

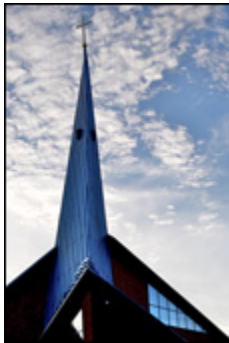
Issues analysis

The seduction of Christianity

Part 1: The rise of the emerging church

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Part 1 of this essay deals with the rise of the "emerging church," which is postmodern and heretical. As such, it is a double threat to doctrinally orthodox Christianity.

Part 2, which is coming soon, will describe the watering down of evangelicalism at the mega-churches in a way that has made many of their people worldly, soft, and vulnerable to the seductions of the emerging church. Parts 1 and 2 were originally written as one essay, because the rise of the emerging church cannot be correctly understood apart from the contemporary changes in evangelicalism.

Paving the way for the apostate church

In a period of 30 years (1960–1990) evangelicalism replaced the Protestant mainline denominations as the dominant spiritual force in America. The rapid decline of the mainline denominations and the rapid rise of evangelicalism was a net gain for the spiritual wellbeing of America, because evangelicalism was doctrinally orthodox and the mainline denominations were becoming increasingly modernist. Modernist churches are morally and spiritually worthless.

Just as modernism took over the mainline Protestant churches, *postmodernism* is now taking over evangelicalism. The evangelical Jonah might be swallowed up by the postmodern whale — that is, swallowed up by the "emerging church." All the gains of biblical doctrine from 1960 to 1990 might be lost.

For this reason, I do not think the apostate church of the end times will be liberal-modernist or backsliding evangelical. I now suspect that the great apostate church warned about in biblical prophecy will be a postmodern institution that grows from what we now know as the emerging church.

The Bible tells us that the apostate church will persecute the true believers in Christ. The emerging church accepts people of almost any religion or heresy, but rejects those who adhere strictly to the Bible and to doctrinal orthodoxy. In a few decades, the emerging church leviathan might persecute the shrunken remnants of doctrinally orthodox evangelicalism.

Seeker-sensitive church vs. emerging church

Friends sometimes ask me, "What is the difference between the 'seeker-sensitive movement' of evangelical mega-churches and 'The Emerging Church,' a.k.a. The 'Emergent' Church?"

I used to think that the emerging church was an extreme version of the seeker-sensitive movement. I now realize that "seeker-sensitive" and "emergent" are very different and that the inability to tell the difference between them is extremely dangerous.



Christians in seeker-sensitive churches have no defenses against the seductions of the emerging church. They are often tempted to read emerging church books. Some of these naive folks are being sucked into the emerging church and are therefore at risk of becoming apostates and heretics. (More about this in part 2.)

The siren song of the emerging church is particularly strong for those in Generation X or Generation Y who have grown up in a postmodern world. Very strong winds of postmodern deception are blowing at the present time. The deception is spiritual, moral, political, and economic.

If the teachings of the emerging church were known up front, many Christians would run the other way, instead of being slowly seduced. This essay will provide a profile of the nature and teachings of the emerging church.

Local mushrooms

Every local emerging church community is unique. They grow from the grassroots like mushrooms in eccentric, highly individual ways. This means that there can be considerable variety and diversity from one emergent community to another. Some of the mushrooms will give you a belly ache. Some will kill you.

An emergent community at a college campus is bound to be far more radical in its postmodernism than an emergent community in a small town in Iowa.

For these reasons, the general statements I make in this essay about the emerging church refer to a range of behavior. In some cases, one may find only a tendency towards the traits that I describe. In other cases, the behavior and ideas might be far more extreme than what I describe.

The emerging churches lack internal brakes and boundaries. Therefore, they can fly from one extreme to another, and can mutate and metastasize quickly.

Defenseless marshmallows

In spite of the dramatic difference between seeker-sensitive churches and emerging churches, it can sometimes be extraordinarily difficult to tell the difference. In part 2, I will describe the mega-churches that have one foot in the seeker-sensitive movement and one foot in the emerging church.

This is worst of all possible worlds. Seeker-sensitive ministries turn people into defenseless marshmallows. The seduction of great numbers of marshmallow people by the emergent predators can easily take place among the teeming throngs of the mega-churches. This is why the swallowing up of the evangelical Jonah by the postmodern whale can happen within a short period of time.

Two ways to spiritual shipwreck

Those who are spiritually shipwrecked by the seeker-sensitive movement are like those who become obese from eating too much cotton candy. They get too fat to keep watch while steering their "ship," and they founder upon the rocks and shoals.

In contrast, those in the emerging church are like those who are bitten by a poisonous serpent, go blind from the poison, and founder on the rocks.

Postmodernism with a Christian wrapper

A friend said that the emerging church sounds to her like the liberal churches. My response was: "Liberal churches represent modernism with a Christian wrapper. Emerging churches represent postmodernism with a Christian wrapper."



Essay #17 of *A Brief history of Conservatism*, which I recently published, explains why postmodernism is more poisonous to individuals, families, and cultures than is modernism. Some limp-wristed liberal modernist churches are relatively feeble in their subversion of society. In contrast, the emergents are sometimes filled with demonic energy and a serpent-like craftiness and can destroy the people, the families, the communities, and the culture fairly quickly.

Emerging churches are eager to proclaim that they practice "Christianity for a postmodern age." They are hostile to traditional evangelicalism, which they suppose to be the Christianity of modernism.

In this perception, they greatly err. Churches of liberal theology are modernist. Doctrinally orthodox evangelicals have been at war with modernism for at least a century and a half and have consistently disapproved of liberal modernist churches.

Furthermore, the emerging church is not the Christianity of postmodernism, because it is not Christian and it is not a church. It is a cult and is loaded with heresies. That is why I metaphorically called it a "poisonous serpent."

You don't have to be a Christian to join an emerging church. They are glad to fellowship with Muslims, Buddhists, Zoroastrians, New Agers, pagans, gays, witches, idol worshipers, nature worshipers, sex worshipers, and atheists. However, no doctrinally orthodox evangelicals need apply — unless they keep their mouth shut about biblical authority, and about truth and the moral laws.

Abomination

Leonard Sweet, a founding father of the emerging church, was deeply influenced by Matthew Fox's book *The Cosmic Christ*. This is Fox's "gospel":

- "Mother earth" is being "crucified."
- The human psyche is being "resurrected" through mystical spirituality.
- The "cosmic christ" is healing "mother earth."
- The "messianic spirit" has come to transform mankind.

- All religions will become one, as their common roots in the "cosmic christ" are revealed.
- There will a one-world government, a utopia, and a sexual paradise on earth.

This blasphemous "gospel" panders to left-wing political agendas, but has nothing to say about the salvation of souls. Emergents are generally indifferent to the eternal salvation of individuals, but are deeply concerned about the redemption of society through the creation of postmodern communities, through Marxist class-warfare politics, and through a "one-world" utopia.



Matthew Fox

Emergent evangelism, missions, and worship

The "cosmic christ" is now an obsolete term. Some emergents might never have heard of the "cosmic christ." However, several elements of Matthew Fox's "cosmic christ" keep recurring in emergent literature, mainly through books written by the leaders of the movement.

In evangelism and missions, emergents do not tell people to change their religious affiliations or their doctrines. They tell them to adopt a "christ"-oriented "spirituality" through contemplation, meditation, and other spiritual exercises. They tell Muslims to remain Muslims in doctrine and practice, but to meditate on "christ." They make no effort to explain who Christ is according to the Bible. These false "missionaries" and "evangelists" say nothing about how Muslim doctrine might contradict who Jesus Christ is, what he did for our salvation, and what his teachings are. They say nothing about issues of good and evil, or right and wrong.

Emergent "evangelism" to Buddhists and Hindus is just the same. Stay as you are, but meditate on "christ." How about a goddess worshiper, a nature worshiper, an idol worshiper, or a sex worshiper? How about a witch, warlock, or satanist? It is just the same. Stay as you are, but just meditate on "christ," whatever that word may mean to you.

The typical form of "evangelism" practiced by American emergents is to invite the unbeliever to "worship." The unbeliever joins the worship of a "christ" that he does not know and that the emergents have not explained to him. The object is to draw the unbeliever into the emotional and sensory experience of worship, which hopefully will induce him to join the "emergent community." After joining, the new person will hopefully absorb vague impressions about the

"christ" by osmosis.

Emergent churches do not teach doctrine, so there is no agreement among them about what they are worshiping when they worship "christ." Many of them reject the virgin birth, the incarnation, the deity of Christ, and the atonement of Christ through his work on the cross. Many of them do not believe in the resurrection of Christ and his ascension into glory. No two emergents seem to agree about what the Trinity is.

Spiritual pornography



From the cover of *The Shack*

The Shack, an essentially emergent book that is popular among both seeker-sensitives and emergents, presents God the Father as a large jolly black woman. (I am not kidding.) God the Son was an affable craftsman from the Middle East. God the Holy Spirit was a small, shiny oriental woman who is semi-transparent. This not just heresy, it is spiritual pornography.

Emergents claim to have "christ-centered worship," but nothing could be further from the truth. When everyone invents their own "christ," people worship a shifting phantom. Some might worship the vile images of spiritual pornography.

We can only know Christ personally through the new birth. We can only understand who he is through the Bible, the creeds, the confessions, the systematic theology of orthodoxy, and good teaching. Once upon a time long ago, all the doctrines pertaining to Christ, his nature, and his works, were explained from the pulpit of evangelical churches. "Christ-centered worship" is the worship of the real Christ by those who know him through the new birth and who have a correct understanding about who he is.

Emergent ecumenicism

What is the point of Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus meditating on an undefined "Christ," while they stay the same in their traditional religions?

Emergents teach that all religions emerged from exactly the same deep spiritual currents. Matthew Fox called these deep currents "the cosmic christ." His claim that all religions have the same spiritual roots can easily be refuted by historians and theologians. Emergents believe this myth, nevertheless. They want so badly to believe that the world is spiritually one

that they will swallow the most fantastic conceptions.

Emergents who are unfamiliar with Matthew Fox and the "cosmic christ" sometimes fall back on New Age teachers of comparative religions — like the late Joseph Campbell, who went to great lengths to try to find a common spirituality that preceded and supported all religions. His book *The Hero with a thousand faces* is one example. Campbell looked to pagan myths as the common basis of all religions — which is even more absurd than Matthew Fox's theory about the "cosmic christ."

Emergents who like metaphysics favor Ken Wilbur's far-fetched theory of how everything is gradually becoming one through mystical forces of "wholeness." One aspect of Wilbur's model is his thesis of a progressive historical increase in the "level of consciousness" and the increasing depth of spirituality throughout the world. However, a better case can be made that contemporary spirituality is shallow compared to ancient spirituality. Wilbur's theory flies in the face of the chronic spiritual shallowness of the New Age movement, over which he has had an influence. Rob Bell, an emergent leader and founding pastor of Mars Hill Bible Church, recommends Wilbur in his emergent book *A Velvet Elvis*.



Dan Brown

Those who have a taste for legendary yarns, mysteries, and action thrillers might favor Dan Brown, the author of *The da Vinci Code*. Brown claims that Gnosticism was an ancient universal religion that preceded all other religions — and that the early church was gnostic. These assertions roll three lies into one.

- 1) Gnosticism was a religion for a small initiated elite and therefore could not have been a universal religion for the masses of people.
- 2) Manuscripts of a mature Gnosticism did not appear until the second century, long after all the books of the New Testament were written. Therefore, Gnosticism could not have preceded Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, or a half-dozen eastern religions.
- 3) Gnosticism was a second-century heresy against a well-established, doctrinally orthodox Christianity. Mr. Brown wants us to believe the exact opposite — that the doctrinal orthodoxy of the Nicene Creed (4th century) is a heretical revision of an original Gnostic Christianity. Preposterous. Only in a postmodern age that is ignorant of history and that reinvents its own history could such humbug pass the laugh test.

The apologists of *The da Vinci Code* argued that it was a harmless literary diversion. It was not harmless, because it provided a Gnostic substitute for the fading "cosmic christ" of Matthew Fox. Emergents have a remarkable facility for seizing upon postmodern fads and making them their own.

Emergents longing for utopia sometimes hate the Bible because it contradicts their hopeful historical myths and their one-world ecumenical hopes. The Bible describes a lost, fallen, and divided world filled with false "christs" and false religions that are leading the multitudes to destruction. The Bible proclaims that not only is the world not evolving towards a utopia, there will be spiritual apostasy, tribulation, and apocalypse at the end of the age.

Before we complete our consideration of the "cosmic christ" and emergent ecumenicism, let us take a quick look at the dangers from the occult.

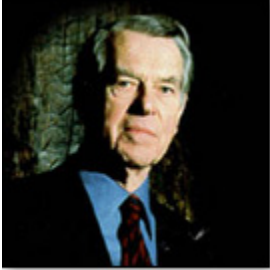
Things that go bump in the night

What is to stop an emergent in worship or spiritual meditation from tapping into a false Christ? Nothing. What is to stop him from communing with a demon and thinking the demon is the spirit of Christ? Nothing.

The unchurched and the person of another religion are unlikely to have accurate knowledge of the real Christ. He does not have the Holy Spirit of Truth dwelling in him to keep him from danger, as a born-again Christian does. Therefore, there is a risk that emergent evangelism will destroy its converts by escorting them unprotected into a labyrinth of occult darkness.

I had a friend who was an assistant to the late Dr. J.B. Rhine, (1895–1980). Rhine was once the leading American parapsychologist. My friend's job was to scientifically investigate haunted houses. I asked him if he had concluded that the "things that go bump in the night" involve some kind of being that is really out there. He said, "Yes, I think that something is out there. However, whatever it is, it is not your friend. Leave it alone and do not play with fire." My friend played with fire and got burned. His hellish depressions led to his untimely death.

I feel that the use of mystical spirituality by emergents to contact an unknown and undefined "christ" is like going into a haunted house at night to get in touch with — we know not what. Many emergents will surely get burned and be deceived.



Joseph Campbell

Experience is all

In a television interview with Bill Moyers, Joseph Campbell said, "I don't think people are seeking the meaning of life, I think they are seeking the experience of being alive."

This statement might be true of an excitable 13-year-old girl, but it is certainly not true of the typical 40-year-old. By age 40, most people are disillusioned with mere experience when experience is cut off from meaning. The desire to know the meaning of life has always been universal to mankind.

In the movie *Razor's Edge* (1949), a defrocked priest said to Larry, a seeker of truth, "The questions you are asking have always been asked by mankind." Larry responded, "That might mean that men can't help but ask them." The ex-priest answered, "You are smarter than I thought."

The emergent church is not a seeker of truth like Larry, but has sided with the truth-impaired Joseph Campbell, who used the experience-central approach of the 13-year-old girl. Dan Kimball, an emergent leader, wrote in *The Emerging Church* that 1) experience influences behavior, and 2) behavior influences what you believe. This is quite true, if you are an excitable 13-year-old girl. If one is permanently trapped in the emotional immaturity of early adolescence, the emerging church must seem like a trip to Disney World.

Furthermore, Kimball's formula is false: Experience may or may not lead to actions. Moreover, if an experience is divorced from truth and meaning, it might lead to evil actions or foolish actions. In contrast, an experience that vindicates a true principle might well lead to a good outcome. However, an experience purely for the sake of experience can easily lead to dangerous delusions and painful disillusionments.

Furthermore, actions may or may not lead to beliefs. However, if they do lead to beliefs, they could lead to either true or false beliefs. In such cases, one will tend to look at the quick payoffs of an action to determine what lesson to take from it. If the payoffs of evil actions are profitable, they could lead to justifications for criminality. Kimball's formula — experience, then action, then beliefs — is a road that leads to destruction.

The most dangerous aspect of Kimball's formula is that it tempts people to say, "I had a beautiful experience. What I am doing is true to that experience. Therefore, what I am doing

is right."

I knew a college kid who used very similar words to justify having sex with his girlfriend. I wonder if Kimball's books are popular at fraternity "animal houses." The difference between the drunken louts and emergents is that the louts will laugh while they are quoting Kimball. A kid who drinks himself blind is not quite as deceived as Kimball and his followers at the emerging church.

Worship equals feelings

Emergents make the experience of worship central to their service. I agree that worship should have a more central place in Protestantism, but I disagree that the experience of worship should be central.

The emergents have emphasized the sensory aspect of worship with cantles, incense, beautiful colors, stained glass, beautiful music, etc. This sensory experience is enhanced by the drama and symbols of the liturgy. These are good things in themselves. I agree that emergent "worship" is aesthetically superior to the ugly and banal "seeker-sensitive" worship. However, the seeker-sensitives are worshipping God. The emergents are not.

The pursuit of aesthetic and sensory experience need not have anything to do with worshipping God. When I go to an art museum and a symphony orchestra, and round out the day with a meal at a gourmet restaurant, I have enjoyed aesthetic and sensory experience. But it has little to do with worship.

I would actually prefer that Christian worship be made beautiful again like it was before the horrid invasion of the seeker-sensitives made worship noisy and ugly. But I would not have this happen at the expense of not understanding who we are worshipping or why. I would rather go to heaven amidst the howling din of the "music" of the ugly seeker-sensitives than go to hell amidst the esthetic beauty of the perfumed emergents.

Emergents and left-wing politics



According to Matthew Fox, Jesus of Nazareth was not "The Christ," but a man who possessed the "cosmic christ." He tells us that Buddha, Confucius, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King had the "cosmic christ." Oprah Winfrey thinks that Barack Obama is "the

one" — i.e., he has the "cosmic christ." The "cosmic christ" of the 21st century are all destined to be left of center politically, because most emergents are politically left-wing.

All men everywhere have a little of the "cosmic christ," or so we are told. Through spiritual exercises and mystical spirituality, anyone can obtain "christ consciousness" and tap into this deep current of spirituality that supposedly underlies all religions.

Although contemporary emergents no longer use the words "cosmic christ" and "christ consciousness," they do a lot of contemplation, meditation, and mystical spiritual exercises to come into an experience with an undefined, but universal "christ."

The old dream of progressives and left-wingers of a utopia and a one-world government that is to be achieved through "deep ecumenicism" is still alive. "Deep ecumenicism" occurs when the people of all religions discover that the deep spiritual springs of their religions are identical to that of all other religions. At least, that is what the left-wing emergents are hoping for. Therefore, do not be surprised when the leftists rush towards the emerging church. Dozens of Hollywood stars are both far-left politically and emergents spiritually.

Every time you hear a putative evangelical leader making left-wing statements, do some research to find out if they consort with emergent leaders. The names Tony Campolo, Jim Wallis, and Richard Foster come immediately to mind. The painful reality is that a number of evangelical leaders who are not the leaders of the emerging church have been substantially influenced by emergent ideas. Doctrinal orthodoxy conflicts with some of the political and moral stances of such men. If you hear one of them talking about "social justice," an idea that came from Marxism, or if you see one adopt a pro-gay or pro-feminist stance, it is not because they are going modernist like the liberal churches — it is because they are going post-modern and emergent.

The bad boys of Generation X and Generation Y love the emerging church. As a dividend to the coming paradise, there will be a sexual paradise. The sacredness of all sex will be proclaimed and moral judgments about any sexual practices will not be tolerated. That goes for adultery, promiscuity, bigamy, concubinage, prostitution, kinky sex, and homosexual perversions. There is something disgusting about an aging emergent leader with a pony tail talking about the glory of sex to Generation X and Y guys who are already hyper-sexualized.

I can't wait to get my hands on statistics on divorce, abortion, and venereal disease among emergents. I wager that the unchurched generally tend to be more traditional, moderate, and regular in their sexual habits than emergents. When religion goes bad, it becomes Satan's playground.

Is the emerging church pagan?

The emerging church welcomes pagans. In addition, it has a few characteristics that are

reminiscent of paganism.

What a local emerging church community believes might shift from month to month and year to year. All the emergents emphasize that they must change with the times. At the same time, they insist, like good postmoderns, that they will not be subject to any authority outside their emergent community concerning Truth and Morality. They will not tolerate evangelicals saying that certain things are sinful based on biblical authority.

However, they do seek for a contingent, temporary, and contemporary "truth" from their local emergent community. In like manner, tribal pagan religion emanates from the campfires of the tribe. Both paganism and the emerging church are grassroots, bottom-up affairs.

Through a process of conversation and consensus-building, each emergent church community decides what is to be true for them — at least, what is true for this month. The process by which emergents use to find the truth of the month is very different from the process of pagan shamanism.



M. Scott Peck

How do they do it?

Give the devil his due. The process for reaching consensus in an emergent community is very sophisticated. It is no easy task for a community to take the place of God in determining what is right and wrong for the community. Therefore, they have a very ingenious way of playing God.

Emergent communities follow the brilliant techniques of the late M. Scott Peck for transforming informal groups into organic living entities. Every person in the group becomes an organic living part of the entity. Peck's organic entities are counterfeits for the "body of Christ" — which is to say, the church. That is why emergents insist on calling their local cults "emerging churches." However, Peck's techniques work fine with a group of atheists or a group of Satanists.

M. Scott Peck warns that one "evil" person in the group could scuttle the birth of the organic entity. How does he define "evil"? Such a person is "divisive" in the sense that he contradicts the core principles of the group which is in the process of formation. What if an outspoken, doctrinally orthodox Christian were in such a group? Would the others regard him as "divisive" — that is to say, "evil"? Yes. They would throw him out.

Emergents have absolute tolerance for brazen falsehoods, if the falsehoods are sincerely believed and are in harmony with the consensus of the group. They have an absolute intolerance for truth if it flies in the face of emergent group-think. In such an upside down world, the craziest ideas can be affirmed and the greatest evil can be praised.

What is the emergent process of discovering the truth of the month? It begins with an extended conversation among the leaders and continues as an open public conversation of the members. The conversation continues until consensus is reached. Consensus can come fairly quickly for an organic group. In contrast, decisions come very slowly, if at all, for the discredited feminist "consensus management" — a business fad of 15 or 20 years ago. Thus, emergent organic groups can do easily what eluded the business leaders.

The group-think that is possible for an emerging church community can be incredibly tight and astonishingly up-to-date. Such unity, combined with rapid change, can be a formidable power. We saw some of this unity combined with rapid change in the Obama campaign.

Whereas the real body of Christ enhances the individual, the emerging church turns individuals into programmed zombie cultists. The sophistication of the process makes people eager to throw away their individuality and become groupies. The emerging church is a soul-destroying cult of the communal type.

The historicity of emergent theology

The grassroots tribal approach for finding truth used by emerging communities has been translated into the historicism of doctrine by ostensibly evangelical scholars. Their misbegotten work has been accepted by purportedly evangelical seminaries and purportedly evangelical publishing houses. To make a long story short, the historicist scholars think that doctrines have welled up from local cultures at different times and places. Therefore, we are told that there is no unchanging doctrinal orthodoxy over the centuries. The doctrine of the atonement is currently under siege by scholars who assert that the meaning of the atonement has changed over time. I recently wrote an essay that demonstrated that the doctrine of the atonement has never changed. What the first century Jewish church believed about the atonement was identical to what the Greek and Roman fathers of the church believed. Starting with the Nicene Creed, all the great creeds and confessions affirmed the same truth.

The historicist "scholars" cherry picked the facts and played bait and switch games to support to their speculative conclusions. They played a con game. Yet they have fooled a handful of evangelical seminaries and publishing houses such as Intervarsity Press, Zondervan, and Christianity Today.

Prestigious evangelical leaders are every bit as vulnerable to seduction by the postmodern

emergent movement as are ordinary Christians. The meltdown of evangelicalism is both top down and bottom up.



Contemplative prayer

One of the most amazing things about the emergents is that they have revived ancient spiritual exercises called "contemplative prayer" or "mystical prayer." I have read all the authors recommended by the emergents — namely, Thomas a Kempis, Meister Eckhart, John of the Cross, St. Theresa of Avila, Thomas Merton, and Thomas Aquinas. The objective of the contemplatives is "union with God," a goal with which I am in accord. However, I reject the Catholic contemplative idea of "deification," which is a heresy.

Contemplative prayer has been a blessing to me and was complementary to my doctrinally orthodox convictions. Then, to my horror, most of the folks I knew practicing contemplative prayer fell of the cliff into shocking heresies.

I have never been a Catholic, nor could ever be one on doctrinal grounds. However, I once had a considerable number of contemplative friends, most of whom happened to be Catholic. Most of these Catholic contemplatives went over the cliff to New Age heresy. Most of these practiced left-wing politics, some were pro-gay, and some were radical feminists of the kind who cannot accept a male gender for God.

Father Thomas Keating, a Trappist monk who was the national leader of the Catholic centering prayer movement, went over to New Age heresy and drew the entire American centering prayer movement with him. A Catholic contemplative prayer chat room I was part of went New Age and all of them accepted the heresy of "deification." They kicked me out because I remained doctrinally orthodox and pointedly said that "deification" is a heresy. However, they welcomed Buddhists and New Agers.

Some trappist monks in the monasteries have become Buddhist. Some went gay. I have met several such ruined monks.

Until the Catholic church can distance itself from New Age follies that followed in the wake of Vatican II, I suggest to my Catholic friends that they avoid contemplative prayer.

Historical and modern vulnerabilities



Meister Eckhart

The 14th century Rhineland mystic Meister Eckhart fell into the heresy of pantheism. Pseudo-Denys was a Neoplatonic mystic of the Eastern church in the 6th century. He introduced the idea of "deification." His Neoplatonism is an exotic form of pantheism. Many Roman Catholic monks followed his mode of contemplation. For these reasons, many Catholic mystics down through the centuries have been prone to the heresies of pantheism, neoplatonism, and deification. A Catholic spiritual director should not launch a novice into contemplative prayer until he has first explained why these three things are heresies.

Seeker-sensitive evangelicals are vulnerable to emergent mysticism for different reasons. Seeker-sensitive pandering breeds a fuzzy narcissism, and the mystical prayer of emergents puts the emphasis on feelings and sensory experiences. The feelings-oriented narcissist will turn contemplative prayer away from God and into spiritual navel-gazing.

Seeker-sensitives are often vague on doctrine, and are just as incompetent as post-Vatican II Catholics are in recognizing heresy. I therefore recommend that those going to seeker-sensitive churches abstain from contemplative prayer.

Narcissism and relativism

Narcissism and a relativism, are characteristic traits of postmodernism. If one is essentially postmodern at heart, he is an easy mark for the emergent church.

Postmodernism is essentially a rebellion against reason and transcendent truth. The two kinds of people who cannot be reached by reason are narcissists and a certain kind of radical relativist. The narcissist is too self-absorbed to rise up beyond himself into the sphere of reason. Postmodern relativism will require a little more explanation.

Nietzsche and postmodern relativism

Friederich Nietzsche (1844–1900), the father of postmodernism, created a new kind of radical relativism.

In philosophy, there is a horizontal axis and a vertical axis. At one pole of the horizontal axis, the realist says, "Things are really out there." At the other pole of the axis, the idealist says, "Things are out there only if man is conscious of them." The vertical axis has metaphysical realism at one pole, and nominalism at the other. The metaphysical realist says, "Metaphysical truth and universal truth really exist and maintain their existence independently of whether we acknowledge them." The nominalist says, "Such universals exist only in the human mind."

Doctrinally orthodox Christianity is realist on both vertical and horizontal axes. Reason cannot flourish apart from the same dual realism. Therefore, Christianity and reason are allies that are arrayed against postmodernism and irrationality.

Nietzsche's early career was devoted to proving that all metaphysical realism is a fraud. He claimed that the philosophers had no grounds for a metaphysical realm. He saw them as con-men who were motivated by hubris and who invented new realms to dazzle their followers and gain power. He began his attack against the philosopher Plato and slowly worked his way to an attack on Christianity.



Friederich Nietzsche

Modernism began in the 18th century with skepticism about metaphysics. Postmodern began in the 19th century with Nietzsche's fierce and bitter war against metaphysics. However, in due time, Nietzsche also turned against both the idealists and the nominalists and brought all four poles of philosophy to destruction.

Into this great void came nihilism and Nietzsche's postmodernism. I have dealt with 19th century nihilism in another essay. Nietzsche's postmodernism was a combination of

radical narcissism and radical relativism. Radical narcissism is "solipsism" — notion that I am everything that exists. Unlike the idealist who says, "Things are out there if man is conscious of them," the solipsist says, "Things are out there if I will them to be out there."

Radical relativism holds that there is no authority outside myself for truth, morals, or values. The radical narcissism and radical relativism of postmodernism cannot be reached by an appeal to reason, as we shall see below in "talking to a postmodern."

The moral of the story is that one's independent powers of reason must be stripped away in

order for one to be absorbed by postmodernism, including the postmodern emerging church community.

Talking to a postmodern

A postmodern friend of mine said to me, "When a court or a legislature declares a gay union to be a marriage, it is a marriage no matter what your religion says."

I attempted to bypass his ideology and his bias against Christianity with an appeal to reason. I pointed out that if a court declared that a dog is a cat, the dog would not turn into a cat. The dog would remain a dog. In like manner, if a court declares a gay union is a marriage that would not turn it into a marriage. It would remain a gay union.

Why do these labels matter? Each species has its own label so we can tell them apart. If some class of things has a unique nature, it is part of a species. The unique nature is what philosophers call "the thing in itself."

Marriage and gay unions do not have the same essential nature. Therefore, they are different species. Each species must have its own label to avoid confusion about the "thing in itself." Rational thought and communication are destroyed when someone arbitrarily switches the labels. When a court decrees that a gay union is a marriage it switches the labels.



My friend answered, "When a court or a legislature declares a gay union to be a marriage, it is a marriage no matter what your religion says." None of my concepts had penetrated his solipsism or radical relativism. Reason and logic bounced off his postmodern armor like a pea from a peashooter bouncing off a tank. His repetition of his opening line was Nietzschean. "It is so because I say it is so."

I told him that he is postmodern and therefore is immune to an appeal to reason. Therefore, an authentic conversation is impossible.

Deprogramming emergents

The cult deprogrammer who specializes in emergents will not be able to appeal to reason, just as I could not reason with my postmodern friend. The way the gospel was once

preached to pagans might have more success. The pagans are not rational and worship idols. My friend worships the idol of himself. Emergents worship the tribal idols of their cult.

How do we inoculate young people from falling into the emerging church? 1) We start teaching them the fundamentals of the doctrinal orthodoxy of Christianity; and 2) We introduce them to metaphysical realism in philosophy and theology in the hopes they will develop their powers of independent reason.

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

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