



Forcing Change

November 2009

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Checking Our Brains at the Door: Spiritual Appeasement in the Age of Emergence

By Carl Teichrib

NOTE: The Emergent church movement is sweeping through modern Christendom. Many articles and a few books have been written critical of this movement, for there are numerous problems associated with it. Conversely, there are valid points attached to the movement that need to be considered – this article does touch on that. However, the primary purpose of this report is to wrestle with the underlying currents that drive the Emergent mood.

Another important point is the language: the words Emergence and Emergent are often used synonymously. There is a difference: *Emergence* refers to the larger context of global change. *Emergent* is the new Christian reaction to this world shift.

Finally, there are various degrees attached to this church movement, making it difficult (and dangerous) to use a single brush stroke when dealing with this issue. This does not negate “contending for the faith,” it does mean, however, that we must be careful when attaching labels.

With a playful grin the moderator asked the four church panelists to fill in the blank; “Jesus loves me this I know, for the _____ tells me so.”

Silence from the stage: The air in the auditorium thickened as more than 200 church leaders and laypeople found themselves squirming: How would this question be answered?

Nervous giggles could be heard. People shifted in their chairs...a few coughed. One of the panel members, an inner-city pastor, made a mock attempt to leave the stage.

Finally, one of the four – an Anglican minister – unapologetically announced; Of course, the Bible tells me so! With the dam now breached, the others found their voices: The Bible plus church traditions, explained the second panelist. “Family...and community,” countered the next speaker. The last on the stage summed it up; “All of the above.”

So why was this such a ticklish issue? Consider the setting: An audi-



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torium full of Christian leaders who had just been told that Emergent Christianity would be marked by the “end of authority” and the death of Sola Scriptura (the Scriptures alone). And the general feeling was that this should be embraced, not mourned. Indeed, the unofficial theme of this one-day event, titled “The Great Emergence,” centered on the question; *what is our authority?*

Here lies the heart of the matter: *Authority*. This is important to understand, as it eclipses the various attachments to the movement. Hence, the Emergent church isn’t *just* about worship styles, community or relationship building, social justice, experienced-based spirituality, or the resurgence of monasticism and ancient practices. True, all of these components can be found in the Emergent movement, but in order to understand the real drivers that give it direction, we have to focus on the challenge to authority.

How Time Flies

On the last day of October 2009, my wife and I attended The Great Emergence seminar in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The keynote speaker was Phyllis Tickle, author of *The Great*

Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why.

A feisty woman in her senior years, Tickle is a dynamic communicator who is very knowledgeable regarding key historical changes. Her premise, as presented in her book and explained to the Winnipeg audience, is that Christianity undergoes a major upheaval approximately every 500 years.



Phyllis Tickle

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For simplicity purposes, Tickle refers to this as a 500-year “rummage sale” – a period where Christendom re-evaluates what is important and “sells off” what is no longer relevant. The last rummage sale, Tickle explained, was the Great Reformation of the 1500s. Before that it was the Great Schism of 1051, with its splitting of Christendom into Western and Eastern lines. Approximately five hundred before that was the Council of Chalcedon, which defined Jesus Christ as “one in person, who is both divine and human.” And of course, five centuries previous had witnessed the ministry of Jesus Christ, and the birth of the Early Church as it ruptured from Temple Judaism. Tickle called this the Great Transformation.

According to Tickle, this cycle isn’t relegated to the Christian church; but rather, similar 500-year sequences can be observed in other faiths and cultures.¹ In essence, as society experiences major changes so too does Christianity – and likewise, the upheavals in the Christian church have shaped history. The Reformation period is a good case-in-point, with its aftershocks altering every facet of Western life: from literacy to theology, from science to politics, from economics to technology. Incredibly, the events of that time have unquestionably shaped our modern epoch.

In looking back to the Reformation, we see the issue of authority taking center stage. Martin Luther’s thesis of 1517 took a critical view of the Roman Catholic teachings of indulgences, and fell as a powerful blow against Papal authority. Luther’s thesis wasn’t the first act in this drama, as men such as John Wyclif and Jan Hus had gone before in elevating Scripture and denouncing the Papacy. But Luther’s thesis acted as a trumpet-call that roused a new period of Roman Church-questioning and Scriptural searching. This “protest” movement also witnessed the birth of other Christian groupings, such as the Anabaptists, who removed themselves further from the Catholic traditions than Luther had.

This questioning and rejecting of Papal authority opened the way to re-discover the standard of Scriptural authority. In so doing, men and women of all ages found themselves standing on an ancient yet solid foundation.

“I will meditate on Your precepts, and contemplate Your ways. I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word.” – Psalm 119:15-16

“The entirety of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever.” – Psalm 119:160

“And that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” – 2 Timothy 3:15-17

Now, approximately 500 years after the Reformation – so explained Tickle at her Winnipeg seminar – the Christian community is experiencing another major upheaval. Furthermore, like the Reformation period, this shake-up isn’t without its own cultural undercurrents. Indeed, those of us in the Western world are beginning to taste the fruit of 150 years of social transformation. Hence, in Christian circles, as in secular settings, long-held views are being challenged.

The Challenge of Our Times

“One World” is a reality. Politically this plays out as *internationalism*: the blurring of sovereignty and the rejection of nationalism. Economically we gravitate towards global socialism. Technology calls into question “reality” as virtual worlds come to life with a keystroke. Global ethics now frames itself around interfaithism, and morality no longer has a foundation. Our world is being rocked, from the halls of government to the family structure.

Historically, our Western institutions were grounding in Judeo-Christian principals. Law, medicine, science, literature, and education in the Western tradition were firmly rooted in the Biblical perspective.² Yet, in the 19th and 20th centuries this position was seriously contested; Darwinism and its challenge to the Genesis account,

psychology and its challenge to the Biblical view of the human condition, the inroads of Eastern spirituality into both culture and churches, the replacement of Biblical compassion with a Leninist form of “social justice,” and the sacrifice of objective truth for “tolerance.”

But here’s a thought: These “challenges” are not the problem. After all, the battle is over hearts and minds, thus we should *expect the challenge*. Nor is Scripture the problem. Again, it’s no surprise that since God’s word has been revealed to humanity, it has seen constant attack. There isn’t a time when it hasn’t been scrutinized, chastised, or marginalized. This doesn’t shake the eternal standard; Psalm 119:89 states, “Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven.”

Simply put, the problem is found in the mirror. It’s *us* as Christians.

How are we handling the philosophical and cultural challenges of our time? Too often, instead of stepping up to the plate, we either conform to the world’s standards or we ignore the question and continue to “play church.” *Generally speaking*, North American churches dropped the ball decades ago.

Think about it. Rather than studying to “show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth,”³ we now have *shinny object syndrome*. Selling a new church-growth strategy? Don’t question; just buy. Parroting a hot-button social issue? Don’t think; just react. From market-driven to “special-interest” driven, we crave to have someone else tell us how to think.

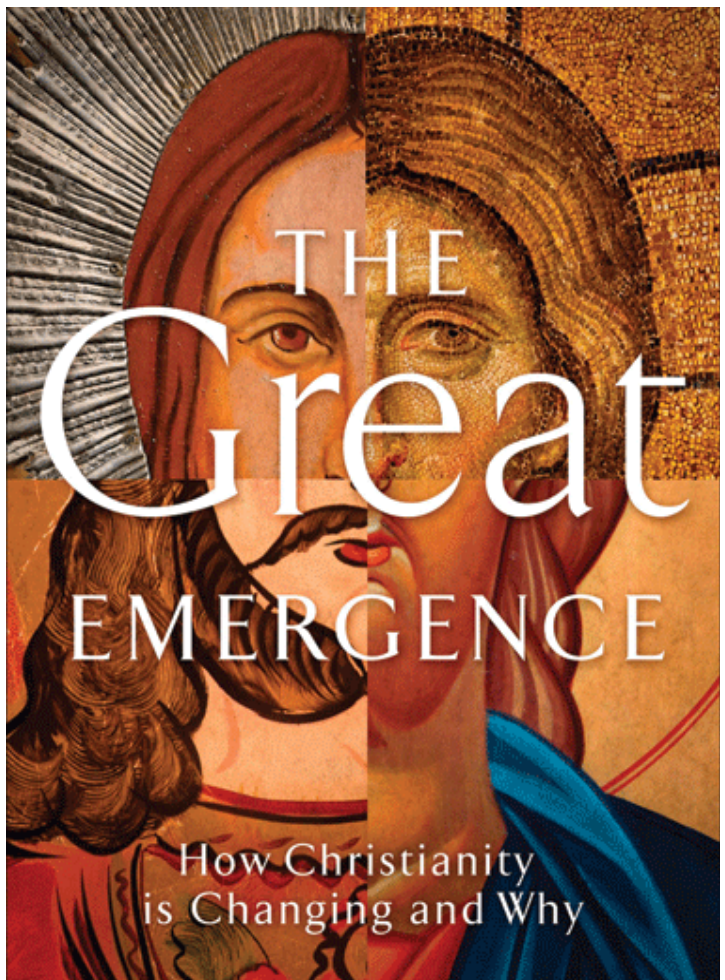
So, instead of grounding ourselves in God’s word (*authority*), we flounder with pathetic excuses for our “ignorance.” Instead of digging and getting dirty, actually wrestling with these issues in a tangible fashion, we push them aside in the vain hope they’ll go away. Therefore, when individuals – Christians and otherwise – ask hard questions in light of evolution, psychology, other religions, social concerns, *and even Scripture*, we met their questions with blank stares, ignorant one-liners, and at times unmitigated arrogance.

We are a lazy bunch; all of us, pastors and lay-

people alike. We don’t study God’s word; we just don’t study! Sadly, Christians in North America are seldom different from anybody else on the street – we are Biblically illiterate, historically ignorant, culturally naïve, politically blind, economically foolish, and sorely lacking in discernment. So when the historic winds-of-change broadside us, we find ourselves stupefied.

Although we have a firm foundation in God’s word, we have so long ignored it *in its entirety* that we no longer recognize its authority; actually, we’re embarrassed by the idea of authoritative truth. So with deep shame in our inability to be “culturally relevant,” we place blame upon the intolerant and divisive nature of the Bible. Instead of engaging culture by standing firm on Scripture, tactfully employing the facts and fallacies of history, and actually befriending people and meeting real needs, we rush towards Biblical revisionism and social appeasement.

Then we package this in Christianese language and announce; “*God is doing a new thing!*”



The Great Emergence and Christendom

While in Winnipeg, Phyllis Tickle introduced her audience to the expansiveness of the Emergence World,

“What we are sociologically and economically and politically and culturally, in every way, in right now is the Great Emergence... the Great Emergence is every part of your life and my life, right now, regardless of your age and regardless of your faith – it would be true if you were an atheist – you cannot escape the Great Emergence.”⁴

Tickle’s main concern is the religious aspect of this social shift, “and specifically with Christianity in North America...”⁵ For Tickle identifies the Great Emergence as the product of Christianity’s 500 year cycle, and she traces the modern expression of this to how Christendom has responded to Darwinism; Freud and Carl Jung (the fathers of modern psychology); and the influence of Joseph Campbell (mythology and comparative religions). Because of these three disciplines – the “sciences” of origins, mind, and religion – the prevailing belief of Christian exclusivity (Christ alone) was undermined.

Einstein’s “special theory of relativity” and Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle also added to this mood of Biblical skepticism. So too did the social revolution of the 1960s: the influx of Buddhism in America and the drug culture. And now technology and virtual reality are blurring lines of meaning and reality. Everything is topsy-turvy.

All of this reminds me of a phrase from historian John L. Reed; “The entire structure of Western civilization is now in the absurd position of a house in search of a foundation.”⁶

Tickle explains this in her book, *The Great Emergence*,

“...‘uncertainty became the only fact that could be accepted as fact, not only in the popular mind, but also in large segments of the academic mind as well...Enter the battle of The Book. Enter the warriors, both human and inanimate, who will

hack the already wounded body of sola scriptura into buriable pieces.”

This uncertainty, now coupled with complex global changes, finds religious expression through interfaithism and universalism – all religions are valid, all spiritual experiences are legitimate, and God’s character encompasses all belief systems. The acceptable universal ethic thus proclaims that truth and absolutes cannot be known, and exclusive truth claims are synonymous with bigotry and narrow mindedness.

How is Christendom responding to this challenge? Enter: Emergent Christianity.

The Emergent Church

Prior to this conference in Winnipeg, I had found it difficult to properly wrap my mind around this movement called Emergent Christianity – and I’m still working on it! So many different facets and sub-movements have been attached to this label. Even those who advocate the Emergent Church find it difficult to define, and some postulate it’s not a “movement” at all, but rather a mood or an attitude.

In grappling with this, I have discovered that the Emergent Church has leveled some valid criticisms regarding traditional church-life. These complaints cannot be ignored.

- Too much attention on church buildings and administrative hierarchy; far too many political games.
- Too many church programs; lots of “busyness” with little genuine service.
- Little room to ask hard questions. Difficult Scriptural queries and life issues are ignored, glossed over, or the questioner becomes labeled a “trouble maker.”
- Lack of meeting real needs, personally and in the general community.
- Personal preferences become spiritualized; too judgmental in non-critical areas.
- The inability to engage culture and society.

- Coldness; a lack of genuine welcome, warmth, and community.

There is legitimacy to these complaints, and I too have been disgruntled with the “church-system” – for a number of reasons. Sometimes my discontent is genuine, other times it has more to do with my attitude, and occasionally it’s a matter of simple miscommunication. Regardless, many who gravitate to the Emergent movement recognize the problems listed above, and often leverage these points to justify Emergent theology, especially the social justice component. The concerns they express cannot be discounted, and either real or perceived, these issues feed the dissatisfaction that drives *individuals* into the Emergent movement.

I understood this aspect before attending the Winnipeg event, and it does provide a partial explanation regarding the expansion of Emergent Christianity. However, as Phyllis Tickle and other Emergent leaders have acknowledged, the Emergent church is the response (or reaction) to the crisis and chaos of the larger world-shift.⁷

How then does the Emergent church look?

According to the Winnipeg conference it’s “theological chaos.” As Tickle explained, the big question is authority, primarily *sola scriptura*. Basically, we can no longer look to the Bible as authoritative in the same way that Christendom has done in the past. In fact, during the Q&A, Tickle was asked about the Gnostic gospels and how we should view these controversial texts. Phyllis responded by saying that in this “rummage sale,” everything is open for revision, including the Bible, and that she expected certain Gnostic books to be incorporated into the Emergent version.

Sola Scripture, we were told, doesn’t work anymore. Not surprisingly, evangelism is a problem as well.

“I, Phyllis Tickle, am living in a democratic – more or less – polity, feeling passionately about my Christianity but with people who are passionately engaged in other religions and faiths that are antithetical to mine. And so how do we decide what the common life is? And how do we get a

theology of religion?

...It’s a real problem for, in my country especially for my Southern Baptist or more evangelical colleagues and friends, who are also taught that not only are they to be Christians, but they have a need to actively evangelize. And that’s really dangerous. It’s dangerous to the tranquility of the polity, and it’s dangerous to human relations in every way.

So we’re desperately in pursuit of a theology of religion that will somehow get around those issues.”

Quite a contrast to the Great Commission that Jesus Christ gave in Matthew 28 – that His followers are to go into all the world and make disciples; Quite a contrast to the activities of the Early Church, who spread the good news of Jesus Christ while facing persecution and death. Quite a contrast to the modern, underground churches in China, North Korea, India, and the Islamic Crescent.

But this negative view of evangelism isn’t a surprise, as the Emergent church also has difficulties grappling with the Biblical precepts of sin and salvation. And this unease is evident in the writings of another Emergent leader, who downplays personal sin while lamenting pressing world problems such as climate change, financial instability, and population concerns. According to Brian McLaren – who Tickle calls the Emergent’s “Martin Luther” – the world’s spiritual problem is the inability of religions to meet environmental and economic crisis.⁸ Personal salvation is thus downgraded in light of global, social struggles.

“Sadly, in too many quarters we continue to reduce the scope of the gospel to the individual soul and the nuclear family, framing it in a comfortable, personalized format – it’s all about personal devotions, personal holiness, and a personal Savior. This domesticated gospel will neither rock any boats nor step out of them into stormy waters. We have in many ways responded to the big global crisis of our day with an incredible, shrinking gospel. The world has said ‘No Thanks’.”⁹

This world-crisis verses salvation-of-souls di-



chotomy is rife through McLaren's book, *Everything Must Change*. And in Winnipeg this social challenge poked up during Tickle's Q&A, when the question was asked about the Emergent church and the "green movement." The Emergent church, we were told, is "greener than green" and may even put the green issue above that of salvation.¹⁰

A rhetorical question from Jesus Christ comes to mind: "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"¹¹ Jesus made the salvation of the individual soul the highest importance.

I have to admit that there's something about this Emergent attitude of Christian "social failure" that irks me. In *Everything Must Change* there's a subsection titled "A Failed Religion?" The premise is that traditional Christianity is a flop when it comes to meeting major social needs; we've been too busy with our "domesticated gospel." Others in the Emergent church hold to this view as well – it's one of the legitimizing factors used by the movement.

So, with a sweep of the hand, Emergent leaders dismiss the rich history of Christian compassion. Never mind the countless hospitals and schools that have been built, orphanages and safe-homes in operation, and the establishment of life-sav-

ing water treatment systems and medical clinics. Never mind the lives, money, and time that have been spent on assisting disaster victims, displaced persons, and the poor on the streets of our cities. Let's ignore the countless millions upon millions who have been physically lifted up, and at the same time been given the gospel of Salvation.

Have Christians made mistakes while engaging in compassion work? You bet. We're humans, and thus we've had some pretty spectacular blunders. But today, right now, there's a multitude of caring believers striving to meet major social needs at the individual and community level, all the while staying true to the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). Are they paraded around as "heroes," as some kind of Christian social revolutionaries? No: they quietly work, day after day, in some of the messiest situations imaginable, striving to make an eternal difference one life at a time – in stark contrast to McLaren's beef that this "domesticated gospel will neither rock any boats nor step out of them into stormy waters."

Christian empathy is not dead. If the church down the street, or your church, isn't interested in missions and compassionate outreach, others are.

But I fear I'm talking about the *wrong kind of compassion*. After all, the international community screams that our pressing global concerns are climate change and the "evils" of capitalism. So...this is what the Emergent church gravitates to, echoing the call for a social revolution! To allegorize: we need a hip-Marxist version of Christianity, the kind where Jesus wears a Leninist goatee and hands-out Al Gore's *Inconvenient Truth* on street corners.

What the world wants is a form of Christianity that dances to the tune of global political correctness, and Christendom has responded with the Emergent church. It's kind of a neo-Marxist liberation theology repackaged for North American tastes.

This may be a harsh interpretation, but it's not wholly inaccurate. I also recognize that not all who espouse Emergence Christianity travel this road. However, the Emergent church certainly ca-

ters to a social-revolutionary message, while degrading the personal crisis of soul and sin. The road to hell is paved with good intentions.

Finally, the Atonement – the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for Man’s sin – is a real embarrassment. “The atonement is the booger,” exclaimed Tickle. The reason for this clash over the Atonement is that the Emergent church sees it as a stumbling block. For those outside of the Christian faith, the atonement is incomprehensible. How is it that God is all-powerful, yet he “*couldn’t figure out some better way to solve it than without killing his own kid?*”¹²

Tickle made it clear that the problem with the Atonement went deeper than the above argument; “Let’s face it. It has to do with the doctrine of original sin, and it has to do with what sin is.”¹³

By and large, the Emergent church doesn’t talk about “sin” in the Biblical context, as *sin* denotes judgment and consequences – starting with original sin and involving every individual soul. That’s too negative and too judgmental. And that’s the issue with the Atonement: God’s judgment for sin, and Christ’s willingness to pay the consequences on our behalf. The Bible is clear in this respect.

Romans 6:23 – “For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

John 3:16-19, 36 – “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil... He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

Ephesians 1:7 – “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.”

2 Corinthians 5:21 – “For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

Who am I kidding? In this New World Christianity, where we go out of our way to appease society, where a global culture drives a “global Christianity,” the above verses are too intolerant. Instead of divisive Scripture passages, we will give the world a better “framing story.” In a nutshell, the Emergent church finds itself at odds with... authority.

- The authority of God’s Word: Scripture.
- The authority of God’s Commands: Go ye and make disciples of all men.
- The authority of God’s Actions: Judgment, and God’s solution for sin.

Ironically, while Tickle continually compared the Great Reformation with the modern Emergent church movement, the two are polar opposites at the most important level. The Great Reformation drove the masses to the study of God’s word and placed it above the institutionalized Roman Catholic Church. On the other hand, Emergent Christianity downgrades the authority of God’s word.

So what “authority” drives the Emergent church?

1) **Jesus Christ.** There is a tremendous emphasis on re-discovering Jesus and finding His “hidden message” – the Kingdom of God via social revolution. It’s “not just a message *about* Jesus that focused on the afterlife, but rather the core message of Jesus that focused on personal, social, and global transformation in this life.”¹⁴ Not all Emergents would hold to this, but this is what the “Martin Luther” of the movement is selling. In this context, Jesus is a peace reformer; and McLaren tells us to “join Jesus’ divine peace insurgency”¹⁵

Never mind Jesus’ words; “Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division; for from now on five members in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father...” Jesus

Christ knew that his message of sin, salvation, holiness and truth would cause strife – even hate. The Emergent church has a hard time with a divisive Jesus.

2) **Bible:** Scripture itself won't disappear; rather it becomes re-framed to fit the prevailing cultural view. This type of Biblical revisionism is nothing more than old-fashioned liberalism.

3) **Narratives:** Personal stories that relate a spiritual principle or moral lesson – a “story that gives people direction, values, vision, and inspiration by providing a framework for their lives.”¹⁶ This sounds nice on the surface, but it smacks of an opinion-based gospel: a quasi-fable of sorts, a nice message with a life lesson. Understand, testimonies are important; they are a factual, life account pointing to the saving work of Jesus Christ. But the Emergent narrative process takes a different twist.

At the Winnipeg conference we were told that because society is so Biblically illiterate, the best way to communicate spiritual lessons is to present your interpretation in a short, narrative fashion. It's basically giving “Bible stories” in an abbreviated style to extract a personal lesson. This may be an attractive way to open a conversation, but it must go beyond story telling, otherwise we end up playing the game of “Telephone” – whisper the message in one ear, and by the time it goes around the room, the message is completely distorted.

The real concern, however, centers on the issue of authority. God's word somehow isn't trustworthy, but a person's “re-framed” opinion is?

4) **Spiritual experiences:** Because Scriptural authority has been downgraded, there is nothing of factual substance upon which to gauge spiritual experiences. Mysticism flourishes in this type of atmosphere, and the use of mystical/occult tools such as labyrinths, yoga, and contemplative techniques are often found in Emergent settings.

5) **Community:** One's own Emergent community acts as a hub or clearinghouse to explore spiritual lessons, experiences, and values. The voices of the community act as a vehicle for *relative authority*. “Jesus loves me this I know, for the community

tells me so...”

6) **Interspirituality;** This is basic religious syncretism and universalism. When a Christian engages in religious syncretism, he adopts philoso-



phies and adapts practices from another religion into his own “Christian faith.” Not only does this create a spiritual smorgasbord, such as “Christian yoga” – the blending of Hinduism with Christianity – it also opens the window to religious universalism. This is the core of universalism: All faiths contain truth messages, all spiritual expressions are valid, all religions are legitimate, and all faith traditions contain the fingerprint of the Divine. Therefore, spiritual authority can be gleaned from a variety of faith traditions.

7) **World culture:** The Emergent church views itself as the Christian component to a changing worldview. As this new global paradigm is based on “universal norms” such as interfaithism, moral ambiguity, the green religion, and “social justice” – a euphemism for class warfare, the Emergent church too emulates these trends.

Let me clarify. Not all Christians who are *Emergence* minded – that is, finding themselves sympathetic to Emergent Christianity – shun Biblical authority. Likewise, not all churches that gravitate to the Emergence spectrum disregard Scriptural integrity. There are major pendulum swings in this movement. However, the core of the Emergent attitude does degrade Biblical authority *in the name of Christianity*. When Phyllis Tickle and other Emergent leaders ask; “where now is our authority?”...the answer is evident in where the Emergent church places its emphasis.

The big question on how to engage this new universal culture as Biblically-sound Christians, in love and tact, is a worthy question. And kudos has to go to the Emergent church in one respect:

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is a monthly online publication dedicated to documenting and analyzing the socio-religious transformations now sweeping our world.

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It recognizes that Christianity cannot operate outside of the culture it finds itself in. *Christians cannot hide themselves from the world.* So the question on how the church communicates and interacts with this world culture is important (a powerful example of this interaction can be found in Acts 17), however, the answer cannot be found in *appeasement or world integration*.

Furthermore, the criticisms leveled against traditional churches by the Emergent movement – little warmth, little community, little compassion, little room to question – cannot be taken lightly. In this the Emergent church makes salient points. Therefore, pastors and laypeople alike need to honestly evaluate themselves and their congregation, and make the appropriate, Biblical changes.

At no time, however, are we to turn Scripture into our cultural scapegoat. Moreover, in this age of Biblically illiteracy, the last thing we should do is “dumb down” the Word or disregard it. How important is God’s word? Read Psalm 119. The author of Psalm 138 gives us another hint.

“I will worship toward Your holy temple, And praise Your name. For Your loving kindness and Your truth; For *You have magnified Your word above all Your name.*” – Psalm 138:2 [italics added].

Instead of emphasizing stories and experience over Scripture, we need to study “to show ourselves approved unto God...” [2 Timothy 2:15].

What Direction?

The auditorium where the event was held, a Christian college, was packed full. And the majority of those 200+ in attendance were at the leadership level: pastors, lay leaders, and professors. This show of leadership was acknowledged by Tickle from the stage, and the significance wasn't lost on us. Manitoba's key church leaders filled the seats.



Manitoba, Heart of the Continent

Before my wife and I arrived we were speculating that the demographics would be closer to a 30-and-under majority. We were so wrong; most had grayer hair than me.

Here's one way this leadership demographic played out: In a workshop I attended the issue wasn't about accepting or rejecting Emergent Christianity, it was about how to overcome *resistance*. Don't misunderstand. These were not lay-people wondering how to swing their pastors; these were pastors looking for advice on how to sway their flock. In Manitoba, the Emergent movement is coming from the top-down.

Christianity in my province, like elsewhere, will experience a time of upheaval as we wrestle through this rising trend. But wrestle we must, for

what is being proposed is no small thing. Christendom is seeking to chart a new course. How it answers the following question is a good indicator which direction it will go.

"Jesus loves me this I know, for the _____ tells me so." **FC**

Carl Teichrib is editor of Forcing Change, a monthly journal on global change issues (www.forcingchange.org).

Endnotes:

¹ Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why* (BakerBooks, 2008), pp.19-31.

² For a very good exploration of the Christian roots of Western structures, see Francis Schaeffer's book, *How Should We Then Live? The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture* (Fleming H. Revell Company, 1976).

³ 2 Timothy 2:15

⁴ Phyllis Tickle, part 1 of the speech given at Winnipeg, October 31, 2009.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.16.

⁶ John L. Reed, *The Newest Whore of Babylon: The Emergence of Technocracy – A Study in the Mechanization of Man* (Branden Press, 1975), p.29.

⁷ See also Brian D. McLaren's book, *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crisis, and a Revolution of Hope* (Thomas Nelson, 2009).

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.5. See also chapter 6. Actually, that's what the book, *Everything Must Change*, is basically about.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.244.

¹⁰ This question regarding the green movement was the last question of the day, October 31, 2009.

¹¹ Mark 8:36-37.

¹² Phyllis Tickle, Winnipeg, October 31, 2009.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ McLaren, *Everything Must Change*, p.22.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.159.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.5.

Esoteric Christianity

By *Carl Teichrib* (www.forcingchange.org)

Note: This article was originally published a number of years ago. It is as relevant today as when it was first written, as Christianity is being bombarded by a host of similar messages.

It was a four-hour visit, but it seemed like all day.

For a number of months I had been talking with a local gentleman who claimed to have had a deep spiritual experience. Shaken and changed by this supernatural event, this gentleman declared that the “veil had been opened” and he had entered the “Holy of Holies” within his own soul. He claimed that through this experience he had been given a true understanding of who God is, and that he now knew the hidden secrets of God’s heart; “The oracles of God.”

This type of alternative spiritual view wasn’t new to me. I had come across similar views through my studies in the New Age Movement. However, it still caused consternation when, sitting at my dining room table, this dynamic individual was now actively trying to persuade me of the validity of his experience and spiritual position. More than that, his ultimate aim was to lead me into a similar experience so that I too could come “face to face with Jesus” within my own soul.

It was an exhausting afternoon – his experience versus what I understood the Bible to say.

“We don’t need the Bible; just put it on the shelf,” was something he repeated.

Why should I park God’s Word on a shelf? During our discussions, both at this particular meeting and at subsequent others, I was told that “truth” already resided in the soul. Moreover, God was revealing this new soul-reality by doing “a new thing” through fantastic (mystical) experiences. After my guest departed it felt like a spiritual whirlwind had ripped through my house. But something good came out of this episode; it made me think.

Throughout the course of our time together, my guest continuously referred to “fearing God” – not that we were to fear God, but just the opposite. The claim was simple: In order to know God fully, man must shed any fear of God, for the fear of the Lord breeds pride, lust and anger. This fear of God, my guest explained, was the root of pride and sin.

Scripture, however, paints a different picture:

“Now let the fear of the LORD be upon you. Judge carefully, for with the LORD our God there is no injustice or partiality or bribery.” 2 Chronicles 19:7

“The fear of the Lord – that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.” Job 28:28

“The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous.” Psalm 19:9

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding.” Psalms 111:10

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.” Proverbs 1:7

“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in Hell.” Matthew 10:28

And in the song of Mary found in the first chapter of Luke, Mary tells us in verse 50; “And His mercy is on those who fear Him. From generation to generation.”

Now my guest also had a verse – even while exclaiming that the Bible was no longer relevant – “there is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.” (1 John 4:18).

Is this a contradiction? Not at all. The context of 1 John 4:18 centers around love, salvation, and punishment for sin. One commentator writes,

“We must here distinguish between the fear of God and being afraid of him. The fear of God is often mentioned and commanded as the substance of religion. Such fear is consistent with love, yea, with perfect love. But then there is a being afraid of God, which arises from a sense of guilt; and so fear here may be rendered dread: There is no dread in love.” (Matthew Henry)

The bottom line is this: As Christians we must revere God without holding onto the fear that comes with judgment, as our penalty for sin has been paid in full by Jesus Christ. This is the basis for our confidence before the throne of grace; assurance through Christ’s sacrifice, coupled with an intense reverence for a God who is terrifyingly awesome and infinitely powerful.

But by equating the “fear of God” with pride and sin, my guest was saying something far different. Yes, I understood that his position didn’t jive with Scripture, but something larger was gnawing at me. And then it hit: My guest had literally reversed the truth – to be utterly fearless is the highest expression of pride. Consider the analogy of the lion...

Why is the lion considered the King of the Jungle and a “beast of pride”? Because he has no rival, and therefore fears no other creatures.

Why did Lucifer fall – because he feared God with humility and trembling? Just the opposite; Scripture tells us that the pride of Satan (Lucifer) was his downfall (Ezek. 28:17 and 2 Timothy 3:6). Pride says,

“I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.” (Isaiah 14:13-14).

This is akin to spitting in God’s face and declaring “I no longer fear you. I will become as you are, or better.” To say, “I no longer fear God” is the ultimate act of pride and arrogance; it places the creature as equal to or above the Creator.

But who was telling my guest that to fear God was the root of pride? In later conversations, he explained that the spirit within his soul guided him into all knowledge. When I asked him which spirit it was that had control of his soul, and directly challenged whether or not it was an agent of Satan masquerading as an angel of light, he sharply replied; “as long as you have no fear, it doesn’t matter which spirit it is.”

This is very dangerous ground. The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, an occult society that had its start back in 1887, teaches that; “Fear is failure and the forerunner of failure...Therefore fear not the Spirits, but be firm and courteous with them...” (Israel Regardie, *The Golden Dawn*, “Fourth Knowledge Lecture”).

Yet, God’s Word tells us that we are not to believe every spirit, but rather to test them to see if they are from God (1 John 4:1).

Please understand; this is nothing to fool around with. In 2 Corinthians 11 we find that “Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.” Furthermore, 1 Peter 5 tells us that, “your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” Obviously, the spirit realm isn’t something to fool with.

The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ, a New Age text written in response to a mystical vision, also links fear and spirituality,

“When man comes to himself and comprehends the fact that he is son of God, and knows that in himself lies all the powers of God, he is a master mind and all the elements will hear his voice and gladly do his will. Two sturdy asses bind the will of man; their names are Fear and Unbelief. When these are caught and turned aside, the will of man will know no bounds; then man has but to speak and it is done.” (*The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ*, Chapter 92)

Notice the connection between suppressing spiritual fear and rising to a god-like state (“in himself lies all the powers of God”). After all, becoming God is what this is all about, isn’t it?

The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ also states: “Now, men and birds and beasts and creeping things are deities, made flesh” (Chapter 28). John Randolph Price, author of *The Planetary Commission*, says it even more dramatically,

“Nothing can touch me but the direct action of God and God is my Omnipotent Self. I can do all things through the Strength of the Christ I AM. I AM STRENGTH!” (capitals in original, p.133).

Annie Besant, past leader of the Theosophical Society and one of the “mothers” of the New Age Movement taught that “Man is not to be compelled; he is to be free. He is not a slave, but a God in the making.” (*Esoteric Christianity*, p.220).

During the numerous follow-up conversations that ended up happening with my guest, it became evident that he followed this self-deification line to a remarkable degree. It’s the same line that Satan used in the Garden of Eden, the same line that caused man to fall: “You will not surely die...For God knows that when you eat of it [the forbidden fruit] your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God...” (Genesis 3:4-5).

Today, just as in the past, we as Christians are in a vulnerable position. The short book of Jude describes this problem very simply,

“For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.”

(Jude 4)

This fits in our post-modern age as much as it did during the early church. My mystically-oriented guest was very evangelistic with his message, and ended up going from church-to-church proclaiming this new gospel – sometimes using very blunt tactics, but more often employing provocative statements and questions in order to open doors and seed confusion.

Romans 11:34 rhetorically asks: “Who has known the mind of the Lord?”

In this day and age, many men and women are now claiming that they know the mind of the Lord, the secrets of God, and the hidden thoughts of the Almighty. They come equipped with new prophecies, teachings, and doctrines; often validated by fantastic experiences, signs and wonders, and great proclamations of “thus saith the Lord,” or “God is doing a new thing.”

Dear reader, be aware! Be aware of wolves in sheep’s clothing, be aware of experienced-based teachings that counter or twist God’s Holy Word, be aware of those who proclaim an “esoteric” version of Christianity – rightfully teaching that Jesus was divine, but adding to it the message of an internalized, self-deification based on a mystically expressed “Jesus spirit.”

Jesus said in Matthew 24, “Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many.”

Let us not be counted in that number. **FC**

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