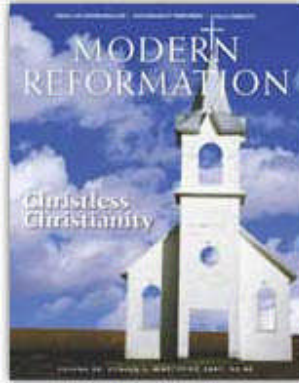


Reaching Out Without Selling Out

An Interview with Mark Driscoll



In February 2007, Michael Horton had the opportunity to interview Mark Driscoll, pastor of Mars Hill Church (Seattle, Washington) and author of The Radical Reformation: Reaching Out without Selling Out (Zondervan, 2004).

This interview was originally broadcast on March 11, 2007 on The White Horse Inn radio program. To hear the entire interview online, go to www.whitehorsesinn.org, click "Previous Programs," then click "Broadcast Archives" at the top of the page.

Can you give us some background on your congregation? It's mostly a younger crowd, isn't it? Well, it started that way. I'm in Seattle, one of the least-churched cities in America. There are more dogs than evangelicals in our town. I started here as a non-Christian, I became a Christian when I was 19, got married at 21, started a Bible study at age 25 that today is over 6,000 people. I think we're the fifteenth fastest growing church in America right now. So, it started off really young, but the age has spread. It's about half single, half married, about forty percent conversion growth as far as we can tell. So, it's been pretty busy.

Wow, and you're doing this with a good dose of Reformation theology, specifically Calvinism? It's going well so far. We're enjoying it. I'm a Bible teacher, I have a high view of Scripture, we do Communion every week. So far God's using it to reach a lot of mainly younger people who are a little weary of pluralism and postmodernism and looking for some truth and some Bible and ultimately really intrigued by Jesus. So, I'm really glad for what he's done.

Now, wait a second. Teaching and Communion every week? We've been told that this generation isn't interested in teaching and they grew up in churches of their Boomer parents where teaching was pretty light and stage productions other than Communion were key. What's different about this generation or at least these people in your church? *Christianity Today* did a story in September that was interesting. It was about the resurgence of Reformed theology among younger evangelicals...it was the cover story. What we are seeing is,



the two hot theologies right now among the younger evangelicals are sort of a "new Reformed theology," which is basically just the older form rediscovered, and what is known as Emergent, or emerging theology, which is becoming the new left. So, we are seeing a return to Bible exposition...In our network, we've seen a hundred new churches planted in the U.S. just in the last few years, all led by basically expository Bible teachers who serve Communion every week and have a Reformed theology that includes male leadership in the church and are conservative evangelicals and it's going very well. There's a major upswing in that direction.

Now, you were involved on the ground floor of the emerging movement, sometimes called the Emergent Movement. How did that originate and what is your relationship to it now? In the mid to late 90's, my friends-whom I love very much-in this organization called Leadership Network brought together a bunch of young pastors just to share ideas and network and see what the next generation of ministry might look like. That led to what was called the Young Leaders Network. I became involved in the early days of that. We did some speaking and traveling together, we talked about the future of where Christianity might be going in America.

And this is with Brian McLaren and others? Brian McLaren was added about a year or two later to that team, and then it separated from Leadership Network and became, ultimately, the Emergent Village. And it was in that transition that I tried to part company on some theological issues. I still consider a lot of the leaders in that movement to be personal friends and people that I do love, but theologically I had to part ways, as it were, over some doctrinal issues.

What would you point out as the most critical areas of disagreement between the emphases of Reformation theology and Emergent theology? The biggest issue is always the inerrancy and authority of Scripture, which for me are watershed issues that then lay the groundwork for the resolution of the other issues. Behind that comes penal substitution issues-Jesus' death on the cross in our place for our sins, such things as eternal torment in hell, things such as original sin-we are sinners both by nature and choice, things such as the exclusivity of Jesus-no salvation apart from the person and work of Jesus, and also gender roles, which includes male leadership in the church, male/female roles in the home, as well as sexual issues, like homosexuality, bisexuality, lesbianism-is there intentional creative design by God that's designated for gender? And those are kind of the big issues on the table. They're not new issues, but they've got a new interest.

As we look at this generation, is there sort of a realization among pastors in your network that we have over-stereotyped generations and turned churches into niche demographics? I think that one of the sad things that has happened is that there is an assumption that there is a sameness, or commonality, among generations, and at least in what we're seeing in a world that is more pluralistic, that is more diverse, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-perspectival, you're



really dealing with a lot of different tribes of people. They may be the same age, but they may have a completely different view of God, of the world, of truth, of life and death and sexuality, and so I think it's reductionistic to put millions of people in a bucket and say because they were born between certain years they're all the same. The result of that is you're told how to market to them, how to program for them as if one size does fit all and a franchise mentality would work for a whole generation, which isn't true.

So the real difference between, say, a Willow Creek and the Emergent Village is the difference between the mall and Starbucks. In the seeker movement the ideology was to hold to evangelical theology but to take some of the rough edges off; some of the doctrines you do believe, like hell, you sort of tuck those away so that they're not out in plain sight. It's interesting among some young evangelicals who are more "emerging," for them the *theological* issues are really important and they are pressing the theological issues but they're coming to more liberal conclusions and they end up having much smaller congregations. You're looking at house churches, new monastic communities, alternative communities that are smaller and grass-roots in orientation, more theology-driven but more liberal in their orientation.

Remarkable. How much of this, Mark, is because they did grow up in churches that really downplayed the rough edges and didn't really engage in in-depth instruction from the Scriptures and had kind of "worship lite"? How much of this longing for some substance and yet, sometimes without a rudder, is due to that upbringing in the mega-church? Well, I don't think it's just mega-church, or size of church. There are men like Spurgeon who had large churches. But I think it's more of an orientation of church where the people that you're seeking to attract are consumers and you're a producer of religious goods and services, so you pull your constituency and target your market. I think that led to a theological reduction, to a drive of pragmatism and best practices that walked away from a core theological conviction driving what it means to be the church. And I think a younger generation of evangelicals is wanting to get back to that theological core. One of my concerns is, they tend to be leaning into church history, they tend to be leaning into experience, and they tend not to have as high a view of Scripture as I would have hoped for. And I don't say that broad brush for everyone, but the area of concern I see is a low view of Scripture and the result is, when you're looking for firm foundations upon which to build and you *don't* end up at Scripture, you're going to find yourself in very serious trouble.

How much of this, too, is "channel surfing"? The younger generation, 40 years old and younger, are so used to surfing the Net and surfing the channels. How much of this is, "Yeah, there's a depth of *interest* in theology, but a kind of eclectic 'make-it-up-as-you-go-along'?" The word that's used a lot is "mosaic," you know, pieces from many traditions and perspectives and ideologies that come together to formulate a whole-That's the language that is



used. On the flip side, I think for those who weren't raised in the church and aren't the products of more soft-centered evangelicalism—those who are just not Christian—what we are seeing is that they have a strong interest in Bible and theology. Like I said, in our city, I can't believe it, Michael. We are going through the Book of Ruth and we grew by a thousand people this month—in one of the least church-ed cities in America. We're growing by non-Christians coming for Bible teaching. We're seeing that same thing throughout the country. I could point to most of the major cities across the country and show you young, Reformed-minded Bible teachers whose churches are growing very fast but it's primarily Bible, doctrinal, theological instruction. They have unbelievers who are coming for theological instruction to learn about the God of the Bible, which I find whole-heartedly encouraging. I'm thrilled by that.

So unlike the church growth emphases of the previous generation, where you kind of move people out of the churches they already belong to into larger churches, you're actually seeing (and a lot of your friends who are doing this faithful biblical exposition) non-Christians become Christians and the growth coming from actual evangelism? Absolutely. But the evangelism is Jesus-centered Bible teaching where the text is open and Jesus is the hero of every page of Scripture, which is just classic, Reformed, biblical theology. So, yeah, that is in fact what we are seeing. The people have been marketed, they have been pitched, they have been sold, they have had their felt needs assuaged. What they haven't had is anyone get up and open the Bible, tell them who God is, what he has done and call them to repentance in a very clear, forthright way that respects their intelligence.

What does that look like in concrete terms on the ground? That means that Christians need to be loving their neighbors as Jesus did, you know whether it's like Jesus with the woman at the well who was a social outcast and very sinful; there is a deep love for that person and a willingness to sit down and dialogue with them, not just preach at them... or whether it's a man like Zaccheus; it's actually having meals with such people and entering into a relationship with them so that the gospel can be explained and demonstrated and defended. I think the hard thing is that most people are for evangelism, but it is time-consuming. It does take energy and some people are very difficult and their understanding grows slowly and it's a commitment to walking with people in relationship, in community, in conversation, practicing hospitality, loving your neighbor...and I think we see that in the incarnation of Jesus, that God himself would spend time with some of the people that he spent time with, and people like me who he's still willing to spend time with is remarkable.

So your preaching, your Word-based ministry, it's not one thing over here and then you also have this outreach program over there, but your outreach is a ministry of the Word to your neighborhood. We call it "air war" and "ground war." The preaching of Scripture is air war. It deals with multitudes and wide audiences, but then our people really do the ground war. They love their neighbor, they share the gospel with their friends, they open their home to family,



friends, and coworkers...they're really doing the work of the ground war, and generally speaking, that's where most evangelism happens - on the ground war. The air war can help articulate the gospel, but then people are going to have questions, misunderstandings, misapplications, and somebody who loves God is going to need to help walk with them through those particulars.

A lot of us grew up in churches, Mark, where we were told, "You are a member of this church now, which means that you have to find your gift-teach such and such a grade in Sunday school, be a greeter, show up for various church events... are you going to join the clean-up ministry or the tract ministry..."-and you end up spending all of your time in church-related activities so that you couldn't actually spend time out in the world in your secular calling, investing in relationships with friends. You kind of scurry out there to make a buck, then scurry back into the church to be with your people. Do you think that that is a fundamental flaw in the way a lot of traditional churches approach the outside world? Look at the way they look at their programming. Sometimes a church only considers formal ministry in the church, as opposed to informal ministry in their home. So, you know, we like to tell our people that informal ministry counts. If you're having your lost neighbors over for dinner to love them, that counts. And so, I think it's an understanding that church is not just a thing that people come to; it's also living the lifestyle created by the gospel, knowing that wherever we're at we're witnesses, we are missionaries, we do bring the gospel with us, we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we are given opportunities. We should not overlook those in the name of formalized ministry but to see those informal opportunities as God's providential hand giving us wonderful opportunities out in the marketplace... We don't have any evangelism training, we don't have an evangelism department, we don't have altar calls, we don't do any advertising, we don't do any marketing. I tend to preach right through books of the Bible, occasionally I'll do a series. I did a twelve-week series on the cross, on penal substitutionary atonement, so the times I do something topical is usually theologically clarifying for people. And what we find is that in previous generations it was a fight between "Is Sunday to disciple the believers or to reach the lost?" My articulation is, Sunday is for the worship and the adoration and the exaltation of Jesus, and if everything is about Jesus, then it works for Christians *and* non-Christians. Everyone needs Jesus, and the gospel is for Christians, too. It's not just something you believe and then move on with the rest of your life. The gospel of conviction of sin and repentance and trusting in the finished work of Christ is something that every Christian practices every moment of every day, and I think it's a truncated view of the gospel if it's a few laws, or a sales pitch we give to someone, they pray the prayer, and then we've concluded our evangelistic endeavor. I think it's a very reductionistic view of the gospel.

The title of your book, *Radical Reformation: Reaching Out Without Selling Out*, is interesting. Why the title "Radical Reformation"? What's "reformation"? It's a reforming of our understanding of missions. In previous



generations, the idea has been that missionaries are people that we send overseas to bizaare foreign cultures and they are the highly trained professionals that go share the gospel. Well, what we're looking at is God has brought the nations, the United States of America, our cities and our areas are very tribal with different races, nations, groups, tribes, subcultures of people and that mission is something that happens across the street as well as across the world. And I think that's what Jesus was getting at when he said "Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, ends of the earth." It's fine to send a missionary to China, but the number of evangelicals in China is statistically the same as the city of Seattle. So if we're going to send missionaries to China, I'm all for it, but we also need to send missionaries to Seattle, Philadelphia, New York City, to these major culture-making urban centers that create pop culture. That's where the television stations are, the record labels are, that's where the media is centered, politics are centered, money is centered, and if we don't have a faithful gospel witness there, then we're essentially just handing over the making of culture for the next generation to people who have no idea of the gospel. And, to me, the understanding of mission is not just going across the world; sometimes we're going across the street and that counts as well.

Mark, thank you so much for the time you've given us and for the insights you've passed on to us. We all have a lot to learn and areas to improve as we think about reaching out without losing "the reached."