

Is the Emerging Church Movement in Error?

Since my connection to Christ in 1978, I have observed many models or concepts people have regarding how they connect to the body of Christ. The following are some of the popular concepts I have observed regarding how believers define the church for themselves.

1. The “I am the church” concept

Many people do not have any personal affiliation to any particular local church even though they still attempt to cultivate a relationship with God. They may even read the Bible, pray and share their faith, but they have no organic connection to any community of believers.

In my opinion, these believers have a disembodied faith and foolishly think they can fulfill their purpose in Christ alone! This is as ludicrous as cutting off a finger and thinking that it can continue to live and function normally without the rest of the body (read 1 Corinthians 12)!

2. The “my family is my church” concept

There are many believers who rarely participate in a local faith community because they are constantly doing things on weekends with their families. They take the “putting family first” mantra too far and think that as long as they are spending time with their families, they are putting the kingdom of God first.

What these people don’t realize is that if their children don’t see them living sacrificially for the kingdom of God in the context of a local congregation, then they will most likely not attend church at all when they get older, and they will also likely come up with their own definitions of

Christianity. Also, we will be nurturing self-centered children if everything we do for Christ revolves around them and they don't see us serving in the context of a local congregation.

3. The micro-church concept

The micro-church concept is also known in some circles as the house church concept. This has to do with trying to go back to the simplicity of the first-century church, when groups of 30 to 70 people met in homes, were very relational and won souls through word of mouth and friendship.

Those in the micro-church tend to be very critical of what they call the "box church" or "institutional church," which depend on large buildings and programs to preach the gospel, putting an inordinate amount of time and money into expansion by buildings, developing professional-sounding worship experiences and producing great Sunday experiences.

While I agree with them that the so-called institutional church has lost a lot of its focus and has turned the majority of church attendees into spectators, I also believe that the body of Christ is called to penetrate and influence culture. In today's world, it is very hard to influence top leaders without the so-called institutional model that many marketplace leaders respect. Also, I believe you can have a large church that meets in huge facilities without compromising your call to have genuine fellowship by utilizing the use of small groups that meet in homes. It is not the size of the church or the facilities that matter but the ministry and discipleship capacity of a local church that matters.

Also, the only reason the first-century church utilized house churches or micro-churches was not because of the superiority of the method but because of persecution; they were not legally allowed to worship in public and could not build large church buildings. As soon as the persecution lifted in 313 AD,

the body of Christ began to build large buildings (for example, cathedrals) so they could accommodate larger crowds of people.

4. The independent congregation concept

There are thousands of independent churches in America that are islands unto themselves without any formal affiliation with other churches, associations, denominations or movements.

Although I believe this is better than the first two concepts discussed above, I still think it is very limiting because every city should have a regional church expression in which likeminded pastors work together to serve their communities. One church alone cannot be God's answer for a large community or city. Every congregation is, at best, only part of the body of Christ, not the totality of it. Independent pastors and congregations have to ask themselves the theological question of how Jesus would speak to them in the same way He spoke to the messengers of each of the seven city churches mentioned in the book of Revelation (chapters 2 and 3). If Jesus came to your city, to whom would He give his letter? To which messenger would He speak? This demonstrates that if there is no unity in the church, it actually limits what the Holy Spirit can say to a region!

5. The apostolic church concept

This model is when a church helps unify other likeminded gospel preaching churches in their communities and/or regions and gives leadership and vision to city-reaching efforts. Many of these churches eventually form formal associations with other churches that function together as an organized network or coalition. These churches function very similarly to the first-century churches in that they are not compelled to work together as a denomination but do so on a voluntary basis because of common vision.

This is the church model that is exploding in Africa, Asia,

Latin America and beyond and is mainly responsible for the global expansion of Christianity.

6. The historic mainline denominational church concept

Although many have written off this church model, I believe God still has a redemptive purpose with the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Methodist and other mainline denominations.

There are people who love and serve Jesus in every Christian denomination. Although many of their congregations are greatly struggling and losing their youth, they may yet have some kind of future impact on world evangelization. Denominations like the Roman Catholic Church are being presently purged and hopefully being restored back to their original calling, while some other liberal Protestant denominations are likely disinheriting themselves and losing members because their ideology has virtually no distinction from the non-Christian world.

7. The emerging church concept

The emerging church is made up primarily of younger evangelical leaders who have grown tired of the dry, modern, logical approach to the faith. Consequently, they have reverted to a form of postmodernism, which is a denial that objective propositional truth is knowable in this life, resulting in subjectivism.

Although I believe Christianity is very experiential and subjective, I also believe that truth is knowable; otherwise Jesus would not have said He is the Truth (John 14:6) and the church would not be called the ground and pillar of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). Denying that we can know absolute truth in this life eventually leads to liberalism because faith will be based on the feelings and perspectives of believers instead of the unchanging Word of God.

8. The online church concept

Many Christians have a home church that streams its services on the Internet, making it possible for them to be blessed without ever setting foot in the church building.

Cyberchurch services are growing in popularity and are ideal for homebound people and for people in areas without access to a church community. The drawback is that many will substitute the real experience of community for cyberchurch and will miss out on real-life relationships. This kind of church is better than nothing but will greatly limit your calling since you need to function in a body in order to fulfill your purpose (1 Cor. 12).

9. The workplace church concept

Many business leaders have been so frustrated with the lack of business savvy or leadership in their local churches that they have taken the kingdom message too far and set up churches in their offices. (In the kingdom of God, all believers are priests and ministers, not just pastors and preachers. Thus, when they do weekly Bible studies with their employees, they call this their church.)

Although I believe it is a great thing to shepherd your employees and give them Bible studies, every business leader needs a local church, especially for their families to be cared for. If you are a high-level marketplace leader and are frustrated with your local church pastor and/or vision, then find an apostolic leader you can align with and receive input from.

In some cases the marketplace leader can have an individual apostolic leader as a mentor while their family is cared for in a local church they all attend. My experience has been that high-level marketplace leaders need strong apostolic church leaders in their lives to hold them accountable in regard to their families, their ambitions and their work ethic. Without

a local church, many of these marketplace leaders go off into unbiblical pursuits and eventually experience cynicism and shipwreck.

10. The mobile church concept

There are some translocal ministers who teach that their traveling team is their church. They take the words of Jesus in Matthew 18 too far when He says “where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them.” Jesus never called this experience a church; the book of Acts and the epistles model a church that has ministry to all people from the cradle to the grave. Mobile teams should pray together and learn from one another and function as part of the larger body of Christ, but every one of those team members should have a home church and a pastor or apostle they are in alignment with so they will have credibility within the church world and so they will have the most possible care and protection.

In closing, there are probably many other forms and/or models of the church we can discuss that are not mentioned in this article. These are just the main models that I have observed.

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