

Book Reviews

The Radical Reformation: Reaching Out Without Selling Out, by Mark Driscoll, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2004.

Reviewed by Dr. John E. Bauer

Mark Driscoll is the founding pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle, Washington. In the middle of one of the most secular cities in the United States, he is preaching the gospel to increasing numbers of individuals who come from non-churched, unchurched, or dechurched backgrounds. He is also a regular columnist in the Seattle Times.

This book provides an explication of his philosophy of ministry. In it he challenges the ways in which traditional Christian churches have sought to share the Good News of Jesus with their communities. It is his argument that the only successful (and biblical) way for the church to reach out, is to remain faithful to both the scriptural texts and the cultural contexts of America. His Trinitarian view of the church requires the presence of all three in ministry: Gospel, culture, and church.

In a helpful little exercise, Pastor Driscoll describes the results if any of these three elements is missing. If the gospel is shared with the culture in the absence of the church, paraministry and parachurch organizations are usually involved. While filling specific needs, they are generally not well equipped to provide comprehensive and life long spiritual nurture. If the gospel is shared through the church without cultural relevance or connectedness, the result is fundamentalism in which preservation of the rites, traditions, and facilities are more important than gospel outreach. This is the situation in most conservative or evangelical Christian churches in America. The third situation arises when the church adapts to the culture at the expense of faithfulness to the Scriptures. The end result of this phenomenon is liberalism. Most of mainline Protestantism fits this description. In their zeal to be politically and

socially relevant, mainline churches have bankrupted the gospel of its central teachings of salvation by grace through faith alone, and have replaced it with a message of tolerance for sin, social activism, and inclusiveness.

What is needed, says Driscoll, is a “radical reformation,” which entails “gathering the best aspects of each of these types of Christianity: living in the tension of being Christians and churches who are culturally liberal yet theologically conservative and who are driven by the gospel of grace to love their Lord, brothers, and neighbors” (p.22).

One of the more radical aspects of reformation outreach is described in contrast to what might be called “routine presentation evangelism.” In this traditional model, practiced by most churches that at least pay lip service to outreach, it is necessary for people to first believe in Jesus and then belong to the church. The individual is presented with Law and Gospel information, perhaps through a Bible information class, or in a door-to-door canvass. When individuals have received enough education to express their full doctrinal agreement, then they are formally welcomed into the friendship and membership of the church.

Driscoll advocates what he calls “reformation participation evangelism” which first establishes a caring friendship relationship between a Christian and a non-Christian. Non-Christians observe authentic faith and ministry lived openly and are invited to participate in it. The gospel is naturally present in word and deed within the friendship. Conversion to Jesus follows his or her conversion to Christian friendships and the church. Finally, the church celebrates the conversion of their friend.

To say the least, this book will challenge the reader’s traditional views of the church, friendship evangelism, and outreach. What is refreshing is that this radical reformation is advocated in the context of faithfulness to the Scriptures. This book has much to say to all pastors who are determined to understand and reach their communities with the gospel.