



General Topics :: Frank Viola - Shaking Up Church

Frank Viola - Shaking Up Church - posted by MisterCheez (), on: 2007/12/17 0:50

Hello,
I just stumbled across an author by the name of Frank Viola. His thoughts on the organization of the modern church compared to the early church have struck a chord with me. However, before plunging into his writing, I wanted to see if anyone knows anything about him and what he promotes. Primarily, is his historical research accurate? Is his interpretation of Greek/Hebrew accurate?

I got a little "check" in my spirit when picking up one of his books and thought it might be wise to bounce this off the community of SI.

Thank you,
Brian

Re: Frank Viola - Shaking Up Church, on: 2007/12/17 3:43

Hi Brian. don't know if this will help you, but he is part of the Emergent Church movement and gives (http://search.freefind.com/find.html?id44070390&_charset=utf-8&bcd%C3%B7&scs1&pageidr&queryBrian+McLaren+&modeFind+pages+matching+ALL+words) Brian McLaren a thumbs up on his site <http://www.ptmin.org/articles/emergentchurch.php>.

His itinerary -

February 2nd and 3rd, 2008
The Southeastern Regional Emergent Conference
"A Sustainable Faith: A Simpler Way to Do Faith, Spirituality, and Life"
St. Petersburg, Florida
Speakers:
(http://search.freefind.com/find.html?qBrian+McLaren+&id44070390&pageidr&_charset=utf-8&bcd%C3%B7&scs1&query+Shane+Claiborne&FindSearch&modeALL&searchall) Shane Claiborne, Frank Viola, and Tim Keel

Re:, on: 2007/12/17 11:02

I really don't know much about the Emergent Church, I think that's my next personal study.

But, I have found Frank Viola's books to be very informative and well worth a read. Especially "Pagan Christianity". If you read it get ready to have your traditions shaken up real good.

Krispy

Re: Frank Viola - Shaking Up Church - posted by LoveHim, on: 2007/12/17 12:18

dear brian,

i have bought a collection of books from frank viola sometime early last year. the books themselves were excellent and very informative comparing the early church to how church is ran today.. it helped me to re-evaluate how and why we do church the way we do.

that being said, it was disappointing to see him linked with brian larsen (sp?) from the emergent church movement.

like krispy said "pagan christianity" is good. "who is your covering" and rethinking the wineskin" are also very good books to me.

i hope that kinda helps.

phil

Re: Viola - posted by GodsPeace (), on: 2007/12/17 15:56

Hi,

I wonder if anyone will take the time to read the link to Viola's site (mentioned earlier). it's a pretty good read, and not too bad of an introduction to Viola, unless, of course, the other man mentioned is such a turn off to you that you will close yourself off. I'll repeat the link here:

(<http://www.ptmin.org/articles/emergingchurch.php>) Answers on the Emerging Church

I excerpted this from the above, it's a pretty nice, if inadequately short, intro to Viola's thoughts.

Quote:
-----Myself and others have taken this concept a step further by suggesting that the New Testament documents were written to Christian communities that possessed a certain spiritual environment. For them, "church" was not filing into a building and sitting like a pillar of salt during a worship service officiated by a clergyman (pastor or priest). The modern "audience church" historically evolved (or devolved) from cultural elements that, in my view, replaced the organic expression of church life that the early Christians knew.

That said, I believe that understanding the grand narrative is only a piece of the puzzle toward rightly grasping Scripture (as well as the incredible Lord that Scripture presents). Another important piece is to live in the same spiritual context in which the early Christians lived. This includes face-to-face community as well as Christ-centered, open participatory gatherings.

For instance, try applying Paul's teachings in 1 Corinthians 14 to a typical church service. It can't be done. What congregant, for instance, sitting frozen in a pew is going to interrupt the pastor or priest during his sermon? And what pastor or priest will yield the floor to the person who interrupts? Hence, 1 Corinthians 14:30 has no relevance at all in such a setting.

However, if a group of Christians are living in a face-to-face community that practices, as the early Christians did, open-participatory church meetings, then that passages makes perfect sense and all of the instruction applies. I don't speak as a theorist as I've been in hundreds of meetings like this. Hence, I (and many others) don't understand 1 Corinthians 14 as a rusty, historical text only applying to Christians two thousand years ago. Instead, the text lives and breathes and speaks to us today, for we are living in the very same spiritual context in which its original recipients lived. I can multiply example after example of this same principle. It can be extrapolated to the rest of the New Testament. For the vast bulk of the New Testament was written to shared-life Christian communities, not to individual believers.

In that regard, I believe there is a great need to freshly examine how we have been "doing church" since the Reformation. I also believe that a new look at the New Testament narrative along with the historical origins of our church practices can teach us a great deal about ecclesiology . . . if we are willing to be instructed by it. The fact is, what we are presently doing is not getting the job done nor is it meeting the needs of scores of contemporary Christians. (I receive a steady stream of letters from people who tell me that they had to leave the traditional church in order to survive spiritually!) Your mileage may vary; but we can't ignore the masses where this holds true.

Viola mostly keeps things from the other man he mentioned, Brian McLaren, separate from his own area of expertise. Apparently, Viola is not 100% familiar with, but generally agrees with, specifying exactly what it is that he's read. He seems to think that the other man has a strength in apologetics.

Though not familiar with the McLaren, I have read most of Viola's books. I don't just suck in everything he has to say, and I question much. Some things are hard to question, without access to a theological library. However, I agree with most, and I wish that other's would really approach what he says with a heart open to the Lord.

Regarding both Emerging Church and Home, or House Church, Viola is quick to point out that neither has a monolithic, theology or statement of faith, and the range is all over the theological map.

Quote:
-----My main focus deals primarily with ecclesiology and its connection with Christology. Frank Viola

Viola's a specialist in the field of ecclesiology, and really deserves equal time. Especially by those who are in a position to act on what he says in areas the Lord brings alive in your hearts. Viola's all about us being an expression of the body of Christ, but Christ is the head of his body, and through the 'churches' historic syncretism, we have opted to decapitate that body, and install a head of our own choosing.

Now, I didn't get this from Viola, who I've only read during the last couple years, but I was led to this after many years of questioning literally everything that we do in "church". Not necessarily to be confused with what we do in Jesus.

Viola, from all I've read, isn't brainlessly going about following any wind of doctrine. He's all about subjecting things to the Word. He wisely considers History as helpful in finding out from whence all our (multitudinous) pagan practices came from, but I think his heart is to figure out how this aids our understanding of Scripture, with a heart toward the unification and building up of the body, and the glory of Jesus Christ, and not the other way around.

Quote:
-----For this reason, I have been labeled by some as a "radical ecclesialogist" in the emergent church conversation opposed to a "traditional ecclesialogist."

Quote:
-----To use a metaphor that comes from my school teaching background, some in the emerging church conversation view Kingdom work and theology as a required class, while they view ecclesiology and church form as an elective class. To wit, church form and structure doesn't really matter. There's no such thing as a perfect church so that translates into the belief that church form/structure/leadership/meetings, etc. is optional and up for grabs. So the thinking goes.

I believe this view is profoundly flawed. How we "do church" is vitally connected to our Christian life and spiritual progress as well as the displaying of Jesus Christ in the earth.

I was led to this over 30 years ago when I realized that if we took all the money we misappropriate for "Church" (in itself a tragic mistranslation of a word without even a hint of the concept of a 'building' in its denotation), Instead, out of obedience, if we took our money and spent it on the poor, widows, fatherless and strangers, we would today be walking on a level with the Lord that we only dream about. (my opinion). Coming to this realization, after more than 5 years studying for the ministry, I gave up all ideas of ever asking money for what I might be used of Him to do, and decided never have anything to do with creating a money-pit (sometimes called a church & staff).

What started me thinking was that, at that time the financial figures that I obtained was that Evangelical US church members spent about 90% of their charitable giving on supporting a Professional Christian (or more than one), an authorized, acceptable, comfortable meeting place, a specially anointed set of vehicles for the Professional Christian's family's daily ventures, a set apart fund for retirement and education of the Professional Christian and their offspring, (lest they have to live by faith) and numerous other support personnel to keep the Professional Christian from becoming overly encumbered by the needs of the nonprofessionals that clamored for professional attention. (But I don't have any strong views on the subject. Yeah, right!).

I'm in a 'church' now that is re-thinking everything. I'm new to them, and a lot of people don't like it, even though I've never actually said the above statements to them. Mostly it's the main pastor who is the proponent of the changes. If he was n't, I would be sooo forcefully ejected from the 'church'! So, thank God for him!

This is an exceedingly unpopular message. I think the average person who decides this is the way to follow Jesus will not have the wonderful backing I'm getting (from a few key members) Generally the support of the Professionals, their staff, or the nonprofessionals who back them, will be limited to supporting you 'out of the building'.

I'm gaining a lot of opposition from WOF Wolves. Paradoxically, they are financially strapped Filipinos, and apparently think that if Jesus was physically prominent today He'd have a huge 'church/stadium', would have a couple mansions, a Lear jet, and a Mercedes for each day of the week. So, I thought rather than fight them - I have to love them, if the Lord leads maybe I'll just start an additional morning service on a beach, and meet up with the main body during the normal (afternoon) service.

Sorry, like the other responder, I need to bone up on what variations the emergent church includes. I'm busy dealing with trying to help a body that is somewhat receptive to return to these primitive Christian roots, and simultaneously deal with a faction in it that think Benny Hinn is the greatest! So, first things first. Gotta' throw out the baby with the bath water. Sorry, wrong baby! Too bad... hate to waste the water.

Jeffrey

Re:, on: 2007/12/17 16:59

What I saw when I first heard about Mr. Viola was, taking the Home-Church movement into the Emergent-Convergent movement, by him or through him, such as through these conferences posted above. Many ministries start out good - then take all their followers with them into the "next step". That's been a trend now for a while.

We were taught, why do we have to spit out bones, when we can have fillet?

There are so many good Authors, if we need some, besides the Bible itself and it's so risky now-a-days, to have to pick through who's who in this last-day's zoo.

I guess the Classics spoiled us and we know 'where' this Emergent-Convergent movement is leading to.

It is worth researching, because it's spreading into the least likely places, by ways we didn't see coming before, but headed in a direction that's Biblical in a negative sense. :-o

Re:, on: 2007/12/17 17:25

Quote:

LoveHim wrote:

dear brian,

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i hope that kinda helps.

phil

I don't know anything about the people mentioned so far, but the Emergent Church is a no-no.

The title "Who is your Covering?" struck me because that is a common hobby horse of the Restoration Movement.

That's why they had problems with me when I went to a church of this type until recently. They think everyone has to be "covered" by someone considered spiritually senior. I kept saying in actions and sometimes in words, "*the Lord* is my Covering", but they never understood, even though He wouldn't let me become an official member, while going regularly to meetings for about 3 years.

I know this wasn't the topic of this thread but would be interested in what that book says.

Maybe you can pm me, not to get the thread off track?

Thanks

Jeannette

Re: - posted by Compton (), on: 2007/12/17 17:51

Hmmm...I would have never though Viola would've found comisseration in McClaren. I always thought Viola's stringent adherence to first century practices as portrayed in scripture made him too fundamentalist for the fundamentalists! Perhaps Viola and McClaren strike a common chord because they both talk about the 'ancient church.' while making careers criticizing traditional Churches. (aka 'the status quo') Yet, unlike the ancient Christians, McClaren has made agnosticism acceptable and fashionable with young immature Christians, which could make one wonder about Viola's moorings...I suppose this is one of the risks these two gents take in making a career of criticism...pretty soon there is no one left that they respect enough to correct them.

Ironically, Viola defends McClaren as being misunderstood and even 'maliciously' critiqued himself. If I have 'misunderstood' McClaren, I make no apologies for he is an able communicator and I am an able reader...I can only respond to what he says, not what he means or what he has encoded.

Here is are two parts of an interview with McClaren that make no bones about his patronizing disagreement with what I would call essentials of biblical faith and sound doctrine. (Indeed, I think he would scoff, at the absolutism of such a thing as sound doctrine...) Hopefully merely letting McClaren speak for himself won't be miscontrued as 'malicious' criticism. (By the way...the second half is more to the point.)

(<http://bleedingpurplepodcast.blogspot.com/2006/01/brian-mclaren-interview-part-i.html>) McClaren Interview I

(<http://bleedingpurplepodcast.blogspot.com/2006/01/interview-with-brian-mclaren-part-ii.html>) McClaren Interview II

MC

Re: - posted by Compton (), on: 2007/12/17 17:53

Quote:
-----why do we have to spit out bones, when we can have fillet?
There are so many good Authors, if we need some, besides the Bible itself and it's so risky now-a-days, to have to pick through who's who in this last-day's zoo.

Well said.

Re: - posted by Mattie, on: 2007/12/17 19:45

While much of Viola's discussions on early church practice and history is very informative, I think there is a danger in straying from the Person of Christ and focusing so much on "practice". While the Scriptures do show us a glimpse of what some of the early church gatherings were like, it gives us no law on how we are to hold services. However God chooses to lead is entirely up to Him. As long as He manifests Himself and truth is exalted then I think that is what matters. Frank Viola and Gene Edwards must beware of calling all "institutional" (atleast institutional in their eyes) churches being so mething outside of God's plan. God is jealous for His church and we must be careful how we talk about her.

Re: - posted by sojourner7 (), on: 2007/12/17 20:43

Something Francis Schaeffer said comes to mind:

The call of the gospel is still compelling.
His grace is irresistable, His love is
unfailing, His promises are timeless and
true. If the Church has lost her relevance
for today; it is because she has forgotten
her place--she serves as the body of Christ!!

Re: - posted by roadsign (), on: 2007/12/17 21:45

Quote:

----- there is a danger in straying from the Person of Christ and focusing so much on "practice"

I suspect that there is much focus on the "practice" because the "practice" is viewed as the culprit. On the contrary, if the problems were viewed as theological/ spiritual, then theological/spiritual solutions would be sought.

I am convinced that as long as the fallen nature of humanity is not recognized for what it is, then God's solution will have little value, and people will keep stumbling over the scriptures that explain the redemptive work of Christ, and its implications in the Church.

(<http://www.ptmin.org/articles/>) Articles by Frank Viola

Diane

Re: - posted by MisterCheez (), on: 2007/12/18 12:07

Thank you for all of the input.

Emergent church stuff aside, the root of his message seems correct:

The form of many current church organizations hinders true fellowship, community and giving.

By reminding us that Christ is the head and we are the body, Frank does us a favor. I find Art Katz ideas on community and Frank's concerns about institutional church striking a chord with me.

"Church" is a body and as such, should be more fluid, organic and Christ-led. Churches should be meeting not only to discuss scriptural truths but, "what is the head telling us this day/week?"

For me, knowing I can still be a valid believer and not buy into the Sunday/midweek/institution is your covering/ religion is fresh air to a suffocating man.

Not only do I think the church should be more fluid, under persecution it has to be.

Brian

Re: - posted by LoveHim, on: 2007/12/18 12:45

Quote:

-----The form of many current church organizations hinders true fellowship, community and giving.

i agree with you in this. but one thing we have to keep in mind is not every church is like the church we go attend. i find that remembering this will keep me from assuming every church is like this or that.

Quote:
-----By reminding us that Christ is the head and we are the body, Frank does us a favor. I find Art Katz ideas on community and Frank's concerns about institutional church striking a chord with me.

this does with me as well. when i started to read and study this stuff about 1 1/2 - 2 years ago, it was very refreshing and interesting.

i was raised in the same church and the same denomination from when i was 2, so it was nice to hear about the early church and the practice of them.

Quote:
-----For me, knowing I can still be a valid believer and not buy into the Sunday/midweek/institution is your covering/ religion is fresh air to a suffocating man.

believe me brother, you sound so much like myself last year. i would just caution you to continue to keep this in prayer a

and give it to the Lord. many times we may be too quick to react a certain way because we have seen the other extreme and we go completely to the other extreme. what i have found is that while i still agree with much of early church practice of things, i have allowed the Lord to give me patience and love for many of my friends who think that one has to go to an institutional church for church.

i guess i'm just trying to say continue to give this time (pray about it, study about it), but never allow yourself to become bitter or angry with people who do not agree with you on this issue. that will come with giving this issue to the Lord and continuing to focus on Him.

there is more to say, but i think i've probably said enough. i hope that this post may be a blessing to you. if you would like to talk about it more, please feel free to pm me or whatever.

phil

Re:, on: 2007/12/18 18:45

Quote:

MisterCheez wrote:

Thank you for all of the input.

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"Church" is a body and as such, should be more fluid, organic and Christ-led. Churches should be meeting not only to discuss scriptural truths but, "what is the head telling us this day/week?"

For me, knowing I can still be a valid believer and not buy into the Sunday/midweek/institution is your covering/ religion is fresh air to a suffocating man.

Not only do I think the church should be more fluid, under persecution it has to be.

Brian

That is so true, Brian

However, I would ask everyone to take a look at the Emerging Church thread that He_Reigns has just started. The information there brings a balance.

As I posted in response:

Quote:

-----The trouble is that there is nothing wrong with the desire to be more flexible and re-evaluate how one "does church" (I hate that expression but can't think of a better one offhand). So many of us are no doubt tired of dead, traditional ways of "worship", where the tradition has gradually taken over the life and fossilised the church. (Like a lobster, it has to change its shell now and again or it will cease to grow and will eventually die.)

The real problem seems to be that the re-evaluation doesn't stop at outward, non-essential church customs, such as form of service, music, when or if a collection is taken, or the kind of bread and wine used at communion.

It's when the re-evaluation turns to throwing out or redefining our essential *beliefs* we have a problem.

And it's a very very big problem.

In HIm

Jeannette

Re:, on: 2007/12/18 18:47

Quote:

Mattie wrote:

While much of Viola's discussions on early church practice and history is very informative, I think there is a danger in straying from the Person of Christ and focusing so much on "practice". While the Scriptures do show us a glimpse of what some of the early church gatherings were like, it gives us no law on how we are to hold services. However God chooses to lead is entirely up to Him. As long as He manifests Himself and truth is exalted then I think that is what matters. Frank Viola and Gene Edwards must beware of calling all "institutional" (atleast institutional in their eyes) churches being something outside of God's plan. God is jealous for His church and we must be careful how we talk about her.

Amen, good point

Re: - posted by areed, on: 2008/2/9 21:28

Brian,

Have not met Frank personally but have been in the house church arena since 96 and have talked with him on the phone. I must say I am surprised at his linking up with the emergent stream. But then I was surprised to see him link up with Gene Edwards. That aside his writings are very good. His emphasis is not on practise. Although he has written books that indicate some practises keep us from experiencing the body life exhibited in the n.t.

I would say his emphasis is more on the purpose of God having been influenced by Stephen Kaung and Austin T. Sparks and the like.

regards,

Ken M.