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The Kingdom of Emergent Theology

by Gary E. Gilley

It has been claimed that Sigmund Freud enjoyed telling his followers a story of a pastor who visited an atheist insurance agent who was on his deathbed. The family had asked the pastor to share the Gospel with their dying loved one as they waited in another room. As the conversation continued longer than expected there was hope that the pastor was being successful in his mission. When the pastor finally emerged from the bedroom it was discovered that the agent had not converted to Christ, but he had been able to sell the pastor an insurance policy.

While Freud used the illustration to warn his fellow psychoanalysts to stay true to their beliefs, Richard Mouw, president of Fuller Seminary, from whom this account has been obtained, has another application to offer. Although an unlikely source (in this writer's opinion) to offer the following warning, Mouw writes:

"In rejecting the very real defects of fundamentalism during the past few decades, evangelicals have begun to take very seriously their responsibilities to the larger culture — and with some obvious signs of success. The questions we must face honestly



are these: Have we sold a new policy to the culture — or has the culture sold us a policy?"¹

This is a thought-worthy question in light of the emergent church movement's recent inroads into evangelicalism, and in some cases, even fundamentalism. The emergent church is a movement deeply concerned with having an impact on culture. But evidence is mounting to the effect that culture is having more of an impact on the emergent movement than the other way around. As a matter of fact, emergent seems to be chasing, even imitating culture, rather than changing it. The reason this is true has to do with its understanding of the kingdom of God.

Mark Driscoll defines the emerging church as "a growing, loosely connected movement of primarily young pastors who are glad to see the end of modernity and are seeking to function as missionaries who

(continues on page 14)

Inside this Issue:

WHEN THE CHURCH IMITATES SCIENCE FICTION	PAGE 2
ORU FINANCIAL WOES ALLEVIATED	PAGE 3
SHOPPING WITH TONY CAMPOLO	PAGE 4