would shame them or at least make it clear to any objective outside observer (perhaps the local media) that their negative comments are not fair.
- Radically eliminate church-culture aspects of one’s church activities.
- Consider having church services in public places in the community but contextualizing them to that public place. Do not have preaching or music. Rather have people dress appropriately. Do not stick out. Have people meet in a size appropriate to the setting. Write curriculum and have people do small group discussions. Do this in movie theaters, roller rinks, ball fields, coffee shops, bars, restaurants, parks, hiking trails, BBQ’s, picnics, fitness centers, etc. Pretend meeting in a formal church is illegal. See if your non-Christian friends prefer these meetings or the regular church service.

These sort of activities are likely to help educate Christians that discipleship is not getting what you want but serving others creatively.

The second practice that emerging churches emphasize is communal organic outreach to the poor. As the saying goes, “The only cure for the love of money is giving it away.” Most Americans are wealthy global standards. In the text we have been looking at, Jesus says that if anyone asks you for something, give them more than they ask (Mt 5:42). This does not mean Christians are robots who automatically give when they are asked. But the command does invite Christians to be creative generous givers. For example, there are many Christian street workers who refuse to give money to pan-handlers but instead offer to buy them a meal, eat it with them, get to know them and seek to find out if the person knows about what services are available to them. Emerging church leaders realize that any religion or belief system is judged by how the unfortunate are treated. Mother Teresa has the best reputation of any Christian since Jesus among non-Christians.

Karen Ward says,

They took a poll here in my area of Seattle and found that 95% of the nonchurched have a favorable view of Jesus, so Jesus is not the problem. It is the church they dislike, because they do not readily see the church living out his teachings.<sup>54</sup>

Interestingly, emerging church leaders prefer not to run social programs.<sup>55</sup> Rather they encourage more organic, life-style oriented service of the poor. “Most service is pretty organic, in the form of individual initiatives rather than planned programs” says Rebecca Ver Straten of Tribe in Hollywood.<sup>56</sup> “A programmatic, top-down approach, which requires the selling of an idea and appeals for volunteers to commit to support the initiative” tends to divide evangelism from service and produce many people who are not personally involved in service.

Spencer Burke tells a wonderful story about engaging in service to the poor.

On one occasion, our community was getting kicked out of a park because of our interaction with the homeless. “You can’t feed the homeless here; you need a permit,” the policeman said. I replied, “We are not feeding the homeless. We are having a picnic. We’re eating *with* them.”<sup>57</sup>

This is a perfect example of what it means to respond creatively when criticized. Burke could have protested angrily, “No we won’t go” or he could have complied meekly, “yes, sir, we will go.” Instead, he suggests a third response – we are having a picnic!

I know from working with the poor that one begins to learn the discipline of turning the other cheek because you realize that you should not answer back angrily to every hurtful comment and nor can you tolerate behavior that destroys others. Often a third approach is needed.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 48.

<sup>55</sup> Perhaps this is still because many are small and new and defy any institutional structure.

<sup>56</sup> Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 143.

<sup>57</sup> Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 135.

<sup>58</sup> Sometimes I would have a homeless man knock on the church front door, while he was drunk – an angry drunk. He would sometimes knock during our evangelism program. Our policy was to give people a \$10 grocery gift card once per month. But this man had gotten his already. I was forced with the options of

How might other churches use this emerging church practice to help their congregants learn how to turn the other cheek?

- Make clear from the pulpit that caring for the poor is not a gift for some but rather a posture for all.
- Break down cultural – you must have perfect clothing to worship here – barriers between the church people and the poor.
- Break down geographic barriers that separate you from the poor.
- Encourage people to explore ways they can have sincere conversations with poor people through their vocation and encourage people to think of creative ways to help the poor.
- Be slow to create programs. People have more ownership when their actions are personal. Programs sometimes make less people serve the poor because they know “we have a program to do that.”
- Help people realize that the best way they can get an evangelistic open door with anyone including their rich neighbors is displaying their sincerity toward helping the poor.

Emerging churches are known for their emphasis on the arts. Gibbs and Bolger provocatively argue that the current North American church is highly influenced by print culture. They argue at the time of the Reformation, “The new literate class waged war on the illiterate, as images were often the only way for the illiterate to understand the gospel. Thus stained glass, symbols, and the teaching of the story came under deep suspicion.”<sup>59</sup> Emerging church leaders encourage artists to express themselves by doing visual art, writing music, making films, designing spaces, designing clothing, pottery, poetry, web design, and photography.

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telling him to go away (following the policy) and causing a scene. Or I could give in – setting the stage for him to come each week at that time. Or, I would try to come up with a third option. How could I give to him who asked me? Usually my answer would be something like this, “Leonard, I can’t give you a gift card because we already gave you one this month. But we do have some food (ice cream!) and coffee. Would you like to come in and have some?” Uncomfortable? Yes, he often smelled bad, scared people, and it was an interruption. But I think it was what Jesus wanted me to do.

<sup>59</sup> Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 70.

This art is used in worship services and also in the community. Mark Scandrette of ReIMANGINE! (San Francisco) organizes experimental projects, art installations, parties and events. “At an arts warehouse, the group hosts art-making weekends and studio nights. One night featured intercession and sculpture. On another occasion, members wrote graffiti prayers and ate meals with heroin addicts under the freeway.”<sup>60</sup>

There is a great emphasis on the art being made “in-house” as opposed to imported. It is therefore an authentic expression of worship from that community. Not all of it is of high quality. It is not sustainable for most of the churches to have original art each week. Andrew Jones also points out that creativity has to do with rediscovering ancient practices “making the old live again today.”<sup>61</sup>

Fostering and encouraging this kind of creative expression reminds people that following Jesus is not simply following a bunch of rules. Artists think outside the box. They are also not afraid to reflect on the realities of life and express them sharply.

When people insult you, take what is yours, waste your time, or demand your money, it is natural to respond angrily and viciously. Another way would be to respond complacently. But Jesus asks for a creative self-sacrificial response – he asks for art. He asks for beauty and dignity.

How might other churches use this emerging church practice to help their congregants learn how to turn the other cheek?

- Have people write down insults they hear. Then have them take photographs, draw a picture, write music or write story about what turning the other cheek or walking the other mile might look like.
- Have them artistically depict how Jesus allowed himself to be beaten, his clothes to be taken, to be forced to carry the cross, to give forgiveness at the cross and yet how evil was slowly conquered in those decisions.

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<sup>60</sup> Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 83.

<sup>61</sup> Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 187.

- Sponsor an art show in an appropriate place in your community even if very few Christians submit art. Have Christians sincerely ask questions to the artists about their work. Go the extra mile.
- Support local artists financially.
- Help the poor engage in art. Grandview Calvary Baptist Church in Vancouver, British Columbia set up a pottery studio and kiln for the poor.
- Hand out art supplies before worship services. Have a bulletin board where people can see the art immediately after the service – art that was inspired by the sermon, songs, prayers and worship text of the worship service immediately after the service.
- Have artists meet with the pastor once every three months and invite them to do art including photographs, visual art for bulletin covers, short films, and song-writing that will correspond to upcoming services.
- Especially encourage imaginative ways of applying a sermon – knowing that the Holy Spirit will be at work in doing this. Encourage the sharing and discussion of these points of application.
- Consult artists in all building renovations and plans.
- Consult web design specialists in your congregation about your website.
- When having difficulty making decisions in a staff or elders meeting, invite participants to express themselves artistically. Then return to the issue.
- Critically look at your worship services and church activities and analyze whether young, old, and poor people are being alienated by an emphasis on difficult vocabulary and small print.
- Encourage people to face situations with imagination. What possibilities am I missing? What might God want to do in this situation? How could I respond creatively?

The fourth practice that emerging churches do differently is that they encourage interactive preaching. Doug Pagitt is the pastor of Solomon's Porch in Minneapolis and a member of the leadership of Emergent Village. He has written a book entitled *Preaching Re-Imagined*.<sup>62</sup> Doug does a couple of interesting things as a preacher. First, he has a Bible study on Tuesday night regarding the upcoming Sunday sermon with a number of people from the congregation. He can learn from them and quote them in the sermon. Second, after his sermon, he gives ten minutes of open-mic discussion time so that people

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<sup>62</sup> Doug Pagitt, *Preaching Re-Imagined: The Role of the Sermon in Communities of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).

can suggest applications, ask questions, and hear from one another. Third, he encourages people to blog about the sermon afterward.

As someone who is currently a college professor, encouraging interaction seems obvious in the classroom. I present content but I don't always lecture the entire class period. I give some opportunity for some interaction and questions. However, the sermon is a different animal.

For a variety of reasons this one-way lecturing is the norm in most of our churches. First, there are people who believe one-way lecturing reinforces the authoritative nature of the message. Second, many believe that discussion about application would detract from the focus on God in the worship service. Third, it is impractical in large settings to have good discussion.

Pagitt says the one-way lecturing model of preaching cultivates a sense in which the pastor is admired, unquestioned, and isolated. He or she is "the one who knows the Bible." He doesn't think that this is good for the community or for the pastor in the long run. Still, Doug advocates that the preacher should not just give into the whims of the congregation. The preacher is to prepare and speak courageously to challenge the community in the area of its blindspots. There will simply be times when they point out his blindspots as well. At other times when they will challenge one another.

At the Emergent Village Theological Conversations, they have organized the time as a series of interview. In this way, the theologian, Walter Brueggemann, Miroslav Volf, etc., answers questions extemporaneously. There is a certain authenticity that results. For example, number of times Volf admitted that he needed their help in understanding how best to implement his theological conclusions.

If we are hoping to improve thoughtful creative discipleship, Pagitt's advice is worth considering.

How might other churches use this emerging church practice to help their congregants learn how to turn the other cheek?

- Brainstorm ways for the pastor to prepare his sermon topics, texts, questions, illustrations and applications with the help of others.
- Set up mechanisms for people to ask questions about the sermon (a box, the offering plate, raise their hands, mics in the aisles, etc.)
- Have people eat a meal together after the service and invite them to come up with questions about the sermon or its application.
- Have the pastor brainstorm 10 different applications for a sermon and have the people check which is most appropriate to them.
- Set up a blog to encourage interaction about sermon application.

## Conclusion

This practical theology framework has allowed us to move from the current state of Christian discipleship, to the role of the emerging church movement, to Bonhoeffer's insights on discipleship practices, to the meaning of "turning the other cheek," to emerging church practices that may help young adults learn to turn the other cheek.

My hope is that churches outside the emerging church movement will be: deeply engaged with its local culture, habitually ministering to the poor, joyfully encouraging artistic expression and exploring greater interaction with the sermon. These activities fit with Bonhoeffer's understanding of discipleship practices: Christ-centered, communal, physical practices and creative. They also have the potential to inspire young people to creatively respond to evil acts in the spirit of Jesus.

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