

# **“The Emerging Church”**

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## Abstract:

*Modern ecclesiology has been evolving over the last few decades as Christian institutions and belief systems have adapted in response to postmodern society. This trend is known as the emerging church movement. A movement that spans across denominational lines, the emerging church has influenced Church culture by attempting to change the way individuals view religion. This study examines the trends within Christianity over the last several years and their impacts on ecclesiology and society. Findings include a more progressive theology, an increased emphasis on missiology, changes in structure of religious services, and a deeper connectedness with the global community.*

For many, Christianity seems to be a choice between an archaic liturgical calendar and pipe organ or a radically conservative and commercialized subculture. Does the Christian faith really boil down to either traditional mainline Protestantism or Evangelicalism? In search for something in between, many find a home in the emerging church. The emerging church has been labeled the “third way” between traditional Protestantism and evangelicalism.<sup>1</sup> It is also known as the third way of integrating faith and culture. Traditionally, people minister to the culture. Evangelically, people try to transform the culture. Emergers try the third way by ministering within the culture as the culture to transform the culture. This paper examines how the emerging church movement and how it is changing the way people think about and approach both church and culture.

## I. [Not] Defining the Emerging Church

It’s a movement... It’s a conversation... It’s emerging! It may not be the super savior that many in the movement believe it to be, but the “emerging church” has definitely gained some attention in recent years. The word of its existence has spread in academia, in the media, and all over the internet- but somehow the emerging church still remains a mystery. What is this “emerging church”? Who is involved with this movement? How are “emergers” changing the face of modern day Christianity? And, is this “emerging church phenomenon<sup>2</sup>” even worth discussing?

To discuss the emerging church, in theory, one should first define the emerging church. Unfortunately, “defining the emerging church is like nailing Jell-O to wall.”<sup>3</sup> The emerging church is a label that has been widely used to describe current changes and reformations in Christianity in response to a post modern culture. The emerging church is not a denomination, a set of doctrinal beliefs, an organization, or a

<sup>1</sup> Belcher, Jim. *Deep Church: A Third Way Beyond Emerging and Traditional*. Downers Grove, IL: Ivp Books, 2009. Print.

<sup>2</sup> Shane Claiborne mockingly calls the emerging church a phenomenon in: Claiborne, Shane. "The Emerging Church Brand: The Good, The Bad, and The Messy." Weblog post. *Sojourner: Christian Justice and Peace*. 13 Apr. 2010. Web. 1 May 2010. <<http://blog.sojo.net/2010/04/13/the-emerging-church-brand-the-good-the-bad-and-the-messy/>>.

<sup>3</sup> Kevin DeYoung describes his difficulty defining the emerging church in: DeYoung, Kevin, and Ted Kluck. *Why We're Not Emergent: by Two Guys Who Should Be*. Chicago: Moody, 2008. Print. 17.

community aligned with a common purpose or mission. It is “so diverse and fragmented that some observers and insiders do not like to think of it as a movement at all. For insiders, it is more of a conversation.”<sup>4</sup> One thing is for sure, the emerging church is something that is creating discussion about the future of Christianity in the United States, United Kingdom, and around the world.

Dan Kimball, author of *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations*, calls the emerging church a mindset that measures its success missionally<sup>5</sup>. He cautions that it is not a model, but an attitude that desires to produce disciples that will transform church and culture. The emerging church is a mindset that questions the status quo in exchange for a religion, or more accurately a network of relationships, that appeal to the younger post-modern generation. To begin to explore the emerging church, one must first understand the cultural shifts that the emerging church is responding to and attempting to transform.

## II. An Open Door Through Cultural Shifts

The emerging church is “a label that has been used to refer to a particular subset of Christians who are rethinking Christianity against the backdrop of Postmodern”.<sup>6</sup> Postmodern refers to the society shift away from modernism. A movement that lasted roughly from 1700 to 1990, modernism focused on “trust in reason to discover truth”<sup>7</sup> and relied heavily on reasoning, science and logic. The rationality of modernism meant that society was not particularly “friendly toward Christians beliefs” regarding the supernatural and miraculous.<sup>8</sup> Even so, modernity found order through tradition and structure, relying on the differentiation

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<sup>4</sup> Kimball, Dan. *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations [EMERGING CHURCH]*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company, 2003. Print. 14.

<sup>5</sup> Bolger, Ryan K., and Eddie Gibbs. *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005. Print. 29.

<sup>6</sup> Hammett, John S. "An Ecclesiological Assessment of the Emerging Church Movement." Web. 30 Apr. 2010. <<http://ateam.blogware.com/AnEcclesiologicalAssessment.Hammett.pdf>>.

<sup>7</sup> Kimball, *Emerging Church*, 44.

<sup>8</sup> Pettegrew, Larry D. "Evangelicalism, Paradigms, and The Emerging Church." *The Master's Seminary Journal* 17.2 (2006): 159-75. [Http://www.tms.edu/tmsj/tmsj17h.pdf](http://www.tms.edu/tmsj/tmsj17h.pdf). Web. 1 May 2010. 164.

between right and wrong to help govern societal standards.<sup>9</sup> The ethical norms in society were developed from Judeo-Christian morality<sup>10</sup> Overall religion was viewed as a favorable aspect of society, as the world was still living within the mentality of Christendom. That is that the world was still culturally Christian, especially in the United States.

The twenty-first century is post-Christian and post-modern. Religion has been exchanged for spirituality, relativism and systematic thinking. In this “global, pluralistic atmosphere”, everything is a matter of personal preference.<sup>11</sup> Postmodernism is characterized by an appreciation for “decentralized and shared authority, hesitance to impose any metanarrative, playful or even suspicious approaches to language, and respect for individual experience over group conformity”<sup>12</sup>. One theologian describes postmodernism as an age championing atheism, relativism, pluralism, conventionalism, anti-foundationalism, deconstructionism, and subjectivism.<sup>13</sup> Another describes postmodernism as a conglomeration of diverse groups that have an overall assumption of dualism and the goodness of heart of humanity.<sup>14</sup> These characteristics paint a picture of an unknowable God that cannot be understood even if he does exist, and a humanity that is capable of living a good meaningful life without any sort of divine guidance or intervention.

Religion is no longer an integral part of life, but rather an optional addition. Spirituality exists outside of the scope of institutions and systematized theology. The result is a decline in church attendance; only forty

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<sup>9</sup> Pope, Robert. "Emerging Church: Congregation or Aberration?" *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 7.2 (2008): 25-45. Web. 1 May 2010. <[www.dwlib.co.uk/congregational/lectures.html](http://www.dwlib.co.uk/congregational/lectures.html)>. 30.

<sup>10</sup> Kimball, *Emerging Church*, 59.

<sup>11</sup> Kimball, *Emerging Church*, 59.

<sup>12</sup> Gay, Doug, and Ron Rienstra. "Veering off TheVia Media: Emerging Church, Alternative Worship, and New Media Technologies in the United States and United Kingdom." *Liturgy* 23.3 (2008): 39-47. The Liturgical Conference. Web. 1 May 2010.

<sup>13</sup> Geisler, Norman. "The Emergent Church: Emergence or Emergency?" *Worldview Weekend*. Worldview Times, 22 Sept. 2008. Web. 01 May 2010. <<http://www.worldviewweekend.com/worldview-times/article.php?articleid=3991>>.

<sup>14</sup> Kowalski, David. "Postmodernism and the Emerging Church Movement | Apologetics Index." *Apologetics Index: Christian Apologetics and Cult Information*. July 2006. Web. 01 May 2010. <<http://www.apologeticsindex.org/290-emerging-church>>.

percent of the population of the United States attends services on a regular basis.<sup>15</sup> Many prefer loosely defined individualistic spirituality to institutionalized religion, and Christians who do attend church are less likely to be committed members of their congregation.<sup>16</sup> Even individuals who attend church are less likely to ascribe to a particular denomination or doctrine. “God is whatever works for you” and more than half of the nation’s youth believe that “all religious faiths teach equally valid truths”.<sup>17</sup> There is no longer a need to differentiate between belief systems because any religious or moral perspective is considered relative to individual circumstance and preference. All worldviews are equally valid as “relativism has become the norm... people no longer feel constrained by any particular meta-narrative and consequently ‘pick and mix’ from variety of sources the things that they believe they might find to be helpful.”<sup>18</sup>

For youth in post-modern culture, there is “an exposure to pluralism in a way that no generation has had it before...either you go the fundamentalist route ... or you develop a consciousness that the world is a complex place, so it makes sense to look around at what else is in the marketplace.”<sup>19</sup> People are no longer following the faith of their parents and have an increasing diversity of practices and beliefs to incorporate into their own personal sense of spirituality.<sup>20</sup> In this free market of spirituality, the Christian church struggles to attract and maintain membership and active participation amongst youth and young adults.

#### **a. Broken Christianity**

People seem to like Jesus as a teacher and a philosopher, but Christianity is often viewed in a negative light and has been for awhile. As Ghandi once said: “I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ”. The image of the church in postmodern, post-Christendom

<sup>15</sup> Bolger, and Gibbs. *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*, 2005. 19.

<sup>16</sup> Hammett, John S. "An Ecclesiological Assessment of the Emerging Church Movement."2010.

<sup>17</sup> The quote is from Pastor Rob Rienow at Wheaton Bible College near Chicago and the statistic is from a 1999 poll. Both are cited in this article: Leland, John. "Searching for A Holy Spirit- Young People Are Openly Passionate About Religion - But They Insist On Defining It In Their Own Ways." *Newsweek* 8 Mar. 2000: n. pag. *Newsweek*. Web. 22 Apr. 2010.

<sup>18</sup> Pope, “Emerging Church: Congregation or Aberration?”, 2008. 31.

<sup>19</sup> According to Wade Roof, author of *Spiritual Marketplace*: Leland, “Searching for A Holy Spirit”, 2010.

<sup>20</sup> Bolger and Gibbs. *Emerging Church*, 26.

culture is a hypocritical institution and an isolated, judgmental subculture. Commercialized Christianity and megachurches are no longer appealing, and people desire something more authentic than just a Christian label. A non-Christian student attended a Christian music festival, and made the following observations about the hypocrisy of commercialized Christianity:

"I have a difficult time locating any similarities between what Jesus says and does, and what the people -in particular the organizers- [at this festival] said and did.... Jesus is a beacon of righteousness who leads the way through the dark world to eternal peace, love, and eternal salvation; the Jesus of [the festival] is a blue-light special, pointing you to the quick fix of righteous bargain in the shopping mall of endless consumption. These two versions of Christ, and the premises they entail, are antithetical. They negate one another, leading me to a very unsettling, unpleasant conclusion [about the festival]: It was, in the end, a very un-Christian affair."<sup>21</sup>

The problem is that society perceives Christianity as an institution that has neglected its values. In a world of Christian subculture with its own music, apparel, and jargon, it is easy to see how Christianity is perceived to be condescending and apart from culture.

Today's society has two main forms of church the traditional and the contemporary American model. The traditional church is institutional, and generally marked by the following traits: modern cultural context, privileged stature in larger culture, hierarchal authority where pastors are teachers who lead by their spiritual authority, church services include hymnals and organs, and missions involve sending people overseas through denominational mission agencies.<sup>22</sup> The contemporary model is increasing in popularity and is generally comprised of the following traits: postmodern cultural context, mindset of a cultural war to regain position of stature in culture, leadership involves pastors taking on the roles of CEOs running business in the spiritual market, church is viewed as a collection of goods for spiritual consumers, worship

<sup>21</sup> Quoting Rick Levin's article, "Christapalooza: 20,000 Christians Convene at the Gorge: God Doesn't Show", *The Stranger* (Seattle). 1999. From: Kimball, *Emerging Church*, 83.

<sup>22</sup> Driscoll, Mark. "A PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE EMERGENT CHURCH Mark Driscoll." *Criswell Theological Review* 3.2 (2006): 87-93. Web. 2 May 2010.  
<<http://criswell.files.wordpress.com/2006/03/3,2%20APastoralPerspectiveontheEmergentChurch%5BDriscoll%5D.PD>>. 87.

services involve acoustic guitars and strategies to reach “seekers”, and missions are done through a church department that organizes and funds trips overseas.<sup>23</sup>

The church has had difficulty adapting these models to fit the needs and desires of a postmodern generation. In fact, the traditional churches modern roots actually may prevent it from effectively ministering to postmoderns. Traditional church pastors, particularly in the evangelical tradition, have a tendency to assume that the younger generation should have the same values as their older counterparts. Most leaders of the traditional churches have a modern mindset and a difficulty understanding the mentality of postmodernism.<sup>24</sup> As a result, they blame the youth for the changing culture, holding them at fault for the rise of postmodern thought. The problem is that many churches try to minister to postmoderns, rather than minister with postmoderns. Ministering to postmoderns means viewing the postmodern generation as “trapped in a moral relativism and epistemological bankruptcy out of which they must be rescued” rather than embracing the fact that this is the “present condition into which we are called to proclaim and live out the Gospel”.<sup>25</sup>

#### **b. Responding to the Zeitgeist**

Insiders in the emerging church “see in the fragmentations of postmodern culture an invitation to reframe the pieces so that they make sense again.”<sup>26</sup> The emerging church movement stems from a desire to attract the younger generations, Generation X and Millennials, who have grown up outside of the church. This common concern for the postmodern generation launched a loosely connected movement that is changing the way people “think about church”.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 88.

<sup>24</sup> Kimball, *Emerging Church*, 2003. 63-64.

<sup>25</sup> Doug Pagitt purposed three categories of ministry: ministering “to postmoderns”, “with postmoderns”, and as “postmoderns”. These three categories will be discussed later in this paper. Scot McKnight used Pagitt’s categories in his article. The direct quotes are from this article: McKnight, Scot. ““What Is the Emerging Church?”” Lecture. Fall Contemporary Issues Conference. Westminster Theological Seminary. 26 Oct. 2006. Web. 1 May 2010.

<sup>26</sup> Bader-Saye, Scott. “Improvising Church: An Introduction to the Emerging Church Conversation.” *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 6.1 (2006): 12-23. Print. 15.



"On the one hand, 'emerging church' is being used as a shorthand way of describing a genuine concern among leaders of traditional denominations to engage in a meaningful missional way with the changing culture, and as part of that engagement to ask fundamental questions about the nature of the Church as well as about an appropriate contextualization of Christian faith that will honour the tradition while also making the Gospel accessible to otherwise unchurched people."<sup>27</sup>

The emerging church describes a movement coming from the context of evangelicalism with a genuine desire to see transformation. On the other hand, John Drane rightly describes that a large portion of the emerging church is comprised of a group of angry people who are frustrated and disillusioned with their own faith tradition and want to create their own spiritual communities that fit their idea of what a church should look like in modern society.

The emerging church stemmed not only as a response to the postmodern culture, but also as a reactionary response to the "seeker- sensitive" evangelical church trend of the early 1990s<sup>28</sup>. Church became a consumer good where ministries tailored their church models to meet the demands of the consumer oriented society. Christianity became more of a stylistic fad than a lifestyle. The emerging church desired to go back to a "vintage Christianity" where faith and community are authentic. Church leaders began asking why Christianity was losing appeal in society. They determined that postmodern culture shunned the notion of a manmade religion that was close-minded and judgmental - even to the point of having the audacity to claim that their religion was the only correct worldview. United by the question of how to make Christianity relevant to a changing culture, the emerging church began as a conversation between leaders who deeply cared about seeing their faith passed down and lived out in the next generation.

It is important to note that this conversation started long before the turn of the twentieth century. One of the first books to propose the idea of a revolutionizing, emerging movement was written in the 1970s by Bruce Larson and Ralph Osbourne. *The Emerging Church* challenged ministries to recognize that

<sup>27</sup> Drane, John. "Editorial The Emerging Church." *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 6.1 (2006): 3-11. Web. 30 Apr. 2010. 4.

<sup>28</sup> Kimball, *Emerging Church*, Chapter 1.

the church currently had inadequate goals: increased church membership, greater numbers of Christians, more efficient ministries, and large buildings to host everything.<sup>29</sup> The authors urged pastors to move toward a model that emphasized relationship over religion. For Larson and Osbourne, church was about relationship with God – “accepting, honoring, serving and enjoying... a right relationship with God: a worthy goal of any man”; relationship with oneself – understanding the good news that God loves each of us as individuals and desires to use us to further His Kingdom; relationship with others in life – having healthy relationships with friends, family and a Christian community; and relationship to the world in which we live – committed to social justice and fostering a servant’s attitude toward the poor and the least of those in this world.<sup>30</sup>

A church’s goal is for the church to be the people of God with Christ as their guide. To accomplish this, Larson and Osbourne, believed that the church would have to realize five key factors. First, the church needs to recognize that worship is not a constructed event, but rather a time when God is present within the praises of his people.<sup>31</sup> Secondly, structurally churches need to realize that the administrative aspects of the church should be in the hands of the laity, not the clergy. Christ is with the people and chooses to work within the body of people, not just a few spiritual leaders. Thirdly, because Christ works through His people, the church’s objective should be to help people in their community discover their spiritual giftings and put them to use within the congregation and surrounding community. Fourthly, the Church should forego the strategic models and remember that God is the primary resource- always present and in relationship with the people and congregation. Lastly, the church should rethink how they appoint leadership and delegate responsibility to maximize human resource. Human resource is expressed through the relationship between the laity and the clergy, transparency and vulnerability, the physical proximity amongst people, and the

<sup>29</sup> Larson, Bruce, and Ralph Osbourne. *The Emerging Church*. Waco, Tex.: Word, 1970. Print.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 32-38.

<sup>31</sup> This characteristic and the four following can be found in: Ibid. 54-59

utilization of testimony to discuss how God is moving within the church.<sup>32</sup> Their desired goal was to see a church that excelled by offering opportunities for the church to be relevant to its members and the surrounding community.

"Specific opportunities for existing churches are constantly expanding and proliferating. New techniques and programs which take seriously the lay apostolate, lay witness, issue-centered ministries, and the understanding and appropriation of "secular" wisdom can revolutionize the Church without destroying anything of value and give it a whole new image in the world' eyes and a whole dimension of ministry."<sup>33</sup>

Almost thirty years before the official start of the emerging church conversation, these authors recognized the potential of the church to transform its image and the changing culture.

### III. An Emerging Conversation:

The emerging church began as a conversation "about 'how to do Church' in our age".<sup>34</sup> In the mid1990s, the Leadership Network- an organization that exists "to identify, connect and help high-capacity Christian leaders multiply their impact"<sup>35</sup>- began formally inviting pastors to discuss how the church could be reaching the next generation of church members. In 1996, the Leadership Network called a conference of young, influential leaders in the church to discuss generation X's position within the church.<sup>36</sup> The conference participants brainstormed a new model of church- the emerging model. The emerging model is missional and characterized by the incorporation of the following traits: postmodern and pluralistic cultural context, acceptance of the marginalized in culture, leadership are pastors and laity who view themselves as local missionaries, services blend ancient worship styles and local styles that relate to the demographics, and missions are global incorporating multifaceted outreach on both the global and local levels.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 69-72.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 133.

<sup>34</sup> McKnight, Scot. "What Is the Emerging Church?", 2006, 29.

<sup>35</sup> "Our Mission." *Leadership Network*. Web. 02 May 2010. <[http://www.leadnet.org/about\\_OurMission.asp](http://www.leadnet.org/about_OurMission.asp)>.

<sup>36</sup> Driscoll, Mark. "Emerging Church." Address. Religion Saves & Nine Other Misconceptions: Answer Anything Question 2. Mars Hill Church, Seattle. 24 Feb. 2008. *Chrisridgeway.blogspot.com*. Chris Ridgeway, 24 Feb. 2008. Web. 1 May 2010. <<http://www.theodigital.com/2008/03/mark-driscoll-on-emerging-church-full-transcript.html>>.

<sup>37</sup> Driscoll, A *Pastoral Perspective on the Emergent Church*, 88.

As the emerging church movement began, this small group of individuals who attended the conference began researching missiology together and traveling the country speaking about how the United States was a mission field that needed relevant missionaries to serve their own postmodern, pluralistic culture. The Leadership Network hired Doug Pagitt to lead a team that included Mark Driscoll, Chris Seay, Tony Jones, Dan Kimball, Andrew Jones, Spencer Burke, and Brian McLaren.<sup>38</sup> Eventually, the team began to split off into their own directions. Some, like Driscoll, left to pastor their own church plants and began their own initiatives within the emerging church. The remaining faction of the group under the leadership of McLaren morphed into an organization known as Emergent which later became a part of the Emergent Village- a loose association of churches that hold conferences and exchange ideas.

McLaren describes the birth of the movement in six stages<sup>39</sup>. Stage one: a bunch of twenty-something to middle -aged pastors meet to discuss the future of reaching eighteen to twenty year olds who do not attend church. Stage two: the conversation shifts into a discussion about how to be a missionary to the local community, focusing on how to evangelize and disciple people. Stage three: the conversation became less about the younger demographic and more about reaching the cultural mindset of a postmodern, pluralistic society. Stage four: the conversation expands to include a discussion of church history and Christian traditions around the world. Stage five: dialogue expands once again as the movement shifts to focus on the importance of social justice and recognizing global issues to expand the 'Kingdom of God' within and outside the United States. Stage six: the church begins to seriously consider a focus of spirituality, emphasizing the importance of love, awareness, and tolerance within the context of a life of authentic worship.

The participants within the conversation slowly began to split off with the progression of each "stage" of the emerging churches development. The result of the original meetings of the Leadership Network's

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 89, and Driscoll, "Emerging Church", 2008.

<sup>39</sup> Robinson, Bob. "'Brian McLaren: Six Stages of the Emerging Church Conversation'" Web log post. *Vanguardchurch.com*. 01 Apr. 2009. Web. 22 Apr. 2010. <<http://vanguardchurch.blogspot.com/2009/04/brian-mclaren-six-stages-of-emerging.html>>.

conglomeration of pastors has been called many things by many people. The emerging church is an umbrella catch-all label for “fresh expressions of Christianity” in response to the zeitgeist of the age.<sup>40</sup>

"The term emerging church has been applied to high-profile, youth-oriented congregations that have gained attention on account of their rapid numerical growth; their ability to attract (or retain) twentysomethings; their contemporary worship, which draws from popular music styles; and their ability to promote themselves to the Christian subculture through websites and by word of mouth."<sup>41</sup>

#### a. Voices in the Conversation:

To understand why the movement is so diverse and has so many factions, an introduction to the voices that started the conversation is necessary. Many believe that Brian McLaren is the spokesperson for the emerging church movement. In recognition for his “elder statesman” position in the emerging church movement, TIME magazine declared him one of the “25 Most Influential Evangelicals in America”.<sup>42</sup> McLaren is perhaps the most controversial figure in the emerging church movement. He pastored Cedar Ridge Community Church in the Baltimore area until 2006. McLaren has a Doctor of Divinity degree. He has written several books, works for Sojourners, and is heavily involved with both Emergent and the Emergent Village communities. McLaren’s *Generous Orthodoxy* has been considered one of the most influential books in the movement – as it suggests that the church needs to widen its viewpoints to allow for more shades of gray regarding doctrinal issues. McLaren is known for his strong dislike of the evangelical church and openly admits that his movement is rooted in his personal strife and anger toward his evangelical upbringing. For McLaren, the emerging church is a political movement where church “has everything to do with public matters in general and politics in particular- including economics and aid, personal empowerment and

<sup>40</sup> Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Church*, 2005. 42.

<sup>41</sup> Brian McLaren. Web. 03 May 2010. <<http://www.brianmclaren.net/>>.

<sup>42</sup> TIME Magazine. "TIME: 25 Most Influential Evangelicals Photo Essay: Brian McLaren." *TIME Magazine*. 29 Nov. 2004. Web. 02 May 2010. <<http://www.time.com/time/covers/1101050207/photoessay/17.html>>.

choice, foreign policy and war."<sup>43</sup> His books call for a radical overhaul of church and theology suggesting that one can see Jesus and God's Kingdom when we come to a "place of cynically doubting much of what [we have] been told about Jesus."<sup>44</sup>

Hired by the Leadership Network, Doug Pagitt was the original leader of the emerging church conversation. He is founder and pastor of Solomon's Porch- "a holistic missional Christian community in Minneapolis, Minnesota".<sup>45</sup> His ministerial educational background is a Master of Arts in Theology from Bethel Theological Seminary. As a founder of Emergent Village, Pagitt has been an active voice in the movement, organizing cohorts of churches within the movement. Pagitt's view of the emerging church mission has been categorized as a spreading the "hope of God's redemption through a sort of quasi-universalism."<sup>46</sup> Tony Jones, the most recent leader of Emergent Village before the leadership decided to decentralize into a board structure, is also on staff with Solomon's Porch as a theologian-in-residence. He is an author, speaker, consultant on the emerging church and doctoral fellow in practical theology at Princeton Theological Seminary.<sup>47</sup>

Chris Seay is the founding pastor of University Baptist Church in Waco, Texas and currently pastor of Ecclesia in Houston. His church's mission statement is indicative of his viewpoint of the emerging church: "We reject unfounded categories that divide the world into uniquely sacred or purely secular. God is redeeming all of creation through Jesus."<sup>48</sup> He is currently the president of the Ecclesia Bible Society

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<sup>43</sup> McKnight, Scot. "McLaren Emerging." *ChristianityToday*. 26 Sept. 2008. Web. 01 May 2010. <<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/september/38.59.html>>.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> "About." *DougPagitt.com*. Web. 03 May 2010. <<http://dougpagitt.com/about/>>.

<sup>46</sup> Patton, C. Michael. "Will the Real Emerger Please Stand Up?" Web log post. *Parchment and Pen: A Theology Blog*. Reclaiming the Mind Ministries, 06 Aug. 2008. Web. 27 Apr. 2010. <<http://www.reclaimingthemind.org/blog/2008/08/will-the-real-emerger-please-stand-up/>>.

<sup>47</sup> Tony Jones. Web. 2 May 2010. <<http://tonyj.net/>>.

<sup>48</sup> "Ecclesia Church :: Houston." *Ecclesia Church | Houston, Texas*. Web. 03 May 2010. <<http://www.ecclesiahouston.org/v2/index.php>>.

which is leading a project called The Voice. "The project is a first-of-its kind re-telling of the Bible that consists of creative voices from historians to poets, storytellers to songwriters."<sup>49</sup>

Spencer Burke has been at the forefront of the emerging church movement, and is another highly controversial figure in modern theology. Burke is a teaching pastor at Mariners Church in Irvine, California and is the founder of a website called TheOOZE.com which is a web-based community and forum discussing the emerging church. Also an author, Burke wrote *A Heretic's Guide to Eternity*, a "groundbreaking and controversial book that explores grace and salvation beyond the confines of religion".<sup>50</sup> Burke is known for his universalistic theology and unapologetic criticism of the beliefs of orthodox Christianity.

Steve Chalke is another controversy, but of the British variety. Chalke was ordained a Baptist minister from Spurgeon's Theological College in London, and later founded the Oasis community.<sup>51</sup> He is known for his work with social justice issues including homelessness and sex trafficking. He founded Faithworks Movement- an organization dedicated to helping local church members get more involved in their community. Chalke is controversial because of his theology, particularly his rejection of substitutionary atonement. In his opinion, the work of the cross contradicts the love of God. The Christian idea of Christ being tortured and dying for the atonement of the sin of the world is "a form of cosmic child abuse" and is not compatible with the God of the Bible.<sup>52</sup>

Dan Kimball is the author of *Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* and pastor of Vintage Faith Church in Santa Cruz, CA<sup>53</sup>. He has degrees from Multnomah Biblical Seminary and Western Seminary. Kimball is considered an emerging evangelical that is trying to rethink the way that

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<sup>49</sup> Donovan, Ken. "New Bible Project for Young Generation Launched." *Christian News*. Christian Today, 11 Feb. 2007. Web. 03 May 2010.

<<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/new.bible.project.for.young.generation.launched/9492.htm>>.

<sup>50</sup> "Bio - Spencerburke.com." *Spencerburke.com - Making Sense of Church, Culture and Technology*. Web. 03 May 2010. <<http://spencerburke.com/bio>>.

<sup>51</sup> "Oasis UK - Rev Steve Chalke MBE, Founder of Oasis." *Oasis UK - Welcome*. Web. 03 May 2010. <<http://www.oasisuk.org/about/stevechalke>>.

<sup>52</sup> Geisler, "Emerging Church: Emergence or Emergency?", 2008.

<sup>53</sup> "Dan Kimball." *Dan Kimball: Vintage Faith*. Web. 03 May 2010. <<http://www.dankimball.com/about.html>>.

churches worship and live life in community. His view of the emerging church is a movement committed to a “mission to win the lost through the essential message of the Gospel.”<sup>54</sup>

Andrew Jones is a young pastor noted for having similar intentions as Kimball, but living out his faith in the United Kingdom<sup>55</sup>. Jones adheres to reformed theology, and has recently been critical of some of the liberal theology born out of the emerging movement. He was originally part of the Emergent Village, but left in 2010. “It is just not something that I can lend my name to or my time. In the early days, I joined ... because it was more about uniting churches around mission and equipping people to reach the next 'postmodern' generation. I hope they can shift it back again to its origins.”<sup>56</sup>

Also of the reformed persuasion, Mark Driscoll is the pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle, WA. He is widely considered one of the most influential pastors of our age and one of the most influential men in Seattle. He also founded the Resurgence, an organization to train church leaders, and the Acts 29 Church Planting Network. Driscoll is known for his blunt honesty, “reformissional” strategies, and his Evangelical, Charismatic Reformed theology.<sup>57</sup> Driscoll split from the Leadership Network’s discussion of the emerging church before the Emergent or Emergent Village were formed. He is openly critical of his former dialogue buddies, and is often seen as the forefront of the emerging reformed branch of the movement. Driscoll jokes that his church is emerging, but the members would not know it because all they know is Jesus.

Finally, Scot McKnight is one of the leading scholars on the emerging church movement. His blog “Jesus Creed” was rated the best blog for the emerging church. He is a professor of Religious Studies in North Park University. He has his Ph.D. from the University of Nottingham and is an acclaimed authority on

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<sup>54</sup> Patton, “Will the Real Emerger Please Stand Up?”, 2008.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Jones, Andrew. "Goodbyes to Emergent Village." Weblog post. *Tall Skinny Kiwi*. 07 Jan. 2010. Web. 2 May 2010. <<http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/2010/01/goodbyes-to-emergent-village.html>>.

<sup>57</sup> "Mark Driscoll." *Mars Hill Church*. Web. 03 May 2010. <<http://www.marshallchurch.org/markdriscoll>>.



the New Testament, early Christianity, and the historical Jesus. He is one of the greatest friends and biggest critics of the emerging church movement.<sup>58</sup>

There are many leaders of the emerging church, but no leader, no official statement of belief, and no official mission. The emerging church movement insists that it has no defined leadership, and that is an intentionality because none of the voices in the movement necessarily agree with one another or support the efforts of their fellow conversationalists. One blog clearly states this sentiment: "Contrary to what some have said, there is no single theologian or spokesperson for the emergent conversation. We each speak for ourselves and are not official representatives of anyone else, nor necessarily endorse everything said or written by one another."<sup>59</sup>

#### **b. Characteristics of the Emerging Church**

So what actually unites the emerging church together as a movement? Bolger and Gibbs outline nine defining characteristics of an emerging church, stating that the first three are core values and remaining six are common practices:

"Emerging churches are communities that practice the way of Jesus within postmodern cultures. This definition encompasses nine practices. Emerging churches (1) identify with the life of Jesus, (2) transform the secular realm, and (3) live highly communal lives. Because of these three activities, they (4) welcome the stranger, (5) serve with generosity, (6) participate as producers, (7) create as created beings, (8) lead as a body, and (9) take part in spiritual activities."<sup>60</sup>

While this definition of the emerging church movement is the most widely accepted, it does not seem to clearly make a distinction between an emerging church and any other contemporary church in society.

Scott McKnight's analysis of the emerging church seems to have the clearest perspective of what the emerging church actually entails. McKnight defines the emerging church first by insisting that there is no "emerging church", but rather "a loose association of those who want to explore conversation about the

<sup>58</sup> "Scot McKnight Bio." Weblog post. *Jesus Creed*. Beliefnet. Web. 3 May 2010. <<http://blog.beliefnet.com/jesuscreed/bio-scot-mcknight.html>>.

<sup>59</sup> Quoting an article from the ooze.com: DeYoung, *Why We're Not Emergent*, 2008. 19.

<sup>60</sup> Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 2005. 44.

Christian faith and Christian mission and the Christian praxis in this world of ours, and they want to explore that conversation with freedom and impurity when it comes to doctrine.”<sup>61</sup> To explain the loose association, McKnight uses the analogy of a lake with five streams flowing into it.<sup>62</sup> Lake Emerging is fed by streams: (1) prophetic, (2) postmodern, (3) praxis, (4) post-evangelical, and (5) political.<sup>63</sup>

The first stream of is prophetic rhetoric. McKnight talks of how the emerging church uses language reminiscent of the prophecy of Hebrew Scripture or at the very least proactive speeches. For example, in his book *A Generous Orthodoxy*, McLaren writes: “Often I don't think Jesus would be caught dead as a Christian, were he physically here today. ... Generally, I don't think Christians would like Jesus if he showed up today as he did 2,000 years ago. In fact, I think we'd call him a heretic and plot to kill him, too.”<sup>64</sup> His language is strong and hyperbolic, designed to invoke a reaction. The language used in the movement is highly critical of evangelicalism and other breeds of Christianity. McLaren's statement about forgetting everything that the church has said about Jesus in order to know Jesus is another example. While the statement may not be entirely true, the rhetoric is just strong enough to attract an audience. One negative aspect of this proactive language is that “Emerging churches are taking the disgruntled children of evangelical mega-churches and re-orienting them into cool-hip services where they complain about their parents' church. That's not the point. The point is to get people who don't know Jesus, and introduce them to Jesus.”<sup>65</sup> The rhetoric used by the emerging church may captivate listeners, but it also marginalizes the movement from the greater Church community.

The second stream of Lake Emergent is postmodern. In responding to the postmodern culture, leaders in the emerging church looked to the theologians before them that chose to investigate and respond to

<sup>61</sup> McKnight, Scot. “What Is the Emerging Church?”, 2010.

<sup>62</sup> McKnight originally used the analogy including only four streams when he spoke at the Westminster seminary, but later added a fifth stream in this article : McKnight, Scot. “Five Streams of the Emerging Church.” *Christianity Today*. 19 Jan. 2007. Web. 01 May 2010. <<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/february/11.35.html>>.

<sup>63</sup> McKnight, “What is the emerging church?”, 2006 and McKnight, “Five Streams of Emerging Church”, 2007.

<sup>64</sup> McKnight quotes McLaren's *Generous Orthodoxy* in: McKnight, “Five Streams of Emerging Church”, 2007.

<sup>65</sup> Driscoll, “Emerging Church”, 2008.

changing culture rather than avoiding it. Some cite Niebuhr as an inspiration because he analyzed how Christianity could interact with culture and proposed that Christ could be a transforming force in culture-working within the cultural setting of the time with the radical Gospel message to influence both beliefs and practices in the modern world<sup>66</sup>. Echoing Niebuhr one blogging theologian wrote that the difference between fundamentalists, evangelicals and emergers is this: fundamentals separate from culture, evangelicals change culture, and emergers are sensitive to culture because they are within culture.<sup>67</sup> The emerging church also stems from the theological insights of Jamie Smith, Kevin Vanhoozer, John Franke, Stan Grenz, Ray Anderson and other contemporary voices in Christianity. The theology is less pious than traditional evangelicalism and centers on the concepts of "faith seeking understanding, trust preceding the apprehension or comprehension of truth, and the recognition that even the mind... is in illumination in order to comprehend the Gospel."<sup>68</sup> The emerging church is a change in way of thinking that embraces questions, encourages honesty about doubts, and bringing a fresh perspective to ancient truths and practices.<sup>69</sup>

The heart of the movement and Lake Emergent's third stream is praxis. There are several elements of praxis: worship, orthopraxy, social justice, and a missional lifestyle. As far as worship, emergers are reinventing the worship scene by mixing modern technology, ancient practice, and flexibility to allow God to move amongst his people. Many emergers assert that orthopraxy is more important than orthodoxy, meaning how a person lives is more important than what a person believes. Regarding social justice, emergers embrace a social Gospel where the kingdom of God entails interaction with others. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the emerging church is missional. Being missional means living "mission dei"- or "participating with God in the redemptive work God is doing in this world". It also means embracing participation in community, sometimes even to the point of new monasticism and intentional residential

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<sup>66</sup> Hammett, John S. "An Ecclesiological Assessment of the Emerging Church Movement." 2010.

<sup>67</sup> Patton, "Will the Real Emerger Please Stand Up?", 2008.

<sup>68</sup> McKnight, "What's the emerging church?", 2006. 11.

<sup>69</sup> Patton, "Will the Real Emerger Please Stand Up?", 2008.

Christian living communities. The emerging church “does not invite people to church but instead wanders into the world as the church”.<sup>70</sup>

The fourth stream is post-evangelical. It is important to remember that the emerging church stems from evangelicalism. The evangelical movement largely focuses on “getting people saved”, that is converting individuals to Christianity. Post-evangelicals are skeptic of the “getting saved” theology because the diversity of Christian conversions means that there is no clear consensus on how to know when someone is ‘saved’. The Biblical story is a narrative, and people’s faith stories generally mimic that format. Furthermore, evangelicals advocate the use of language as assurance of salvation as they embrace conversion through a sinner’s prayer format where a public profession equates to an eternal salvation. Emergers believe that no language even in prayer can capture God’s transformative process in someone’s life, and that conversion is as that simple as saying the right words at the appropriate time. Evangelism itself is still embraced but in terms of a missional lifestyle where relationship is the tool for bringing people closer to God.

Finally, the fifth stream of the movement is political. In his book *Everything Must Change*, McLaren asserts that the very frameworks through which we view society must change. The Kingdom of God is about meeting physical as well as spiritual needs, and in order to do so, Christians must be active in government, politics, and the global market place. McLaren’s book quotes a man named Justine from Rhwanda who realized that the Gospel was revolutionary: “I see what Jesus meant by the kingdom of God. I see it’s about changing this world, not just escaping it and retreating into our churches. If Jesus’ message of the kingdom of God is true, then everything must change.”<sup>71</sup> In the views of emergers, evangelicalism has been culturally “hijacked by the right-wing political movement”.<sup>72</sup> According McKnight, emergers are “a latte-drinking,

<sup>70</sup> McKnight, “What’s the Emerging Church?”, 2006.21.

<sup>71</sup> McKnight, “McLaren Emerging”, 2008.

<sup>72</sup> Quotation from pastor Rick McKinley from : Krattenmaker, Tom. “A Force for Good.” *USA Today*. 12 Nov. 2007. Web. 02 May 2010. <<http://blogs.usatoday.com/oped/2007/11/a-force-for-goo.html>>.

backpack-lugging, Birkenstock-wearing group of 21st century, left-wing, hippie wannabes. Put directly, they are Democrats".<sup>73</sup>

#### **IV. Multiple Varieties of Emerging**

There are multiple types of boats afloat upon Lake Emergent. Depending on the commentators, the emerging church can be divided into two or two dozen different categories of emergers. For the purposes of this paper, the emerging church will be divided into three distinct categories: emerging reformers, emerging evangelicals, and emergents. Also noteworthy is a fourth hybrid category known as mainline missionals- this group is influenced by the emerging movement, but not necessarily a part of the movement itself.

##### **a. Emerging Reformers**

Emerging reformers are people like Johnson, Driscoll and the Acts 29 Church Plant Network. They embrace reformed theology emphasizing the sovereignty of God and generally embrace charismatic worship. Ed Stelzer labels this group relevant: "Relevants are theologically conservative evangelicals who are not as interested in reshaping theology as much as updating such things as worship styles, preaching styles, and church leadership structures."<sup>74</sup> According to Driscoll, the reformers embrace both orthodoxy and orthodoxy: "what I will use is two hands... And I believe doctrine/belief goes in one hand and practice, or methodology, goes in the other... and our approach has always been two handed. What we believe is timeless, and what we do should be timely."<sup>75</sup> Emerging reformers believe that church planting is an effective way to reach the postmodern culture, diminishing larger mega-churches in exchange for smaller local churches or multiple campuses of the same church. These relevant reformers are inspired by the fresh perspectives of Dan Kimball, Donald Miller and Rob Bell while adhering to the theological direction of

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Driscoll, Mark. "A PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE EMERGENT CHURCH ", 2006. 91.

<sup>75</sup> Driscoll, "Emerging Church", 2008

reformed leaders like John Piper, Tim Keller and D.A. Carson.<sup>76</sup> “They are often deeply committed to biblical preaching, male pastoral leadership and other values common in conservative evangelical churches.”<sup>77</sup>

Emerging reformers have created what is known as the foundationalist model of the emerging church. It is called the foundationalist model because the church is more conservative in theology and ecclesiology. The model for church includes standard preacher-centered teaching, music for worship, and many aspects of a traditional reformed, evangelical church. However, their services may be in innovative location such as movie theaters or auditoriums instead of traditional church buildings. Also, evangelistic ministries involve meeting people where there are and “This may come in the form of people meeting in pubs, having tattoos, cussing from the pulpit, playing loud rock music for worship and adding a layer of “alternative-ness” to their overall church service.”<sup>78</sup> These churches sometimes exist as a subset of a larger church, perhaps as an alternative service at a more traditional church. “They follow standard Evangelicalism in that they aren’t attached to traditions, and come out politically and theologically conservative, while maintaining a more accomodational stance toward culture in the name of evangelism.”<sup>79</sup>

## **b. Emerging Evangelicals**

Emerging evangelicals say "well we're not trying to change all of Christianity- we're just trying to make church and Christianity more relevant- more applicable to people who otherwise have no interest in Jesus or church".<sup>80</sup> Dan Kimball and Scot McKnight would fall into the catergory of emerging evangelicals because they have no desire to leave the evangelical faith, but they do want to redesign worship services and church structure. Also known as Reconstructionists, emerging evangelicals are “are generally theologically evangelical and dissatisfied with the current forms of church (e.g. seeker, purpose,

<sup>76</sup> Driscoll, “Pastoral Perspective on the Emergent Church”, 2006.

<sup>77</sup> Stetzer, Ed. "First Person:Understanding the Emergent Church." Weblog post. *Crosswalk.com*. Web. 3 May 2010. <<http://www.crosswalk.com/1372534/>>.

<sup>78</sup> Daniels, Wess. "Four Models of Emerging Churches." Weblog post. *Gathering In Light*. 11 Jan. 2008. Web. 3 May 2010. <<http://gatheringinlight.com/2008/01/13/the-four-models-of-emerging-churches/>>.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Driscoll, “The Emerging Church”, 2008.

contemporary)”<sup>81</sup>. They are attempting to redevelop church by providing a more informational, incarnational, and organic form of church. The result sometimes takes the form of house churches and new monastic communities.

While he would not necessarily approve of this distinction, Shane Claiborne could be considered a reconstructionist, emerging evangelical. Claiborne is the author of *Irresistible Revolution* and *Jesus for President*, and founder of the Simple Way- a new monastic living community in Philadelphia. Claiborne is recognized as one of the most radical Christians of our time as he invites people to join the “revolution”. His mission is to “love God, love people, and follow Jesus”. He believes that church is done in community, communal living in the inconvenient places. According to Claiborne, “the entire story of Jesus is about a God who did not just want to stay “out there” but who moves into the neighborhood, a neighborhood where folks said, “Nothing good could come.””<sup>82</sup> Claiborne does not consider himself part of the movement because he often gets the negative publicity due to perceived affiliation with the emergent church, but he does support the changes in the church and he himself is large influence in this reconstructionist emerging movement. As Shanre writes, he does not want to get caught up in the politics of defining the movement; instead he would rather keep doing what he is doing: “Without a doubt-- there is an actual movement in the church, and I would much rather celebrate that, and join it with all my heart, and encourage everyone I know to do the same.”<sup>83</sup> Like Claiborne, many other emerging evangelicals do not appreciate the labels, but are simply doing what they can to re-imagine the church. “This group does not accept any one style of culture as being good, thus their non-conformist attitude is directed at modernity and postmodernity alike. They see Jesus (and his incarnation) as their primary model for engaging culture.”<sup>84</sup>

### c. Emergents

<sup>81</sup> Driscoll, “Pastoral Perspective on the Emergent Church”, 2006.

<sup>82</sup> Claiborne, Shane. “Shane Claiborne - Letter to Non-Believers.” *Esquire*. 18 Nov. 2009. Web. 03 May 2010. <<http://www.esquire.com/features/best-and-brightest-2009/shane-claiborne-1209>>.

<sup>83</sup> Claiborne, Shane. “The Emerging Church Brand: The Good, The Bad, and The Messy.” 2010.

<sup>84</sup> Wess, “Four Models of Emerging Churches”, 2008.

Emergents are the most controversial and most well-known subset of the emerging church. Rather than work within the structural or theological framework of the church, emergents have created their own movement where “much of the focus is on adopting postmodernity, and contextualizing the Gospel accordingly.”<sup>85</sup> Emergents include McLaren, Pagitt, Burke, Chalke, and Jones. Emergents have gathered under umbrella organizations such as Emergent, Emergent Village, and theOOZE.com. What unites these churches are their beliefs, or rather lack thereof. As the Emergent Village website reveals, “We believe in God, beauty, future, and hope – but you won’t find a traditional statement of faith here. We don’t have a problem with faith, but with statements. Whereas statements of faith and doctrine have a tendency to stifle friendships, we hope to further conversation and action around the things of God.”<sup>86</sup> TheOOZE.com is another online initiative, designed as a forum for conversation. Its desire is to “create environments where church leaders (traditional teachers/theologians as well as emerging storytellers/artists) can converse about and collaborate on resources and experiences for the broader faith community.”<sup>87</sup>

The community aspect of the emergent cohort is not the controversial factor. What makes McLaren, Burke, and friends noteworthy is their theology. “Revisionists are questioning (and in some cases denying) issues like the nature of the substitutionary atonement, the reality of hell, the complementarian nature of gender, and the nature of the Gospel itself.”<sup>88</sup> As mentioned before, some consider the traditional views of atonement irrational because they conflict with God’s love. Others deny the existence of heaven or hell. Few will take a definite stance on issues like abortion and homosexuality out of fear of offending someone. The emergent church encourages “postfoundationalism” which means that they believe that there are no universal implications or exclusive claims revealing absolute characteristics of God. If someone knows how to love and to act rightly, that is all that matters. Emergents do not require their followers to adhere to a doctrine or system of beliefs. Brian McLaren unpacked this sentiment by saying:

<sup>85</sup> Wess, “Four Models of Emerging Churches”. 2008.

<sup>86</sup> “About » » FAQs.” *Emergent Village*. Web. 03 May 2010. <<http://www.emergentvillage.com/about-information/faqs>>.

<sup>87</sup> *THEOOZE - Conversation for the Journey*. Web. 04 May 2010. <<http://theooze.com>>.

<sup>88</sup> Stezler, “First Person: Understanding the Emerging Church”.



"I don't believe making disciples must equal making adherents to the Christian religion. It may be advisable in many circumstances to help people become followers of Jesus and remain within their Buddhist, Hindu or Jewish contexts... rather than resolving the paradox via pronouncements of the eternal destiny of the people more convinced by or loyal to religions other than ours, we will simply move on..."<sup>89</sup>

Orthopraxy takes center stage and the focus becomes social justice and living a life that benefits the community. Emergents embrace much more "liberal" social, political and theological positions. As a result, many Christian thinkers believe that the Emergent contingent of the movement is walking a fine line between Christianity and heresy. That is why others believe that emergents have already "totally gotten off the highway and they're lost out in the woods".<sup>90</sup>

#### **d. Mainline Missional**

Another category of the emerging church are "mainline missionals" or emergers who remain in the context of mainline Protestant Christianity, but are adapting style and focus to meet the demands of a postmodern culture. For example, there is an emerging movement within Lutheran denominations: "Luthermergent is a network of friends committed to both the emergent and Lutheran tribes. We are here to resource each other, gather for relationship building, have generative conversation, and connect one another to both local and global emergence."<sup>91</sup> There is also a Presbytermergent movement<sup>92</sup>, a MethoMergent in the Methodist church<sup>93</sup>, and Anglimergent movement with Anglican movement.<sup>94</sup> These churches stay within the context of their denomination, but are adopting some of the characteristics of the emerging church movement. Many traditional churches are influenced by the emerging church, whether or not they create an official subset of emergence or even realize the emerging church's influence. Churches

<sup>89</sup> Kowalski, David. "Postmodernism and the Emerging Church Movement | Apologetics Index.". 2010.

<sup>90</sup> Driscoll, "What is the Emerging Church?", 2006.

<sup>91</sup> *Emerging Leaders Network - Sharing Stories, Experiences, Resources, Hopes, Dreams, and Prayers*. Web. 03 May 2010. <<http://luthermergent.ning.com/>>.

<sup>92</sup> *Presbytermergent — Loyal Radicals*. Web. 03 May 2010. <<http://presbytermergent.org/>>.

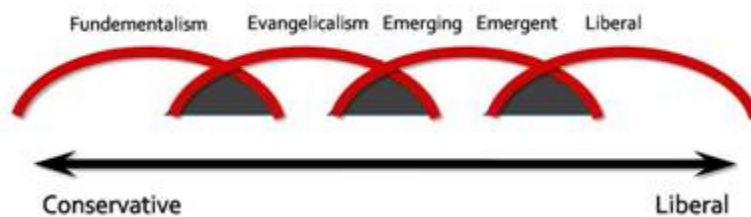
<sup>93</sup> *MethoMergent*. Web. 03 May 2010. <<http://methomergent.blogspot.com/>>.

<sup>94</sup> *Anglimergent*. Web. 03 May 2010. <<http://anglimergent.ning.com/page/page/show?id=1972049%3APage%3A7761>>.

are adopting methods of worship and evangelism designed by the emergers for their own use within the context of a traditional denominational structure.

#### e. Plotting Differences

In an article about the emerging church, Michael Patton created a helpful diagram to visually plot the differences among emerging leaders. Patton plotted the leaders on a scale between fundamentalism and liberalism, showing a wide range of theological stances.<sup>95</sup>

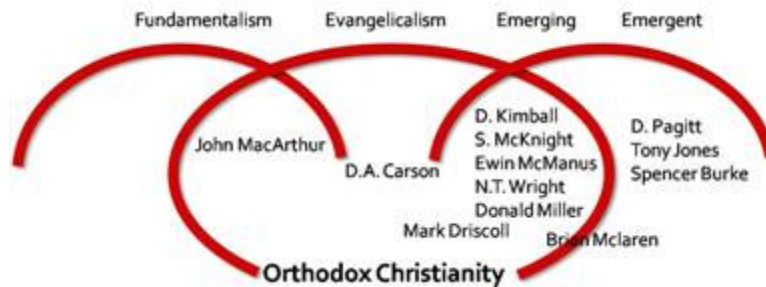


Patton describes fundamentalism as a strict adherence to orthodoxy and conservative theology that is almost in and of itself unbiblical because fundamentalists have a tendency to separate from culture. For Patton, traditional evangelicalism is the desire to share the Gospel and change the world; yet traditional evangelicalism refuses to admit that it is a part of the culture. Most emergers admit their place in culture, yet remain loyal to orthodoxy. Emergents allows the culture to begin to define their theology, and focus more on orthopraxy. Liberal theology holds few tenets of orthodoxy. Patton notes that these spheres of theology often overlap, and that it is entirely possible to be a fundamentalist evangelical- such as the Christian Right- or an emerging evangelical as previously mentioned.

Patton used the theology scale to evaluate the position of church leaders and where they fall on the above spectrum based on orthodox Christianity. According to Patton, orthodoxy means adhering to a set of doctrinal beliefs that are *sine qua non* or held “by all Christians, of all time, everywhere”. These basic

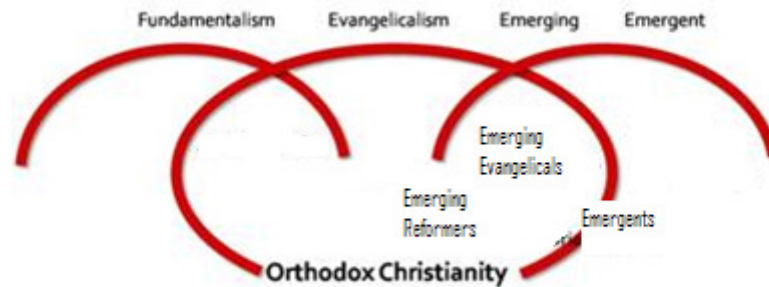
<sup>95</sup> The following descriptions and graphics are taken from Michael Patton’s website and blog article. All credit for this graphics belong to the author. The information can be found at: “Patton, “Would the Real Emerger Please Stand Up?”, 2008.

tenets are: “deity of Christ, doctrine of trinity, the sovereignty of God, the historicity of the physical death, burial and resurrection of Christ, hypostatic union (Christ as fully man, fully God), the sinfulness of man, the necessity of atonement, salvation by grace through faith, the reality of the body of Christ, the authority of the Body of Christ, the inspiration of scripture, the canon of scripture consisting of the Old and New Testaments, and the future second coming”. Admittedly, Patton’s essentials lean a little on the reformed evangelical side of the Christian tradition, but for the most part, his analysis does explain the basics of orthodox Christianity. Based on an understanding of orthodoxy and the conservative to liberal scale, Patton created this diagram.



The center circle represents the spectrum of orthodox Christianity. Mark Driscoll is representative of the emerging reformers, who are the most conservative branch of the emerging movement. As Driscoll said in his analysis, emerging reformers still rely on the traditional and reformed theologies such as D.A. Carson, but also draw inspiration from the slightly more emerging Donald Miller. Emerging evangelicals are men like Kimball and McKnight who are within the scope of orthodox Christianity and evangelicalism, but tend to veer more toward the emerging movement. Patton considers himself to be in this category of emergers. The Emergent church walks a fine line between orthodoxy and liberalism. Brian McLaren often straddles the line by being indecisive about his opinions, while others like Burke have openly called themselves “heretics” as their theology is unconventional for Christianity. The controversy concerning the emerging church generally involves leaders and churches that fall to the left of this spectrum, acting outside the scope of what most would consider being orthodox Christianity. Here is Patton’s graphic with the

subsets of the emerging movement, as defined by this paper, plotted in their respective locations on the spectrum.<sup>96</sup>



## V. Transformations in Christianity

The emerging church may be diverse and at times divisive; however, “the conversation has been going for nearly a decade and shows no signs of slowing down as more people are discussing these important missional matters”.<sup>97</sup> As the emerging church seems to be a continuing trend in church culture, it is important to recognize how this movement is changing Christianity. Patton also describes five ways in which the emerging church is changing Christianity. This paper will borrow his five categories and add a sixth. The emerging church is emerging in six categories: ecclesiological, sociological, theological, epistemological, political, and missionally.

### a. Emerging Ecclesiological

The emerging church began as a conversation about how to rethink church for a postmodern culture. Their goal has always been to make church more relevant to the culture of the times, and emergers

<sup>96</sup> Graphic is derived from Patton’s graphic above. The plotting of the three categorical groups and the removal of the leaders names were my emphasis. The graphic was altered in a paint document to show clarity in this paper. Graphic credit still goes to Patton, but the alternations are mine.

<sup>97</sup> Driscoll, “A Pastoral Perspective of the Emergent Church, 2006. 92.

are achieving just that by reorganizing the way church is structured and the way people think about church in society. Ecclesiology is "The study of the Christian church, its structure, order, practices, and hierarchy."<sup>98</sup>

"If you are serious enough to contemplate major trends in the Church today, at an international level, and if you define emerging as many to us do- in missional, or ecclesiological terms...- then you will learn quickly enough that there is a giant elephant in the middle of the Church's living room. It is the emerging church movement and it is a definite threat to traditional evangelical ecclesiology"

There are several areas in which the emerging church is reforming the church including structure, worship, preaching, discipleship, and leadership.

### **i. Service Structure**

Church is no longer about a building or an institution; church exists as a body of believers. Church is who Christians are as people, not a place that they go on Sunday for service<sup>99</sup>. As a result, church services take a different form and are "less traditional structurally"<sup>100</sup>. Service may be held in the living room of a house, a movie theater, an auditorium, or even a rented pub. The structure of the service becomes less hierarchical as the laity are incorporated into the service, and worship often takes a more interactive form. Instead of being 'seeker-sensitive' like the modern churches, emerging churches are "gatherings designed to include and translate to those who have no previous church experience."<sup>101</sup> Traditional aspects of church are reincorporated into the service: the modern church replaced stained glass and medieval paintings with video screens and the emerging church brings back the classic aesthetics on the video screens. The service is designed to be an atmosphere where people can experience God in a more mystical way. Vintage replaces the commercialized consumerism of the contemporary church model. ""The goal is to move away from a more consumer-oriented, "sit-and-watch" event to a more vintage, community-oriented

<sup>98</sup> Entry from the glossary at: "Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry." *CARM - Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry*. Web. 03 May 2010. <<http://www.carm.org/christianity/dictionary-theology/ecclesiology-freethinker>>.

<sup>99</sup> Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 2005 90.

<sup>100</sup> Patton, "Will the Real Emerger Please Stand Up?", 2008.

<sup>101</sup> Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 2003. 185.

participatory gathering' in which people can experience God as well as hear about Him".<sup>102</sup> Instead of the focus being a pastor speaking at a congregation, the service is oriented around the feeling of being in a Christ-centered community with spiritual guidance from leaders who are fellow journeymen in the faith.

Services tend not to be linear, in that the message may be woven in over the course of the service. Instead of following the format of worship, message, prayer, dismissal that was common in the modern contemporary church, the emerging church interweaves the components. Worship may be broken up by prayer or an exhortation from a pastor, the message may be given in segments, prayer may occur at multiple points in the service, and the structure remains flexible. Services are "Spirit-led"<sup>103</sup> meaning that the staff may choose to have an altar call mid-service instead of the traditional closing altar calls of evangelical 'seeker-sensitive' churches. Essentially, the service structure suits the needs of the demographic that it is trying to reach. Bolger and Gibbs describe this change as being a transition from a regimented "solid church" to a flexible and networked "liquid church".<sup>104</sup>

In the earliest envisioning of the emerging church, the effective strategy for church structure was a large group worship service, small group Bible studies, unified and specialized retreat programs, and continued discipleship and training.<sup>105</sup> Many emerging churches have adopted that structure and believe that the relationships formed in the smaller group settings and mentor relationships are the essence of the movement. The ecclesiological hierarchy is kept at a minimum, and the church functions from a point of communal mission and accountability.

## ii. Worship

<sup>102</sup> Pope, "Emerging Church: Congregation or Abhorrent?", 2008. 40.

<sup>103</sup> Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 2003. 124.

<sup>104</sup> Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 2005. 113-114.

<sup>105</sup> Larson and Osbourne, *The Emerging Church*, 1970.

Stylistically, emerging church worship has its roots in the alternative worship movement. The altworship movement began with Sheffield's Nine O'Clock Service in the United Kingdom<sup>106</sup>. The service was modeled after the European club scene: the orientation was not toward a stage at the front, but rather a multisensory environment. The service utilized projected images, video clips, worship stations set with varying ambiances, and created an overall interactive worship experience. Originally, altworship was an "expression of praise mixed with a powerful medium of corporate celebration."<sup>107</sup> The style transitioned into a hybrid style of worship using simple acoustics and electronic influences.

Kimball notes that these worship gatherings do not rely on a particular musical style, but rather theologically sound lyrics. The worship leader does more than just sing; the leader is a teacher who incorporates scripture into music and often improvises to meet the atmosphere of the group. Emerging worship values ancient traditional forms of worship embracing silence, lectio divina- or repeating of the scripture, and contemplative prayer. The emerging church is also reclaiming the sacraments that their evangelical roots neglected like taking communion together. Many say that the emerging worship style is not cutting edge, but rather getting back to the basics after evangelical contemporary churches made worship a consumer oriented event. "Alt worship represents the opening of a new cultural and aesthetic agenda for the mediation of worship - one that is likely to stay with us for decades to come."<sup>108</sup>

Many worship settings utilize stations, setting up different mini-environments for prayer and contemplation. "Worship is participatory and multisensory. People are encouraged to tangibly express their spirituality."<sup>109</sup> Emergers consider artwork a form of worship and find ways to incorporate art into their worship experiences<sup>110</sup>. For instance, a station in an interactive service might include painting supplies

<sup>106</sup> Gay and Rienstra. "Veering off TheVia Media: Emerging Church, Alternative Worship, and New Media Technologies in the United States and United Kingdom." 2010.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. 42.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. 47.

<sup>109</sup> Lawton, Kim. "The Emerging Church." *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly*. Educational Broadcasting Corporation. PBS, 08 July 2005. Web. 1 May 2010. <<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week845/cover.html>>.

<sup>110</sup> Patton, "Will the Real Emerger Please Stand Up?", 2008.

or during a large group meeting an artist may paint something on an easel while the music and preaching is underway. This incorporation is how the emerging church gives individuals the space to “create as created beings”.<sup>111</sup>

The mantra is that “God wants your worship, according to the way He made you. That may differ somewhat from the worship of the person who brought you to Christ or the person who leads your Bible study or church.”<sup>112</sup> This perspective that there are multiple ways to worship is emphasized by Gary L. Thomas in his book *Sacred Pathways*. Though not officially affiliated with the movement, Thomas has been another inspirational source for the emerging church. Thomas maintains that that everyone worships God in their own unique way and that there are various worship temperaments. Based on psychological personality testing, Thomas developed nine temperaments: the naturalist- who connects with God in nature; the sensate- who connects with God in the five senses; the traditionalist- who connects with God through ritual and symbol; the ascetic- who connects with God through solitude; the caregiver- who connects with God through serving others; the enthusiast- who connects with God through mystery and celebration; the contemplative- who loves God through contemplation; and the intellectual- who loves God with the mind.<sup>113</sup> Recognizing that people love God in different ways, the emerging church attempts to design worship to meet the needs of varying worship styles. For the naturalist, the church uses prayer walks and outdoor services. For the sensate, there are incense and candles. For the traditionalists, there are ancient prayer books and sacraments. For the ascetic, times of silence and meditation are offered. Social justice initiatives allow the activist to worship and the community structure allows the caregiver to serve. The enthusiast can embrace the charismatic aspects of emerging church worship, the contemplative can reflect through testimony sharing, and the ongoing conversation and bible study appeal to the intellectual.

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<sup>111</sup> This is one of the common practices of the emerging church listed in the definition of the emerging church according to: Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 2005.

<sup>112</sup> Kimball quotes Gary L. Thomas from *Sacred Pathways* in: Kimball, *Emerging Church*, 221.

<sup>113</sup> Thomas, Gary. *Sacred Pathways*. Nashville, Tenn.: T. Nelson, 1996. Print.



For the emerging church, worship is a holistic activity where everyone has the opportunity to experience God in a way that appeals to their spiritual temperament and individual relationship with God.

### iii. Preaching

Dan Kimball discusses the shifting values in approaches to worship services in his book *The Emerging Church*<sup>114</sup>. Instead of the sermon being the focal point of the service, the sermon becomes an element of the service where the preacher explains how the wisdom of Scripture applies to kingdom living. As opposed to merely explaining what the truth is, the emerging church focuses on who the truth is – emphasizing the life and teachings of Jesus. Emerging preachers do not assume that the audience has a Judeo-Christian worldview or knowledge of biblical terminology and stories. The preacher takes the time needed to recap information before moving forward, and sees the service as an opportunity to motivate people throughout the week as opposed to an opportunity to preach a lesson from a liturgical calendar. Also, preaching is done through more than words as “the scriptural message is communicated through a mix of words, visuals, art, silence, testimony and story”.<sup>115</sup> Kimball describes how the preacher goes from a broadcaster type position of authority to an interactive facilitator, using experience rather than just facts to influence belief and subsequently behavior.<sup>116</sup>

### iv. Discipleship

The heart of the emerging church is in discipleship and spiritual formation. For the emerging church, spiritual formation is a holistic journey with systems in place to guide people into maturity. Small groups form the heart of the discipleship structure allowing for accountability and mentoring. The Bible is viewed as “a compass for direction and a means to experience God”.<sup>117</sup> In a traditional evangelical church setting, discipleship begins after someone converts to Christianity. This is known as bounded-set

<sup>114</sup> These characteristics are paraphrased from a chart found on page 175 of: Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 2005.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid. 175

<sup>116</sup> Ibid. 187

<sup>117</sup> Ibid. 215.

conversion; once someone converts to Christianity, then discipleship begins. The emerging church believes that since it is impossible to know when someone converts to Christianity, spiritual formation begins with relationships. This is known as centered- set spiritual formation. Centered-set spiritual formation believes that there is no clear “in” or “out” group and that discipleship begins at the moment a relationship is formed.. In other words, most churches follow a Roman Model of discipleship which includes a presentation of the Gospel, a decision for Christ, and then inclusion into the fellowship. Emerging churches use a Celtic Model which is fellowship first, then ministry and conversation, and finally belief and an invitation to make a commitment to Christ.<sup>118</sup>

The goal is that everyone, whether Christian or not, is continually mentored and disciple toward a deeper relationship with God. As a result, the emerging church reaches out to members of the community that are still exploring Christianity. Discipleship excludes learning both orthodoxy and orthopraxy as part of the evangelism process and throughout and individual’s life. The emerging church discipless “people who follow Jesus by faith... with the goal of being transformed and participating in the transformation of the world.”<sup>119</sup>

## **v. Leadership**

In the emerging church, the pastor is considered a fellow journeyman. “The preacher and worship leader lead by participating in the gathering.”<sup>120</sup> Kimball describes the emerging church leader as a spiritual guide, who diffuses power, remains interconnected and relationship driven, values diversity, is giving the right to lead through trust, and leads by listening.<sup>121</sup> Leadership delegates tasks and responsibilities whenever possible, allowing volunteers to run the church. Positions are delegated based on people’s natural gifting, and people are encouraged to take on responsibilities where they can best serve. Also, the

<sup>118</sup> Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 2005. 205

<sup>119</sup> McLaren, Brian. "Emergent Evangelism." *ChristianityToday*. 01 Nov. 2004. Web. 01 May 2010. <<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/november/14.42.html>>.

<sup>120</sup> Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 2005. 185.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. 229.

amount of hired leadership is held at the minimum in order to lower budgets.<sup>122</sup> One emerging pastor describes how the service structure and large group meeting flows from a place of relationship: "Friendship is amazingly strong glue and all the heavier forms of commitment fall apart without it. As friends, we get a lot more done, because we like one another and don't want to let one another down."<sup>123</sup>

## vi. Gospel of Kingdom

There is an ecclesiological shift from the "gospel of salvation" to "gospel of the kingdom" message.<sup>124</sup> The cross is still central, but "the good news is not that [Jesus] died but that the kingdom has come."<sup>125</sup> The emerging church recognizes the importance of telling people the Gospel for evangelistic reasons, but puts more emphasis on the ability of the church to make a difference in this world. The movement also redefines redemption in terms of the Kingdom of God. The role of the church is to bring the Kingdom of God into the world today rather than merely to convert souls for life in the Kingdom post death. As a result, the focus is social justice and redeeming this world rather than eternal life or judgment after death. "Church is not a means through which the souls of individuals might ultimately escape this God-forsaken world, but rather is the way through which the body of Christ puts hands and feet on Christ's Gospel and thus embodies the reality of God's love for the world."<sup>126</sup>

### b. Emerging Sociologically

Emerging sociologically means that the church lives and exists with the context of society. This means "looking like culture, talking like culture, being justice focused, and willing to traverse Christian subculture taboos."<sup>127</sup> "Religion is relocated from public realm where truth is sought to private, personal

<sup>122</sup> Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 2005. 229.

<sup>123</sup> Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 2005. 107.

<sup>124</sup> Pope, "Emerging Church: Congregation or Aberration?" 2008. 42.

<sup>125</sup> Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 2005. 54.

<sup>126</sup> Moritz, Joshua M. "Beyond Strategy, Towards the Kingdom of God: The Post-Critical Reconstructionist Mission of the Emerging Church." *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 47.1 (2008): 27-36. Print. 31.

<sup>127</sup> Patton, "Will the Real Emerger Please Stand Up?", 2008.

realm where psychological and social well-being are paramount”.<sup>128</sup> John Stott, who is not a part of the emerging movement, says that the three core practices of the emerging church are “the way of Jesus, breaking down the sacred-secular divide, and community living.”<sup>129</sup> The church focuses on existing within culture and meeting people where they are. There is no distinction between the secular other and the sacred church. As Mark Driscoll writes in *The Radical Reformation*, “We must throw ourselves into culture so that all that God made is taken back and used in a way that glorifies him. Our goal is not to avoid drinking, singing, working, playing, eating, lovemaking and the like. Instead, our goal must be to redeem those things.”<sup>130</sup> Transforming the secular space, as noted by Bolger and Gibbs, is one of the core defining characteristics of the emerging church.

The breakdown of the barrier between sacred and secular is done in several ways. Swearing beyond the pulpit is permissible, and at times encouraged. Discussing theology over beers is an effective way to start a conversation. Essentially, the church is to be socially engaged with their local culture. Sermon illustrations may be drawn from pop culture, music and movies as the church leadership makes an attempt to explain things through a cultural lens. Seay’s *The Voice* project is a good example of how the church is trying to make the scriptural message accessible and understandable to the social context of the times. The emerging church is trying to traverse the Christian stereotypes and subculture that is considered hypocritical and judgmental by societal standards.

Also, the social gospel is a pinnacle of the emerging church. The church is actively involved in community outreach and social justice. The church has a responsibility to the community first and foremost. “Modern Christendom has drifted far from alleged revolutionary implications of the gospel for

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<sup>128</sup> Pope, “Emerging Church: Congregation or Aberration?”, 2010. 31.

<sup>129</sup> McKnight, “McLaren Emerging”, 2008.

<sup>130</sup> Driscoll, Mark. *The Radical Reformation: Reaching out without Selling out*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2004. Print. 152.

transforming the lot of the socially downtrodden and economically excluded".<sup>131</sup> Like most of the emerging church leaders, McLaren asserts that social justice is an integral part of the Christian life: "The way we treat our neighbors; the way we treat people of other races, religions, social classes, educational backgrounds, political parties; the way we treat other people and interact with the environment, and all the rest is part of our spirituality."<sup>132</sup>

## VI. Emerging Theologically

Theologically, the emerging church had avoided having a distinct statement of faith. . However, it should be noted that emerging reformers adhere to reformed theology and the emerging evangelicals still maintain a more liberal evangelicalism. Emerging churches tend to have no strong ties to denominations and many are not accepting of systematic theology. The movement disdains labels and leaves much of its theology undefined. The church remains agnostic regarding the future of the unevangelized and will not say whether an individual is destined for heaven or hell. The official stance is generally that the future of non-Christians is unknown so the church cannot make a clear statement nor should because doing so is outside the scope of human ability and is not a loving expression of God's Kingdom. The more liberal emerging movement does not make claims that Christianity is the exclusive religion and embraces God's presence in other religions. Many emergent Christians embrace a quasi-universalism.

"The task of theology, in the emergent model, is to express communal beliefs and values, to set forth the community's particular "web of significance" and "matrix of meaning".<sup>133</sup> They also embrace multiple theories of atonement and question imputation.<sup>134</sup> Some of the Emergent leaders go as far as denying the significance of the work of and the historicity of Christ on the cross. "Of all the elements of Christianity, the most repugnant is the notion of the Christ who took our sins upon himself and sacrificed

<sup>131</sup> Quoting Chalke in: Hawtrey, Kim, and John Lunn. "The Emergent Church: Socio-economic and Christian Mission." *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 27.65 (2010): 65-73. Print.

<sup>132</sup> Lawton, *The Emerging Church*, 2005.

<sup>133</sup> DeYoung and Kluck. *Why We're Not Emergent: by Two Guys Who Should Be*. 2008.

<sup>134</sup> Patton, "Will the Real Emerger Please Stand Up?", 2008.

his body in agony to save our souls. Did we ask him to?"<sup>135</sup> Some emergents believe that the cross is not representative of the loving nature of god and thus should not be the focal point of Christianity.

Theologically, the emergent church leaves room for the subjects that normally divide the church: homosexuality, abortion, and so forth. DeYoung criticizes the emergent approach to theology saying that not taking a stance on anything hurts everyone because people need more spiritual guidance and closure that blatant ambiguity. Emergents simply do not officially comment on many theological issues, but instead embrace an open discussion of all opinions. "The goal, so we in the emerging movement often say, of the Christian life is not to master the Bible but to be mastered by the Bible."<sup>136</sup> .

## VII. Emerging Epistemologically

The emerging epistemology, that is the study of knowledge, is characterized by suspicion of all truth claims, willingness to question, doubt and uncertainty concerning individualistic approach to faith learned in community, broadened perspectives, recognition that our knowledge is not objective, denial of man's ability to have absolute certainty, skeptical of traditional sources of authority, emphasis on mystery and inability to define God.<sup>137</sup> The emerging movement, with the exception of the emerging reformers, does not claim the authority, infallibility, or absoluteness of the Bible. According to McLaren, "the Bible never calls itself the foundation" of a Christian life and should not be held about other sources of information.<sup>138</sup> There is a strong distaste for any sort of propositional statement, everything is discussed as a possibility, but nothing is definite. Some emergents believe that men cannot possibly know God's truth and if they did, language would not be sufficient for discussing those truths. Therefore, there can only be truth in the context relative to our lives and communities and the church cannot be dogmatic about doctrine or moral standards.<sup>139</sup> The caveat that they emerging reformers and evangelicals would make is

<sup>135</sup> Burke quotes journalist Polly Toynbee in: DeYoung and Kluck. *Why We're Not Emergent*. 2008.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid, 2006. 23.

<sup>137</sup> Patton, "Will the Real Emerger Please Stand Up?", 2008.

<sup>138</sup> McLaren quoted in DeYoung, *Why We're Not Emergent*, 2008. 81

<sup>139</sup> Kowalski, "Postmodernism and the Emerging Church Movement", 2006.

that there are some central tenets that the church does agree on and embrace- the tenets of orthodox Christianity and everything else are up for discussion. The emergent church embraces the postmodern epistemology of church and questions everything, and proposes a more “generous orthodoxy”. As a result, the emerging church does not emphasis apologetics, but they are willing to discuss them with transparent humility.<sup>140</sup>

### **VIII. Emerging Politically**

The emerging church claims to have no political party affiliation. McLaren likes to say that the emerging church is purple because it is active, but not aligned to anything but the church itself. However, the platform of most emergers seems to be more moderate or democratic than anything else. In the latest election, McLaren urged the emergers to join the Matthew 25 Network- a political action committee supporting progressive Christians for political offices.<sup>141</sup> The emerging church could be a significant voting block for political races in the future, or at least the emergent church could. Political party allegiances are not encouraged, as one’s only allegiance should be toward the church.

"By identifying with Jesus, believers undergo a profound change of allegiance. They die to self and recognize that their primary identity is as adopted daughters and sons in the family of God and that the loyal expression of that family is the church, understood as a community of Christ followers seeking to live out their new identity in all the circumstances of their daily life."<sup>142</sup>

In all circumstances does also involve politics.<sup>143</sup> The more conservative emergers still remain conservative in politics, and some revisionists like Claiborne encourage the church to avoid participating in politics altogether. Regardless of the results, the emerging church is breaking the stereotype that most Christians votes conservative republican by reinforcing that a Christian’s allegiance is to the church and not to any political party or movement.

<sup>140</sup> Bolger and Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 2005. 124.

<sup>141</sup> McLaren, Brian. "The Matthew 25 Network." Weblog post. *Brian McLaren*. Web. 4 May 2010. <<http://www.brianmclaren.net/archives/blog/the-matthew-25-network.html>>.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid. 91.

<sup>143</sup> Patton, "Will the Real Emerger Please Stand Up?", 2008.

## IX. Emerging Missionally

Missions no longer are trips that people go on short term. To be missional means to live an authentic Christian life with the desire of sharing the love of God with others in daily life. "Evangelism or mission for me is no longer about persuading people to believe what I believe... It is more about shared experiences and encounters. It is about walking the journey of life and faith together, each distinct to his or her own tradition and culture but with the possibility of encountering God and truth from one another."<sup>144</sup> Emergers look at their local community and spheres of influences as a mission field. However, instead of employing strategies for evangelism, emergers simply live a Christian life, invite others into their life, and invest in the lives of the people that they come in contact with on a regular basis.

## X. Emerging or Reappearing:

Some commentators on the emerging church insist that the emerging church is nothing new or noteworthy. The church is always adjusting to the culture of the times, and changes in worldviews are nothing new for our society. As Peter Drucker discusses in his book *Postcapitalist Society*, the world is always in flux and society is always transforming.

"Every few hundred years in Western history there occurs a sharp transformation. Within a few short decades, society rearranges itself- its world view; its basic values; its social and political structure; its arts; its key institutions... Fifty years later, there is a new world. And the people born there cannot in even imagine the world in which their grandparents lived and into which their parents were born. We are currently living through just such a transition."<sup>145</sup>

The church is always redefining itself, and the emerging church is just another transitional step in that process according to some. Others believe the emerging church is the reappearance of past cultural movements.

Some say that the emerging church is a resurgence of Protestant congregationalism in that the church is sense as a body of people who rely on one another in community and live within society to

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<sup>144</sup>

<sup>145</sup> Quoting Peter Drucker's book *Postcapitalist Society* in: Kimball, *Emerging Church*, 2003. 65.



awaken their fellow man to the love of God.<sup>146</sup> Others believe that the emerging church is a form of neo-romanticism. Romanticism was the response to the enlightenment that welcomed "'both experience and tradition, both emotion and reason, both the Greco-Roman and Medieval heritage, both religion and science... both the individual and the group, both order and freedom, both man and nature". The emerging church is a similar dichotomy in modern society. They want the best of the church and the best of the culture of the times.<sup>147</sup>

The biggest criticisms of the emerging church surround the emergent branch of the movement. Many view the emergent as theological liberalism repackaged for the next generation. According to Dan Kimball, many of the emerging church leaders are beginning to become concerned with the future of the movement because of the direction McLaren, Burke and other emergent leaders are taking.

"A lot of things discussed and then even becoming beliefs is pretty liberal theology. My concern is seeing younger Christians especially who don't know these theological issues were discussed before and the results of the discussions throughout Church history get caught up in thinking this is a new expression of Christianity when it is pretty much classical extreme liberalism in a new, cooler wrapper. We need to look back at the discussions the Church has had throughout Church history to understand some of the discussions happening today."<sup>148</sup>

Shane Claiborne has a similar reason for not publically accepting his influence in emerging church movement. "Much of the time I find myself agreeing wholeheartedly with the critics who thought they were critiquing me but really only critiquing the emerging church. I was merely guilt by association, and an association with something I could not even identify, much less align with."<sup>149</sup> Driscoll has similar criticisms regarding the emergent church: "the emergent church is part of the Emerging Church Movement but does not embrace the dominant ideology of the movement. Rather, the emergent church is the latest version of

<sup>146</sup> Pope, "Emerging Church: Congregation or Aberration?", 2008. 43-44

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

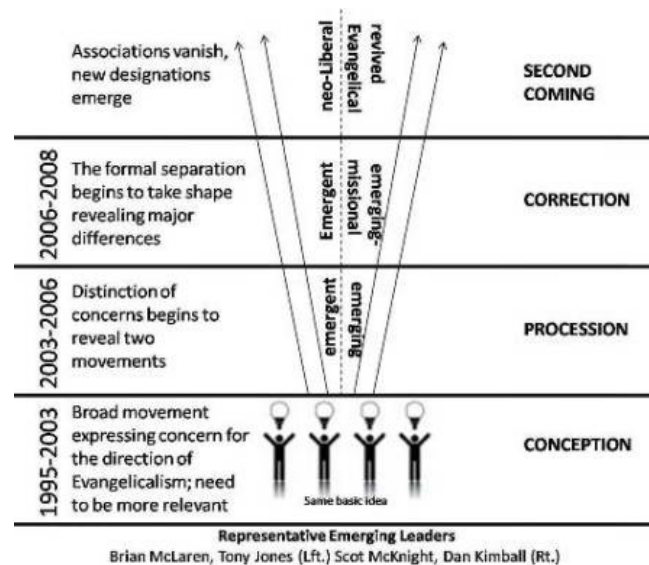
<sup>148</sup> Smith, Adam. "The End of the Emergent Movement?" *RELEVANT Magazine*. Web. 02 May 2010. <<http://www.relevantmagazine.com/god/church/features/21181-the-end-of-emergent>>.

<sup>149</sup> Claiborne, "The Emerging Church Brand: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly?", 2010.

liberalism. The only difference is that the old liberalism accommodated modernity and the new liberalism accommodates postmodernity".<sup>150</sup>

## XI. Death of the Movement:

Many have proclaimed that the emerging church has officially died and that its impact will be absorbed into either the traditional church or unique movements that are forming from the undercurrents. In his article, *The Second Coming of Emergers*, Michael Patton remembers the life of the emerging church and speculates its legacy. Like many others, Patton believes that the emerging church is not completely dead, but rather redefining itself. He created the following chart to depict the life of the emerging movement:



The emerging church began broadly with the conception of rethinking the direction of evangelicalism to make the Christian faith more relevant to postmodern culture. As the movement grew, there became a clear distinction between waves with the movement: McLaren and Jones were creating something new while Driscoll and Kimball were reimagining evangelicalism. It is only a matter of time before individuals involved in the discussion part their separate ways with different goals in mind as they attempt to minister to the same demographic. In recent years, the formal separation between leaders in the emerging church

<sup>150</sup> DeYoung and Kluck. *Why We're Not Emergent: by Two Guys Who Should Be*. 2008. 16.

becomes increasingly clear, revealing major differences between leaders in the movement. The distinction is made between the emergent and the emerging-missional schools of thought. The associations linking the emerging and the emergent into one solidified movement are vanishing and the schools of emerging thought can be divided into two categories: the neo-liberal and the revived evangelical.<sup>151</sup>

According to Mark Driscoll, the schools of thought within the emerging church must eventually systematize and result into more definable movements with their own scope and mission.

“In the end, I believe the conversation will result in multiple communities arriving at different conclusions and breaking off to have their own conversations, with their own Bible translations, leaders, books, magazines, websites, blogs, conferences, and model churches. That is already happening as new networks are forming and new church planting networks are establishing new churches with varying answers to the missiological questions. Over time, this may result in new denominations because inevitably systems must be put in place to serve a movement and somehow an umpire must be put in place to make decisions about what is and what is not acceptable doctrine and practice.”<sup>152</sup>

Driscoll has already begun to move down this path as his branch of the emerging church movement has founded the Acts 29 Church Planting Network. Using Patton’s terminology, Driscoll would definitely be in the revived evangelical category. As would Kimball and McKnight since they both see the emerging movement as a revival of evangelicalism for the next cultural generation. Other reviving evangelicals like Claiborne have distanced themselves from the movement from the beginning will continue to progress on their own initiatives. Consequently, the emerging terminology may soon be deceased, especially since the emergent wing of the movement is becoming increasingly liberal.

The neoliberal branch of the emerging movement is still gaining momentum and criticism. McLaren just released another book that is turning heads and shows no sign of leaving the emerging stage. With *A New Kind of Christian*, it seems as if McLaren wants people who have been on the fence in the movement to choose to be emergent or to back away from the momentum as he makes bold claims regarding the

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<sup>151</sup> Patton, C. Michael. "The Second Coming of Emergers" Web log post. *Parchment and Pen: A Theology Blog*. Reclaiming the Mind Ministries, 25 Sep. 2008. Web. 27 Apr. 2010.  
<<http://www.reclaimingthemind.org/blog/2008/09/the-second-coming-of-emergers/>>.

<sup>152</sup> Driscoll, "A Pastoral Perspective on the Emergent Church", 2006. 93.

gospel and basic tenets of faith. "McLaren is rethinking Jesus' mission on Earth, and even the purpose of the crucifixion."<sup>153</sup> McLaren is challenging people to make a discussion to embrace an open minded Christianity that many believe is no Christianity at all. Considering his popularity, this debate is sure to continue into the future. With the Emergent Village and theOOZE.com still popular, the emergent church has enough support to sustain itself. The emergent church will continue to exist as long as it can gain angry Christians who are disappointed with the church and draw in others within the postmodern culture. Some commentators believe that the emergent church's success depends on the leaders' ability to continue publishing books, and it appears that these authors show no sign of stopping.

## I. Conclusions

To summarize, the emerging church is a catch-all label for various church leaders whose mission is to make church relevant for the postmodern generation. These leaders, although divers in opinions and rarely in agreement, are transforming the face of Christianity in our time. Church is becoming more about the people involved as community is the focus. In addition, the emerging church is rethinking the way people worship, think about, and serve God through vintage and innovative strategies geared toward the specific needs of individuals and communities. The emerging church exists to make church relevant and meaningful.

While this movement remains difficult to define, it is worth talking about because its impact of Church and society is evident. Whether the emerging church is something innovative or a reappearance of older theological positions, one thing is certain: the emerging church is making an impact on Christianity. Emergers are determined to see Christianity reformed so that their faith can remain part of culture. Altworship, missional evangelism, intentional Christian living communities and other dynamics of the movement are changing churches around the world. Reframing church allows for the church to reach new locations and new demographics.

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<sup>153</sup> Bradley Hagerty, Barbara, prod. "Jesus, Reconsidered: Book Sparks Evangelical Debate." *Morning Edition*. NPR. 26 Mar. 2010. NPR, 26 Mar. 2010. Web. 22 Apr. 2010. <<http://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=125165061>>.

Many are skeptical of viewing the emerging church as a unique movement that will continue until the church is reformed, but most acknowledge its significance as an influential movement in Christianity today. The emerging church is not so much a unique movement as it is a movement of the church emerging or coming into being. The church is continually defining and redefining itself as culture changes, and there will always be something new emerging. As Driscoll commented in his analysis: "The emerging church will come and go. The traditional church will come and go. The church of Jesus Christ will continue on, because Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever."<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Driscoll, "Emerging Church", 2008.

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