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21 October, 2007
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THEO2710

Annotated Bibliography | Author's Note

At the onset of this project, I had hoped to illuminate the connection between the declining condition of Christian education within the context of the Sunday school. Not surprisingly, however, there exists very little information that directly discusses the intersection of the emerging church's upward growth and the Sunday school's decline. I did, however, notice a few very significant and pertinent connections between the two movements.

Most notably, the emphasis and necessity of community-centric involvement is strikingly evident in both movements. Within the selected articles found below, there is deep and recurrent evidence that the ideal emergent church will be centered in very tangible ways around community—the greatest majority of research suggests that Sunday school, in an ideal setting is much the same.

With that said, the emerging church demonstrates, if yet only hypothetically, great potential for the re-imagining of congregational, community-oriented education. This will not be significantly observable, however, until the emerging movement becomes more cohesive in its definition, practice, and membership. Once the emerging movement has begun to address its most critically decisive issues—particularly the role of traditional practice in the face of post-modern influence—there is great potential and opportunity for truly transformational educational structures.

These are things that are today only alluded to. Time will offer the ultimate say on the extent to which emerging congregations can rescue the institution of Sunday school and community education. If there is any hope for a re-visioning and renewal of Christian education in the context of the church, the possibility of the impetus coming from the emerging church is as likely—if not moreso—as any other source.

Archibald, Helen Allen. "History of religious education 1850-1950 : a documentary trail."

Religious Education 82.3 (Sum 1987): 405-414. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials. EBSCO. Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, WA. 15 October 2007.

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Helen Archibald begins with an inquiry into what type of documentary trail may exist for plotting the actual development and content of religious education up until the recent present. Choosing the period of 1850-1950, Archibald notes that in 1850, there was a strong general evangelical consensus, but by 1950, the religious landscape in the United States was marked by distinct pluralism. A significant factor in the decline of religious education is the professionalizing of the clergy and the subsequent marginalization of laity, for it is in this process that the religious education—specifically in the context of Sunday school—gets ignored.

In her conclusion, Archibald offers no significant conclusions regarding the development of the Sunday school. Instead, she declares the need for a large-scale repository of curriculum and related components in hopes that one day, the church may begin to make sense of the vast and varied components that comprise Christian education—a point which we have not yet reached, in her view.

Burton, Larry D., et al. "Curriculum design and children's learning at church." Religious Education 101.1 (2006): 4-20. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials. EBSCO. Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, WA. 15 October 2007. <<http://0-search.ebscohost.com/deborah.spu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0001511421&site=ehost-live>>.

Larry D. Burton outlines the purpose of this research project with the aim of discovering the relationship between curriculum design and learning in children's ministry. This goal is pursued by the implementation of two different curricula—a traditional Adventist curriculum dating from 1940, and a new revised curriculum, *GraceLink*—in two different groups of 5-6 year-olds. By way of pre-test and post-test data, Burton and his colleagues concluded that while both curriculum achieved similar factual Biblical learning, neither prepared the students to effectively express the concepts and ideas presented.

The implications of this study are significant in the discovery that neither curriculum design appropriately prepared students for personal expression of the studied concepts, suggesting that new methods are perhaps needed to achieve the kind of learning and comprehension that is desired within the church.

Byassee, Jason. "Emerging model: a visit to Jacob's Well." Christian Century 123.19 (19 Sep. 2006): 20-24. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials. EBSCO. Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, WA. 5 October 2007. <<http://0-search.ebscohost.com/deborah.spu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&db=rh&AN=ATLA0001533420&site=ehost-live>>.

Jason Byassee offers a narrative account of his visit to Jacob's Well Church (JW) in Kansas City, Missouri. In stark contrast to much that is being discussed lately on the Emergent church, Byassee reports that JW defies many common definitions of the emergent. To illustrate this, Byassee notes that the Apostle's Creed serves as JW's statement of faith. So as to not hold too fast to completely traditional designs of worship, JW is embracing its role within a post-modern context by the removal of a traditional pulpit, creation of meditative prayer rooms, and "professionally-lit art galleries."

As a whole, Byassee lifts Jacob's well up as a good example of theologically sound Emergent practices. He notes that in a time when many Emergent congregations are trying to re-invent the wheel, Jacob's Well has found their success by "sinking its roots into the local, the particular and the church catholic."

Howell, James C. "Fellow students: theological formation in the parish." Christian Century 124.4 (20 Feb. 2007): 32-35. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials. EBSCO. Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, WA. 18 October 2007. <<http://0-search.ebscohost.com/deborah.spu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0001564158&site=ehost-live>>.

Writing from the experience of parish ministerial leadership, James Howell echoes the popular idea that the institution of congregational education is in decline—at least as we have come to consider congregational education and more specifically, Sunday school. Through experience within his own parish, Howell notes that education within the context of a congregation must be much more based in community development and experiential process. Howell seeks to promote the message of “how today’s lesson is not something to be endured, something you’re *willing* to do.” Instead, he suggestively questions, “Isn’t each lesson part of a lifelong theological education?”

Lehmann, Daniel J. "Whatever happened to Sunday School." Christian Century 106.13 (19 Apr. 1989): 404-405. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials. EBSCO. Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, WA. 5 October 2007. <<http://0-search.ebscohost.com/deborah.spu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0000816237&site=ehost-live>>.

In his introductory remarks, Daniel Lehmann brings to light a very significant change within the institution of Sunday school—once used as a primary means for spreading the faith, Sunday school has become merely a vehicle for retaining current members. Lehmann notes that there are limits to a congregation's time, talent, and money and that when something has to give, it is usually the training of children.

Lehmann exposes the inward/outward conflict of Sunday school and the tension of ministering for congregational development versus outreach ministry—recognizing that most churches do not have the resources to sustain both.

McKnight, Scot. "Five streams of the emerging church: key elements of the most controversial and misunderstood movement in the church today." Christianity Today 51.2 (Feb. 2007): 34-39. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials. EBSCO. Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, WA. 5 October 2007. <<http://0-search.ebscohost.com/deborah.spu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&db=rh&AN=ATLA0001561560&site=ehost-live>>.

Scot McKnight considers the emergent church “the most controversial, most significant movement in church history.” He distinguishes the amorphous and ever-changing movement by five characteristics. It is Prophetic (or at least Provocative), Postmodern, Praxis-oriented, Post-evangelical, and Political. McKnight, an admitted emergent, notes that the movement faces problems that are very much similar to the Christian Church at large. The emergent church’s stances, McKnight suggest, particularly with regard to the adoption of post-modern cultural elements, is something that is hard for mainline denominations to accept. Nevertheless, McKnight suggests that in the pursuit of differing approaches to the same God, traditional denominations have little to fear from a movement that offers no signs of going away any time soon.

Pettegrew, Larry D. "Evangelicalism, paradigms, and the emerging church." Master's Seminary Journal 17.2 (Fall 2006): 159-175. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials. EBSCO. Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, WA. 20 October 2007. <<http://search.ebscohost.com/deborah.spu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&db=rh&AN=ATLA0001558183&site=ehost-live>>.

Larry D. Pettegrew looks closely at the paradigms of the Christian church and considers the many shifts in understanding of the church throughout the pre-modern, modern, and post-modern eras. Pettegrew recognizes the extensive paradigm shift that the Emerging Church is now advocating. In doing so, Pettegrew references the thoughts of Dr. Ed Stetzer who further illuminates the differences within the emerging church by categorizing members into three categories: relevants, reconstructionists, and revisionists. By this, Pettegrew acknowledges the difficulty in defining the movement because “what one emergent leader believes may not be what another emergent believes.”

The article notes Dr. Robert Webber’s concept of *Ancient-Future Faith* and the idea that there is much to be learned of the church’s future by digging into the church’s past. In sum, Pettegrew seems more interested in defending Evangelicalism as something apart from the emerging church, and, while recognizing the growing force of the movement, warns heavily in his last lines about the risk of false teaching (heresy) that is inherent within the development and implementation of a new paradigm.

"Slight decrease seen in Sunday school classes." Christian Century 122.16 (09 Aug. 2005): 15-15. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials. EBSCO. Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, WA. 20 October 2007. <<http://0-search.ebscohost.com/deborah.spu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0001471064&site=ehost-live>>.

This brief Christian Century article highlights the growing trend that churches are demonstrating of cutting youth education programs at the edges of the population age ranges. Particularly, it is noted that the programs for 5-6 year-olds and high school students are among the first to be abandoned, with the numbers of congregations offering Vacation Bible School down by a significant percentage. A lack of teachers is cited as the main cause of the elimination of programs.

Stafford, Tim. "This little light of mine : will Sunday school survive the "me generation"?"

Christianity Today 34.14 (08 Oct. 1990): 29-32. ATLA Religion Database with

ATLASerials. EBSCO. Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, WA. 15 October

2007. <[\[search.ebscohost.com/deborah.spu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&\]\(http://search.ebscohost.com/deborah.spu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&db=rh&AN=ATLA0000830895&site=ehost-live\)](http://0-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

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Tim Stafford begins his assessment of the Sunday school by painting a dim and darkening view of the institution as a whole, with national attendance flat or declining. Stafford cites a study which noted that even-though a quality Christian education program has, statistically, the strongest tie to a person's growth in faith, only 3 of 10 churchgoers are involved in such education. Among the problems that Sunday schools face are lack of vision, but more importantly, lack of necessary numbers of well-trained lay-leaders—usually requiring more than any other program within the church. Stafford continually goes back to question of how an institution that has succeeded for 200 years can be in such peril as it now seems.

Additionally, Stafford discovered that there's nothing particularly new on the Sunday school horizon—just “a bit of tinkering, mostly out of desperation.” He comes around to suggest that an explanation might begin with the unpleasant suggestion that we don't care enough about children. In an age when there is little loyalty to congregations or denominations, Stafford suggests that Sunday school has virtually no capacity to attract a quality-seeking population.

Strommen, Merton P. "The future of Sunday school : a researcher's reflections."

Religious Education 78.3 (Sum 1983): 341-353. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials. EBSCO. Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, WA. 5 October 2007. <<http://0-search.ebscohost.com/deborah.spu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0000932963&site=ehost-live>>.

Merton Strommen begins with candor and describes his personal experience with Sunday school—something he defines as the teaching ministry of the congregation—and his vision for where it is headed in three areas: its sacred cause, its social concern, and its use of lay people. As a researcher, Strommen incorporates significant amounts of data to illustrate and substantiate his position—largely that the Sunday school’s future success lies in well-formed peer relationships that come about as a result of both the theologically trained lay-person, and an outreach ministry involving both the lived and spoken Gospel.

Written as a direct address to the issue of the Sunday school’s development specifically within the 1980s, there is some amount of contextualizing needing in the application of Strommen’s ideas.

Webber, Robert E. "Narrating the world once again: a case for an ancient-future faith."

Criswell Theological Review 3.2 (Spr 2006): 15-28. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials. EBSCO. Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, WA. 18 October 2007. <<http://0-search.ebscohost.com/deborah.spu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0001556916&site=ehost-live>>.

Webber asserts that the Emerging church is a movement of renewal, reform, and restitution—reacting against an evangelicalism that has been corrupted by its association with modern and contemporary culture. He goes on to contend that the world was once defined by God’s story, but now in contemporary times we have no definitive story—rather we face many inadequate, competing stories.

The author contends that it is the role of the emergent church to reclaim the story of God as definitive of society. He ends with the question of whether the emergent church will allow itself to be formed by post-modern culture, or return to the roots of the faith in the ancient church—to not adapt the faith to a post-modern culture, but to recover God’s story and re-situate all ministry in the divine narrative.