

## **The Conversations of Our Times: Part One**

Many who follow my writing know that two of my favorite metaphors for describing the signs of the times are [National Park and Jungle](#) (you might want to read this before reading on). Briefly what I mean by this is that prior to the 1980s we lived in what I describe as a National Park world. If you let your imagination run wild with this metaphor you will conjure up many images about the world that was, but for now just think of the world prior to 1980 as a tame, either/or world that played by a set of well known rules. Now change mindsets and think about the world since 1990 as a jungle and let your imagination run wild as you compare the two metaphors, but for now think of the emerging world as a wild and unsafe place of both/and that has no established rules other than the law of the jungle-survival.

In this wild, unruly world, a growing conversation is taking place that no Christian leader can afford to ignore. The players in this conversation are multiplying like rabbits. As we will see in a moment, much of the future of Western Christianity lies at the heart of this conversation. So we had better pay attention.

### **Here's a list of the primary players as of now**

The Emergent Folks  
The Incarnational Folks  
The Organic Folks  
The Attractional Folks  
The Reproductive Folks

Here is the where they fall on my continuum with the far left being a radical departure from traditional Christianity and the far right being the closest to third century Christianity.

Emergent —Incarnational — Organic — Attractional  
–Reproductive

Several books are shaping this conversation. Here is a list of some of them based on the above continuum:

### **Emergent**

The New Christians by Tony Jones  
Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church, by D.A. Carson  
Everything Must Change, by Brian McLaren  
A Generous Orthodoxy, by Brian McLaren  
A Christianity Worth Believing, Doug Pagitt  
Truth and the New Kind of Christian, R. Scott Smith  
They Like Jesus But Not the Church, Dan Kimball

### **Not Emergent Anymore**

Radical Reformission, by Mark Driscoll

### **Incarnational**

The Shaping of Things to Come, by Alan Hirsch  
The Forgotten Ways by Alan Hirsch

### **Almost Incarnational**

The Tangible Kingdom, by Halter and Smay  
Pagan Christianity, Viola and Barna

### **Organic**

The Organic Church, by Neil Cole  
Inside the Organic Church by Bob Whitesell

### **Attractional**

The Externally Focused Church, Rusaw and Swanson

The Purpose Driven Church, Warren  
The American Church in Crises, Olsen  
**Reproductive**

The Multiplying Church, by Roberts  
Missional Leader, Roxburg

A Second Resurrection, by Easum

Unfreezing Moves, by Easum

The Sticky Church, Osborne (TBR)

### **The Conversations of Our Time**

This conversation is primarily focused on the nature and mission of the church in the postmodern world as well as how Scripture is interpreted. Over the next few weeks I will try to shape each of these conversations and their implications.

## **The Conversations Of Our Times: Part Two**

### **The Emergent Conversations**

(If you haven't read the previous post you might want to do so for clarification) Although no one person speaks for the Emergents, so far the primary mover and shaker of this movement is clearly [Brian McLaren](#). His book, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, is a basic primer for Emergents. But recently [Tony Jones](#), the National Coordinator of [Emergent Village](#) has become one of the most helpful voices for those trying to understand Emergents. His book, [The New Christians](#), is the best explanation of Emergents to date (although I don't think the title helps the conversation.)

If you have followed my writings the past year you know I have voiced some concerns about the direction the Emergent movement is going, especially in the writings of [Brian](#). However, *The New Christians* has addressed many of my concerns to the point that I'm not quite as uncomfortable with their inquiries into the meaning of Scripture. I recommend anyone read Appendix B "A Response to our Critics." It is worth the price of the book. Jones clearly states that Emergents believe that no one comes to God except through Jesus. That should put many questions to rest and cause angst to others, but it settles my primary concern.

Emergents are hard to describe

<http://www.emergentvillage.com/>. The [National Park world](#) (prior to 1980s) was an "either/or" world. You either did it our way or there was the highway. [The Jungle](#) (today's world) is what I refer to as a "Both/and" world. Emergents practice a "both/and" approach to issues which makes it very hard to pin them down. They prefer shades of gray, albeit deep shades of gray, to something that is clearly definitive.

The best way to describe this movement is to start with their basic message: Emergents believe that it is no longer possible to hold on to the tenets and practices of modern day Christianity for two reasons; they are flawed and they don't relate to today's world. The postmodern world requires a new view of faith

and new kind of Christian- a postmodern faith and a postmodern Christian.

The Emergent movement is all about entering into conversations about what it means to be a Christian in a postmodern world. The conversations focus around a yet to be determined theology and new way of life. The more conversations the closer they might come to truth. However, to them truth is more beauty more than fact. Truth is messy and beautiful but never objective or eternally certain. Emergents will speak with passion and urgency but never with certainty. To them there is no certainty, only what one believes today, at this moment, in this locale. In addition, they seem to leave open the option of their theology evolving beyond what we know as Scripture as well as a total reinterpretation of that Scripture. The good thing about Emergents is they are a gentle people actively and graciously seeking dialogue with divergent forms of thought.

The Key issue I have with the Emergent movement is this – Is the message of the Gospel actual reality and eternally true, or is it nothing more than a construct of our own language within the community of faith at this particular time in history in this particular place with this particular community? The emerging movement says we can never really know the reality of the Gospel apart from our communal language- that is our talk within the community constructs the gospel- which brings us very close to relativism. When accused of being relativistic in their thought they respond by saying everything is relative. Emergents remind me more of philosophers than theologians.

The Emergents want to change the theological dialogue so that it can have better conversation with the theology of the marketplace. They are rethinking how theology changes in culture, a very dangerous approach to ministry. I don't feel as if we have to adopt a postmodern faith in order to reach the postmodern world. That's far too much compromise. We also don't have to adopt a postmodern faith in order to address the issues raised by these emerging leaders.

However, I do agree with them that we must adopt new methods of reaching the new world. Like we've heard many times- we must be in the world but not of the world. I agree with the authors that we can't come on to postmoderns like gangbusters with an elitist attitude as if we have THE truth. I agree with them that the four spiritual laws no longer work. I agree with them that if we lead from the big story we are dead in the water. I agree with them (and with Viola) that the distinction between clergy and laity is not biblical and shouldn't exist. I agree with them that the new world sees everything in shades of gray.

But I do not agree that Christians must feel they have to be two steps removed from the reality of the Gospel in order to reach this new world. In fact, I think it is just the opposite. The clearer a leader is about the reality of gospel and the direction of their

calling the more likely that person is to lead a growing and thriving community of faith.

I still don't feel the Emergent movement is going to be the primary shaper of the new Christian world. I think it will be a part of it, but only a small part. Look at most of the emerging churches- they are small and you seldom hear about them. That's because they believe and live as if small is better than big. They don't even believe in planting churches in order to reach more people, nor do they believe in doing things to get people to come to their church. They plant churches only to save themselves, whatever that means.

**So here's my question for the Emergents.** In a world where so many people are searching for spiritual guidance from so many venues, can you offer to take the position that Christians have to become like them in order to offer the direction they are seeking? Isn't the Gospel always counter to the culture? Do you really believe broken people are going to be satisfied with never being eternally certain about anything? Do you really think people can have a personal relationship with Jesus when they know all that relationship consists of is the construct of their communal language? Do you really believe that people will believe that words brought Jesus back from the dead? Do you really believe you can reach the bulk of the population when you take the conversation as deep as you do? Or are you really only concerned with appealing to philosophers?

The Emergent movement is providing a marvelous conversation for all of us. They have revealed the naked truth- the emperor has no clothes. The established Christian church is basically dead and in need of [A Second Resurrection](#). For that we can be grateful and enjoy the conversation to a point. It should continue to be a fun ride for those who are secure enough to question their own understanding of reality.

### **The Conversations of Our Times: Part Three** **The Incarnational Conversations**

This is the third in a series of observations on some of the more significant conversations occurring within Christianity that will have a profound impact on the church. You might want to first read the two previous posts on this theme.

Alan Hirsch is the primary mover and shaker of the Incarnational movement. You can see his blog at <http://www.theforgottenways.org/blog/>. You can also [click here to](#) see a book review I did of his book, *The Forgotten Ways*.

Alan's primary message is the U.S. Christianity is only reaching 35% of the population and that number is shrinking. In order to reach the rest of the postmoderns we must go back to first century ways of doing ministry and that spells trouble for the institutional church.

Incarnational church leaders focus on going to where people are instead of attracting people to come to them. The incarnational church (most of which are fledglings groups) sends people out into the culture to spread the seeds of Christianity. Having a worship service and doing things to attract people to the church aren't a concern. Relationships and friendships among the neighborhoods where one lives are their primary concern. The Incarnational model is seeking to bring the church back to its historical roots and free it from its institutionally dominated understanding of what it means to be a church. However, taken to its ultimate conclusion, the institutional church isn't needed. Most of the incarnational churches exist apart from any form of institutional church and are more akin to house churches.

Alan's first book, [The Shaping of Things to Come](#), is a book that should be read by every Christian who knows something is wrong with today's version of Christianity but can't put their finger on what it is. The authors challenge every facet of Christianity today from ordination to the traditional creeds and offer a new, but ancient, way forward. It is well worth the read because it will open your eyes to some possible ways to redo or undo your ministry.

Throughout the book I found myself saying "Yes, But!" On one level I envy the journey on which they invite us to join them. On another level I wonder what will become of the institutional church if what they propose is followed. They are surely on to something, but following it might totally destroy the church as we know it. They go far beyond "reshaping" or talking about innovation as is found on the cover. A better title for the book might be "The Rewiring of Things to Come: The Beginning of a Revolution."

The authors are advocating a wholesale rewiring of Christianity back its 21st century roots. They actually show how to be the church without being institutional at all. They talk about a missional, incarnational, messianic, apostolic church that is found within the surrounding community rather than within the four walls of a church.

Although I agree with Hirsch about the church forgetting what it means to be the church, I feel it's impossible for Christianity to survive without the institution in a society where institutions are part of the basic fabric of life. I know Christianity flourished under Mao in China without any institutions, but that was China in a day when public institutions were not part of the fabric of society.

**So, here's my question in the Incarnationalists:** Should we downplay the importance of the institutional church just because the vast majority of them are ineffective and do not reflect the spirit of Christ or should we seek to return them to their biblical roots? Can a totally non-institutional church thrive in a society based totally on institutions? If you

really hold to your beliefs, why do you still leave room for the institutional church?

Next week I will take a look at the Organic Movement, which some might put in the same camp as the Incarnationalists, but I don't. I will give special attention to Viola's new book, [Reimagining Church](#).

## **The Conversations of Our Times: Part Four**

### **The Organic Conversations**

The Organic Movement is a kissing cousin to the Incarnational movement and a distant cousin to the Emergent movement. Like the other two it doesn't see as much of a need for the institutional church has had traditional Christianity.

But unlike the Emergent movement it is more literal in its interpretation of Scripture and truth. Neil Cole has long been one of the leading voices for the organic church. In his view the house church is the primary form of church. I have no problem with this view because Cole doesn't dismiss the institutional church. In fact, one of my partners, Bill Tenny-Brittian, has extensive roots in the house church movement. I see it as a kissing cousin to small groups that multiply. However, a new voice on the scene is Frank Viola and his book (with Barna), [Pagan Christianity](#). This book stands in direct opposition to the Emergent folks because it takes a more literal approach to the Scripture. His book documents the problems with the institutional church that functions more like a business than the living organism it was created to be. Pagan Christianity is not only a logical sequence to Barna's recent book, *Revolution*, it also is an interesting and accurate account of the historic events that have shaped today's counterfeit form of Christianity.

Their major criticism of today's church, other than it being totally non-biblical, is the passivity and the elitism of today's Church. I agree the passivity and elitism of today's church is deplorable and has to be addressed if Christianity is ever going to be what Jesus wanted it to be. Every church leader ought to read this book and respond to its criticism of modern day Christianity. Any positive movement away from these two sins of the church and this book has done its job. Although the authors leave some wiggle room, the only really logical conclusion of their arguments is the end of the institutional church.

Whereas I agree the present form of Christianity isn't biblical, I still question whether what they suggest can survive much less thrive within our context. Frank Viola's [Reimagining the Church](#) is a logical sequel to his book *Pagan Christianity*. Like the former book, this one is a meticulous, interesting, disturbing look at the New Testament understanding of the early church.

What's interesting is I agreed with much of *Pagan Christianity* but not with much of *Reimagining the Church*. In this book Viola makes his true feelings known- the only legitimate form of Christianity is the house church. Toward the end of his book he

compares the renewal of the institutional church to trying to repair a house whose foundation is cracked.

Before giving my critique of his argument I need to say a couple of things. First, anyone who has followed my writings knows I have been a critic of most of the modern day forms of the institutional church for a long time. My books, *Sacred Cows Make Gourmet Burgers* and *Growing Spiritual Redwoods* both point up the need for a more organic approach to the church, but without abandoning the institutional setting. I just don't feel as if Christianity can reach its potential in an institutional and concert driven society without assuming some form of institution and large venue worship.

Second, we should all be indebted to Viola for his diligent and provocative work. Like the Emergents, Viola has revealed the naked truth – the emperor has no clothes. Most of the practices of modern day Christianity, including our forms of church, are foreign to Scripture and are in many ways lethal to the development of the kingdom of God. We must hear his argument and apply the applicable implications without throwing the baby (institutional church) out with the bath water. However, I find Viola's basic conclusion about the institutional church to be flawed for several reasons:

Viola sees the Trinity as the key to understanding the church (page 33 ff). But nowhere in the Scriptures is the church described as the reflection of the Trinity. In other words, he uses a man-made doctrine (the Trinity) rather than Scripture to provide the meaning of a biblical term and to repudiate other man made doctrines. I'm not denying the Trinity. I'm just saying it is poor scholarship to use one man made doctrine to denounce another man made doctrine and call it the biblical position on the subject.

When comparing the institutional church to the organic church Viola always uses the best possible examples of the organic church and the worst possible examples of institutional church practices. Viola refers to the house church as if it is a panacea where everyone loves everyone. I've had enough experience with house churches to know they have as many problems and are as shallow as are most institutional churches.

Throughout the book he totally ignores many of the new forms of church life emerging simply because it is institutional. And he encourages his readers to abandon the institutional church altogether. I think this is a very deadly game he is playing.

Viola acknowledges the need for contextualization (pps. 37-39) when it comes to cultural things in the Scriptures but denies the need to contextualize the Gospel into our present culture. It's okay to rule out the need for women to cover their heads in public but it's not okay to say that in an institutional and concert driven world an institutional church with a formalized worship service might be valid. To him that would be

"overcontextualizing," but who is to say where the line should be drawn?

When it suits him Viola uses a literal translation of the Greek; when it doesn't he loosing interprets the text to fit his basic premise. Consider his treatment of oversight in the church (Chapter Nine) and authority and submission in Chapter 12. In both cases he either interprets a clear text into oblivion (pps. 168-176, ) or he totally ignores texts (p. 211) that don't fit his theme. One of the most flagrant attempts to make the Scriptures fit his thesis is on page 193 where he proof texts congregational consensus decision making by quoting from Acts 15:22 "with the whole church" and totally ignoring Acts 15:6-7 "The apostles and elders met to consider this question. After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them."

His use of the term, "family," to be the basic metaphor for the church goes against most of Scripture where the church is described as the "body of Christ," or the "bride of Christ" (Chapter Five). If Christianity has to be contextualized to the world in which it finds itself to be effective, then what Viola is advocating will be the death of Christianity in the West. Without the institution and without large venue worship, the vast majority of people in this country will never experience Jesus. The house church movement has simply not shown itself to have long term sustainability. I have no problem with the house church movement. I pray it flourishes; but I also pray the institutional form of Christianity can take the legitimate violations of biblical principles Viola points out and put them into practice. And what would this look like?

Church planting would be the number one mission of all of God's people and Apostolic church overseers would emerge as the most important role in the church.

The distinction between laity and clergy would be replaced by the priesthood of all believers and preaching and teaching would be based on affirmed gifts rather than on academic authority.

Leadership would always be a shared leadership (Chapters Eight and Nine). But still there needs to be a "first among equals" for Christianity to reach its potential in our society. However, leadership must be earned, not taken. The primary roles of this leadership would be to servant (role model), motivate, and mold.

Christians would understand that church is not something they "go to" but is something they are wherever two or three of them gather.

Every believer would be a participant in a regular small group where all the pastoral care and edification would be received (Chapter Four).

The large venue worship would be solely for evangelistic purposes rather than the care and feeding of a passive audience (p. 49).

The Lord's Supper would never be taken in public worship but would be experienced in the small group where there is complete unity and agreement and "friendship intimacy" (Chapter Three).

All authority would have to be earned within the congregation so most of the pastors and staff would be raised up from within the congregation (Chapter Nine).

Denominations would no longer be needed as people would understand that there is only one church in each city and our unity would be based on our acknowledgement of the Lordship of Jesus Christ (Chapter Six).

The Church would understand that it is the Body and Bride of Christ and act accordingly which means unity, harmony, and a common purpose prevail (Chapter Five).

Decision making would prerogative of the Elders (shared leadership team) of the church as is demonstrated in Acts 15 (you should note that Viola interprets this text into oblivion with some strange story that brings the entire Jerusalem church into the decision making process p.193).

I find nothing in Viola's writings that can't be applied to the institutional church. Sure, it will cause much consternation in most congregations. But we still won't have to throw the baby out with the bath water. Viola's book would be far more appealing if he left room for contextualizing the church into our society and eliminating all of the bad baggage of established Christianity.

**So here's my question not so much to the Organic folks but to the Attractional and Reproductive folks: how can we take the unarguable truths in this book and apply them to our present day context?**

### **The Conversations of Our Times Part: Part Five**

Attractional/Incarnational Conversations

We continue our conversation about the various conversations underway today. We have looked at the Emergent, Incarnational, Organic, and now the Attractional/Incarnational conversations.

During this time period, I have been having a month long dialogue with [Tony Jones of Emergent Village](#) and many of his friends. You might want to check that out. You can find Part One of this blog and then go to Part Two and Three on their blog.

There are two branches of the Attractional model. On the one hand there are those dying churches that focus primarily on taking care of their members within the institution. It has long been my contention that these churches ought to be closed or transitioned. So, I will not dwell on them.

On the other hand there are those Attractional churches that are also Incarnational. Most of these churches are growing. Some of the most notable

voices for the Attractional/Incarnational model are Rick Rusaw, Eric Swanson, Bill Hybels, and Rick Warren, and Larry Osborne.

These folks realize the U.S. church is basically ineffective, that the world has changed, and that a biblical Christianity needs to be reestablished, but none feel as if the institutional church must be eliminated. All believe the church should be an institution that sends people out into the world to share the Good News to advance the Kingdom.

These churches attract people to their worship to experience God. The attractional church evangelizes by sending people into the community and attracting people to its institution of worship. This combination is found in the vast majority of the effective churches in the West.

### **So, here's my question to the**

**Attractional/Incarnational leaders.** Are you listening to the Emergent and Incarnational and Organic voices since they are clearly showing up the fallacies of most Attractional churches? In one sense they are so correct - the day has come when the church needs to focus more on how to go to world more than on how to get people to come to the church.

### **The Conversations of Our Times: Part Six**

The past few weeks I have examined four of the five most significant conversations occurring today- Emergent, Incarnational, Organic, and Attractional/Incarnational. Today, let me talk about implications of the four of them together.

### **What's at Stake in These Four Conversations**

Over the past decade too much time and energy has been taken up by these conversations. Too many people are caught up in these conversations and seem to have no clue how damaging they can be to the future of Christianity. I have no problem with the Incarnational, Organic, and Emergent movements being part of the ongoing conversation as long as we realize they are just one of the many voices in the midst of much larger and important conversation. I don't feel they are the wave of the future and I worry about the affect they are having on the future of the institutional church. Anyone who buys wholeheartedly into their conversations will wind up with a much smaller field of ministry or leaving the institutional church altogether, or even worse, the Christian community.

***However, we should all be indebted to these folks for bringing to our attention so elegantly the fact that Western Christianity is nowhere near what Jesus had in mind when he sent his disciples out into the world to build his church. We should be willing to concede that most of our churches are spiritually dead and are beyond revitalization or turn around. Their only hope is resurrection. That is why I wrote [A Second Resurrection](#).***

We need to hear these folk. Moreover, we should be asking why they feel so passionate that much of Western Christianity is, at best irrelevant, and at its worse, a fraud. I also have no problem with the Attractional/Incarnational folks as long as they realize that focusing primarily on the growth of their church isn't the primary mission of the church. However, these are not the primary conversations in which we should be engaged. They all take our attention away from what should be the primary conversation of our time-**what is the best way to expand the Kingdom of God on earth?**

### **The Conversations of Our Times: Part Seven** **The Reproductive/Multiplication/Movement**

So far we've looked at several conversations – Emergent, Incarnational, Organic, and Attractional/Incarnational. Now it's time turn to another major player in this ongoing conversation- the one, I think, which should be occupying most of our time and energy- the Reproductive/Multiplication groups.

The primary difference between the effective attractional/incarnational folks and the Reproductive/multiplication folks is that the reproductive/multiplication leaders focus almost exclusive on the process of church planting and/or multiple sites as opposed to growing their own church. Their focus is not on their church but on advancing the Kingdom. I know most of the attractional/incarnational folks would say they believe in church planting, but that's not their primary focus. Reproductive/multiplication leaders focus primarily on reproducing churches that reproduce churches.

Reproductive/multiplication leaders also realize that Western Christianity is in the tube but aren't willing to give up on the institutional church.

We are seeing leaders emerge whose primary mission is the advancement of the Kingdom rather than the growth of their church. This is what separates these pastors from all the others (I would have to say that Hugh Halter has a similar mission). The primary ways they advance the Kingdom is through developing church planting and multiple sites. Instead of a new faith or new Christians they are calling Christians back to the primary mission of the church- **to "go make disciples."**

The impact of this reproductive/multiplication movement is growing exponentially. One example is the recent Exponential Conference. Three years ago a group of reproductive/multiplication leaders, led by Todd Wilson, started a church planting and multiple site event called Exponential. Three hundred people attended. This past April (2008), over 3,000 people attended the event. Church planting churches and multiple site churches are now one of the fastest growing segments of western Christianity. Many voices head up the Reproductive/multiplication movement. I can only mention a few.

GlocalNet

<http://www.northwoodchurch.org/glocal/glocal.html> is an organization founded by Bob Roberts, pastor of NorthWood Church <http://www.northwoodchurch.org> in Keller, Texas. GlocalNet is establishing church planting centers all over the U.S. Robert's goal is to resource these centers so that far more churches can be planted than if his church continued to focus on church planting.

Dave Ferguson, pastor of Community Christian Church in Naperville, Illinois <http://www.communitychristian.org>, has developed New Thing <http://www.newthing.org/index.htm>, whose purpose is "to be a catalyst for a movement of reproducing churches relentlessly dedicated to helping people find their way back to God."

Wayne Cordeiro, pastor of New Hope Christian Fellowship in Honolulu <http://enewhope.org>, has established New Hope International <http://www.enhi.org> for the sole purpose of raising up 21<sup>st</sup> century church planters throughout the world.

Todd Wilson, pastor of New Life Christian Church in Centerville, Virginia and founder of Passion for Planting <http://www.churchplanting4me.com> has joined with Dave Ferguson, founder of New Thing Network to form Leading Edge Ministries, ([www.leadingedgeministries.org](http://www.leadingedgeministries.org)), an alliance of many leading organizations whose purpose it is to make it feasible for any church to take part in the church planting movement. They offer all of the supporting resources and coaching for planting a church.

What's so interesting about Reproductive/multiplication leaders is that they openly embrace the Incarnational people. These leaders have made one thing clear- you don't have to be incarnational or Emergent to spread the Good News. They realize that reaching the world will take the combined effort of all forms of Christianity.

The reproductive/multiplication leaders incorporate the best of the incarnational, the attractional, the organic, and the Emergent values. They believe we must plant as many churches as possible in as short a period of time as possible in any way possible. But their emphasis is not the institutional church; their emphasis is on planting churches that will plant other churches. The emphasis is not on the church but on the process of planting. These leaders also realize that in today's world big may not always best, so they embrace the multi site route as well as the Emergent and Organic, and House Churches.

My prediction is that Reproductive/multiplication leaders will do far more to shape the future of Christianity in the West than will all of the other voices taking part in this conversation.

**So here are my questions to the Reproductive/multiplication leaders.** When are all of you going to get together and bring about one huge movement that will change the course of the world? What's keeping you from forming a

Reproduction Bank where people of all persuasions can donate money to the cause of planting church planting churches? When are any of you going to truly become a movement?

### **The Conversations of Our Times: Part Eight**

#### **The Primary Conversation of Our Time Becomes Clearer**

I'm coming to the end of this series and want to thank everyone who has contributed. Who knows you may find some of it in a book some day.

We are all indebted to the [Emergent](#), [Incarnational](#) and [Organic](#) folks for so clearly calling to our attention the fact that Western Christianity is nowhere near what Jesus had in mind when he sent his disciples out into the world to build his church. We need to hear them. Moreover, we should be listening to why they feel so passionate about Western Christianity being either irrelevant or a counterfeit. Doing so may help some of us change our ways or avoid some of the mistakes made by institutional churches.

***Perhaps now you see why these conversations lie at the heart of the future of Western Christianity. If the basic mission of Christianity is not the health or growth of institutional churches but churches that contribute to the expansion of the Kingdom of God, then the vast majority of established Western Christianity is virtually dead. The acknowledgement of this condition is one of the reasons why this conversation is so important. If our churches were making disciples, transforming their communities, and actually bringing the Kingdom to bear on this earth, the conversation around the Emergent, Attractional, Incarnational, and Organic folks would not be necessary. But it is, and all of us had better take heart and listen to what God is saying in this conversation.***

However, the Emergent, Incarnational, Attractional, and Organic conversations are not the primary conversations in which we should be engaged. The focus of our conversations should be on the multiplication of the Kingdom of God rather than the health or growth of the institutional church. In the context of our society that means we must focus on what it means to be the institutional church that advances the Kingdom of God. As long as our society is based on institutions we can't throw the baby out with the bath water.

If we are listening to the conversation, we can't help but be impressed by the enormous potential awaiting the church if it frees itself from its institutional bondage and becomes engaged in Kingdom ministries like churches planting churches, multiple-site churches, Organic churches, and yes, Incarnational ministries that leave behind the institutional church as we know it, and even the

Emergent folks who ask all kinds of uncomfortable questions.

We are witnessing the birth of what I call the 'Untethered Church'- the church free to be the church wherever two or three are gathered together, a pub, a night club, a strip mall, a neighbor's home, a parking lot, a shooting gallery, a soup line, a biker club, a coffee shop, and even an institutional church whose primary mission is to those who aren't yet part of the Kingdom of God.

The emerging world is shaping up to be wonderful riot of expressions of authentic Christianity. Something we haven't seen for some time. The question is – *Will you be a part of it?* One more post to come on What Can I Do with these Conversations?

### **The Conversations of Our Times: Part Nine**

Well we have come to the end of this series. I hope it has been helpful.

Perhaps you are asking, what can I do with all of these conversations? Well, here are some places to begin.

Pay attention to the conversations going on today and see what you can learn from them. It may surprise you.

For those of you in spiritually alive congregations look for ways to mentor pastors in churches whose spiritual life is not so good.

For those of you in dying churches, get out of there as fast as you can and quit wasting your life.

Focus your people on the question - *"What is it about my relationship with Jesus that the world cannot live without knowing?"*

If you want your church to thrive in a pagan world you need to spend time with pagans. So get out of the office and help your members grow up spiritually.

Focus on growing people instead of growing your church.

Eliminate the missions committee and consider every leader a potential missionary to the West.

Focus on making your church so loving and warm people can't help but grow.

Don't encapsulate your people so firmly in church activities they lose touch with their pagan friends. Don't extract them from the world.

And above all, find ways to participate in the reproductive movements underfoot today.