

Emerging Church Movement Threatens Church Foundation, Says Pastor

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"If churches embracing the principle of Sola Scriptura (by Scripture alone) fail to understand and address the concerns voiced in the Emerging Church conversation, we may lose an entire generation of professing believers," says the Rev. Rutledge Etheridge, an adjunct professor of systematic theology at the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary (RPTS) in Pittsburgh and pastor of Providence Reformed Presbyterian Church.

According to Etheridge, the emerging church movement – known for flexible methodology and efforts to be culturally relevant – seeks to glean the good from Christianity's past while painting a fresh picture of the faith today. Those familiar with the movement say its members seek to live their faith in what they believe to be a "postmodern" society, while its leaders are often critical of traditional evangelical churches and often place high value on good works or social activism.

Though emergent leaders such as Mark Driscoll, pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle, contend that the movement is very broad, ranging from doctrinal Christians to emergent liberals, the latter group makes up a large enough piece of the movement to lead many conservatives to question the entire movement.

Etheridge says its understanding of the nature and content of Scripture proves detrimental to the identity and mission of the church.

"If the Emerging Church eventually defines Christ's church, then the church as Christ defined it will be no more," the Reformed Presbyterian pastor contends.

Next weekend, Etheridge will deliver three seminar lectures, entitled "The Church's Identity Crisis: Sola Scriptura and The Emerging Church," which will address the emerging church movement's wide-reaching conversation about how to live the Christian life with authenticity.

"While we should applaud and apply much of its content, we must also confront that it is moved along by an old philosophical wind which ever threatens to wrest Christ's church from the foundation of her faith – the written Word of God," says Etheridge, whose lectures next Saturday at RPTS are sponsored by the Reformation Society of Pittsburgh.

In his first seminar, "The Mechanics and Mission of the Church – A New Old Conversation," Etheridge will examine key issues raised by the Emerging Church conversation and explain why these issues are so critical to the church's nature, purpose, and impact on the world.

In the second, "The Emerging Church – Reformation or Regression," the Pittsburgh pastor will demonstrate how the Emerging Church leaders' critique of the church is fueled by elements of the same philosophy they want it to reject. Their forward thinking call to the church is actually a call backward, Etheridge claims.

In the third seminar, "Sola Scriptura – Clarity Amidst the Confusion," Etheridge will call Christians to confidence in God's Word and the ability He gives them to truly know and live it. The call will be a response to the Emerging Church's details of a call to be humble in approaching Scripture, which Etheridge says amounts to an agnosticism contrary to the knowable claims of the Bible.

Eric Young
Christian Post Reporter