

## BOOK REVIEW

## Essays on New Ideas about What It Means to Be Christian | A BOOK REVIEW BY RYAN BELL

**E**mergent Village has always been about friendship, and if the recent book, *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, is any indication, this friendship is growing and bearing fruit in remarkable ways.

Although this book is the first volume of a publishing partnership between Emergent Village (also known as, simply, Emergent) and Baker Books, Emergent is far from new. This friendship has been evolving since the mid-1990s and is only now hitting its stride. Emergent describes itself as “a growing, generative friendship among missional Christians seeking to love our world in the Spirit of Jesus Christ.”

Through the years, this loose and amorphous network of Christians has defied categorization, but it seems fair to say that the glue that holds this broad friendship together is a shared vision for a theology and practice of Christian life that both blesses the world and gives witness to God’s kingdom, now present and yet to come. I have also observed with others that Emergent is a kind of “third place” for post-Evangelicals and post-Liberals to fellowship and engage in serious conversation about how Christian faith is “emerging” in our increasingly post-Christian world.<sup>1</sup>

This book is comprised of twenty-five essays, each by a different author, and edited by Doug Pagitt, pastor of Solomon’s Porch in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and Tony Jones, national coordinator for Emergent Village. Both men have authored numerous other books and have been instrumental in leading this conversation since its inception.

Although the book is organized around the theme of hope, the reader quickly realizes that its diverse topics and perspectives defy categorization. At times, I struggled to understand how individual essays related to section themes. Part 5: Hopeful Activism is the most thematically consistent section, whereas Part 1: People of Hope is the most general.

Each essay reflects deep theological thought, feet-on-

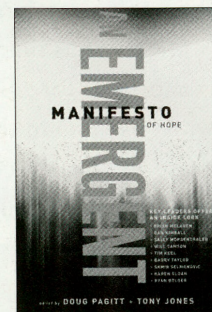
the-ground experience of living in God’s kingdom, and unwavering commitment to the gospel of the kingdom and the way this good news takes shape in diverse places.

One pleasant surprise for readers of *Spectrum* is Chapter 16, “The Sweet Problem of Inclusiveness: Finding Our God in the Other.” The author of this chapter, Samir Selmanovic, is both a Seventh-day Adventist pastor and a long-time participant and contributor to the Emergent conversation. I first met him when we were both pastors on the East Coast and the content of his essay is true of my experience of him as a person and as a leader.<sup>2</sup>

With his characteristic insight, Samir wonders “whether Christ can be more than Christianity,” and whether Christianity has become an idol—something greater than God.<sup>3</sup> He reminds us that “Christ never proclaimed, ‘Christianity is here. Join it.’ But Christ did insist, ‘The kingdom of God is here. Enter it.’”<sup>4</sup> In short, Samir, like all the authors in this volume, calls the church to its better self rather than railing against a faith and a church that has somehow let them down.

Although the topics range from postmodern parenting to sexual ethics, and from leadership to ecclesiology, each essay, in its own way, faithfully reappropriates our various traditions for a vastly different world.

Another thing to say about this book, which is based on my own personal experience with Emergent Village and personal acquaintance with a number of its authors from years of meeting together at conferences and other gatherings, is that it is, above all, honest and



Doug Pagitt and Tony Jones, eds., **An Emergent Manifesto of Hope** (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2007).



real. There are no airs, no pretense, in these essays. These authors have no burden to make claims for things that are, as yet, unknown.

But if you listen carefully to this choir of authors there is a melody that emerges amidst the harmony—a deep conviction that God is at work, here and now, in our world in surprising ways. In the words of Mark Scandrette, “We are recovering from a legacy in which religious experience and devotion have been significantly separated from the domain of everyday life...Embracing the reality of the kingdom means that everything matters and that all of life is spiritual.”<sup>5</sup>

If there is one organizing principle to this book, it is the word *hope*. Some people have been critical of the word *manifesto* in the title. I like the evocative nature of these two words colliding: “Manifesto of Hope.” It rings in my ears and enlivens my imagination, like “Waging Peace” or “Loving Babylon.”

It is hard to speak into the “noise” of contemporary culture. Hope is a value that has difficulty getting traction in a world full of pain, suffering, and injustice. It sounds like little more than wishful thinking. This book

launches a volley into this fray—but it doesn’t incite violence. To the contrary, it is a manifest of hope, inciting goodness, mercy, and justice in communities all over the United States and around the world.

This is vintage Emergent Village—creative, forward looking, messy, exploratory, intelligent, passionate, and missional. ■

## Notes and References

1. For more information about Emergent Village, visit its Web site at <[www.emergentvillage.com](http://www.emergentvillage.com)>.
2. Samir blogs at <[www.faithhousemanhattan.org](http://www.faithhousemanhattan.org)>. At his site, you can find both audio and video of him speaking on the same topic, “Finding Our God in the Other.”
3. Doug Pagitt and Tony Jones, eds., *An Emergent Manifesto of Hope* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2007), 192.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, 27.

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