

Improvising Church: An Introduction to the Emerging Church Conversation

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Abstract

Participants in the emerging church tend to avoid describing it in ways that might suggest it is a formal or coherent 'movement', preferring to think of it as an 'amorphous friendship' or a 'conversation'. The cynic might suspect that such fuzzy language reflects an attempt to avoid criticism by refusing to articulate clear positions. Those inclined to generous readings will accept that the conversation is still young, experimental and evolving. Even those of us who lean toward the latter view, however, often find that the fluidity of structure and breadth of conversation that is celebrated among these emerging Christians makes it very difficult to get a handle on what is happening. It is all the more difficult, then, to provide thoughtful analysis and critique. Nonetheless, the conversation (and even more so the practice) contains interesting and hopeful elements and, as such, it deserves to be discussed and evaluated with constructive critique and gracious encouragement.

I deliberately used the language of 'improvisation' in my title, though to some this may suggest that emerging communities are thoughtless and careless, willing to 'make up' church as they go along. Yet, as Sam Wells has shown us in his excellent book *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics*, true dramatic 'improvisation' is not an uninformed attempt to 'wing it', but can be the reflective practice of those who are so deeply shaped by the traditions and conventions of their field that they creatively adapt to new situations in ways that are both imaginative and faithful.¹ This metaphor of improvisation has much to commend it in relation to the life of the church, and is particularly useful for understanding what is going on in emerging churches. Drawing on the work of N. T. Wright, Jonny Baker and Doug Gay describe emerging church worship styles as 'faithful improvisation' that 'will be judged by its faithfulness to the story and the author. But within this there is a whole range of imaginative possibilities'.² This metaphor reminds us that the emerging church will function at its best precisely as it seeks to dwell deeply in scripture and tradition, so that the continuation of the story is both fresh and the recognisable outgrowth of what has gone before.

My first goal here is to gather up the pieces of the emerging conversation into categories of thought and practice that seem characteristic of the whole, even if they

are at times internally contested. My second goal is to contribute something to that conversation, to guide that conversation forward in ways that can bear fruit for the church even beyond those who would self-identify as 'emerging'.

Types of Emerging Churches

Given the fluid nature of this conversation, it may be helpful to begin with a loose typology of emerging churches. The first, and least interesting, of the churches described as 'emerging' are those that are concerned with cultural and stylistic change to the exclusion of real theological and ecclesial transformation – what I would call the 'Evangelical Pragmatists'. Many articles in American magazines and newspapers regard 'emerging' as synonymous with being 'hip' or 'cool'³ in a way that continues trends within American evangelicalism going back to the Great Awakenings. From the tent preaching of John Wesley and George Whitfield to the televangelists of the 21st century, evangelicals have long believed that the simple message of salvation was amenable to any medium. Assuming that Christianity is constituted by a core of unchanging beliefs and values, these evangelicals imagine it can be re-packaged in new cultural forms without changing the content. When such Evangelical Pragmatists engage with postmodern culture, it becomes just another means of packaging the gospel for a new generation. Some contemporary manifestations might seem more radical (e.g., the *Scum of the Earth* church in Denver, Colorado, with its appeal to punks, ravers, goths and bikers), but such innovation is not fundamentally different from traditional evangelicalism and what looks like postmodern openness functions as a counterweight for conservative doctrine. Liberality in form stands in an inverse relation to liberality in content. We might question the assumptions behind this evangelical form/content split by appealing to Wittgenstein's critique of essences and his attention to the profundity of surfaces,⁴ but perhaps more to the point, we could recall the dictum of the ancient church, *lex orandi, lex credendi*: the way we pray, our patterns of worship, both reflect and shape the way we believe. Form and substance cannot so easily be separated.

Unlike the Evangelical Pragmatists, many other emerging churches are rising out of postmodern culture in a conscious reaction against evangelical theology and subculture. We might call this second type of emerging church the 'Post-Evangelical Emergents'.⁵ In these churches both methodology and theology, form and content, are changing. Brian McLaren's *Cedar Ridge Community Church* might fit into this category, as also would *Solomon's Porch* in Minneapolis.⁶ These communities exhibit a spirit of inquiry about doctrinal questions and spiritual formation as well as a desire to move beyond the traditional liberal-conservative divide.⁷

There is also a third kind of emerging church – not as directly linked to an evangelical past – that is growing up in denominational settings. We might call these the 'Mainline Missionals'. The Church of England publication, *Mission-Shaped Church* does a fine job of engaging the 'fresh expressions of church' that are arising in England, some of which are independent but many of which have maintained ties to the Church of

England.⁸ These churches are not emerging from a rigid religious subculture but rather out of and in reaction to the 'maintenance' mindset prevalent in many denominational churches.⁹ Churches emerging within this environment are leaving behind a discredited liberalism and the remnants of civil religion in order to establish creative, postliberal, missional communities. *Church of the Apostles* in Seattle, (a joint Episcopal-Lutheran church plant), would be an American example of this type of emerging community, while *mayBe* in Oxford, England, would be a UK example.¹⁰

Unlike the Evangelical Pragmatists, the Post-Evangelical Emergents and the Mainline Missionals share a similar *telos* if not a similar starting point, and the focus of what follows in this article will be on these latter two types. It is the conversation between these two that has the most potential to bear fruit. For instance, though the independent Post-Evangelicals have been on the forefront of developing creative models of church life and worship, the emergents from the mainline have something to teach them about the importance of authority, institution, and connection, all of which still tend to be viewed with suspicion in much of the emerging conversation. There is a tendency among Post-Evangelical Emergents to gravitate towards nondenominational, independent and house church models that are disconnected from a larger body, both in terms of support and accountability. I suspect this is a continuation of the modern bias against tradition and connection that lingers even among the most postmodern of emergents. The negative reaction to the election of a 'National Director' (whose title was quickly changed to 'National Coordinator') for the US *Emergent Village* network, suggests that many have an intuitive hostile reaction to authority and structure, which they view in terms of control and negation rather than support and direction.¹¹

Emerging leaders would do well to consider the ways in which order, oversight and connection can foster relationship, mutual growth, humility and accountability. Without some such shift within emerging circles, this movement threatens to fragment the church further and to languish because of its disconnection. On its website, *mayBe* maintains that the institutional connection to a larger community of churches (in this case through episcopal oversight and support) is not a weakness but a strength that actually allows them the freedom to explore and imagine:

We want to grow and mature. Our confidence to do this comes from our roots: The bible is the text that forms us. We are nourished by Jesus's meal – the Eucharist. We are part of the Church of England. And we stand in the tradition of our brother and sister Christians down the centuries and around the world. It's this grounding that gives us confidence to explore. With these roots down, our walls can come down.¹²

Postmodernity as Crisis and Opportunity

Though there is no single pattern of 'emerging church', in one way or another they all understand themselves as emerging out of postmodern culture, or to put it another

way, emerging from the ruins of modernity. In the closing pages of Walker Percy's novel *Love in the Ruins*, after 'Paradise Estates' has devolved into violent chaos, a small Catholic church emerges in a nearby swamp, led by a befuddled priest and housing a congregation of misfits, white and black, Catholic and Protestant, drunks and 'love couples' – all of them 'eating Jesus' and trying to start over. In some ways this could be a blueprint for the emerging church (perhaps it is no accident that Brian McLaren, one of the leading figures in the conversation, wrote his Masters thesis on Walker Percy). During this time of cultural transition, the emerging churches are trying to imagine different forms of church life that fit the missional needs of a new cultural context.¹³

Steve Taylor introduces his book *Out of Bounds Church?* with this near-apocalyptic warning:

It is time to listen carefully. Can you hear the grind and groan as the tectonic plates of our culture shift? We live on the fault lines of a widespread cultural change. Institutions are in decline. Ancient spiritualities have re-emerged. World music has collided with pop music. The center looks out to the edge. In the midst of all this change, innovative expressions of church and worship are emerging across the globe.¹⁴

While these words reflect the tendency to hype and overstatement that plagues much emerging church discourse, they express an appealing sense of opportunity and hope that is also characteristic of the emerging conversation. These Christians see in the fragmentations of postmodern culture an invitation to reframe the pieces so that they make sense again. The cultural changes in the West are viewed as labour pains – real, productive struggle that is ready to birth something new. The emerging churches want to be on the front lines of that new birth and, indeed, to midwife the process. As Taylor puts it:

In this crisis there is opportunity. We can offer the culture the richness of our Christian heritage – the beauty of new expressions of faith and community that have the power to sustain us in a time of fragmentation.¹⁵

Alongside this sense that postmodernity offers an important opening for the church, one often hears the complaint that traditional churches – whether evangelical or mainline – are failing to grasp the moment. Instead of accepting the gift of renewal that can come from dwelling in the margins, too many churches (both liberal and conservative) are still striving to regain social status and civic privilege. Dan Kimball laments, 'Most of our churches do not connect and engage with our emerging post-Christian culture.'¹⁶ Yet the emerging conversation tends not to linger over the failure of denominational structures or mega-church evangelicals to respond to the needs and opportunities of the postmodern shift, and the critical voice is largely drowned out by a wide-eyed excitement about what might emerge to fill the vacuum. The dominant tone is one of hope, possibility and opportunity. Part of the attraction

of the emerging church is its willingness to grant permission for people to dream again about what the church can be. *Solomon's Porch*, an emerging church in Minneapolis led by Doug Pagitt, openly expresses its sense of purpose through a 'dream statement' ('We Dream of a Church Where...').

Taking postmodernity as a cultural conversation partner, however, can create problems, since the very definition of postmodernism is contested. Imagining a church in response to postmodernity is thus a daunting task, especially when 'postmodernity' becomes a catch-all category for either 'all the new things we like' or, among some reactionary evangelicals, 'all the new things we dislike'. Overall, the emerging conversation tends to be more effective at engaging postmodernity in pragmatic ways than in reflecting on it theoretically. Emergents generally define the postmodern ethos in terms of a cluster of cultural transitions that have had most impact on younger generations – things like a return to mystery (with a renewed interest in spiritual practices and medieval mysticism), a hunger for spirituality (even if overlaid with 'new age' assumptions and do-it-yourself religion), new models of networked communities (via Internet, cell phones and increased mobility), a desire to find roots in tradition (in contrast to the modern suspicion of tradition), and a yearning to encounter God through image, ritual and sacrament (in contrast to highly word-centred and often iconoclastic modernist forms of Christianity). In other words, the demise, or decline, of modernity has in many ways opened a path to retrieve things premodern and to regain the integrity of a church long compromised by its partnership with power (if you detect a slight Anabaptist tone here you would not be completely mistaken). If postmodernity as a cultural shift means entering into a post-Christian or post-Christendom era, then the emergents are ready to welcome a position at the edges that places them in continuity with Jesus' own powerlessness. If postmodernity means a shift in which average people, especially young people, have a higher tolerance for ambiguity and find themselves more moved by narratives than apologetic arguments, then the emerging church is ready to offer a place to delve into divine mystery and ponder the Christian story.

Though not widely invoked in emergent conversations, Alasdair MacIntyre's descriptions of modernity and postmodernity, as well as his accounts of tradition and virtue, make him a helpful dialogue partner. MacIntyre helpfully maps the postmodern landscape by suggesting that there are three competing approaches to rationality and moral inquiry.¹⁷ The first is the 'encyclopaedic' approach, the Enlightenment mindset that still seeks objective, foundational knowledge apart from appeals to authority and tradition. The second is the 'genealogical' approach, the deconstructive edge of postmodernism which necessarily tends toward nihilism. The third is the approach through 'tradition', which invites a recovery of premodern modes of thought, especially those associated with Thomas Aquinas. This taxonomy of moral inquiry could shed some light on the situation of the emerging church. For instance, some conservative evangelicals have critiqued the emerging church from a perspective of retrenchment, a desire to return to modernist 'encyclopaedic' approaches to faith driven by a fear that genealogical nihilism is the only possible

outcome of postmodernity.¹⁸ The emergent thinkers, in turn, need to be able to articulate more clearly why they might celebrate the demise of certain aspects of modernity insofar as it allows them to recover a tradition-based approach to Christian theology, worship and mission.

The danger is that emergents will settle for a thin notion of tradition as a repository of ancient practices that can be raided randomly for the sake of creating 'cool' worship. Some voices in the conversation, such as Robert Webber, are calling for a thicker account of tradition, but so far this has not become a major theme in emergent writings.¹⁹ On this point D. A. Carson makes a significant critique when he comments:

It is ironic that some emerging leaders speak constantly of the importance of Tradition, yet fail to live in any long-standing living tradition. By constantly appealing to the 'capital T' Tradition, and then in effect picking and choosing from its offerings, they do not succeed in living out any of the traditions that flow from the Tradition, but create their own eclectic, *ad hoc* churchmanship... As long as you can pick and choose from something as vast as the great Tradition, you are really not bound by the discipline of any tradition.²⁰

Neo-Romanticism

One way of describing the ethos of the emerging churches is to compare it to another moment of cultural transition, roughly 1780–1830, in which Romanticism emerged as a critical response to the Enlightenment. We might even describe the emerging church as an expression of Neo-Romanticism. Indeed, when emergents speak of 'modernity' they tend to mean more precisely the Enlightenment with its rationalism, foundationalism, and disdain for mystery and tradition. Just as Romanticism sought a fuller vision affirming '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',²¹ so emergents appeal to aesthetics, nature and emotion, while urging a more holistic approach to faith that unifies mind and body, individual and community. The danger here is in forgetting that Romanticism is, in its own way, just as 'modern' as the Enlightenment, at least insofar as it accepts the modern turn to the subject as the principal locus of authority.

To use George Lindbeck's categories, the emerging church is seeking to move beyond the cognitive-propositional understanding of doctrine that has been pervasive in evangelical circles.²² Yet while many emergent leaders now speak the language of Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic approach (for instance, Doug Pagitt: 'In many ways, becoming Christian is much like learning our native language; we pick it up when we are immersed in it'),²³ the Neo-Romantic tendencies in emergent could yet lead the conversation into a reiteration of liberal experiential-expressivism. That is, like Schleiermacher 200 years ago, the passion for a more holistic faith, a strong sense of community, an attention to beauty and nature (all of which are evident in

the emergent conversation) could tempt one to begin evaluating doctrine and worship by the standard of experience or feeling, thus failing to challenge the basic anthropocentric turn of modernity. The answer, however, is not to ignore or become suspicious of passion and emotion, nor to minimise the importance of the experience of God. Kathleen Norris seems to find the right balance when, in contrast to the modern idolatry of personal experience (which ultimately becomes indistinguishable from personal preference), she appeals to 'experience tested in isolation, as by the desert fathers and mothers, and also tried in the crucible of community.'²⁴ A critical recovery of aesthetics, experience, tradition, the mystical and the mediaeval, may well nurture faithful and creative embodiments of church so long as we avoid the temptation to make personal experience the measure of faith.

Via Media

Another central feature of the emerging church, not unrelated to its Neo-Romanticism, is its search for the *via media*. In a recent interview, Brian McLaren declared that finding a middle (or third) way is at the heart of the emerging enterprise:

When people feel stuck, whether they're stuck in a tradition that they feel needs to be updated (yet they've got liturgical fundamentalism), or they're stuck in a theological system (so they've got theological fundamentalism), or they are stuck in a polarization, I think people feel one way of getting out of being stuck is to introduce a third element.²⁵

McLaren sees the Emergent conversation as trying to find and embody that 'third element', something that may turn out to be one of the greatest strengths of the emergent conversation.

First of all, in theological terms, emerging churches are seeking a third way beyond the liberal-conservative divide. McLaren, borrowing a phrase from Hans Frei, has referred to this middle path as 'generous orthodoxy'.²⁶ Like the postliberals, the emergent leaders are trying to find a new way of embodying the faith in the postmodern world that gets beyond the old labels of conservative and liberal. In this way the postliberals and the emerging post-evangelicals have much in common, not because they are finding a compromise (a little of this and a little of that) but because they are rejecting the old dichotomy altogether and trying to rethink Christian discipleship through a re-engagement with the Church's deep tradition. In this connection the works of Nancey Murphy and Stanley Grenz have made significant contributions to the emergent conversation.²⁷ One of the most important theological shifts in the direction of generous orthodoxy is the conscious reframing of redemption in terms of the kingdom of God. The work of Christ and the Spirit is no longer thought of primarily in terms of saving individual souls from an eternity in hell. On the contrary, salvation is not only individual, it is communal; not only eternal, but also temporal. It is 'Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is

in heaven.' Mission, then, means more than evangelism, and evangelism means more than 'getting people saved'. Indeed, the language of being 'saved' or 'born again', with its punctiliar implications, is largely eschewed in favour of a model of journeying, delving ever deeper into one's participation in the kingdom of God. Evangelism is no longer regarded as a conquest or victory ('winning souls') but as a kind of dance (McLaren's description) in which there is not a winner or a loser but an ongoing relationship in which each partner learns from the other.²⁸

Secondly, in terms of worship, emerging churches are seeking a third way beyond the traditional-contemporary divide. The emerging church seeks to engage postmodern culture in creative and sympathetic ways while also drawing on the ancient spiritual storehouses of the church's deep tradition. If there is a particularly fitting biblical epigraph for the worship practices of the emerging church it would be Jesus' words to his disciples in Matthew's gospel, that 'every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old' (Matthew 13:52). Embodying the kingdom of heaven in postmodern culture will require a boundary-breaking eclecticism, retrieving ancient practice as well as embracing everyday epiphanies. The goal is not to promote 'contemporary' church but to move beyond the either/or of traditional *versus* contemporary. Robert Webber's language of 'ancient-future' has been widely adopted as a way of describing the dual movement of looking back while moving ahead.

This emerging approach to worship reflects a renewed appreciation of aesthetics, especially the recovery of art and image in worship. As Maggi Dawn has noted

'Emerging' circles represent a large number of people who have emerged from the traditional evangelical dualism between body and soul, world and spirit. One of the Christian truths lost to the puritanical end of evangelicalism is that beauty is one way of grasping and understanding truth. Art, music, design – all of these are windows onto God. Combine the rediscovery of aesthetics with a theology based in the celebration of, not the rejection of, the body, and a lot of Christian expression begins to shift.²⁹

Consequently, the emerging church movement embraces worship that is multi-sensory, multi-layered and multi-media in contrast to the modernist emphasis on a word-centred, rational worship that contains the body in the pew so that the mind can do all the work. Unlike the 'seeker-sensitive' worship movement associated with Willow Creek or Vineyard churches, in which 'worship' was purged of most of its traditional Christian distinctiveness, emerging worship reclaims all the accoutrements of piety – candles, icons, incense, kneeling and chanting – alongside the projection screens, electric guitars and televisions rolling looped images. The technological elements are intentionally subdued, made subservient to personal connection and spiritual reflection. Emerging worship tries to create the ambiance of the art gallery or the café rather than the excitement of the arena or the rock concert.

Thirdly, in relation to culture and mission, emerging churches are seeking a third way that can encompass both relevance and resistance. One of the most quoted

authors among emergents is Lesslie Newbigin. By approaching Western culture as a mission field, he provides important tools for thinking about what enculturation and mission might mean in postmodernity:

We must start with the basic fact that there is no such thing as a pure gospel if by that is meant something which is not embodied in a culture . . . Every interpretation of the gospel is embodied in some cultural form.³⁰

There is no way that we can avoid cultural embodiment, nor should we wish to do so. While in certain ways the church exists as a counter-culture (with its own language, practices and stories), this culture is not (or should not be) self-contained and all-sufficient. Christians rightly participate in and with those outside the church in a shared cultural life (making art, growing food, participating in sports, seeing movies, organising schools), and this shared cultural life is not something to lament or fear. It is in and through this sharing of life that the witness of the church becomes real for those who might never come to church. Unlike the mega-church that seeks to centralise and Christianise cultural activity by building its own schools, gyms, bookstores and coffee shops on the church 'campus', emerging Christians tend to prefer bringing the church into the world. Through this, they hope both to bear witness to and to learn from those outside the church. McLaren has written that

one of the tragic ironies of the twentieth century was the continual talk about 'church renewal' that preoccupied us with how the Spirit would work through us in our church services. Meanwhile Jesus was concerned about how the Spirit would work through us in the world outside the church – its ghettos, art galleries, shops, schools, sidewalks, parks, fields, forests, apartment buildings, buses, trains, and office buildings.³¹

The etymology of 'relevant' might be helpful here, specifically its connection to the word 'elevate', which suggests a liturgical metaphor. The church's witness in the world could be construed as a reiteration of the moment when the priest elevates the host during the traditional eucharistic liturgy. Seen in this way, relevance (re-elevation) is about lifting up Christ so that he may be seen by the world. Indeed, it may be that one of our most profound forms of re-elevation will be to find the ways in which cultural productions (films, music, novels) open up to the beauty of God. In other words, relevance may mean opening our eyes to see what Karl Barth has called 'secular parables of the kingdom'.³² Of course, as Jonathan Wilson has warned,

this understanding of the mission of the church must be disciplined by the gospel and firmly grounded in the conviction that 'relevance' is an intrinsic characteristic of the gospel, not a demand of the culture. Otherwise, the quest for relevance becomes a quest for acceptance.³³

Another way of putting this is to say that relevance must always walk hand in hand with resistance: incarnation must be balanced by the cross.

Maybe has articulated this *via media* of relevance and resistance well in its website discussion of 'the spirit of *maybe*'. They write

At the heart of Jesus's message in action and word was his insistence that things were changing. That, despite appearances to the contrary, God's just and gentle rule was breaking in. That those with ears to hear and eyes to see should be listening and looking for signs of life-bringing change. But also that there were other, death-dealing powers at work that will not give up without a fight. There is a long biblical tradition of pointing out the difference between the life-giving and death-dealing powers. Of being quick to praise, ready to lament. It's a mighty tradition in whose steps we are humbly trying to follow. And so *maybe* is *holding out for the real thing*. We want to be characterised by celebration of all that is good in the world. And resistance to all that is dehumanising and destructive.³⁴

In this way a community like *maybe* commits itself to faithfully 'improvising' church; that is, living so fully in the biblical tradition that they become able not simply to repeat a script from the past but to enact the spirit of that script in the present.

At their best, emerging, improvising churches engage in intentional spiritual formation (and here the language of 'new monasticism' is quite fitting)³⁵ so that they can trust 'doing what comes naturally' as they engage a changing culture. In this way the deep roots of the tradition can nourish these communities as they risk stretching the edges of mission without fear that their creativity and exploration will be swallowed up by syncretism and compromise. To improvise church is to release control of the outcome precisely because we trust that the outcome has been assured through the life, death and resurrection of Christ. The church can risk being creative in its faithfulness because we trust that in God's providence even our failures will be gathered up and made to contribute to the final act of the drama.

Notes

- 1 Wells, *Improvisation*.
- 2 Baker and Gay, with Brown, *Alternative Worship*, 128. See also Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 139–143.
- 3 See for instance, Leland, "Hip New Churches."
- 4 See for instance Ludwig Wittgenstein on the difference between seeking an 'essence' of language versus finding meaning in use, *Philosophical Fragments* §91–94, or the 'essence' of games versus a surface, i.e., visible, 'family resemblance' (§66–71). Fergus Kerr raises the interesting question of whether Wittgenstein was familiar with 'Nietzsche's celebration of (what he took to be) the pre-Platonic Greek way of thinking: "Oh, those Greeks! They knew how to *live*. What is required for that is to stop courageously at the surface, the fold, the skin, to adore appearance ... Those Greeks were superficial – out of profundity! The depth of the world is on the surface, so to speak.'" Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein*, 188 (citing Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 35).
- 5 Tomlinson, *The Post-Evangelical*, provides one widely read account of this emergence from the evangelical world.
- 6 See Cedar Ridge Community Church and Solomon's Porch websites.
- 7 See for instance Pagitt, *Reimagining Spiritual Formation*.

- 8 Church of England Council for Mission and Public Affairs, *Mission-Shaped Church*. See also *Fresh Expressions Project*.
- 9 See Payne and Beazley, *Reclaiming the Great Commission*, which describes the attempt of the Episcopal Diocese of Texas to make the shift from maintenance to mission.
- 10 See Apostles Church and maybe websites.
- 11 See US Emergent Village website. For a discussion of ecclesial authority in response to modernity see Bader-Saye, "Listening: Authority and Obedience."
- 12 Maybe, "Values."
- 13 Though he is not an 'emergent' author, Jonathan R. Wilson captures the spirit of emergence when he writes, 'In order to be faithful to the unchanging, ever-present Jesus Christ and to the mission given it by Jesus Christ, the church must carefully and persistently attend to its circumstances. We live in a time of tremendous change and uncertainty. In such a time, the church has many opportunities for revitalized witness to the gospel.' Wilson, *Living Faithfully*, 5.
- 14 Taylor, *Out of Bounds Church?*, 11.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 27.
- 16 Kimball, *Emerging Worship*, xi.
- 17 MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*.
- 18 For instance, see Carson, *Becoming Conversant*.
- 19 See Webber's series of 'Ancient-Future' books, including *Ancient-Future Faith*.
- 20 Carson, *Becoming Conversant*, 140–141.
- 21 Barzun, *Berlioz and the Romantic Century*, I, 379, cited in Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought*, 81.
- 22 For Lindbeck's categories see Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 16–19.
- 23 Pagitt, *Reimagining*, 27.
- 24 Norris, *Cloister Walk*, 43.
- 25 McLaren, Interview at the Emergent Convention, Nashville, May 22, 2004.
- 26 See McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*.
- 27 Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism*, and Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*.
- 28 McLaren, *More Ready Than You Realize*.
- 29 Dawn. weblog.
- 30 Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 144.
- 31 McLaren, *More Ready Than You Realize*, 140.
- 32 Barth discusses the 'secular parables' in *Church Dogmatics IV/3.1*, 38–165.
- 33 Wilson, *Living Faithfully*, 3–4.
- 34 Maybe, "The spirit of maybe."
- 35 On this see New Monasticism website.

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