

BOOK REVIEW

by Beryl Clemens Smith

CONFESSIONS OF A REFORMISSION REV. – Hard Lessons from an Emerging Missional Church

by Mark Driscoll

Published by Zondervan, 2006

Driscoll's second book is a continuing saga of the organizational development and congregational growth of Mars Hill Church in Seattle, WA.

This book was published in 2006, two years after Driscoll's first book (THE RADICAL REFORMISSION) and about 8 years after the church had grown from about 6 families to over 4,000.

Seattle Magazine said of Driscoll, "PC is not in this pastor's playbook, and in famously secular Seattle, his Mars Hill Church in Ballard is drawing thousands weekly. His message is fundamentalist Christian, his delivery system is pure alternative culture wired for sound."

The outline of this book, with a few excerpts from each chapter:

CHAPTER ZERO - Ten Curious Questions

1. Will your Rev. require reformation?
2. Will your church be traditional and institutional, contemporary and evangelical, or emerging and missional?
3. Will your church be an emergent liberal church or an emerging evangelical church?
4. Will you proclaim a gospel of forgiveness, fulfillment, or freedom?
5. Will your church be attractional, missional, or both?
6. What shoe size will your church wear?
7. Will your church have a mission of community or be a community of mission?
8. Will your leaders work from guilt or conviction?
9. Do you have the guts to shoot your dogs?
10. Can you wield a sword and a trowel?

His comment on the concept of "Church + Gospel - Culture = Fundamentalism" (look closely at those words and their connectors):

Fundamental churches: "Though they know the gospel theologically, they rarely take it out of their church. This is classic fundamentalist Christianity, which flourishes most widely in more independent-minded, Bible-believing churches. Fundamental Christians are prone to love their Lord and their brother and sisters but not their neighbors." (p. 15-16)

MY COMMENT:

I cannot help but think that had Mark Driscoll attended Bob Jones University, as a Bible Major, then took graduate school at a seminary that believed in the verbal/plenary inspiration, authority, and sufficiency of the Word of God (and had leaders and professors who really preached that), he would not have had trouble answering these questions correctly. His approach to Christianity from unbelief, agnosticism, criticism, were the presuppositions that led to a lot of his "off-the-wall" and inaccurate statements about the people of God in fundamental, orthodox, Bible-believing churches.

Driscoll's idea of Christ's mission on earth: "Jesus' incarnation is in itself missional. God the Father sent God the Son into culture on a mission to redeem the elect by the power of God the Ghost." (p.26)

MY COMMENT:

Driscoll may be correct regarding the mission of God's Son, but his reference to the Holy Spirit (agiou pneumatou) "God the Ghost" is **offensive** because it relegates the Spirit of God to this world's concept of "Casper the Ghost" or some comedic invention of Disney.

CHAPTER ONE – Jesus, Our Offering Was \$137 and I Want to Use it to Buy Bullets***o -45 People***

"God saved me while I was living with my lesbian mom and my dad was in prison for murder. I am a founding pastor."

Chronicling visits to various mainline Protestant churches:

"...in visiting numerous churches scattered across the city and throughout the surrounding suburbs, rarely did I hear a clear declaration of the person of Jesus Christ. He was never presented as the eternal God who incarnated as a man in culture to live without sin, die as a substitute for sinners, and resurrect in triumphant victory over Satan, sin, and death; who is now exalted as King of Kings and Lord of Lords; and who is coming again to judge the living and the dead, sending the repentant to his heavenly kingdom and sentencing the unrepentant to his fiery hell." (p.42)

Disturbing reaction:

"During this time, I was deeply convicted that until this point I too had been on my own mission with my church, trying to reach hip postmodern people and have hip music and basically just do the cool church thing. I had grown facial hair, started cussing again (I had stopped for about fifteen minutes after I got saved), and briefly considered taking up smoking but had asthma, which kept me from achieving my full cool potential. But I was certain that while Jesus did not mind if hip post-moderns got saved or if our band was rockin' like Dokken, he did have bigger things in mind when he got out of his tomb on Easter Sunday than me growing facial hair, cussing, and rocking out." (p.50)

“I know this may sound nuts, but when you are the only pastor on staff at a small church, you don’t have a boss, a job description, or a general clue what you are supposed to be doing. In some ways, I felt like the kid in that movie *Home Alone*.” (p.50-51)

MY COMMENT:

I found myself writing the following word in the margin of many pages: “DUH!!” For whatever reason, God did not send Mark Driscoll to a Christian College or Christian Seminary. Or else, I kept asking myself, “Why does he keep asking these obviously very stupid questions?” Maybe this is my own sense of criticism, pride or something. However, Mark is in Seattle; I am in Auburn.

CHAPTER TWO – Jesus, If Anyone Else Calls My House, I May Be Seeing You Real Soon

45-75 People

Some random quotes:

“I occasionally bought lottery tickets and promised God I would tithe if he’d let me win, but to no avail.” (p.58)

“I often preached in a ball cap and said ‘due’ and ‘bro’ a lot.” (p.59)

“Our music style has broadened to include indie rock, rockabilly, folk, and old-school country and blues under Tim’s leadership...we enjoy singing from the Psalms, from other Scriptures that we set to music, older hymns that we have redone, as well as from a large library of songs that our own musicians have composed out of their love for God.” (pp. 157 & 189)

“I studied the history of pop culture, I learned that the generational theory was a recent invention that apparently began with the hippies. The story is that the hippies were the first American generation to break from their parents and forge for themselves an independent identity marked by getting stoned more than the apostle Paul and raging against some guy called ‘the man,’ who was apparently quite busy causing every evil in the world. As I researched the hippies, I learned that the Christian version of being hippified was called the Jesus Movement and led to such nondenominational denominations as Calvary Chapel and the Vinyard.” (pp. 64-65)

“I will now simply come out of the closet and reveal that I am an intense biblical literalist who believes that the man is the head of the home, that the man should provide for his family, that children are a blessing, and that we would not have so many deceived feminists running around if men were better husbands and fathers because the natural reaction of godly women to godly men is trust and respect. For some, this theological instruction was as popular as a fart in an elevator, and they left the church.” (pp.66-67)

“This is the first church I have ever pastored or have ever been an official member of.” (p.168)

“At Mars Hill, we use irony and sarcasm to learn to laugh at ourselves and to laugh with God because people are nuts and good comedic fodder.” (p.188)

A FINAL COMMENT FROM DRISCOLL:

“Honestly, I am glad that more people don’t go to church in Seattle, because if they did, they would likely end up at churches led by pastors who are going to hell with their gay partners. Things are so bad that even two Baptist churches have gay pastors, and when the Baptists are gay, a city is officially lost.” (p.182)

“But now that I’ve had a few years of ministry beatings, I am increasingly grateful for the Christian leaders whom Jesus is using even if they are considerably different from me. Over the years, I have had the unpleasant experience of being widely misunderstood, gossiped about, and criticized. For some reason, the perception has gotten out that I walk around with no pants on with a handgun in my underwear strap, drinking beer, eating meat, and screaming random verses out of the King James Bible.” (p.183)

MY FINAL COMMENTS:

I’ve written enough! If what you have read piques your interest in what’s happening in the “emergent” church (be it liberal, evangelical, neo-fundamental, missional, attractional, or whatever), buy the book and read it. In it you will find the author taking the growth of Mars Hill Church through the following growth stages: 0-45 people; 45-75 people; 75-150 people; 150-350 people; 350-1,000 people; 1,000-4,000 people; 4,000-10,000 people. At each stage, Driscoll chronicles the obstacles, challenges, personal struggles, and what he felt the Spirit of God was leading him to do. Some of those things appear to have brilliance, some carnality, some stupidity, some vulgar, some stumbling and fumbling; but in each stage –for the reader of his journey - there are questions to be asked and personally answered as to what appears to be a 21st Century religious phenomenon. It helps describe the phenomenon of the growing “emergent” church movement, with its craving for entertainment, mega-status, cultural shock value, sales of worship-leader CDs and DVDs, preacher-originated, comfortable feel-good sermons, and an insipid, flavorless douse of salt on our godless culture.

My brethren: This is the picture of America in decay. I urge you to ***pray for revival!*** If your church is not having a regularly scheduled prayer meeting at least once a week, where people really pray, and you are not a man of the closet, then you stand under the judgment of the Word of God and are ***Laodicean!*** I urge you to repent!

Beryl Clemens Smith