

Book Review

Why We're Not Emergent (By Two Guys Who Should Be)

Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck,

Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008. 256 pages.

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Why We're Not Emergent (By Two Guys Who Should Be) is the first in what will undoubtedly be a long line of conservative theological responses to the Emergent Church Movement (ECM) by individuals who belong to "Generation Y."¹ Authors Kevin DeYoung, senior pastor of University Reformed Church in East Lansing, Michigan, and Ted Kluck, *ESPN* writer and *Sports Spectrum* columnist, produced this work after several painstaking years of research, both focusing on the writings of preeminent ECM celebrities such as Brian McLaren, Rob Bell, Leonard Sweet, Doug Pagitt and others while also visiting a number of churches that follow an ECM pattern.² Written with a turn-by-turn chapter approach, this book attempts to hit what the authors consider to be the major doctrinal and theological issues of ECM. DeYoung focuses the majority of his writing on biblical theology while Kluck pays close attention to theology in praxis.

DeYoung and Kluck focus on the ECM's approach to Scripture. Unlike the conservative theological perspective, the ECM view Scripture as playing a part in defining truth, but not being the "final rule of faith and practice." According to the authors, ECM adherents believe that

the Scriptures carry a valuable opinion, but may not be of a heavier weight than "the wisdom of the ages" or the opinion of another individual.

The authors also discuss the role of Christ at length. For example, Rob Bell's short video series, *Nooma*, as well as his book, *Velvet Elvis*, teach that Peter began to sink when he walked on the water because he lost faith in himself, not in the Master. Donald Miller, in his widely read book, *Blue Like Jazz*, describes what it might look like to meet Jesus. He refers to the encounter as one in which Jesus would ask Miller "his story" and then help him find the path to travel and identify personal issues on which to work. Both descriptions of the role of Christ describe Jesus as a psychologist rather than as Savior and Lord. DeYoung repeatedly encourages readers (and the ECM for that matter) to remember that Christ is both Lion and Lamb—meek and strong, gentle and fierce, loving and powerful.

Though it is true that Jesus expects believers to follow in His footsteps as His representatives on Earth, it is not through personal power or belief in self that this is accomplished. Only through complete trust and dependence upon the

Holy Spirit can believers ever truly do the work of Jesus. The Apostle Paul said it best, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 5:20, NIV). Jesus is not a self-help guru or a psychologist; He is the soon coming King!

The authors conclude with a discourse on the seven churches of Asia Minor, as described in Revelation. This is where I believe the writers most accurately reflect the mind of Generation Y evangelicals. DeYoung presents a superb argument for why the seven churches represent the Church. Orthodox Evangelicals often fall into the Ephesian church model of being greatly pious and wonderfully doctrinal, yet sadly unloving whereas ECM congregations most closely resemble the church of Thyatira and Laodicea—beautifully loving and open to all people, but failing in sound doctrine and tolerant of all things, including sin. The authors contend that the Church Christ desires must be doctrinally committed while expressing love and acceptance toward people and their problems, but not their sin. This accurately depicts the position of most Generation Y evangelicals, who

remain widely conservative in theology (Scriptures Inspired, Salvation through Christ alone, etc.), while moving center/left-of-center politically on many issues (poverty, educational equity, climate change, etc.), believing that moral issues stretch beyond the stalwarts of the Religious Right (abortion and homosexual unions).

This work presents a refreshing look at not only the ECM but also the Western, Evangelical Church as a whole. The authors remain both interesting and relevant while dealing with daunting issues of eternal consequence. They present their case consistently and in a fair and even-handed manner by using exact quotes from ECM leaders as the primary focus of their discussions. Although not everyone will agree with DeYoung and Kluck’s conclusions, the authors cannot be accused of completing this work with anything other than a heart of reconciliation and love toward their ECM brothers and sisters. I highly recommend this book to all individuals engaged in church ministry, despite one’s personal persuasion on the Emergent Church Movement.

¹There is considerable conversation as to the years that constitute the conclusion of Generation X and the start of Generation Y (aka Millennials). Generally, I refer to Generation Y as individuals currently between the ages of 19 and 35.

²It must be said that there is no official ECM pattern. The ECM is a movement of churches that in general reject fundamentalism and orthodoxy and embrace more liberal theology and politics. To be fair, ECM churches believe that the praxis of their communities and worship experiences are more indicative of the way Christ would in fact act. There is no ECM denomination, no statement of fundamental truths, and no corporate missions endeavor.