

Overall, Manley has produced a stimulating and colourful work of scholarship that is of great interest to a wide range of readership.

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**R.S. Anderson, *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches*.
Downers Grove: IVP, 2006. (236pp.)**

To date I have kept away from anything to do with the emerging church movement. As a theologian I have an innate dis-ease of the trendy fads which come and go, and the emerging church movement has appeared to me to be one such fad. In addition, there has not appeared in print many works of theological substance from the emerging church movement. Rather, the published works have tended to be of a popular nature, aimed at a general readership or of a pragmatic nature. And it is this last point which has been the most problematic in terms of theological interaction – pragmatism has tended to eclipsed theology.

The landscape has changed recently with the publication of two works that interact with the emerging church in some theological depth. The first work is D.A. Carson's, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005). Carson's work exemplifies a fundamentalist orientation which those of us familiar with his work have come to expect. On almost every page Carson focuses his negatively critical lens on the movement and has little to say in its favour. While this work does have many useful questions with which the emerging church movement really does have to wrestle with, the style and negative positioning of the work has limited its effectiveness in communicating with the movement. The second work is that under review by Ray Anderson, senior professor of theology and ministry at Fuller Theological Seminary. Unlike Carson, Anderson undertakes a decidedly evangelical critique of the emerging church, one which judges but is not judgemental. Rather than negatively critiquing the emerging church, Anderson undertakes a spiritual critique with the aim of equipping the new movement with theological robustness so it may further the Gospel and the Kingdom in an ever-changing world.

Anderson begins with a programmatic and provocative preface entitled: 'What has Antioch to do with Jerusalem?'; an obvious play on Tertullian's famous question: 'What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?'. Anderson uses his question as a paradigm for discussing an emergent theology for emerging churches. Jerusalem is a symbol of the established church with its tradition, stagnation, and domination. Antioch is the church of the Gentiles; a place of new mission strategies, innovation, and change for the sake of the Gospel. When Anderson uses the term 'emerging church' he refers primarily to the first-century emerging church at Antioch, including the other churches established by Paul. When he refers to 'emerging churches' he means those contemporary Protestant and Roman Catholic communities intentionally seeking to live out the Gospel in ways that connect meaningfully with contemporary culture. Anderson's work thus sets out to present an *emergent* theology drawn out of the early Antioch *emerging* community in order to fill a perceived need for a creative and constructive theological paradigm for the emerging church movement (p.10).

After a brief foreword by Brian McLaren, the ten chapters are eloquently set out as follows: 1. It's about theology, not geography; 2. It's about Christ, not just Christology; 3. It's about the Spirit, not just spirituality; 4. It's about the right gospel, not just the right polity; 5. It's about kingdom living, not kingdom building; 6. It's about the work of God, not just the word of God; 7. It's about the law of love, not the letter of the law; 8. It's about the community of the Spirit, not just the gifts of the Spirit; 9. It's about mission, not just ministry; and 10. It's about the church ahead of us, not only the church behind us. Each chapter finishes with a 'Concluding Nontheological Postscript'. Here alone one has the outline for a ten-week sermon series!

I have to admit that Anderson is one of my favourite practical theologians and I deeply respect his theology. At the centre of his theological convictions is the Word incarnate - Jesus Christ - and the triune God of Christian revelation. With a decidedly evangelical commitment and a passion for resourcing the church, Anderson's work is serious theology. This is reflected in the final paragraph of the book:

The emerging church is about being the church, like a family. It is an everyday reality with occasional gatherings and some celebrations. Being the body of Christ is a domestic as well as public practice of kingdom living. Being the church is as much a transformation of the secular sphere into sacred service as it is filling

the sanctuary with ordinary saints. The Spirit of Christ has provided all the parts – some assembly is required’ (p.219).

Anderson’s work is stimulating and striking at the same time. On so many levels it has an intuitive ring of truth about it, and yet parts of it are deeply troubling. And that is, I believe, the point of Anderson’s prose. An emerging church sponsors an emergent theology, and this theology is disturbing at first as the established (Jerusalem) church and theology wrestles with new possibilities and readings of Scripture. If church and theology refuse to wrestle with the theology and praxis of the emerging church (Antioch) then they remain in the mire of Jerusalem with all its legalism and externalisation of Christianity. If it responds to the new movements then it becomes an emergent theology that is prepared to grow and mature. This thesis creates certain problems, of course. Who is to say what is more mature theology and practice? How may we discern truth from culture or distinguish truth from experience? At what points may Antioch in fact be wrong and Jerusalem have it right? These and many other questions remain unanswered in Anderson’s work. In place of an apologetic for the emerging church, Anderson is more concerned to inspire and advocate for an emergent theology.

Throughout the work Anderson makes significant contributions to hermeneutics and theology, especially focussing on the work of God in Christ and the Holy Spirit in an emergent theology. In the chapter on the work of Christ, Anderson summarises his case for a theology of emerging churches with the following points (pp.134-135): 1) the work of Christ becomes a narrative text that served the critical criterion for interpreting and applying the narrative of Scripture; 2) Christ’s work took place through the power of the Spirit of God; 3) following the resurrection Jesus breathed the Spirit upon his disciples with the promise that through the Spirit his own authority to minister the work of God on earth would continue; 4) the presence and power of the Spirit post-Pentecost was assumed by the emerging church to be equal to Jesus’ words; 5) the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the historical Jesus and the Spirit of the eschatological Christ. Thus: ‘...I assume that the resurrected and coming Christ enters now into the present time as our contemporary, creating new narratives of Christ’s work by the Spirit through which we are to read and interpret the textual narrative of holy Scripture...[these] serve as hermeneutical criteria in reading and applying the Scripture narratives as Word of God’ (p.135).

In his Spirit-focussed hermeneutic, Anderson provides a way beyond the 'What would Jesus do?' hermeneutic of much contemporary evangelicalism. This hermeneutic assumes the absence of Christ whereas Anderson assumes the presence of Christ by the Spirit. Instead we have to ask how it is that Jesus can continue to minister to us today as our Great High Priest. The answer, according to Anderson, is by the Spirit through the people of God gathered in the church. Thus new church movements may be new movements of Christ by his Spirit, and theology must be responsive to this if it is to be faithful to God in Christ. Theology must be emergent as it responds to emerging Churches in order to be faithful to God.

Anderson finishes this work with a reminder of 'four last things', namely: 1. Being in Christ, not just believing in Christ; 2. Living the sacramental life of grace, not only dispensing sacramental grace; 3. Being a truthful church, not just the true church; and 4. Being the church, not just going to church (pp.213-219). The 'four last things' provide both a synopsis of the current work and a fitting conclusion to the central argument which Anderson develops over these pages. In this work the heart and head of a master practical theologian is exposed and provides a wealth of material on which others may build. Many of the ideas in this book are developed throughout Anderson's other writings, especially, *The Shape of Practical Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), and *The Soul of Ministry* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), however, it is helpful to have this crystallization of his views in this work and focussed on the specific context of the emerging church movement. The emerging church movement – 'Antioch' - has much to offer the established church - 'Jerusalem', but it also has much to learn. Anderson has provided the first lesson, may many more follow.

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