

A Plea for Teaching Children Hymns

Scott Aniol

The scene is so familiar. Parents, children, the worship service, and all the “accessories” that come along for the ride—the books, the scraps of “scribble paper,” the Cheerios, and the crayons. Each week, parents go to great lengths to keep their children occupied during the worship service. “They can’t handle what’s going on,” is the excuse. “They’ll get bored and irritable if they don’t have something to do.” Fundamentalists bemoan the fact that a “generation gap” exists between older and younger professing believers. But could it be that the older believers have actually created the problem in the first place?

Two problems exist: Children and teenagers don’t care for solid hymns or long sermons, and modern young people’s sacred music has been severely dumbed down. Which came first, the chicken or the egg? The answer to this question may not be so easy to determine, but the fact is that it is parents who must provide the solution.

The first issue contributing to the problem is that parents (and adults in general) don’t give children enough credit. For some reason they assume that young people cannot handle deep, biblical truths or solid, objective hymns. They have bought into the secular psychology that says that “children will be children;” in other words, don’t expect too much out of young people. Adults seem to assume that children need silly, trivial music and activities to keep them occupied. It is the parents that defend their children’s immaturity and they are actually encouraging the generation gap. This leads to a second issue. It is the parents who fuel the problem by exposing their children only to that which is trivial, light, and shallow.

They assume that children can handle nothing more than Bible stories and simple verses. They allow their children’s music tastes to be shaped exclusively by trivial choruses and silly songs with slight truth. These same songs comprise the musical selections of Sunday schools and other children’s gatherings. It is no wonder that children don’t know good, historic hymnody. It is no wonder that these same songs that the children grew up with are now being included in hymnbooks for adults. The fact is, however, that young people are very capable of understanding and appreciating deep truth. They can be trained to sit under lengthy teaching. They can be taught to enjoy good

music. The problem is not lack of ability. The problem is lack of education.

There is certainly nothing inherently wrong with simple truth and enjoyable activities for children. But when children are not stretched—when they are not encouraged to expand their knowledge and tastes—how can

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they ever be expected to grow to maturity? From their child’s earliest years, it should be the parents’ goal for their children to grow out of the shallow and trivial. Yet parents actually encourage the opposite, encouraging their children to remain immature well into their young adult years (and beyond).

The solution to the problem is this: expect more out of children. Teach them deep truth and solid hymnody. Certainly bring the truth to their level, explain the content, and make sure they understand it. Certainly use terms and illustrations with which they can readily identify. But hold high expectations, not low. Expect much, not little.

The church needs to take responsibility, too. Sunday school or other children’s gatherings should not be a time to encourage and promote silly songs or immaturity. These gathering are the perfect time to immerse the children in great hymnody. They are the perfect time to teach them what good hymns mean and why they are good. The goal for children should be to train them to remain in the worship service, actively participating in what is going on. Using Sunday school to prepare them for what is coming will help them participate more actively and appreciate true worship.

Adults must stop fueling the flame of immaturity in young people. If they want to bridge the so-called “generation gap,” they need to expect more out of children, train them to understand and appreciate deep truth and solid hymns, and help them grow to be mature by weaning them from trivial expressions of praise to God.

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Putting Theology Back in the Pew

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Emergent Delusion

Dana Burkinshaw

You may not have heard of the latest “church movement” focusing primarily on “GenXers”: the “Emergent Church” (EC), also known as the “Emerging Church.” To those searching for a “new methodology,” a “new wave” or a “new thing God is doing,” this is it. Some say the EC is the next step beyond the “seeker movement.” Leaders of the EC say they have answers for today’s generation. Those answers focus on experience much more than on the Bible. Leaders of the movement insist that in our fast-changing culture, something is happening. What was once a nation with a Christian worldview is becoming a post Christian, unchurched, unreached nation. New generations are arising in our midst without any Christian influence. Thus, we must re-think everything we have done with Christianity over many centuries.

Defining the EC is a bit like nailing jello to the wall, but here it goes anyway. It relies heavily on mysticism. Some leaders will tell you that you cannot know truth. An EC service will often meet in homes and will rely on extra-biblical paraphernalia, extra-sensory images, sounds, smells of candles and incense, silence, mystical meditation, making the sign of the cross, touching icons, statues of saints, rosary beads for Protestants, liturgy, yoga-like deep breathing, contemplative prayer, and sacraments. They are looking for a full sensory immersion with the divine—an encounter with the Lord using all their senses. Worship is stressed, but some would say more than the Word.

The EC borrows liturgical practices from Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Lutheran sources. They rely heavily on the traditions and views of Church Fathers. They are captivated by worship elements from early church history. The inclination of the EC to abandon the inane “praise choruses” of the

Church Growth movement in favor of ancient forms of singing is a laudable development. The result can be music of real substance. Along with that, however, the EC tends to adopt a more sacramental view of the ordinances. They have not learned to discern between the desirable and undesirable elements of church history. I long for a church more cognizant of the centuries which preceded us, but the EC has difficulty seeing that there are bad old things as well as good old things.

The EC is also fascinated with the arts, which could be a hopeful trend. The fields of visual art, music and architecture have been

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woefully neglected by the church in recent decades. But, alas, as with ancient things, there is little attempt to distinguish between good art and bad art. The important thing, says the EC, is that we *have* art and that everyone feels free to express himself as the “spirit” moves him.

Another characteristic of the EC is its emphasis on the imagination in the life of the believer. While I enthusiastically applaud a greater awareness of the role of the imagination in living the Christian life, I am dismayed at the direction the EC has chosen to go with this heightened awareness. If you don’t like the idea of a God who can be judgmental, wrathful and vengeful, simply “re-imagine” a God who is always kind, loving and merciful. This is Postmodernism at its worst—the conviction that one can “create” his own reality.

The most visible leader of the movement is Brian McLaren whose book *A Generous Orthodoxy* has caught on all over. In it he states that, “The Christian faith should become a welcome friend to other religions of the world,

and not a threat.” He states in the book that not all people need to be Christians in order to follow Jesus. Some may be able to be “Buddhist or Hindu followers of Jesus.” The gospel, he says, is good news even for those who reject it! McLaren is not so sure that individual salvation from consequences after this life is really the message of the Bible. He is uncomfortable with a “hell-centered” approach to salvation. He believes instead in what he calls “planetary salvation”—that God is far more concerned with saving mankind from injustice, oppression, greed, war and environmental degradation in this life.

It offends sinners to hear about the need to repent and believe the gospel as preached by Christ and His apostles. It does not offend them to hear that God is angry about corporations that manufacture products in a way that is deemed not friendly to the environment and that in His judgment He is raising up a cadre of “Christians” to save the planet from the industrialists. For the postmodern young people that McLaren is targeting, that is “speaking their language.”

Others either in the EC movement or supportive of it include Robert Schuller, Richard Foster, Brennan Manning, Dan Kimball, Bill Hybels, Dallas Willard, Bruce Wilkinson, Eugene Peterson, John Ortberg, John Eldredge, Dr. Robert Webber, Tony Campolo and Rick Warren, as well as dozens of lesser-known individuals.

Today a new movement is reaching out to young people. That movement is turning to mysticism and theological pragmatism. One of the key features of the EC movement is the conviction that practice must precede theology. It offers today’s youth an undefined, mystical experience and the “hope” that somehow the kingdom of God is emerging in the processes of history to bring planetary salvation. It offers a confused view of the exclusive claims of Christianity.

This is not the language of the gospel. This is the language of “dialectic synthesis” that supposedly promises a better future. How better to resurrect the vain dream of the tower builders at Babel?

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Putting on the Kindness of Christ

Steve Owen

The Bible clearly teaches that it is essential that each one of us labors to become Christlike. Colossians 3 & 4 details for us how we can methodically put on Christ. Last month we examined the first step to Christlikeness: putting on a heart of compassion. [You can view all previous *Sola!* articles at www.ekklelesia.to]. The second step the Holy Spirit directs us to take towards Christlikeness is kindness. Let’s consider what it would mean for a believer to put on the kindness of Christ.

One of the key features of the Emergent Church movement is the conviction that practice must precede theology.

First, we need to fully comprehend what kindness is. The noun in Colossians 3 translated ‘kindness’ is used 13 times in the NT. It has reference to how God treats those who are His enemies. In Romans 2.4-5, Paul argues that God’s kindness calls the self-righteous sinner to repentance. Sinners should recognize that God has been good to them in spite of their evil ways. The Lord “is kind to ungrateful and evil men” (Lk 6.35). “He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Mt 5.45). Kindness is the virtue of God that moves Him to save those who are “disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending [their] lives in malice and envy, hateful, [and] hating one another” (Tit 3.3-5). No one should fear to come to Christ for salvation because “my yoke is [literally] ‘kind’” (Mt 11.30). It also has reference to how God graciously treats those who were once His enemies but now have been reconciled to God. Ephesians 2.7 tells us that the saints shall eternally enjoy “the riches of His grace in kindness.” No true Christian should have to have kindness explained to him because he experienced it firsthand when he was saved (1Pe 2.3). Christlike kindness then can be defined as gracious forbearance and generosity in the face of present or past provocation.

Christlike kindness is essential to the Christian. Without kindness, men are useless in the eyes of God (Ro 3.12). It is the absence of

kindness that God lists as evidence that even religious people are great sinners and condemned before Him. In Romans 3.12 the Holy Spirit laments that “there is none who does [kindness].” Without kindness, the Christian has no testimony before the lost. God uses kindness to call the self-righteous to repentance (Ro 2.4-5), and it is by practicing kindness that mistreated and persecuted Christians are able to commend themselves as servants of God to the conscience of evil men (2Co 6.6). The kind response to the hateful deeds of evil men will cause them to deeply consider your life and message (2Co 6.3-6). Without kindness, the Holy Spirit is deeply grieved within His own church (Eph 4.30-32). God Himself is brought to grief by our lack of kindness to one another. And finally, without an understanding of God’s kindness, the Christian will lack the motivation to grow in Christ. It is the proper understanding of the kindness of God upon a redeemed sinner’s life that fuels the burning desire to be like Christ (1Pe 2.3).

Kindness will be wrought in your life only by first taking God’s Word and meditating upon the kindness of Christ toward us.

We can test ourselves to see if we lack Christlike kindness. Ephesians 4.31 lists for us the characteristics of a person lacking kindness. We know we lack Christlike kindness if we hold any kind of a grudge (“bitterness”). The bitterness that refuses to forgive an offender is the exact opposite of kindness. Are you an angry person? If we haven’t heeded God’s command to put off anger (Col 3.8), if we burn with anger on the inside (“wrath”) or let it come exploding to the outside (“anger”), we know we have failed the test for Christlike kindness. Do we shout at people in anger (“clamour”)? Do we speak “abusive speech” towards those who offend us, such as cursing and name-calling? Do we wish ill towards others? Do we delight in their misfortune? If so, we are filled with malice and stand in desperate need of Christlike kindness. We will never be kind until we repent of our anger.

Positively, Christlike kindness is evidenced by the way we treat foolish and sinful men. First on the list is obedience to authority, whether it be civil authority (“rulers” Tit 3.1) or any other

kind, such as an employer or teacher (“authorities” 3.1). Rebellion to authority and kindness cannot co-exist. Furthermore, Christlike kindness requires that we sincerely and eagerly do good deeds for those in need (“ready for every good deed” 3.1). The kind Christian will not speak badly about anyone (“malign no one” 3.2) and is not belligerent or contemptuous towards anyone (3.2). He shows “every consideration for all men” (3.2). The kind Christian seeks the salvation of his persecutors by responding to their hatred with kindness (2Co 6.6). This kindness grows out of a serious consideration of what the Christian was before he was saved: “For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another” (Tit 3.3).

When it comes to our brothers and sisters in Christ, kindness is evidenced by tenderheartedness. We need to love the hard-to-love brethren fervently from the heart (1Pe 1.22). We need to be gracious towards them (Eph 4.32 “forgiving one another” is literally “be gracious to one another”), treating them better than their actions and attitudes deserve. For an example, we should consider how God, because of Christ, has dealt with us (Eph 4.32).

All this represents a tall order for the believer. In fact, Christlike kindness is impossible to produce on a human level. It comes only from the Holy Spirit (Gal 5.22). And the Holy Spirit uses just two means to produce the grace of Christlike kindness in a believer’s life: the Word of God and prayer. If we seek to produce Christlike kindness by any other means, we must fail. Christlike kindness cannot be bought in a store, worked up by any man-made program, or produced by a pharmacist’s pill. Kindness will be wrought in your life only by first taking God’s Word and meditating upon the kindness of Christ towards us and by considering the example of Christ and His Apostles (2Co 6:3-6). And then we must fervently beg God to give us grace to live kindly. This is the only means by which we can put on the kindness of Christ. May God through His Holy Spirit help us all to do it.

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