

Issues analysis

The crisis of Christianity: Part 2

The meltdown of evangelicalism

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This is part 2 of an essay in which we are considering the "emergent church" — a postmodern cult disguised as a church — and the "seeker-sensitive church" that is a real church, but is in bondage to postmodern culture. Part 1 was mainly devoted to the emerging church, and part 2 is mainly devoted to the decadent seeker-sensitive church — and what went wrong with evangelicalism that it would backslide into a bondage to the culture.

Faithful evangelicals must fight a two-front war against postmodernism. One front is the fight against the "emerging church" that is postmodern and heretical. The other front involves delivering the seeker-sensitive church from captivity to the postmodern culture.

The Babylonian captivity of the church

The seeker-sensitive mega-churches are real churches, unlike the "emerging churches," which are cults. However, the seeker-sensitive churches are churches in captivity. They are in captivity to the postmodern culture. The mushrooming of seeker-sensitive mega-churches throughout the land has had zero influence on the postmodern culture. They have had little influence on divorce rates, abortion rates, or the prevalence of sexual immorality. They are impotent in resisting the anti-family agendas of the feminists and the gays.

Seeker-sensitive mega-churches have no influence on the culture because they have been captured by the culture. Conservative friends, that is why we lost the culture war. All the conservative activism in the world cannot compensate for a decadent church. The church must be set free of its bondage to the culture before we can win the culture war.

Presently I shall discuss how God's process of sanctification sets us free from the world, the flesh, and the devil. Freedom from the "world" includes liberation from the popular culture — which now is postmodern.



Ancient Babylon

I like to call the seeker-sensitive phenomenon the "Babylonian captivity of the church." Postmodern culture looks to me like "Babylon." It is every bit as depraved as the idolatrous Babylon that took the kingdom of Judah into captivity.

The early church used "Babylon" as a code word for the Rome of the Emperor Nero. In spite of furious persecution by Rome, that splendid church of the martyrs remained mostly separate from the world and was mostly undefiled and pure.

In contrast, seeker-sensitive evangelicals have suffered very little real persecution, yet have declared unconditional surrender to the culture and have soaked themselves in the polluted waters of the postmodern world.

At the judgment seat of Christ, there is a reward for fighting the good fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil. But will there be a loss for the Christian who capitulates to the world? Will Christ view the present seeker-sensitive ways as a capitulation to the world? In my opinion, the answers are yes and yes.

Those who disagree with me might consider that seeker-sensitive folks are very vulnerable to the siren songs of the heretical emerging church. In part 1 of this essay, I referred to the pampered spiritual babes of the seeker-sensitive world as defenseless marshmallow people. A marshmallow Christian suffers from a weak and sickly spiritual constitution.

A healthy physical body has a strong immune system. An unhealthy body has a weak immune system. For reasons I shall describe presently, I have concluded that the seeker-sensitive church has no defenses against postmodernism and the emerging church. Therefore, I conclude that many seeker-sensitive Christians are spiritually sickly.

A lot of backsliding in evangelicalism occurred over a period of decades to bring us to this sickening dead end.

However, God sometimes brings wisdom out of the mouth of babes (Psalm 8: 2), even perhaps marshmallow babes. Last week I read a report about a group of young evangelicals who were so starved for transcendence and meaty theology that they went over to Calvinistic

churches of the Reformed tradition. In this case, the marshmallow babes had a better understanding that something had gone wrong than did their leaders.

The great backsliding: what went wrong?

The beginning of the great backsliding started with a change in the way the gospel was preached. Less and less was said about Christ being punished for our sins on the cross. Sin and repentance were increasingly glossed over. The perils of hell fire were hushed up. The gospel presentation increasingly resembled a sales pitch in which the preacher manipulated the people to make a choice for Christ. This approach to evangelism produced a lot of weak and vulnerable converts who had no assurance of salvation.



Charles Grandison Finney These methods are similar to the kind of methods used by the pelagian heretic Charles Grandison Finney (1792–1875). The deluded Finney denounced the venerable Westminster Confession as disguised popery. Finney did not believe that the mind or the will have been corrupted by original sin. Thus, he introduced the idea that man can choose his way into faith and into righteousness. He inaugurated evangelism as salesmanship. Finney had a lot of converts who had a superficial understanding of their sinfulness — just like the contemporary converts of evangelicalism

If one has only a superficial understanding of his sinfulness, he will have a shallow repentance. He will nourish the illusion that he is essentially good at heart. Therefore, he will partly trust in himself and partly trust in Christ for salvation. He will have one foot on the rock, which is Christ, and one foot on the sinking sand of self. Therefore, he will have no assurance of salvation.

Two factors make this situation worse. if the evangelist does not bring the seeker to the cross, or if the doctrine of the atonement is never explained, the seeker will not understand that Christ did a complete and finished work of atonement for our sins on the cross. He will not understand that through Christ's cross and resurrection, he has given us a right standing with God and that his resurrection gave us the power of eternal life. Christ did the complete work of eternal salvation for us and there is nothing that we can do to add to it.

If the evangelist is preoccupied with getting the people to make decisions for Christ, the seeker will tend to think that he can choose his way into faith and might fail to realize that

faith is a supernatural gift of God that often comes upon one when he least expects it. The assumption that one can choose his way into faith will intensify seeker's perception that salvation is partly what he does and partly what God does. Such a one is not likely to enjoy the assurance of salvation.

A victorious death or a defeated death

The early 16th century reformer Martin Luther noticed that Roman Catholics had no assurance of salvation because they tried to get to heaven through a combination of grace and works. Even the most dedicated among them suffered and strived to earn God's favor all their lives and still died in fear and doubt. Luther himself found that no quantity or quality of his own good works, penances, or spiritual exercises could relieve him of the fear that he might be damned. Actually, the more Luther did, the more certain he was that he was damned.

A perfect contemporary example of this horrific phenomenon was the spiritual defeat and depression of Mother Theresa on her death bed. Probably no twentieth century Christian had done more charitable good works than her. But her mountain of good works availed her nothing at the hour of her death. Only the works of Christ on the cross and his works in resurrection can avail the believer any peace or assurance in the hour of death.



Martin Luther

Shaken by this morbid phenomenon of the Catholic works treadmill leading to a shadowy and defeated death, Luther renounced Catholic soteriology and taught the finished work of Christ and salvation by grace through faith alone. Luther's doctrine makes it possible for the most humble believer to enjoy the assurance of salvation.

As one who enjoys the assurance of salvation, the happiest moment of my life was when I thought I was on the verge of death! Why should I die in peace and joy while Mother Theresa died in fear, doubt, and grief? Because I have both feet on the rock which is Christ and she had one foot on the rock and one foot on the sand of works — works by which she tried to save herself. She was a vastly more admirable Christian than I, but she followed false teachings pertaining to salvation and I follow biblical truth.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of

God, not of works, lest any man may boast" (Ephesians 2:8).

The multitudes of contemporary evangelicals with no assurance of salvation remind me of the Catholics who worried Luther because they had no assurance of salvation. Evangelicals seem to have lost the most important blessing that Luther recovered for us during the Reformation.

I never doubted my salvation

Since I was born again, I have never doubted my salvation. That is what I mean by assurance of salvation. I have had my share of fiery trials, but never at any time doubted my salvation. Why did I never doubt? These five points sum it up:

1) Prior to my conversion, I had a high level of self-esteem and a positive appraisal of my moral worth. But this was a delusion. Even though I had studied the doctrine of original sin and believed it in my mind, I had a blindness in my heart and could not internalize this truth. I needed a spiritual revelation before I could see depravity in my nature. God gave me this revelation without showing me any particular sin. He showed me my fallen nature as a whole.

In a sudden and crushing revelation, God showed me my sin nature and I realized that I was rotten to the core. I knew I was damned and experienced horror and agony about my desperate condition. I was terrified by the presence of a God who is almighty, holy, and just. With a groan, I sensed his righteous outrage at my sinfulness. Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) got it just right in his classic sermon *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*.

2) I deeply understood that I had nothing good to offer God in order to win my salvation. I abandoned all hope of my own righteousness and cast myself entirely upon Christ for salvation. With the wild despair of a drowning man, I pleaded to Jesus for mercy and rescue from the deadly waves of death and damnation which I thought were dragging me down at that very moment.

Suddenly, my hellish despair vanished and a heavenly confidence took its place. Faith miraculously appeared in my heart! In the power of supernatural faith, I calmly and boldly said, "I am cleansed with the blood of the Lamb." Notice that faith appeared at the moment I least expected. It came as a gift of God and was an utter surprise.

3) Before I had finished speaking these words of faith, I had the uncanny sense that the blood of Christ was washing over me. Before the sense of the warm flow of blood receded, I had a vision of Christ on the cross suffering for my sins. I saw only his face as he looked into my eyes with great sorrow and mercy for me. He was bearing my sins and cleansing me with his blood.

4) As the image was fading, I could feel the Holy Spirit flowing into me to impart the new birth. The Spirit felt like a vital living electricity.

Suddenly it was over and I was calm and tranquil as though I had not been in desperate trauma a moment before. I knew I was saved and never questioned my salvation after that. How can one question a salvation so comprehensive and complete and so utterly the work of God alone?



"The Wise and Foolish Builder," by
Danny Hahlbohm

5) I wish to emphasize to the reader that Christ is the rock that cannot fail. I have assurance of salvation mainly because I threw myself entirely on that rock and stayed on that rock as he did all the work. Ever since, I have rested in complete satisfaction that his saving work is finished and perfect. I have never been tempted to try to add something to that complete work of grace.

However, the assurance of salvation is only the beginning of my long journey of sanctification. Many never really start the journey of sanctification or have much spiritual growth, because the issue of their salvation is never decisively settled. Many stay babes in Christ all their lives.

Christian, the moral of the story is that if you love Christ but have no assurance of salvation, it is because you have one foot on the rock and one foot on the sinking sand of trusting in yourself. You need to get both feet on the rock. Renounce the foolish trust you have placed in your weak, sinful self and trust in Christ alone.

A false sanctification

The popular misunderstanding of the gospel has led many people to an even greater misunderstanding of sanctification. If a person thinks he caused his faith to awaken through works or choices, or thinks that he has some good within him that God can accept, he will suppose that sanctification can come from good works or from keeping the law.

As I traveled through evangelicalism in the 70's and 80's I found two grave errors in many places: 1) salvation through grace and sanctification through works, and 2) Christians

seeking to pump up their "self-esteem."

The false teaching of self-esteem easily snares those with no assurance of salvation because they lack the sweet sense of being adopted sons of God. "Self-esteem" is a silly, foolish thing in comparison with the glory of being an adopted son of God.

Many people who are genuinely saved are nevertheless committed to the idea that they have a goodness that God can admire. Therefore, they are determined to sanctify themselves through good works or through law. No true sanctification can ever come to man in this way. Some spectacular moral failures of evangelical leaders have come because they tried to get holy through their own willpower to keep God's laws. They have trusted in their own righteousness and failed. Reader, if you wish to taste of bitter failure in your spiritual walk, a sure way to do it is to trust in your own righteousness and your own willpower.

Many of leaders of evangelicalism of this generation no longer understand God's way of sanctification. Allow me to describe the hyper-works approach of a very popular evangelical leader. Then let me describe God's way of sanctification, which I wrote about in my book *The Stages of Sanctification*. The contrast between God's way and the way of this popular leader could not be more stark or shocking.

The hyper-driven life

Four years ago, I went to Oxford, England, to attend a conference on C.S. Lewis. Rick Warren was a guest speaker. I sat about ten yards away from him. I had read his bestselling book *The Purpose Driven Life* and enjoyed it and expected good things from his talk.

Warren started talking about his human father, and his face and his voice changed. It was clear to all that he loved and idolized his father. He described his father as though he was the very archetype of spiritual maturity. His father was in the ministry and was driven by works. He was a hyper-manic workaholic. The greater the flurry of works his father did, the more that Warren stood in awe of him.

At that time, it seemed to me that "purpose" was only a prop in Warren's "purpose driven life." It seemed to me that being "driven" was what really enthralled him. He is a works-driven obsessive. As we shall see, recent events have convinced me that Warren does indeed have a purpose. It is inordinate personal ambition!



Rick Warren

During Warren's feverish talk of four years ago, I felt oppressed and restless. Something about him didn't smell right. I worried that there was more of neurosis than Jesus Christ in his hyper-driven life. Warren described how he is sometimes dazed, paralyzed, and nearly blinded by the weird fits he often suffers just before he gives a message to a crowd. This is not an anointing of the Holy Spirit. It might just be the oppression of another kind of spirit. Warren is not being sanctified by his unhealthy works obsession.

It is no accident that Warren has the largest and most successful ministry in America. It is not because he works the hardest — although he might well work harder than anyone else. He is the perfect embodiment of the American evangelical cult of sanctification by works. Therefore, multitudes of evangelicals have gathered eagerly around him. Everywhere in America, frustrated evangelical pastors envy Warren's ability to whip his people into a frenzy of works.

Sanctification comes only by grace through faith

Just as salvation comes only by grace through faith, sanctification comes only by grace through faith. Man's way is works. God's way is by faith and grace which are vivified by the moving of the Holy Spirit. God's way is the only way salvation or sanctification can come to man. The multitudes of evangelicals who insist on being sanctified by good works or by keeping the law remain unsanctified. That is why the church is so worldly. That is also why so many evangelicals remain spiritual babes all their lives.

When the pastor looks down on a congregation full of babes, he will probably give them milk and not meat. Or, he might give them cotton candy to delight them, instead of serious doctrines to sink their teeth into. This is how the seeker-sensitive movement got started.

False sanctification came first. Christian workaholism followed. A works burnout came next. Stagnation and apathy among the spiritual babes came with the burnout. Then came the seeker-sensitive pandering that turned the apathetic babes into spoiled babes.

God's process of sanctification

When we follow God's way, what is the process of sanctification? Well, there is no salvation

without the cross and the resurrection. In like manner, there is no sanctification without the cross and the resurrection.

In salvation, Christ died for us in a work of "substitution" so that we can be "justified." Our sinfulness is imputed to the crucified Christ. The righteousness of the risen Christ is imputed to us. His resurrection imparts to us the power of eternal life.

In sanctification, we die with him in a work of "identification" or "participation," so that we can be delivered from the power of sin. As we die with him, the power of the cross supernaturally destroys the power of sin within us.

Subsequently, we enter into the resurrection of Christ so that the supernatural power of Christ's resurrection might dwell in us — so that we can live a holy life. We can participate in the resurrection to the extent we have participated in the cross. The only holy life that exists on this earth is the crucified and the risen life.

Good works naturally flow from a holy resurrection life, but it is impossible to obtain a holy life through works. The laws of God are written upon the heart of a Christian living a supernaturally holy life. These laws can be naturally expressed through life as it flows out of the sanctified heart, but it is impossible to become holy through the works of the law.

Salvation often occurs in a moment in time, but sanctification occurs in stages over a lifetime. The fruit of this lifetime process of sanctification is progressive stages of maturity. Evangelicals no longer produce very many authentically mature men and women, precisely because they no longer understand God's way of sanctification.



The world is crucified unto me

"God forbid that I should glory, except in the cross of my Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Galatians 6:14).

As we die with Christ in the process of sanctification, we are "crucified to the world." Only through this means can we correctly understand what God desires of us when he commands us to be separate from the world. But what if an entire congregation is seeking sanctification through works or through law? How then can they have a coherent understanding of separation from the world? Uncrucified Christians love the world and have no desire to

separate from it. Therefore, it is very easy for an entire church to be taken captive by the culture. This is exactly what has happened at the seeker-sensitive churches. Separation from the world is never preached at seeker-sensitive churches. If it were preached, it would not be understood, because being crucified with Christ is not taught at those churches.

The sanctified Christian loves his home in heaven and hates this evil, passing world. The typical seeker-sensitive Christian loves the world and lacks assurance of salvation. The typical "emergent" (member of an emerging church) loves the world and is indifferent to eternal life. Emergent gatherings never speak about eternity, but endlessly chatter about changing society.

The Christian who is crucified to the world glories in the cross. The seeker-sensitives are ashamed of the cross. The cross is an offense to the people of the world. Seeker-sensitive ministries are scared to death that someone will be offended. Therefore, they are ashamed of the cross which causes offense.

Seeker-sensitive churches water down teachings about sin and the atonement for fear that someone will be offended. They have largely abandoned mention of the wrath of God, hell, and Satan.

Other touchy subjects are generally excluded, such as no sex before marriage and no sexual perversions such as what the gays practice.

St. Paul's limitations on women in ministry in the church is a taboo subject. Why? An associate pastor said to me that he avoids this subject because "I like to choose my battles." In other words, he elects not to fight this battle because it is a hot potato. After all, the feminists might be offended if we tell them the truth, and we can't have that.

Comfort rules

Seeker-sensitives mimic the postmodern culture because they fear that someone of that culture might come into the church and be uncomfortable with a different culture.

Well, what if experiencing a better culture than what one is used to might do the new person some good? Maybe he has come to church because he is disgusted with his life and his culture and wants to change to a new way of life. Would such a person want to come to church to see a duplicate of the culture out there?

The prime directive of the seeker-sensitives is that the new person must not feel uncomfortable. But what if God wants him to be uncomfortable with his life? "Sorry, God, we will not allow that kind of thing to happen in this church."

Comfort rules in the seeker-sensitive church. One such church I am familiar with lost their

nerve about following God's will at their existing location. Instead, they sold out and moved. A cheap motel chain bought the land and put up a sign that said, "Comfort Rules." When I saw the sign I said, "That says it perfectly."

Seeker-sensitives use a variety of rationalizations for their cowardice about offending someone with truth. One rationalization is that we must make the message relevant to the culture for the sake of the gospel. I don't believe this rationalization, because the very people who use it are ashamed of the gospel.

My own church had a program to encourage people to evangelize. However, all they taught us was "building bridges." My outspoken comment was, "You can build bridges from now until doomsday and nothing will come of it if you never mention the cross." In retrospective, I wonder if building bridges without the cross was first and foremost a tactic for getting people into the church. If we really cared about the souls of men, I cannot believe we would forget to mention the cross.

The great evangelism train wreck



George Barna

Several years ago, I read a study by George Barna that most of the growth at mega-churches was merely a recycling of people from one church to another. Barna accounted for a modest amount of the growth by the birth of children. His numbers indicated that **none** of the growth could be accounted for by **evangelism** — that is to say, people saved through the ministry of the church and who kept on attending the church.

The shattering irony of this story is that seeker-sensitive innovations are justified in the name of evangelism! Year after year, the evangelism fails — and year after year, seeker-sensitive innovations are rationalized by the need for evangelism!

There is something about the seeker-sensitive mind that makes groups of people unable to learn from their failures and compels them to endlessly repeat their mistakes. The inability to learn from mistakes is a characteristic of a fool.

We should have known without the statistics that wherever comfort rules, the people will be lukewarm. Lukewarm people are unfit for evangelism.

The cross and talk of sin make people uncomfortable, so let us forget about the cross and

sin. Maybe if we make folks comfortable they will come here and be comfortable with us. After all, comfort rules at our church. Let us all go comfortably to hell together. Would someone please give me an example of Jesus of Nazarus making someone feel comfortable? He discomfited those who were at ease. Even when he comforted the broken hearted, he did not exempt them from his uncomfortable expectations of faith, obedience, and discipleship.

The kingdom of the babies

In the 1980's, I attended a church that was filled with spiritual babes, yet was specially blessed by God. The sermons were entirely milk without a shred of meat. I approved of this for a season because I felt the babes needed their milk. I assumed that when the babes grew up, the pastor would start serving meat. I stayed in that church for four years. The babes did not grow up, and the sermons were all milk the entire four years. I noticed that not only were the babes not growing, the pastor, elders, and staff were not growing. However, many were increasingly subject to strange doctrines and deceptions.

Christians who refuse to grow up will eventually be deceived. The great deception has come — meet the emerging church. This monster has come to swallow up our stunted spiritual babies.

The great dumbing down

American evangelicalism is devoted to dumbing down the content to reach the babes and the unchurched. Recent translations of the Bible are geared down into the language of a twelve-year-old child. Layers of meaning are shaved off the Bible text in order to achieve this feat of reductionism. Evangelicals have become so enamored of seeker-sensitive innovation that they have tolerated the mutilation of their precious Bible. Their two-edged sword is now shortened, dulled, and bent.



If anyone dares to smarten up, it scares the comfortable nursery full of babes, and howls of protest will be heard that we must not shoot over the heads of the people.

Any success I have as a writer comes from my determination to ignore the ubiquitous practice of dumbing down to reach a wider audience. The more I smarten up, the more successful I am as a writer — except at my own church.

Once upon a time, I had my own column in the church magazine. I endeavored to explore the difficult doctrines of orthodoxy in an intelligent, spiritually profound manner. I was fired after four months to make room for men who wanted to write about their experiences when they go fishing, and teen age girls who wanted to tell what they feel while they are running. That boring, mediocre magazine soon failed, of course. No one read it because the poorly written rambling narratives had little solid content. This was a perfect example of how dumbing down is foolish and ineffective.

Why can't we have a message that the people must stand on tiptoes to reach, instead of one so low that it makes them crawl on hands and knees to reach like a baby?

Multitudes are leaving the seeker-sensitive evangelical churches out of sheer boredom. Even the teens are running away from a steady diet of fluff. They can get all the fluff they want out in the world. However, in all my years in churches, I cannot remember a single case of a member of long standing leaving a church because the message was over his head.

The crisis of our age

I had a disagreement with a young Associate Pastor. He thought we were teaching the teens too much. He did not want them to learn any more until they were applying what they had already learned.

I said, "The crisis of our age is exactly the opposite of what you say. Our crisis is that the teens know almost nothing about basic biblical doctrines." The young pastor went out among the teens to find out the truth. He came back to me and said, "Fred, you are right. The teens know nothing."

This pastor had a lot of courage and integrity to do a survey, face up to painful facts, and admit he was wrong. However, I do not entirely agree that the teens know nothing. The teens had intuitively learned some good things through the seeker-sensitive venues of stories, dramas, testimonies, and entertainment. Unfortunately, they had no conceptual handles on what they learned and they could not put it into coherent words. Such will-of-the-wisp "knowledge" can be blown away like autumn leaves before the strong winds of deception.

Wispy intuitive learning through narratives and through dramas, testimonies, stories, and entertainment venues is widely used both by seeker-sensitives and by emerging churches.

Mimicking postmodernism vs. being postmodern

Unlike the seeker-sensitive churches, the emerging church does not mimic postmodern culture to make people feel comfortable. Emergents try to be at the cutting edge of postmodernism because they want to be the vanguard of postmodernism as the wave of the

future.

Seeker-sensitives water down the atonement because they are ashamed of the cross and are afraid of offending someone. When emergents deconstruct the doctrine of the atonement, it is because they do not believe in the atonement.

King snakes versus coral snakes

Some variants of harmless king snakes are easily confused with deadly poisonous coral snakes. Some seeker-sensitive churches (king snakes) are easily confused with emerging churches (coral snakes). Let me give you an example of a church for which I cannot decide whether it is a king snake and a coral snake.



Willow Creek Community Church

At a men's ministry of my church, we used materials written at Bill Hybel's Willow Creek Community Church, one of the largest churches in the nation. One of the sections of the material included the line, "Jesus died for society." I was the only one at my table who objected. For the sleepy slackers at my table, it was just fine to say "Jesus died for society."

The unanswered question for me was are they ashamed of the cross at Willow or do they reject the doctrine of the atonement? "Jesus died for society" sounds to me like something an emergent would say.

I e-mailed the author of the piece at Willow, and she said that she originally wrote "Jesus died for our sins" and it was edited by another person. She also said that she believes in the atonement and is not ashamed of the cross. A man above her in the ministry hierarchy had blotted out "Jesus died for our sins" and substituted "Jesus died for society." I e-mailed him and he agreed that he had made the change and insisted that the change was OK. It was impossible to figure out if he was a king snake or a coral snake.

I later read *Faith Undone* by Roger Oakland of the Lighthouse Trails ministry. Oakland claimed that Bill Hybels, senior pastor of Willow, was one of the founding fathers of the Emerging Church. I was skeptical because I could not independently confirm this information outside of the Lighthouse Trails ministry.

Then I went to the Leadership Network web site. The first wave of emerging churches was influenced, trained, inspired, and promoted by the Leadership Network, and this influence and promotion still continues. When I entered the Leadership Network web site, they were celebrating their 25th anniversary. I watched their 30-minute anniversary video. Bill Hybels was one of a select group of speakers on the history of the Leadership Network. He talked about his early, continuous, and present association with the Leadership Network. There is no question that Hybels was and is enthusiastic about this organization.

However, it is not clear to me whether Hybels is an emerging church man in his heart of hearts, or is a seeker-sensitive man who was to some degree influenced by emerging church ideas through his association with the Leadership Network. Perhaps, he is cleverly using both movements to maximize his ministry success, defined as the number of people in the pews. He has experimented with cutting edge churches within the larger church, which might turn out to be little emergent churches tucked away within a mammoth seeker-sensitive church.

Hybels has one foot in the emerging church and one foot in seeker-sensitive evangelicalism. Is he a king snake or a coral snake? I don't know. Perhaps Hybels himself doesn't know. Nothing can confuse the mind quite like inordinate personal ambition and exhaustion from an over-scheduled calendar.

The church growth cult



Bill Hybel

Hybel's church, Willow Creek Community, is an archetypal example of the church-growth cult that is driven by the inordinate personal ambition of pastors. This cult might provide a solution to the riddle of why churches like Willow can be a hybrid of emerging church and seeker-sensitive.

The Leadership Network has a famous church growth program that was inspired by the late Peter Drucker, a legendary management consultant for business. Drucker was influential not only in developing the church growth program, but was an early advisor at the Leadership Network about what the emerging church should be. Drucker is deceased, but his wife was one of the speakers on the 25th anniversary video of the Leadership Network.

Churches like Willow might enthusiastically adopt Drucker's church growth ideas and also

adopt a variety of seeker-sensitive techniques. In the process, Emerging church ideas may be absorbed from the Leadership Network by osmosis. Voila, a seeker-sensitive/emerging church hybrid comes into being. Such a creature is a two-headed snake, like the two-headed king snake I saw as a child at the San Diego zoo.

As mentioned in part 1, the worst of all possible worlds is a seeker-sensitive church with emergents freely circulating in their midst. It is open season for the emergent wolves to prey upon the seeker-sensitive lambs.

Who is Rick Warren?

Roger Oakland claims that Rick Warren was one of the founding fathers of the emergent church and was on the board of the Leadership Network in the early days. However, Warren was conspicuously absent from the 25th anniversary video of the Leadership Network. Links on the lighthouse trails web site to evidences of Warren's leadership of the emerging church movement have been purged from the Saddleback Church's web site. Warren seems to be distancing himself from his emerging church associations.

The "Tides of Change" (1995), by Rick Warren and Leonard Sweet, is said to have been a trial balloon for the emerging church. Copies of the video are rare, hard to get, and extremely expensive. Leonard Sweet's later book *The Church in Emerging Culture* (2003) established him as a leader of the movement.

What hard facts can we know for sure about Warren? Rick Warren and Brian McLaren (a leader of the emerging church) both wrote introductions to *The Emerging Church*, by Dan Kimball (another leader of the emerging church). Warren did not seem to understand what he was endorsing. He wrote as though the emerging church was a very innovative and dynamic seeker-sensitive church. Was Warren blind to what he was endorsing, or was he playing a game?

Warren said "a marriage should be between a man and a woman" during the election campaign, when gay marriage was on the ballot in Warren's state of California. More recently, in a television interview with Larry King, Warren denied that he said marriage is between a man and a woman, and insisted that he would never say such a thing in the future. I have video links to the before and after statements. Warren lied. As an evangelical, Warren is supposed to believe that marriage is between a man and a woman. As an emergent, he is supposed to support the gay agenda. Is he playing a game, as his lie suggests, or did he lose his nerve when challenged by Larry King, because he is torn between being an evangelical and an emergent? Is he like Bill Hybels, who has one foot in the seeker-sensitive movement and one in the emerging church?

In the international venues, Warren is setting himself up as a world leader of the emerging church. He has joined the board at Tony Blair's Faith Foundation, which is an ecumenical

project sponsored by the United Nations. They propose to unite the peoples of six different religions to solve social problems and bring world peace. It is a one-world utopian project. It is aimed mainly at the "Abrahamic religions" — namely Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hindu, Buddhism, and Sikhism.

The problem here is Hindu, Buddhism, and Sikhism are not Abrahamic religions. Are Tony and Rick afraid to say so, or are they so muddled with postmodern spirituality (as per the emerging church) that they can't tell the difference?



Eboo Patel

Tony and Rick are too careful and diplomatic to tip their hand away, so I turned to Eboo Patel, the leader of the Interfaith Youth Core, which is in partnership with the Faith Foundation. Eboo is an American Muslim who is much more straightforward about what he is thinking than Tony or Rick. I listened to his 30 minute talk on the streaming web. Eboo repeatedly contrasted "religious pluralism and diversity" with "religious extremism." His repeated point is that you are either one or the other. Terrorists are extremists, but so are doctrinally-orthodox evangelicals who adhere "rigidly" to theological dogma. In other words, anyone who believes in universal transcendent truth is an extremist and is in the same camp as the Taliban, Hamas, and Hezbollah. Eboo implies that anyone who insists that you can get to heaven only through Jesus Christ is an extremist. This is definitely a postmodern point of view.

Eboo talked about the "tolerance, pluralism, and diversity" that is "emerging" from the six religions of his focus. "Emerging" as per the "emerging church"? Well, Eboo is clearly postmodern, and his talk came across to me as emerging church light. He is not yet as far gone as Leonard Sweet with the "deep ecumenicism" of the "cosmic christ." But give Eboo time. He is still young.

However, Rick Warren is not young and has accepted world leadership of a postmodern, spiritual, and utopian organism. What price personal ambition? As someone living an "ambition-driven life," as Warren is, the further from home he is and the more exalted the office, the more postmodern he gets.

Warren is a seeker-sensitive evangelical in California, but is a postmodern when he is interviewed on television by the networks, and is "emerging church-light" when he is in Europe. He reminds me of King Henry IV (Henry de Bourbon, 1553-1610) who converted to

Catholicism in order to be eligible to receive the French crown. Henry said, "Paris is worth a mass." To Warren, world leadership is worth faking an emerging church dance.

Test the spirits

I attended two different Bible studies in which a different emerging church book was discussed and praised in each study. In both cases, I alone identified both books as emerging church books — even though I had read neither books. My doctrinal orthodoxy helped me, but others who were also doctrinally orthodox were fooled.

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1).

How then did I know these were bad books? How did I know that Rick Warren had a "bad smell" when I heard him in person? Why was I the only one to object to the materials from Willow? Was I the only one with a good spiritual immune system? Perhaps.

But, there is more to it than being spiritually healthy. We must test the spirits.

"Test the spirits to see if they are of God" (1 John 4:1).

"The spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thought of a man except the man's spirit within him. The same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world, but the spirit who is from God, that we may freely understand what God has freely given us.... the spiritual man makes judgment about all things..." (1 Corinthians 2:10-15).

As an intellectual type, I have learned that I often discern wrongly if I lead with the intellect. I must allow "the spirit of man" that is to say, my human incorporeal spirit called "pneuma" in the Greek — to stay a step ahead of my intellect. Contrary to philosophers Descartes and Kant, it is not the intellectual mind that "knows," it is the human spirit that "knows." Discernment is all about knowing. However, the human spirit can be deceived. That is what happened to the false prophets of the emerging church.

All who are born again have the Holy Spirit of God indwelling in their human spirit. When the Holy Spirit, who is the "spirit of truth," takes the lead and the human spirit follows, we can discern what is of God and what is of the spirit of the world. The spirit of the world at this time is postmodern.

Those who are crucified with Christ are also crucified as to the world. Those who are crucified as to the world are repelled by postmodernism, instead of being attracted to it.

I spiritually discerned that those emerging church books were not of God, but were tainted

with the bad smell of postmodern.

Therefore, early in the conversation I interjected, "postmodern!", "the emerging church!", and "heresy!" No one in the two Bible studies believed me at that time. I later did research and discovered that I was right in the case of both books.



The wolf is almost upon you

None of those people in these Bible studies are young, and none is a spiritual novice, yet they were all fooled. Suddenly, I realized how quickly the emerging church could deceive us and swallow us up, from the oldest to the youngest.

I wrote these two essays to sound the alarm. Remember how Delila awakened Sampson and said, "The Philistines are upon you!" I say, "Wake up, you sleeping seeker-sensitive sheep! The emerging church wolf is upon you!"

P.S. I am presently attending the *Truth Project* seminars, which are a perfect antidote for all this postmodern confusion.

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RenewAmerica analyst [Fred Hutchison](#) also writes a column for RenewAmerica.

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