

The Emerging Church: A Guide for the Perplexed

Resources for understanding the “emerging church”

Sermon Titles

Helpful resources for worship preparation

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The following is the beginning of an article entitled, “*The Emerging Church: A Guide for the Perplexed*” by Jamie Smith, *Reformed Worship*, September, 2005, p. 40. Jamie Smith (jks4@calvin.edu) is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

The growing attention paid to the “emerging church” has certainly got people talking. And whatever the “emerging church” is, it seems to be quite a chameleon. Depending on who you talk to, it’s either the latest threat to biblical faith or that which will save us from two thousand years of error!

I don’t think that either the alarmists or the triumphalists are right on this score for a variety of reasons. The “emerging church,” first of all, is not really an “it.” It’s not a new denomination or organized fellowship of churches; it’s not even properly a “movement.” It’s better understood as a growing sensibility in the contemporary church—a sensibility that finds manifestations across the spectrum of (mainly Protestant) traditions, from mainline to non-denominational evangelical congregations. More specifically, it is a post-modern sensibility.

... Postmodernism is very important for the emerging church. What it refers to is a deep dissatisfaction with a number of ideas and practices that became dominant in modernity—roughly an era that began in the sixteenth century with the philosopher Descartes and persists until today.

Descartes famously reduced human beings to “thinking things” and thus devalued the emotions, the arts, and even the community. As the church slowly adopted the outlook of modernity, the faith was reduced to a kind of individualistic “talking head” Christianity, mainly concerned with ideas and propositions, rather than practices, formation, and community. While “postmodernism” means many things, it certainly means a rejection of this limited notion of human persons and a revaluing of concrete practices, a central role for the arts, and focus on relationships and community.

Resources which may be helpful in understanding the “emerging church”

Baker, Johnny and Gay, Doug, **Alternative Worship: Resources from and for the Emerging Church**. This British resource draws on Anglican tradition, Celtic spirituality, and the resources of the Iona community. The book includes a CD-ROM with images, litanies, music tracks, video loops, and more.

Butler Bass, Diana, **The Practicing Congregation**, Alban, 2004; **Christianity for the Rest of Us: How the Neighborhood Church is Transforming the Faith**, HarperCollins, 2006.

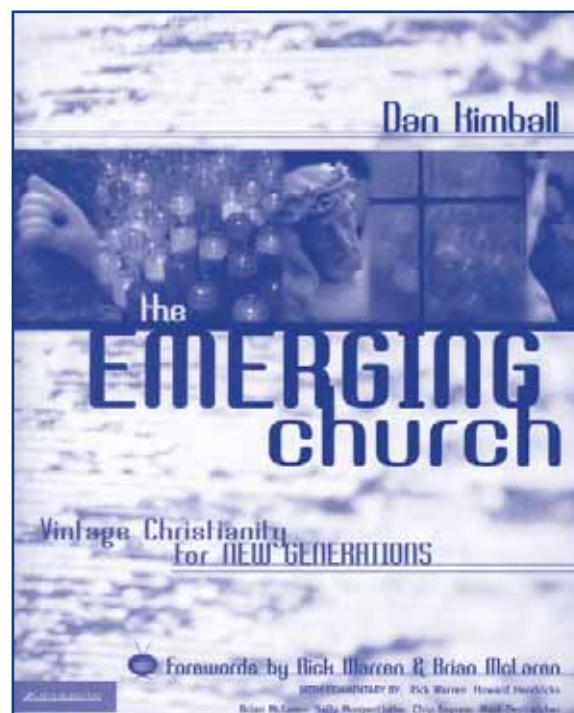
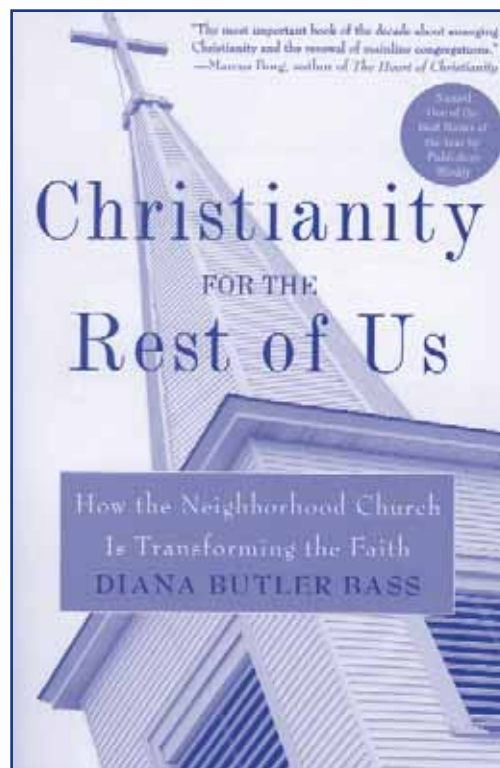
Diana Butler Bass' books outline characteristics shared by vital progressive (but not necessarily big!) mainline congregations.

Kimball, Dan, **The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations**, Zondervan, 2003; **Emerging Worship: Creating Worship Gatherings for New Generations**, Zondervan, 2004.

Kimball explores worship, preaching, leadership, evangelism, spiritual formation, and change in an unapologetically Jesus-focused, historical, missional ministry.

McLaren, Brian, **A New Kind of Christian**, 2001; **The Story We Find Ourselves In**, 2003; **The Last Word and the Word After That**, 2005, all published by Jossey-Bass; **A Generous Orthodoxy**, Zondervan, 2004.

McLaren's books describe what it means to be the church for a postmodern world.



Pagitt, Doug, **Reimagining Spiritual Formation: A Week in the Life of an Experimental Church**, Zondervan, 2004. Pagitt describes a holistic, missional church that rejects the talking-head paradigm of “education-based” ministry and embraces a central role for worship, physicality, hospitality, and creativity. His book describes key practices.

Smith, James, **Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping Post-Secular Theology**, (Baker 2004), **Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition: Creation, Covenant, and Participation** (Baker, 2005), **Who’s afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church** (The Church and Postmodern Culture), Baker, 2006.

Webber, Robert, **Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World**, Baker, 1999; **The Younger Evangelicals**, Baker, 2002. In his books, Webber pays attention to the practices of worship, arts, and community. He sees the emerging church recovering a deep sense of what it means to be “incarnational.”

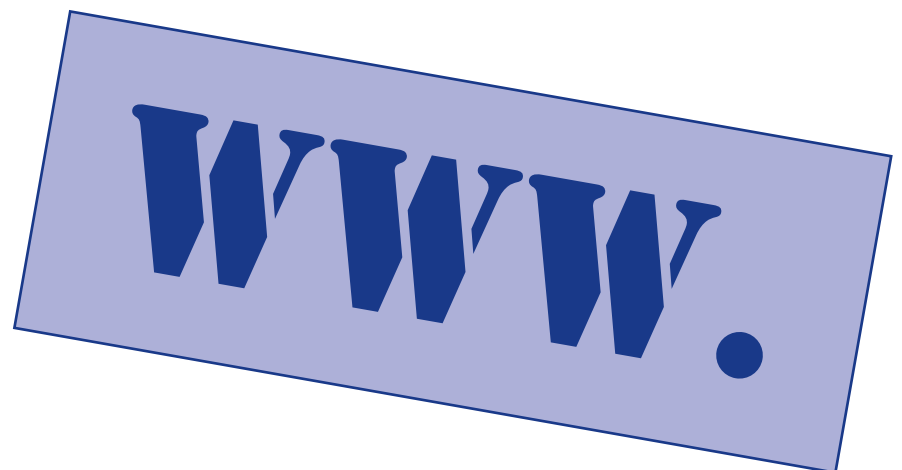
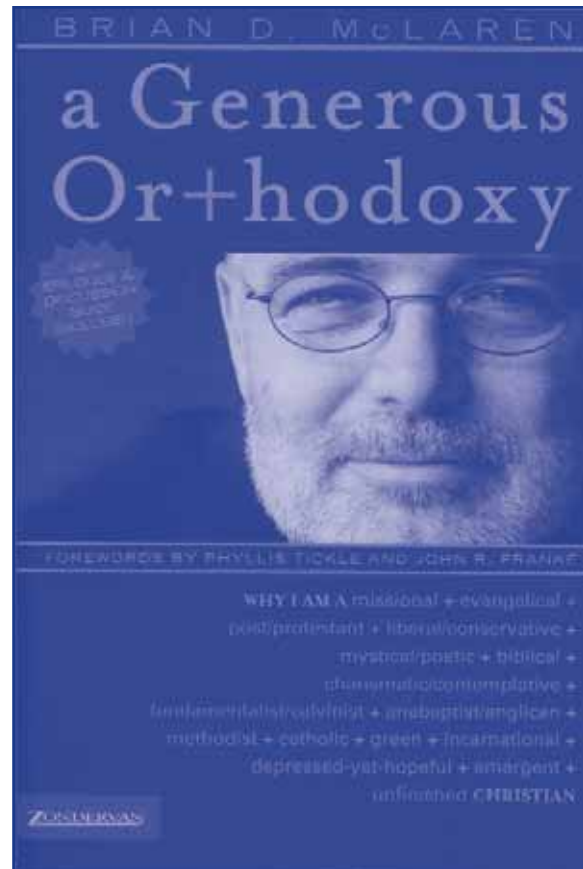
Stories of Emergence, Zondervan, 2003. Pastors and worship leaders who tried to make the transition to emergent worship are honest about the rocky path of trying to rethink paradigms of worship and discipleship.

The Ooze

[<http://www.theooze.com>]. A site containing articles, book reviews, events, and connections regarding the emerging church.

Emergent Village

[<http://www.emergentvillage.com>]. This site has helpful resources, online forums, and information about conferences and events. You can also sign up for an Emergent Village e-newsletter.



Read a good book/ found a good web-site on emergent worship?

Let us know at VineHelpline@presbyterian.ca.