Pastoral Concerns When Planting
Amidst Other Steeples:
Emergent, Reformed, Baptist and Bible Church Influences

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. Our Area of Ministry

While preaching to his own congregation (Protestant Reformed) Hoeksema admits that some of his hearers and those who observe them have been fooled by the externals of Christianity. “Why art thou called a Christian? Is it for the same reason that Grand Rapids is called a Christian city? Is it for the same reason that our country is called a Christian country? Then it means nothing. For Grand Rapids and our country are not and never will be Christian. Is it because you are in church today, and tomorrow people will know that you have been here? Is that the reason?”1

B. Singularity and commonality of all church planting conditions.

II. SELECTED SPIRITUAL INFLUENCES AND THEIR ASSOCIATED AREAS OF DISCIPLESHIP CONCERN

A. People who have come from Baptist churches and matters of sanctification

1. A pharisaism
2. How this term is meant
3. Responses to discipleship/counseling efforts
4. Coordinate with a Keswick or similar view of sanctification.
5. Overall doctrinal understanding

B. Bible Churches and matters of Ecclesiology

1. A differentiation in the issues related to the Emergents and Reformed/Presbyterian churches

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1 Herman Hoeksema, Sermon on the Heidelberg Catechism, “Jesus the Christ” http://audio.rfpa.org/HH-LD12-01so002.mp3
2. Connection with the IFCA

3. At issue: Believer baptism and church membership

4. Ramifications in the people we have met—indirect and direct

5. The practical outcome in the people affected—believer baptism is not essential to obedience

C. Reformed & Presbyterian and matters of Ecclesiology
   1. Who is the church?
   2. Baptism—paedo or credo
   3. The mission of the church—what is “Gospel” ministry?

D. Emerging/Emergent churches and matters of Ecclesiology, Bibliology and Soteriology
   1. Rob Bell, Mars Hill Bible Church, and his/their brand of Emergent theology.
      a. Doctrinal matters.
      b. Practical issues
   2. Issues of significance in those we have met:
      a. Bibliology
         (i) “Springs” versus “bricks”
         (ii) Sola scriptura?

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2 Independent Fundamental Churches of America—headquartered in Grandville, MI

3 The IFCA has issued a basic constitution for its church planters, and it includes this clause regarding who should be accepted as members: “have obeyed the Lord in believer’s baptism or be willing to be baptized.” (http://www.nicechurchplanters.org/home/180001283/180001283/docs/Sample20Constitution.pdf)

4 A clarification: Those in this category will blanch at the idea of being named as any kind of movement, or “category” for that matter. Additionally, some will make much of differentiating among themselves as “emergent” versus “emerging,” etc. However, I will refer to this “movement” simply as Emergent for the sake of simplicity and brevity.

5 Bell has recently announced that he will resign from Mars Hill effective December 2011.

6 Using http://www.emergentvillage.com, search engines, and other tools, I have found other ministries who fall under the Emergent description. However, I have yet to meet people influenced by them. As such, my remarks are limited by the shadow cast by Mars Hill and Bell.
(iii) Subjective authority

b. Soteriology

(i) A “repent”—“believe”—“call” confrontation is out of character

(ii) Similar to McKnight’s “robust gospel”\(^7\)

c. Ecclesiology

(i) Correlation with Bibliology—the church shapes the meaning and value of revelation\(^8\)

(ii) The church’s mission\(^9\)

III. DISCIPLESHIP CONSIDERATIONS IN LIGHT OF THESE INFLUENCES

A. You and the congregation must work to understand our culture\(^{10}\)

B. Know what you believe and why

C. Know what other churches/movements/denominations believe and why

   1. No caricaturing

   2. Read the mainstream first, not the fringes

D. Proclaim the truth of Christ and His Church in faith and the Spirit’s power—exegesis, exposition

   1. Teach in every way possible

\(^7\) The Eight Marks of a Robust Gospel (http://www.christianvisionproject.com/2008/03/the_8_marks_of_a_robust_gospel.html)

\(^8\) In his review of Robert E. Webber’s The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World, Rolland McCune notes: “For the younger evangelicals, authority therefore becomes communal; it arises from within the church.” I watched an outworking of this at one of Mars Hill Bible Church’s baptism services. “Baptism” was redefined, not through words, (a very biblical case was made for believer baptism), but through what was actually accepted as motivations for baptism during the service.

\(^9\) “Living out the way of Jesus in missional communities, announcing the arrival of his kingdom, working for measurable change among the oppressed.” (http://marshill.org/believe/mission/)

\(^{10}\) There are others, but David Well’s five books are excellent tools for finding tools to better understand how Romans 1 – 3 is working out in our society. (No Place for Truth, Losing our Virtue, God in the Wasteland, Above all Earthly Powers, and The Courage to be Protestant)
2. Sermons, tracts, brochures, articles etc.
3. In light of Who’s church it is: ask/answer hard questions at the risk of losing people
4. Teach biblically and theologically
5. Teach with apologetics and evangelism in mind

E. Differentiate between levels of error
   1. Don’t raise up a church of “heresy hunters”
   2. Help people to develop mental taxonomies and theological grids

F. Model and develop academic, theological humility for the people

G. Significant biblical teachings on:
   1. Bibliology
   2. Ecclesiology
   3. Soteriology
   4. Sanctification

H. Evangelistic considerations