Rick Warren Meets Gregory Dix: The Liturgical Movement Comes Knocking at the Megachurch Door

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The movement commonly called "the emerging church" arose out of the evangelical megachurches, where members—especially younger members—increasingly sought an affective, symbolic, and non-dogmatic style of worship. The emerging church arises out of postmodernism's suspicion of truth claims and its trust in experience. This has led to a liturgical style that embraces experience but, as some within the movement acknowledge, lacks theological grounding. As they have turned to the early church for models of authentic common prayer, emergent Christians are building a liturgical style that is often described as "ancient-modern." Episcopalians, like emergent Christians, value enacted over confessional theology yet claim a theological tradition that situates the liturgy within what Phyllis Tickle calls "a grand framing story." An "ecumenical" conversation with emergence holds great promise, will happen primarily at the parochial level, and will require Episcopalians, especially clergy, to be not only rooted in the great sweep of the Christian Tradition but also open to the insights of postmodernism.

America's Critique of Liturgical Renewal

By the mid-1980s, liturgists had begun to question and even to doubt the ability of modern Americans to celebrate the liturgy. For more than a century, an international, interdenominational coalition had clung to a hope not just that the liturgy would be reinvigorated, but that a reinvigorated liturgy would inevitably reinvigorate the church. It seemed by the 1980s that both assumptions had been naive. In every

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denomination, some members, if not many, were resisting the new liturgical forms, and liturgists were not entirely unsympathetic.

The twentieth-century liturgists were the children of nineteenth-century Liturgical Movement pioneers. They envisioned a future that reappropriated the best of the past, especially of a time well before Anglicans, Roman Catholics, and Protestants made liturgy a field of battle, and even before it had been clericalized and complicated during the Middle Ages. They looked mostly to the patristic era, where they found a liturgy that was a crucial force in forming a vigorous young church.

The work of the Anglican Dom Gregory Dix, especially his *The Shape of the Liturgy,* and the scholarship of others of his time shaped generations of liturgists who in turn shaped the new rites.[1] Because of these scholars and pastors, the general contours of the early liturgies, especially the third- and fourth-century liturgies, are unmistakable in all of the rites that were crafted and promulgated in the mid- and late twentieth century. The 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* is no exception. By the mid-1980s, however, the hope that a renewed liturgy would renew the church had turned for many to skepticism and even fear that the new rites were weakening the churches and driving worshipers away.

The Liturgists' Critique of American Culture

Perhaps in self-defense, liturgists sought explanations for the failure of the new liturgies beyond the liturgies themselves. Robert Bellah's wildly popular *Habits of the Heart* came at the right time for liturgists. It exposed the pervasive individualism of modern American culture and its destructive impact on every aspect of public life. In the chapter on religion, Bellah used a woman named Sheila Larson as the exemplar of what American culture had done to religion. "Sheila Larson is a young nurse who has received a good deal of therapy and who describes her faith as 'Sheilaism.' 'I believe in God. I'm not a religious fanatic. I can't remember the last time I went to church. My faith has carried me a long way. It's Sheilaism. Just my own little voice.'"[2]

Sheilaism, Bellah and his colleagues argued, was a symptom of the slow collapse of the hierarchical structure of American society, the

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[1] Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London: Black, 1945).

[2] Robert N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualisim and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 220–221.

de facto disestablishment of religion (so that one's religion was no longer a consequence of anything but one's choice), and the frequent use of religious language without reference to any religious institution. (Today, this might be called using "spiritual" language while actively rejecting "religious" commitments.) Liturgists began to contend that this absence of societal common life, not the new liturgical books, was preventing liturgical and ecclesial renewal in modern America.

In 1985, the same year that Bellah published *Habits of the Heart*, Neil Postman gave liturgists another way to counter critics who blamed them for the decline in mainline denominations. In *Amusing Ourselves to Death,* Postman built on Marshall McLuhan's thesis that the medium is the message. Postman argued that television aims ultimately to entertain, no matter what its content.[3] Because Americans spend a great deal of time experiencing reality filtered through the television, they have been conditioned to evaluate all experiences in terms of how entertaining they are. Liturgists argued that, in a culture that increasingly seeks to be entertained rather than engaged, liturgy seems dull and foreign. This, they claimed, far more than the new liturgical books, was the reason mainline Christian worship was failing to create a resurgence of faith and zeal.

The Complicity of the Churches in Liturgical Dysfunction

A number of liturgists lamented that because the churches did not see these cultural opponents for what they were, they were surrendering to them without a fight. Francis Mannion's analysis of the impact of American culture on the Roman liturgy was highly influential across denominational lines. "I think that the fundamental reason why liturgy has lost a considerable part of its cultural and social power is related to the absorption into post-conciliar American Catholicism of profoundly negative dynamics operative in modern secular culture."[4] The American Roman Church in its practice, though not in its books, Mannion claimed, had adopted a liturgical style that was "therapeutic" (focusing on the individual's feelings, not the community's identity); informal (highlighting intimacy and emotionality over social patterns); and

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[3] Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin, 1985).

[4] Francis Mannion, "Liturgy and the Present Crisis of Culture," *Worship* 62 (1988): 102.

issue-driven (imposing a political or ecclesial agenda rather than encountering a Mystery on its own terms).

Roman Catholics were not the only ones to embody these cultural values. Two years before Mannion, Episcopal liturgical musician Carol Doran and her colleague, poet Thomas Troeger, then a Presbyterian, had reported that they were seeing this trend in "a variety of Christian communions including Baptist, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, United Church of Christ, Methodist and Mennonite Brethren churches. . . . Our general observation is that worship has become problematic for the churches with whom we have worked because the values of popular culture, particularly the high worth placed on the idiosyncratic self, have so pervaded these communities that the historical roots, theological rationale and corporate character of worship have greatly diminished in the consciousness of church members."[5]

Church Growth, the Emulation of Culture, and the Rejection of Liturgy

While Mannion, Doran, Troeger, and many other mainline liturgists were fighting back the encroaching American culture, other church leaders were intentionally clearing the way. This was when the church-growth movement was born and megachurches first began to take shape. "The contemporary *church growth* movement traces it origins to the 1980s and the theories and strategies of Donald A. McGavran, sometimes referred to as the 'father of Church Growth.'"[6]

"Church growth" is essentially pragmatic. Because overt religion is off-putting for many Americans, the megachurch / church-growth strategy remakes Christianity, especially Christian worship, in the image of the culture, stripping away every religious image or symbol that might frighten or offend. As Ruth Tucker cleverly put it, "The end-*times* justifies the means."[7]

By the early 1990s, this approach had borne fruit, and the modern megachurch phenomenon was born. Almost twenty years later, it is clear that it has been an astonishing success. "The raw number of

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[5] Carol Doran and Thomas H. Troeger, "Reclaiming the Corporate Self: The Meaning and Ministry of Worship in a Privatistic Culture," *Worship* 60 (1986): 200.

[6] Ruth A. Tucker, *Left Behind in a Megachurch World: How God Works Through Ordinary Churches* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2006), 98.

[7] Tucker, *Left Behind,* 101.

megachurches [Protestant and Episcopal[8] churches with an average Sunday attendance of more than 2,000] has grown tremendously over the past few decades. Some reports have the number growing from the low teens in the early 1960s to around 310 in 1990 to nearly 1,250 in 2007."[9] The multiplication of megachurches is outpacing the growth of the U.S. population. In 1990, there were 1.2 megachurches for each million American citizens. In 2005, there were four.[10]

Megachurches are growing not only in number but also in size. On average, megachurch attendance increased over the past five years by 50 percent.[11] Many congregations have far more than the 2,000 weekly attendees that would qualify them as megachurches. Joel Olsteen's Lakewood Church in Houston, for example, claims an average Sunday attendance of 47,000.[12]

The Mainline Emulates the Mega

Mainline congregations have looked with envy at the success of megachurches, and some have tried to duplicate it. Stephen Ellingson studied nine Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) congregations in the San Francisco Bay Area that use the megachurch worship format to varying degrees. He claims, echoing McLuhan and Postman, that these methods are not cosmetic. The medium is the message. To the extent that a congregation adopts this formerly alien style, classic Lutheranism is displaced.

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[8] Of the 1361 megachurches catalogued in a benchmark Hartford Seminary database, only two are Episcopal: Christ Church, Ponte Vedra Beach; and St. Martin's, Houston, both having 2000–3,000 attendees on average. See *Database of Megachurches in the U.S.,* Hartford Institute for Religious Research. http://hirr.hartsem.edu/megachurch/database.html. Accessed 21 January 2010.

[9] Scott Thumma and Dave Travis, *Beyond Megachurch Myths: What We Can Learn from America's Largest Churches* (San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 169.

[10] Thumma, *Beyond Megachurch Myths,* 7.

[11] Scott Thumma and Warren Bird, *Changes in American Megachurches: Tracing Eight Years of Growth and Innovation in the Nation's Largest-attendance Congregations*. 12 September 2008. Hartford Institute for Religious Research. http://hirr.hartsem.edu/megachurch/megastoday2008_summaryreport.html. Accessed 21 January 2010.

[12] *Database of Megachurches in the U.S.,* Hartford Institute for Religious Research. http://hirr.hartsem.edu/megachurch/database.html. Accessed 21 January 2010.

> The old boundaries that kept evangelicalism and mainline Protestantism in separate religious worlds are breaking down as churches within the old mainline adopt the worship practices, theological language, and identities of evangelicalism and nondenominationalism. . . . The process of colonization [of the mainline by the evangelical megachurch movement] has become the means by which the larger religious culture of consumption, choice and pragmatism that has fueled the growth of nondenominational and evangelical traditions has decentered Lutheran tradition. This in turn weakens the ability of these Lutheran, and other, congregations to serve as communities of memory.[13]

Substitute any denomination for "Lutheran." Worship crafted on church-growth principles is not just a medium but also a message, and the message includes "the larger religious culture of consumption, choice and pragmatism" exposed by Mannion, Doran, and Troeger, and denounced as contrary to the goals of nineteenth- and twentieth-century liturgical renewal.

The Achilles' Heel of Church Growth

Yet, despite the increasing number of megachurches, the expanding attendance at their services, and the spread of church-growth techniques into mainline denominations, by the end of the twentieth century some megachurch leaders began to admit that they were finding it difficult to attract and retain young adults. Dan Kimball, then a megachurch youth pastor, writes, "Little by little, I began to recognize that non-Christian students, who had once been impressed by all of our programming, dramas, media clips, and topical messages, were showing less and less interest. With technology now so accessible to teenagers that they could easily create their own flashy video clips, seeing it in church was no big deal."[14]

Episcopal theologian Robert Webber identified a far deeper problem. "Because people are drawn by entertainment, showmanship, and celebrity, many local churches have turned to a presentational worship to attract the masses. . . . Worship, instead of being a

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[13] Stephen Ellingson, *The Megachurch and the Mainline: Remaking Religious Tradition in the Twenty-first Century* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 178.

[14] Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003), 32–33.

rehearsal of God's saving actions in the world and for the world, is exchanged for making people feel comfortable, happy and affirmed."[15]

Out of this pastoral and academic disillusionment has come the movement commonly called "the emerging church," or simply "emergence." Exiles from church growth-inspired megachurches, however, are not the only Christians who call themselves "emergent." Karen Ward, while a national officer of the ELCA, is credited with giving the movement its name in 1999. Today, she is the abbess of a Lutheran/Episcopal emergent congregation in the Diocese of Olympia.[16]

While the self-focused worship of church growth may have appealed to a generation that felt itself oppressed by the religion that raised it, it does not appeal to young people today, most of whom grew up without religion. Emergence is a turn *away from* the subject. It is the reclaiming of God as the object of Christian worship, especially in the person of Christ, and the rejection of the narcissistic self as the focus.

A diverse group of observers are working to systematize the writings of these emergent Christians and to explicate the theologies in their practices. However, the emergent movement's "lack of theological method . . . is the systematic theologian's worst nightmare."[17] "There is simply no grand framing story or even unanimity of opinion yet about when precisely it was that this new thing—this new, emerging way of being Christian in an emerging new world—became so clearly distinct from what had been as to be worthy of a name of its own."[18]

The Philosophical Underpinnings of the Emerging Church

One element that clearly is part of the "grand framing story," however, is the complaint of emergence that modernism, the grounding

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[15] Robert Webber, *Ancient-Future Worship: Proclaiming and Enacting God's Narrative* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2008), 151.

[16] Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2005), 321. See also Karen M. Ward, "Back to the Future: Visionary, Entrepreneurial, Missional Anglican Leadership for Today's Church," *Anglican Theological Review* 92, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 167–173.

[17] Joshua M. Moritz, "Beyond Strategy, Towards the Kingdom of God: The Post-Critical Reconstructionist Mission of the Emerging Church," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 47 (2008): 32.

[18] Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2008), 124.

philosophy of the megachurch movement, the fruit of the Enlightenment, is misleading. Within the literature of the emerging church, "Modernism is often pictured as pursuing truth, absolutism, linear thinking, rationalism, certainty, the cerebral as opposed to the affective—which in turn breeds arrogance, inflexibility, a lust to be right, the desire to control."[19] Abandoning this modern worldview, emergence embraces postmodernism. "Postmodernism, by contrast, recognizes how much of what we 'know' is shaped by the culture in which we live, is controlled by emotions and aesthetics and heritage, and in fact can only be intelligently held as part of a common tradition, without overbearing claims to being true or right."[20]

The postmodern world in which the emergent church is taking shape, then, is essentially an epistemological world. In it, knowledge and truth are relative. *How* relative is not a settled question. Some writers and pastors who style themselves "emergent" are biblical literalists while some are agnostics who use Christian language. Most are believers who are skeptical of truth claims, yet believe that a transformative *experience* of God is possible.

Warren Meets Dix?

Rather than disseminating truth claims about the Divine, then, most emergent congregations foster religious experiences. They seek to apprehend the Sacred, not pin it down, insisting that any definition of the Holy is illusory. They embrace art, conversation, shared contemplative silence, the classic spiritual disciplines, and liturgical worship as reliable ways to encounter God.

Dan Kimball tells of his early attempts as the youth minister in a megachurch to replace worship as narcissistic entertainment with something else. "Instead of all the flash and lights, we set up only candles. I felt that this would give a sort of catacombish feeling to our meetings, reminiscent of the early Roman church in hiding. . . . As our unplugged evening unfolded, I could hear the voices of the high schoolers rising in worship. . . . One teenager waited to speak with me. . . . 'I like this,' he said. 'This was really spiritual.'"[21]

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[19] D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2005), 27.

[20] Carson, *Becoming Conversant,* 27.

[21] Kimball, *Emerging Church,* 35.

Lighting candles, displaying religious art and symbols, burning incense, touching and even kissing religious objects, anointing with oil, kneeling (and prostrating!), doing *lectio divina,* sitting in long periods of shared silence, and even celebrating a weekly Eucharist are common among emergent Christians.

For many evangelicals, such symbolic elements are intolerable in worship. "The very thought that something might become ritualist is enough to quench emerging fires of enthusiasm for most patterned activity, even if the activity is cloaked in the language of 'spiritual disciplines.'"[22] Yet, emergent congregations move ahead with a kind of convert's zeal for traditional Christian customs and patterns of prayer, convinced that "*liturgy* and *ritual* do not have to be dirty words."[23]

Emergence embraces the ancient, but it is not antiquarian. It "reclaims all the accoutrements of piety—candles, icons, incense, kneeling and chanting—[but does it] alongside the projection screens, electric guitars and televisions rolling looped images."[24] Emergence, then, has a catholic impulse, incorporating symbolic acts and objects from every age: the most ancient to the most modern. The sensory and kinesthetic elements of worship that were rejected by most of the sixteenth-century reformers on theological grounds and by all of the twentieth-century church-growth evangelicals on pragmatic grounds are used with abandon in emergent congregations. Calvinist and Bauhaus aesthetics are equally repudiated.

Worship as Common Prayer, Church as Common Life

Even as the anti-symbolic style of the megachurch is repudiated by emergence, so, too, is the focus on the conversion of the individual. The experience of the individual *in se* is not the focus in the emerging church. Rather, the individual is always conceived as an individual-in-community. Vitality is in the network, not in its individual parts.[25] Worship, therefore, is a communal action that, while recognizing the unique experience of each worshiper, values more the

[22] John Witvliet, "Embodying the Wisdom of Ancient Liturgical Practices," in *Ancient Faith for the Church's Future,* ed. Mark Husbands and Jeffrey P. Greenman (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2008), 191.

[23] Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches,* 224.

[24] Scott Bader-Saye, "Improvising Church: An Introduction to the Emerging Church Conversation," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 6 (2006): 12–23.

[25] Tickle, *Great Emergence,* 152.

pooled experience of the group. Shared wisdom replaces static and depersonalized truth claims.

> Community is the place where God dwells. God created in community, is expressed and expresses in community. The goal of Christianity is to be a living place of the hopes and aspirations of God. In this way, Christian community serves as a hermeneutic of the gospel. The lives of the people of the community go beyond individual expressions and become the way that insiders and outsiders experience the life of God.[26]

"Community" transcends the particularity of any specific group. Emergence draws liturgical and devotional customs from the long history of the church, with special attention to the most ancient traditions, and weaves them into worship events that are a "living place of the hopes and aspirations of God."

"The word [liturgy] literally means, 'the work of the people,'" Brian McLaren writes. "This is commonly understood to mean that people do the work of praying, singing**,** listening, speaking, kneeling, and so on."[27] *Contra* megachurch evangelicalism, the assembly is not an audience waiting to be entertained or educated. The leaders are neither celebrities nor shamans. "Being organic means intentionally thinking through how not to box things in such a rigid form that it becomes a 'presentation' and a 'production' instead of a church gathered to worship the risen Jesus. . . . It means changing the setup of the chairs and the room to avoid a theater feel."[28]

Emergent Christians often use the word "gathering" instead of "church service." The gathering of the church is the essential and defining action. "If spiritual practices are actions within our power that help us become the kinds of people who can do things currently beyond our power, then 'going to church' means gathering for communal, spiritual practices, engaging in a kind of group workout."[29] McLaren suggests that "liturgy" would better be translated "the workout of the people," rather than "the work of the people."

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[26] Doug Paggit, "The Emerging and Embodied Theology," in *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches,* ed. Robert Webber (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2007), 127.

[27] Brian D. McLaren, *Finding Our Way Again: The Return of the Ancient Practices* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 101.

[28] Dan Kimball, *Emerging Worship: Creating Worship Gatherings for New Generations* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2004), 77.

[29] McLaren, *Finding Our Way Again,* 101.

The Form but Not the Substance

It would seem, then, that seeds planted by the Liturgical Movement have taken root in the most unlikely of places. Emergent Christians have rediscovered ancient practices, especially patristic practices, and are using them to attract postmodern people and inspire conversion, not only of intellectual belief (if even of intellectual belief), but of life.

Yet, while emergent Christians have begun to import the ancient patterns they have seen in the Anglican, Roman, and Eastern traditions, they have not embraced the theologies embedded in the practices. Instead, emergent Christians have unreflectively retained (speaking generally, as one must of everything in emergence) the dominant theology of the tradition from which most of them are emerging. The ancient symbols are reappropriated, but the patristic conviction that the symbols and symbolic actions constitute an objective, efficacious encounter with the Holy is not. These symbols are used because they make an impression. The subjectivism of modernism—that these patterned behaviors "work" for some people—is why they are encouraged. Nothing is said about how they mediate Divine Life. Emergence has not worked out, and even eschews, a theology of symbolic action.

This lack of an intentional, coherent sacramental theology is not without consequence, both for the ability of emergence to enter into dialogue with the great Tradition, and, ultimately, for it to survive. Phyllis Tickle cautions that "the new Christianity of the Great Emergence must discover some authority base or delivery system and/or governing agency of its own."[30]

An Emergent Move Toward Liturgical and Sacramental Theology

Robert Webber attempted this very thing. In writing about and for the emergent community, he contrasted the Platonic understanding of the early Christian writers—that the liturgy is a real participation in the Divine Reality—with Zwingli's memorialism, which "wrenched the Eucharist from its supernatural nature."[31]

Webber recognized that this Reformation shift from the objective to the subjective had an impact on the entire life of the church, not just its understanding of the liturgy and the Eucharist. "The

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[30] Tickle, *Great Emergence,* 150.

[31] Webber, *Ancient-Future Worship,* 134.

ancient church did not design (a contemporary word) worship to reach people, to educate people, or to heal people. Yet in their worship, which was a prayer of praise and thanksgiving offered to God, people were indeed led into contemplation of God's mighty acts of salvation and stimulated to live a life of participation in the life of God in the life of the world. The point is, of course, that how we pray shapes who we are."[32]

Yet, even as he argued against Zwinglianism, Webber repudiated what he called the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, the supposed Lutheran doctrine of consubstatiation, and even the Calvinist doctrine that the eucharistic bread and wine are "'signs, testimony, and witness' to the activity of God in Jesus to save the world."[33] If not Calvin (whose eucharistic theology is arguably the most Platonic and the most patristic of all the sixteenth-century approaches), how did Webber propose that the emerging church should understand the Eucharist and the rest of the classic ordo?

"Real presence makes no attempt to explain what happens at bread and wine. It affirms the mystery of God's presence at bread and wine," he writes.[34] Webber not only sidesteps the essential theological question of what happens *to* the bread and wine, but also does not explore how what happens *at* bread and wine is distinct from what happens everywhere else. While Webber comes the closest of any emergent writer to embracing any notion of eucharistic or liturgical real presence, and certainly moves farthest in articulating a coherent liturgical theology, he actually does little to contribute to the "grand framing story."

The Episcopal Church and Emergence

For the Episcopal Church, all of this is far more than a distant curiosity. The old established churches cannot afford to ignore emergence as it gains an increasingly strong voice within them and becomes an increasingly viable alternative to them. As mainline American Christianity slowly shrinks—with even the once seemingly invincible Roman Church bending to the cultural forces—the future is uncertain, and emergence has as much chance being the church of the future as anything else. For that to happen, however, if Phyllis

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[32] Webber, *Ancient-Future Worship,* 162.
[33] Webber, *Ancient-Future Worship,* 148.
[34] Webber, *Ancient-Future Worship,* 148.

Tickle and others are right, emergence will need to move toward some kind of systematization and structure. Not all emergent Christians want or need to be part of that next stage, but some surely are searching for theological systems and historical roots that will carry their movement ahead. Perhaps that is what the Episcopal Church can give emergent Christians.

Is the Episcopal Church an emergent *denomination*? Anglicans, by virtue of historical expedience and now of genuine principle, are nearly defined by being skeptical of absolutism and tolerating, if not embracing, a wide range of theologies and customs. Like emergence, the Episcopal Church is a liturgically-focused, eucharistically-centered, non-confessional, highly experiential, tradition-loving, patristically-minded, community-oriented, justice-committed movement. The Episcopal Church offers a truly *organic* expression of all of this, however, not a cobbled together collection of bits and pieces gathered from disparate places, torn loose from their theological and historical moorings.

The Episcopal Church also offers emergent Christians a way to escape the modernist extremism of the megachurches without having to give up the bequest of the Enlightenment. If emergence has a major weakness, it is the failure to acknowledge how "modern" generations have advanced human and religious culture. Narcissism is dysfunctional, but a healthy sense of the individual over-against the group is not, and that is an Enlightenment bequest. So, too, is the historical-critical method in biblical studies. Could emergence exist were it not for the historical-critical revolution? Even the rediscovery of many of the ancient texts and disciplines that are essential to emergence is the fruit of the scientific mindset of modernity. If the incarnational principle is true, then no age is without its contribution to the steady march of humanity toward the reign of God. The Episcopal Church, while not forsaking the heritage of the ancient church, also embraces the bequest of modernity.

The Episcopal Church also embraces the tension that is inevitable when those holding divergent theological opinions find themselves sharing a common life. Nothing is as characteristic of emergence as the willingness, and even the desire, to tolerate difference and ambiguity for the sake of a Truth beyond supposed truths. As Doug Pagitt writes, "The rich Christian history is rife with examples of Christian unity beyond uniformity. In fact, I would contend that when uniformity becomes the goal, unity ends, and the gospel and the

church suffer."[35] In post-Reformation Christianity, where is this "unity beyond uniformity" more valued than in the Anglican Communion and, increasingly, in its American provinces?

But despite its inherent lack of uniformity, the Episcopal Church is not chaos. Ancient anchors—creedal, structural, and liturgical (all intertwined)—allow the Episcopal Church to move forward with roots planted deep in the past, and that, it seems, is the quest of emergence.

None of this is to say that the Episcopal Church has "arrived." If the Episcopal Church has something to offer emergence, surely emergence has as much to offer the Episcopal Church. Emergent Christians, perhaps more than those who are at home in the Episcopal Church, may see the landscape more accurately because they are looking for a place to settle. They may perceive what is on the horizon more clearly because they have no institutional ties binding them to what is behind. The place where Anglicanism and emergence meet is fertile ground for ecumenical dialogue, and, just as important, intramural dialogue between Episcopalians who see themselves as emergent and those who are satisfied with what emergence is convinced will soon wither away.

To enter into a serious conversation with emergence, whether at a conference table or on the pages of a fast-expanding literary corpus, the Episcopal Church will need a humility that other ecumenical dialogues may not have demanded. The ELCA in most of its manifestations looks like the Episcopal Church. We could easily recognize them as "our kind." The Moravians, in their own way, seem like us, too. Emergence does not. Within it, though, is an instinct that is very Anglican, certainly in its liturgical aspirations, but hardly only there.

When self-identified emergent Christians find their way into our regular congregations—not our segregated emerging congregations like the Church of the Apostles, the Episcopal / ELCA congregation in the Diocese of Olympia where Karen Ward is the abbess—they will invite us, not to forsake our identity and our heritage, but to reclaim aspects of it that we may have forgotten or that we have not yet found. For that sort of daring, open process to take place, the Episcopal Church will need leaders with remarkable knowledge and skills, and most of them, given our polity, will be clergy.

Seminary education is at least as important now as it ever was, and probably more, since it is preparing women and men to enter into

[35] Paggit, "Emerging and Embodied Theology," 129.

a dialogue with a culture that, on the one hand, does not respect religion and, on the other hand, seeks the Holy but will not be satisfied with canned truth claims that increasingly fail to convince. Without a clergy steeped in the wisdom of the church in every prior age and formed in the traditions (as well as the Tradition) of the Episcopal Church and all of catholic and reformed Christianity, we will be rudderless. Emergence is a move toward the Tradition and the traditional, and we will be able to engage this ancient-future community creatively only if our leaders know from where we come.

Yet, knowing our heritage will not be enough, and by itself could even stand in the way of any fruitful engagement with emergence. Our leaders must also be able to loosen their grasp on the past and ask what is to happen next: not in isolation from the past, but in continuity with it. As the sociologist Roger Finke has learned, churches achieve vitality when they become adept at "using core teachings as the foundation for innovative accommodations."[36] Strength comes, not from strong histories or lofty imaginations, but from the interplay of the two.

In Seattle, there is a self-described emergent congregation that calls itself Mars Hill. On another Mars Hill, Paul demonstrated the wisdom of recognizing what is congenial in what seems foreign. When he invited the Greeks into the church, the ancient wisdom of the philosophers came with them, changing both the Greeks who came and the Christian communities that received them. Unintentionally, he gave us a system and a language for expressing the gospel without which the Tradition may not have survived. We stand on a Mars Hill of our own, crowded with those who have another wisdom to bring. The outsiders' genius may be precisely what the insiders need, and the insiders' wisdom may be precisely the object of the outsiders' quest. Together, they may have the grounding and the vision to carry into the future what both may ultimately want: the doctrine, discipline, and worship of Christ as this church has received them.

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[36] Roger Finke, "Innovative Returns to Tradition: Using Core Teachings as the Foundation for Innovative Accommodations," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43 (2004): 19–34.