

BOOK REVIEW

by Beryl Clemens Smith

RADICAL REFORMATION - Reaching Out Without Selling Out

by Mark Driscoll

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Part I - Loving your Lord through the Gospel

Eat, drink, and be a merry missionary

And now, the news

Shotgun weddings to Jesus

Part II - Loving your neighbor in the Culture

Elvis in Eden

Going to seminary at the grocery store

The sin of light beer

Postmodern pandemonium

This book (and its sequel) bring to my mind the analogy of a young teenager going into battle who has never been in the military, without boot camp, jump school, and the Military Academy. He rises through the ranks to become a general and member of the Joint Chiefs. He makes a million strategic blunders but continues to rise in authority, learning from his mistakes in his rise to prominence. It also reminds me of some men I've known in the Presbyterian denomination who attended a secular university, majoring in who knows what, then goes to seminary and is ultimately ordained and placed into a denominational church. He missed Bible College. He never served any kind of ministerial apprenticeship, and adopts the top-down ministerial hierarchy. Somehow he is unable to see the apathy of the laity and struggles to get his people to understand what the Christian vocation should really be. (If you're interested in what I think on this, read the attached piece I wrote on the Christian vocation.)

I don't think you can read this book, or its sequel, without coming to the conclusion that the emergent church's basic paradigm of church growth is to adopt whatever methods the world uses to attract adherents to their cause, bring those methods into the church and expect those without God (the ungodly) to flock to your mega-church and somehow find God. This is seen in the adoption of the music of pop culture in church services to attract the unsaved into the church. The great hymns of the Church (with their inherent theological content) are thrown out and replaced with what I call "gospel ditties" which have little, if any, theological content. The quality of the music is "low." It simply lacks the majesty of Heaven. I seriously doubt that those involved as "worship leaders" would be willing to listen to the historic, great hymns of the Church played and sung as they were written. They are simply not "hip" and to them they smell of antiquity. Popular rock or jazz "stars" are elevated as "worship leaders." The spectators are entertained. Some "gospel light" is preached in the hope that people will be comfortable enough to find Jesus. It is my opinion that often and unfortunately these musicians would be incapable of earning a living doing a "gig" at a popular bar or nightclub.

It really boils down to your philosophy of church growth. Some years ago I hear Chuck Swindoll say that there are two methods of church growth or evangelism: 1) Bring the world into the Church; 2) Take the Church out to the world. I subscribe to the latter paradigm (as you will see in the attached document).

The original paradigm of Mark Driscoll and Mars Hill Church was built on the first method of church growth. It appears that Driscoll is maturing, as he has studied the Scriptures and endeavored to build the people to whom he ministers. However, in both of Driscoll's books, I get the impression that to him pop music with religious words is as important in the services at Mars Hill as the preaching of the Word. To him, you can't grow a church to 10,000 members without the music of pop culture.

RADICAL REFORMATION excerpt regarding Christian "artists":

"I think the mainstream industry is embracing them because they are reaping financial rewards. Which is probably also the best explanation for why non-Christian corporations bought up all of the Christian record labels. It is still like any business, and it always comes down to the bottom line. But I think that there is also an element in which God is using this music to speak to a world in pain. Certainly in this country of the last few years, people have turned to more positive and uplifting music because of all they see around them. The heart of man will always seek God [this is an anti-Biblical error]; there is only one thing that can fill the emptiness and hopelessness we all feel. And I know there is money and fame at issue and we live in a cynical world that manipulates music and art to make money...We play music, and hopefully people feel better when we are done." (p. 136-7).

In other words, pop, rock, jazz, hot bands are the way to build a mega-church--not the preaching of the Law and Gospel by itself!

CONCLUSION: This book documents the sojourn of a young man who feels that God has called him to Seattle to reach a postmodern culture with the Gospel. He is doing that and I pray that God will bless him and enable him to "reach out without selling out."

The church, which he pastors, is growing like weeds. I believe, however, that we need to ask ourselves this very pertinent question: Does the Gospel of Christ have social (cultural) implications?

I believe that the Gospel of Jesus Christ has social applications but does NOT have social implications. We are to give a cup of cold water, we are to help those in need, we are to bless our enemies; but I see nowhere in Scripture where the "good news" (a FACT) is implied as having the design or power to redeem a culture. The good news is the factual, documented instrument by the power of the Holy Spirit through the lips of Christians to reach the hearts of those whom God has chosen from eternity to be His sons and daughters. No culture or nation has ever been redeemed. God's elect have been and will continue to be redeemed. Christ is building His Church and the gates of Hell pushing against the eternal purpose of God in humanity will never keep our Lord from effectually calling those given to Him by the Father.

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