

The Emerging Church Movement

ABSTRACT

The Emerging Church movement largely consists of Christian communities which have 'emerged' from pre-existing church ideologies and structures. Disillusioned with the organised and institutional church, they support the deconstruction of modern forms of evangelism and community in order to reach an increasingly postmodern society. Emergence Christians commend an 'incarnational' approach to mission, that is, living sacramentally within and amongst the secular world as Jesus did.

The ecclesiology of the movement is varied and flexible, with a characteristic informality and 'this-worldliness' that recognises an urgent need for the gospel of the Kingdom to be dispersed by an 'outward-focused' church. Emergence Christians support 'organic' relationships and projects, operating without a patent 'attractional' agenda and recognising that people need to encounter Jesus from within their own subcultures for transformation to be authentic and sustainable.

INTRODUCTION

The term 'Emerging Church movement' refers to the growing number of churches or organisations that see as their primary mission the reaching of

today's 'postmodern' culture with the gospel of Jesus Christ.¹ An informal and multifaceted movement of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, it spans a multitude of denominations,² and operates in various ways,³ in order to reach people who do not relate to the ideology or practices of the average, or 'modern', church.⁴

As its name suggests, the Emerging Church movement largely consists of Christian communities which have "emerged" from mainstream ideologies and church structures. Whether disillusioned with, or disenfranchised by, conventional churches, emergent groups are generally located outside recognized and accepted traditions.⁵ Thus there is virtually none of the cohesiveness of the dominant, sectarian, or alternative traditions from which they are emerging.⁶ Participants prefer to call the movement a 'conversation', the better to characterise its diverse and interactive nature.⁷

¹ Jason Carlson, "Emerging vs. Emergent Churches: Clearing up the Confusion," November 3, 2007, <http://worldviewweekend.com/worldview-times/article.php?articleid=1645>.

² Participants may be Protestant, post-Protestant, evangelical, post-evangelical, liberal, post-liberal, conservative, post-conservative, Anabaptist, Adventist, reformed, charismatic, neo-charismatic, and post-charismatic. Emerging churches can be found predominantly in Western societies of North America, Western Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and Africa. Wikipedia, "Emerging Church," *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, May 1, 2014, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Emerging_church&oldid=606557874.

³ Some attend local independent churches or house churches, while others worship in traditional Christian denominations. Ibid.

⁴ Rebekah Zorgdrager, "Ecclesiology of the Emerging Church," *The Gospel and Our Culture Network*, November 15, 2008, <http://www.gocn.org/resources/articles/ecclesiology-emerging-church>.

⁵ David G. Bromley and J Gordon Melton, "Reconceptualizing Types of Religious Organization: Dominant, Sectarian, Alternative, and Emergent Tradition Groups," *Nova Religio* 15, no. 3 (February 1, 2012): 7.

⁶ Jesse Carey, "The Emerging Church Explained," *CBN.com: Spiritual Life*, accessed May 7, 2014, http://www.cbn.com/spirituallife/churchandministry/carey_emerging_church.aspx.

⁷ Theopedia, "Emerging Church," *Theopedia: An Encyclopedia of Biblical Christianity*, accessed May 7, 2014, http://www.theopedia.com/Emerging_Church.

HISTORY and CONTEXT

The Great Emergence is sometimes referred to as “the fifth turning” in reference to the fifth time that Latinised culture, and Latinised Christianity with it, has gone through a time of enormous upheaval affecting every part of faith and governance.⁸ Phyllis Tickle notes that these upheavals come every five hundred or so years, including the birth of Christianity in the first century, the consolidation of the Church under Gregory in the fifth and sixth centuries, the Great Schism of the eleventh century, and the Reformation of the sixteenth century. From this historical trend, Tickle deduces that, now in the twenty-first century, Christianity is undergoing another seismic deconstruction and reformation.⁹ It is reassuring to realise that no standing form of Christianity has ever been destroyed in these great crises, but rather, in losing hegemony to the emerging form, has itself been refined and regenerated.¹⁰

This current ‘reformation’ is taking place within, and as a result of, an era of tremendous technological and cultural development.¹¹ We now live with constant global awareness owing to instant information and connection.

People know and learn differently, and Christianity is challenged from

⁸ Phyllis Tickle, *Emergence Christianity: What It Is, Where It Is Going, and Why It Matters*, Kindle edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2012), loc. 2206.

⁹ Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why*, Kindle edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), loc. 150–7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, loc. 278. “Orthodoxy did not cease to be after the Great Schism. Roman Catholicism did not cease to be after the Great Reformation. And Protestantism will not cease to be as a result of the Great Emergence. It will, however, have to reconfigure and adapt.” Tickle, *Emergence Christianity*, loc. 2214.

¹¹ Doug Pagitt, “The Emerging Church and Embodied Theology,” in *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches: Five Perspectives*, Kindle edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), loc. 2213.

within and without by multiple worldviews.¹² Western scientific modernity that developed between the fifteenth and twentieth centuries pursued truth in an objective way, but is now being overtaken by postmodernity, which observes that each person is affected by their culture in such a way that no-one can be objective about truth.¹³ Such 'epistemic humility' creates scepticism, tolerance,¹⁴ ethical relativism, and spiritual ambivalence.¹⁵ By and large, the Emerging Church adopts an uncritical embrace of the postmodern worldview in a pragmatic approach to mission in a secular world.¹⁶

Besides these philosophical changes, the world is faced with increasing awareness of ecological unsustainability, equity shifts that widen the gap between rich and poor, and systemic violence, oppression and corruption around the globe.¹⁷ We live in a world where we have to consider not only how to survive creation (with its disease and disasters), but how to not destroy creation (by pollution and wars).¹⁸ Emergence Christians operate under the premise that this is God's creation, it is our duty to care for

¹² Robert Webber, "Conclusion: Assessing Emerging Theology," in *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches: Five Perspectives*, Kindle (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), loc. 3467.

¹³ Theopedia, "Emerging Church."

¹⁴ "Tolerance is the principal virtue, as nothing is more indicative of the mentality of modernism than telling someone they are wrong (either intellectually, doctrinally, or morally)" Ibid.

¹⁵ Tony Jones, *The Church Is Flat: The Relational Ecclesiology of the Emerging Church Movement* (Minneapolis, MN: JoPa Group, 2011), loc. 36; Brian D. McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 173–4.

¹⁶ Carlson, "Emerging vs Emergent Churches."

¹⁷ Scot McKnight, "Review: Brian McLaren's 'A New Kind of Christianity,'" *Christianity Today: A Magazine of Evangelical Conviction*, February 26, 2010, http://web.archive.org/web/20110605055032/http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/article_print.html?id=86862.

¹⁸ Pagitt, "Assessing Emerging Theology," loc. 2536.

rather than consume it, and God's will is ever and always to be done as faithfully here as it is done in heaven.¹⁹

ISSUES WITH CHURCH

The Emerging Church is driven by the realisation that Christianity is no longer either socially or inherently attractive to the culture at large nor, by extension, are its symbols.²⁰ The vast majority of churches in the West engage their contexts in an 'attractional', and therefore 'extractional', way,²¹ observed by emerging Christians to be ineffective and self-defeating in current society.²² Additionally, an increasing reluctance to 'belong' and 'commit' has spanned the transition from modernity to postmodernity, and may reasonably be expected to afflict institutional and established Christianity more in coming years.²³

Postmodernism is suspicious of power and vested interests, realising that the business of institution generally requires hierarchy, whilst hierarchy by its very nature protects itself at the expense of best practice for the business of institution.²⁴ Deinstitutionalisation, therefore, is a rising ideal in

¹⁹ Tickle, *Emergence Christianity*, loc. 1708.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Attractional: An approach to ecclesiology in which the church develops programs, meetings, services, or other 'products' in order to serve the social and spiritual needs of those who already attend, and to attract other Christians and non-Christians into the church. Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come : Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), 273.

²² Ibid., 59. It may be argued that the NT church attracted, converted, and then supported new Christians socially and spiritually, but the early churches were based in private homes and nearly all members were converts who had many non-Christian contacts.

²³ Tickle, *Emergence Christianity*, loc. 2464.

²⁴ Ibid., loc. 1616.

our times as well as a defining hallmark of Emergence Theory itself.²⁵

Finally, sexual patterns have changed dramatically since the arrival of reliable conception and disease prevention, so that many Christian young people are not living the moral lifestyles they believe is expected of them and take themselves out of church to pre-empt censure.

EMERGENCE ECCLESIOLOGY

Those involved in, and writing about, the Emerging Church emphasise that they are not arguing for one particular model or way of 'doing' church.²⁶

Emerging churches are works in progress, improvisational in their approach to everything from worship to leadership to preaching to prayer.²⁷ Some settings are geared towards a multi-sensory experience, resembling (or even utilising!) cafes, pubs or nightclubs; others will create a contemplative or liturgical feel; yet others are simple house or park gatherings with a shared meal and discussion. Whatever the setting, the characteristic informality of the emerging 'conversation' extends to virtually every aspect of the church experience.²⁸

As culture changes, committed emerging churches rethink, reshape, and revalue how to go about everything:²⁹ church structure, spiritual formation,

²⁵ Ibid., loc. 1613.

²⁶ Zоргdrager, "Ecclesiology of the Emerging Church." The lack of direct discussion defining the ecclesiology of the emerging church may be because that would not be a very postmodern thing to do.

²⁷ Andy Crouch, "The Emergent Mystique: The 'Emerging Church' Movement Has Generated a Lot of Excitement but Only a Handful of Congregations. Is It the Wave of the Future or a Passing Fancy?," *Christianity Today* 48, no. 11 (November 1, 2004): 37.

²⁸ Jones, *The Church Is Flat*, loc. 1742.

²⁹ Kester Brewin encourages churches to befriend change as an organic reality. Nathan C. P.

community life, evangelism, and mission.³⁰ In communicating the gospel, Christianity has generally relied on a single tool, the monologue,³¹ which owes more to the philosophical art of Greco-Roman rhetoric than to biblical tradition. The hyper-stimulated ‘multimedia-raised’ generation is no longer able to access speech or text in the same way previous generations did.³² Many emerging churches, therefore, lacking the resources to preach and teach by sophisticated technologies, expand into other methods: discussions, games, activities, stories, outings, guided meditation, and all forms of social engagement. As for pastoring and church structure, participants avoid power disparity, assuming that all have gifts to offer in service to God and others.³³

CHURCH INSIDE OUT?

Lest any assume this is merely restyling the traditional attractional church approach, emergents often describe themselves as ‘missional’ or ‘incarnational’,³⁴ drawing inspiration from the way God entered into our world and human condition in the person of Jesus Christ.³⁵ They see the Church’s true mission, indeed the essence of the gospel, as dispersing the

Frambach, “Exploring Emergent Ministry,” *Trinity Seminary Review* 29, no. 2 (June 1, 2008): 125, citing Kester Brewin, *Signs of Emergence: A Vision for Church That Is Organic / Networked / Decentralized / Bottom-up / Communal / Flexible / Always Evolving* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), no page.

³⁰ Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), loc. 1488.

³¹ Various called ‘address’, ‘sermon’, ‘homily’, ‘lesson’, ‘exhortation’ or ‘lecture’ etc.

³² Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 189.

³³ Zоргdrager, “Ecclesiology of the Emerging Church.”

³⁴ The word ‘mission’ has become politically incorrect in a post-colonial world that is afraid of ideological coercion and exploitation, a “my truth must become your truth” attitude. Ray S. Anderson, *An Emergent Theology: For Emerging Churches* (Oxford, UK: The Bible Reading Fellowship, 2007), 175–6.

³⁵ Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 54, 86.

Kingdom of God in the world through the lives of its members as well as by the various groups and organisations they form.³⁶

The shift from the attractional to incarnational model is enormous, but the rise of postmodernism and global culture has highlighted the bankruptcy of the existing church and its inability to positively affect Western society.³⁷ A missional church is oriented toward the needs of the world rather than its own preservation, or sees its preservation as dependent upon its contribution to the welfare of society and environment.³⁸ The radical notion that “Christians are not the end users of the gospel” can rebalance a narrow focus on individual salvation and spiritual fulfilment.³⁹

CHRIST into the WORLD

The case can be made that even with these innovations and commitment to mission, the Emerging Church is not challenging all its assumptions. Most Western Christians spend the majority of their lives in unchurched society, where people are busy or preoccupied with secular issues, and consider environmental, economic, social, and political concerns to take priority over spiritual investigation. Although they generally do not regard religious affiliation as an obstacle to business and relationship, nor do they see it as relevant. In a multi-ethnic society it has become improper and socially insensitive to talk about religion, other than to affirm the mantra that beliefs are a private and personal affair, no more than an aspect of

³⁶ Anderson, *An Emergent Theology*, 181.

³⁷ Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 86.

³⁸ Crouch, “The Emergent Mystique,” 40.

³⁹ Anderson, *An Emergent Theology*, 175 quoting Brian McLaren in an uncited discussion.

self-discipline and aesthetic preference.

Thus, when it comes to what goes on within Christianity communities, it seems no-one is looking! If a postmodern were to join a religious community and seek to find meaning and social fulfilment within it, he or she would be operating as a modern. The true postmodern is uncommitted, flexible, ambivalent and cynical.⁴⁰ One can no longer assume that everyone longs for a stable, intentional community or that people without faith feel lost and hopeless, or even that converts will be willing to adopt a lifestyle of high demands on their time and energy. Rather than seeking to bring people into the Church, perhaps now the Church needs to go out into the world.⁴¹

In the gospels we always find Christ in the midst of life and death, and his disciples are to follow him wherever he leads.⁴² A time when Christ would move out of the Church and into the world was foreseen by Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his last year of life in a Nazi jail. Realising that a focus on metaphysics and personal salvation creates 'other-worldliness', thus pulling Christians out of the world, he saw a need for 'this-worldliness', or a kind of faith that moves Christians deeper into the

⁴⁰ Recent generations understand what it means to be constantly targeted by compelling sales messages aimed at every human desire, concern and insecurity. Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 195.

⁴¹ "The church does not drive the kingdom into the world through its own institutional and pragmatic strategies. Rather it is drawn into the world as it follows the mission of the Spirit. The church is constantly being recreated through the mission of the Spirit." Anderson, *An Emergent Theology*, 107.

⁴² Richard Beck, "Letters from Cell 92: Part 3, The 'World Come of Age,'" blog, *Experimental Theology*, December 8, 2010, <http://experimentaltheology.blogspot.com.au/2010/12/letters-from-cell-92-part-3-world-come.html> citing Bonhoeffer's letter to Bethge, July 18th 1944.

world.⁴³ He imagined a “religionless Christianity”⁴⁴ that would by necessity be limited to two things: *prayer* and *righteous action* among humanity, that is, identifying with those who suffer (through intercessory prayer), and acting in solidarity with them or on their behalf, to achieve justice.⁴⁵

Emergence theorists point out that Jesus’ gospel was of the Kingdom of God, not of the Church,⁴⁶ and his parables and analogies illustrate concepts of infiltration and transformation.⁴⁷ Jesus expected his disciples to live sacramentally in the workplace of the kingdom. Even the church-building apostle Paul’s primary concern was for the reputation and progress of the gospel in public and domestic contexts.⁴⁸ The temptation of the Church, however, has been to divide the sacred from the profane, to retreat to the ‘safety’ of Christian community, and to bring those outside the Church *in* rather than sending those inside the Church *out*.⁴⁹

⁴³ Richard Beck, “Letters from Cell 92: Part 4, Religionless Christianity,” *Experimental Theology*, December 9, 2010, <http://experimentaltheology.blogspot.com.au/2010/12/letters-from-cell-92-part-4.html>.

⁴⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 279-280.

⁴⁵ Kurt Struckmeyer, “Religionless Christianity: Dietrich Bonhoeffer,” *Invitation: Following Jesus*, 2007, http://followingjesus.org/invitation/religionless_christianity.htm.

⁴⁶ While the church tends to differentiate itself from the world by its religious nature, the Kingdom of God penetrates and transforms the world by its secular nature. Anderson, *An Emergent Theology*, 109.

⁴⁷ e.g. “salt of the earth”, Matt 5:13; “light of the world”, v.14; “seed”, and “yeast”, Matt 13:3-8,33.

⁴⁸ Rom 12:9-21; Eph 4:25-32; 2 Thess 3:6-13; Titus 2:11-4.

⁴⁹ Anderson, *An Emergent Theology*, 113. Is mission centripetal — drawing energy toward a centre; or is it centrifugal — impelling energy outward? Anderson says it is both *Ibid.*, 182–3., but Frost and Hirsch say that incarnational mission is centrifugal, requiring a sending impulse rather than an extractational one. Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 59.

ORGANIC RELATIONSHIPS

People who seek or form Emergence churches have generally realised a number of truths about community and mission through their observations and experiences in traditional congregations. They have found that like any 'artificial' communities, churches have tremendous inertia, that is, considerable organisation and resources are constantly required to maintain momentum. Knowing this, the established church has paid clergy and staff from early centuries to provide consistent services and programs for members.⁵⁰ As a result, many Christians expect church to serve their needs, although every Christian is called to serve the world. Even lay church communities tend to stratify into 'producers' and 'consumers', creating tensions and politics that can distract and detract from the joy of shared faith and mission.

Emergence Christians have also noted that investing in Christian communities and attending church events helps fill social and spiritual needs, but depletes social energy. This means being less available to others who are more in need of relationship with Christians than are church friends.⁵¹ Even within church, members tend to settle into cliques according to personal similarities and socio-economic standing. The current ability to travel long distances to attend a more compatible church within one's preferred denomination selects for homogenous communities

⁵⁰ Most Emergence groups could not offer financial support to an ordained clergyperson, being too few in number. Tickle, *Emergence Christianity*, 1309.

⁵¹ Depending on the level of commitment to church, one can almost totally avoid local relationships, removing a Christian presence and influence from neighbourhood, workplace, and even extended family.

which are inward focused rather than outward focused. Another effect of travelling to church is the dislocated effect of meeting in remote 'neutral' venues — the communal life of the congregations does not reflect the rich complexity of the members' everyday experiences, struggles and triumphs.⁵²

There are marked differences in relationship patterns within church community and those in everyday life. Whereas individual social 'footprints' are unique, within church their diversity is significantly limited. Rather than just a few of one's contacts knowing each other, in a church context most of one's contacts will know each other, thus reducing the potential for missional contact with others.⁵³ For best results, befriending non-Christians should not be a 'discipline' but something that happens 'organically', as an outcome of natural interactions, circumstances, and attractions. Within such varied contexts, Christian love is constantly modelled and tested while topics of faith and hope come up in casual ordinary ways.⁵⁴ Such opportunities arise, however, only when relationships are authentic, mutual, and equal; now more than ever, people do not want to be patronised or evangelised.⁵⁵

⁵² Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 86.

⁵³ Family members, work colleagues, neighbours, and other contacts may include nominal Christians, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists, atheists, and agnostics.

⁵⁴ These may be a conversation about a movie, a news event, a reflection on a common experience, or comfort offered at a time of grief, suffering or joy. "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone" (Col 4:5-6). Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 81.

⁵⁵ It takes a high level of maturity to be open to relationship with those in different cultural and spiritual contexts, to embrace unity in diversity, and to abandon an 'us-and-them' mentality.

FUTURE CHURCH

The trajectory for the Emerging Church movement, it would seem, is the deconstruction and dissipation of anything we might recognise as ‘ecclesiology’. The pattern of previous semi-millennial reformations, however, shows that churches will still exist in previous forms, but will be reformed and refined by rediscovering aspects of the gospel that have been neglected.⁵⁶ It is possible, even likely, that with the dissemination of Emergence Theory *via* the World Wide Web, its outlooks and practices will become incorporated into mainstream Christian culture.⁵⁷ Nonetheless, by current trends, many more people than ever before will not affiliate with any church and Christianity will be increasingly forced to “find God in the world”.⁵⁸

Pragmatically therefore, if churches as corporations are still to exist, they need to address the spiritual formation and communal worship needs of Christians and visitors without taking over and fulfilling their social needs.⁵⁹ By recognising that people’s ‘real’ lives are in the world, relevant churches can aim to be a ‘pit-stop’ for spiritual service and recharge. The advent in the 1950s of the mega-church construct is an early example of the accommodation and regrouping that always occur within the dominant body of faith when it begins to lose hegemony to new formation within the

⁵⁶ Tickle, *The Great Emergence*, loc. 278–293.

⁵⁷ As with the widespread emphasis on social justice that appeared out of the Liberation Theology movement in Latin America during the 1950s-60s.

⁵⁸ Beck, “Letters from Cell 92, Part 4.”

⁵⁹ Even spiritual formation is accessible on the internet, where Christians have immediate access to more biblical criticism, theology, church history, exegesis, and discussion than biblical scholars of fifty years ago could ever have hoped for. Tickle, *Emergence Christianity*, loc. 1278.

Church.⁶⁰ The mega-church model may have been overly ambitious but could find a new reduced equilibrium. Ironically, a ‘professional’ church that provides programs to a casual itinerant population is the essence of the consumerism that the Emerging Church rejects, and yet may be the most efficient way forward.⁶¹

Out of disenchantment with closed, self-serving communities, some church memberships are selling their buildings or repurposing them missionally by hosting local events and projects in order to reconnect Christians with the world.⁶² For the gospel to be ‘incarnated’ (dispersed) into the many subcultures that exist in complex postmodern societies, people need authentic encounters with Jesus from within their own networks. It is critical that people experience Christianity in a way that does not dislocate them from their indigenous family and social groups, but rather allows them to come to understand it through their own histories and experiences. The Emerging Church ethos releases individual Christians to follow their own hearts and ideas for missional projects, or to just live gently, ethically, and redemptively amongst their own people.⁶³

⁶⁰ Ibid., loc. 674.

⁶¹ Despite a countercultural challenge to the conventional church, participants in the Emerging Church are already deeply predisposed to consumeristic tendencies. Jones, *The Church Is Flat*, loc. 2640.

⁶² Some churches host sports, arts, charities, medical health centres, co-operative supermarkets, or community vegetable gardens. “We can design buildings that people flow organically toward.” Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 191.

⁶³ Ibid., 63. Mission ought not to deliberately infiltrate any subculture by going ‘undercover’ as it were, in order to disarm them and preach the gospel. This is non-organic and would be perceived as quite sinister by the targets of this mission. Likewise, missional work need not be aimed at Christian conversion to be Kingdom work. Nor do charitable projects need to be organised and conducted with other Christians as a form of outreach. All sorts of people have a heart for meeting various societal needs, and a sole Christian in any charitable organisation is ‘preaching’ to the other administrators and workers as well as to (and

CONCLUSION

The Emerging Church movement can generally be viewed as a positive force within the Church. The goal of spreading the Kingdom gospel to the entire world, including the postmodern post-Christian world, is a clear biblical mandate which Emergents are helping to carry out.⁶⁴ The controversial implication is that forms of Christianity that have thrived in modernity are unlikely to survive the transition to postmodernity.⁶⁵ Just as the final form and function of any object is not clear while the object is emerging or in the process of being created, so it is with the Emerging Church in its many ecclesiological forms.

Every successive generation of church-goers aspires to make the Church more relevant to the times, and the practices of youth ministry often become normal whole-church ministry within ten years. Youth ministry of the 1990s centred on having a varied program, and the mantra was “Be relevant!” In regard to relevance, the ongoing Emergent conversation offers many positive correctives for the contemporary Western church.⁶⁶ The apostle Paul in prison in Rome pressed upon the church in Colossae a timeless model of incarnational, relational, missional discipleship (Col 4:1-6 NRSV). If Christians are treating others justly and fairly (v.1), praying for evangelistic opportunities (v.2-3), living wisely before all, making the most of their time (v.5), and giving gracious answers (v.6), they are doing

possibly more effectively than) the recipients of the charity.

⁶⁴ Carlson, “Emerging vs Emergent Churches.”

⁶⁵ Crouch, “The Emergent Mystique,” 37.

⁶⁶ Rick Bartlett, “Why I Can’t Write an Article on the Emergent Church,” *Direction* 39, no. 1 (March 1, 2010): 103–4.

all they can to help create fertile soil for God to do his world-redeeming work.⁶⁷

"It seems that we humans were designed to find our purpose and meaning not simply in ourselves and our own inner lives, but in one another and in the shared meaning and purposes of a family, a street, a workplace, a community, a town, a nation."

N.T. Wright

⁶⁷ Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 82.

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