

Greetings! We at January Adventure are always on the lookout for insightful dialogue about the term “Emerging Christianity.” Several weeks ago, I was driving to Winter Park, FL, and decided to listen to the JA-2012 Richard Rohr CD on the way down.



On Disc 5 of that series, there is a question asked that caught my attention, probably because we all seem to ask the same thing at one time or another: “I live in a community with no known progressive churches or groups. What suggestions do you have for finding like-minded people in my community.”

Here is Fr. Richard’s response (transcribed, edited lightly):

“It’s almost a price we’re paying for agreeing that we don’t want to build parallel structures that then have to defend themselves, and create an infrastructure, soon becoming another denomination.

“(Finding like-minded people) is a matter of finding support systems, discussion groups, prayer groups, service groups, ministry groups where a lot of your Christian need is met by belonging to that group. Certainly serving through that group. It doesn’t need to call itself Emerging Christianity in any way.

“I know some Catholic men, for example, who said to me ‘You know, I’ve heard sermons all my life; I know how to recite the creed; I know how to receive communion. All these sermons are telling me to go and do something. Well, it’s time I do something.’ So they’re using Sunday morning to work for Habitat for Humanity (instead of going to church) and that’s their emerging church without any guilt, without any shame.

“I love to say that Jesus didn’t say, ‘Worship me.’ He said, ‘Follow me.’ One of the most clever ways to avoid following Jesus is this obsession with God needing correct worship. I think this is tied in with the sacrificial notion...that this does something for God. I’m not against the gathering of the Christian people, but certainly in the Catholic world correct form, decor and vestments became an obsession.

“As a confessor, I would say the most common ‘sin’ confessed by Catholics is ‘Father, I missed mass on Sunday.’ This is not a high level of moral discernment of what evil is. I’d say, ‘Try to get the feeling of what evil is. Missing a service on Sunday is not even in the same ballpark.’

“Some people cannot pay their employees a just wage, they can be racist, but they go to mass on Sunday.

“After a while, you recognize that ‘correct worship’ is smoke and mirrors. We’ve got to say ‘What’s really Jesus about?’ We clergy (and I understand it if you are a pastor or clergy), have a vested interest in keeping parishioners coming back. But we see Jesus in this mobile, peripatetic ministry where he clearly is not hanging up a shingle and creating an institution that people have to belong to...membership requirements, who’s in and who’s out, rights and privileges, responsibilities, degrees of investments, and you just say, ‘Is this really worth it?’ It probably is worth it on some levels. But on other levels it isn’t.

“And that’s what Emerging Christianity has the courage to say. Is there some way we can address those other levels without being dualistic, reactionary, rebellious against our mother church? And, for me, that’s the heart of the matter, the heart of non-dual thinking. Both Mother Teresa and the Dali Lama said the same thing: Bloom where you’re planted. Stay and don’t rebel against your mother tradition; thank God for it. But also recognize that no matter how wonderful your reform of the Christian Gospel is, it’s still only part of the pie. It’s only a piece of the picture, and usually you have to compensate for the few blind spots of every denomination that I know of. We all get a certain part of the Great Crown that was Christ, and we neglect a few others. ...

“Emerging Church for me has the freedom to let us pay attention to some other things. Do we have to organize that? Not necessarily. It might destroy it.”

Reference: A January Adventure in Emerging Christianity 2012: “The Change That Changes Everything,” Disc 5: McLaren & Rhor in Dialogue—Questions and Answers.